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Reviewing the History of the Colossian Hymn Hypothesis:

The Hymn's Shifting Boundaries and Contexts from 1913 to the Present

Today, I will be reviewing the history of the hypothesis that Colossians 1 contains an early Christian hymn, focusing on the shift in scholarship on the extent of the hymn. In the current state of scholarship, you will typically see Colossians 1:15–20 discussed as a hymn. However, the relation of 1:12–14 to the hymn is up for debate. Revisiting this history may open up avenues for better understanding how this passage functions in the letter, its relation to the rest of the Pauline corpus, and early Christian hymnody.

As we proceed, we will see two movements that seem to have created the current state of scholarly writing on the Colossian hymn, in which 1:15–20 is presumed to be the extent of the hymn without sufficient attention to 1:12–14. First, Eduard Norden's initial work on Colossians 1:12–20 was first assumed then eventually neglected. Second, by the mid-1980s, a few conservative scholars began to misread previous scholarship because of a disproportionate focus on concerns over some of the conclusions of the form critical and history-of-religions approaches to the passage. Contemporary interpreters appear to have lost a clear and coherent place for verses 12–14, orphaning these words in the larger context of the letter to the Colossians.

Before the Hymn Hypothesis

Prior to Norden's work around the turn of the last century, interest in Colossians 1—especially verses 15–17—already ran high. The early apologists frequently referred to this

passage, as did later church fathers when addressing Christological debates.¹ Whether or not the passage contained an early Christian hymn, it served a role in disputes over the preexistence of Christ as the Son of God, his role in creation, and his relation to God the Father. Thus, one should expect commentators to linger over these verses.

At least as early as Calvin—but possibly as early as Chrysostom—several commentators found a more natural break between 1:11 and 12, rather than 1:14 and 15. Chrysostom’s second homily on Colossians addresses 1:9–15. It seems to indicate that a new thanksgiving section begins at the end of 1:11, “with joy giving thanks,” which elaborates the content of the knowledge of God mentioned in 1:10 and the means of endurance called for earlier in 1:11.² Chrysostom also sees 1:15ff as integral to the thanksgiving beginning in 1:12. Calvin breaks the passage into 1:12–17 and 1:18–20 and addresses 1:12 as the beginning of a new thanksgiving section.³ In his *Gnomon of the New Testament*, Bengel takes 1:12–20 as a section, with a subsequent section following in 1:21.⁴

Lightfoot starts a new “doctrinal” section at 1:12 or 13 and proceeding through 2:3.⁵ He takes εὐχαριστοῦντες as paratactic to οὐ παύομεθα in 1:9 and presumably treats ὅς in 1:13 as if it

¹ Cf. Benjamin Edsall and Jennifer Strawbridge, “The Songs we Used to Sing? Hymn ‘Traditions’ and Reception in Pauline Letters” *JSNT* 37, no. 3 (2015): 290–311, esp. 301. Portions of Colossians 1:15–20 are referenced more than 670 times in the early church fathers.

² John Chrysostom, “Homilies on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians,” ed. Philip Schaff, trans by J Ashworth and John Albert Broadus, NPNF¹ Vol. 13 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 265–70.

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), Logos Edition, 2330–2332. On page 2230 he says, “Here is a summary of the doctrine of the gospel concerning the great work of our redemption by Christ. It comes in here not as the matter of a sermon, but as the matter of a thanksgiving.” Although he does not go into a syntactical explanation, he seems to take εὐχαριστοῦντες as beginning a new thanksgiving section.

⁴ J.A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. Bengel and Steudel, trans. J. Bryce (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1860), 4:159–60.

⁵ J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. 8th edition (New York: Macmillan, 1886), 124. He gives a structural layout in the introduction of his commentary that seems to imply 1:13 is a transitional verse between the thanksgiving prayer and this new doctrinal section, but he does not indicate a division at 1:12 or 13 in his running commentary.

were a personal pronoun.⁶ He gives an extended introduction within his commentary to 1:15–20 as a passage in which “St. Paul defines the person of Christ.”⁷ However, he still seems to take this as being directly connected to the passage he begins at 1:12 or 13.⁸ And he takes 1:21–2:3 as applications of 1:13–20 to the Colossians. T.K. Abbott similarly takes 1:13 as a transition point in the prayer starting in 1:9 and moving into a “doctrinal” portion of the letter.⁹

Beginnings of the Hymn Hypothesis

In 1913, Eduard Norden published an extensive study of early Christian hymns and liturgical forms, in which he treated Colossians 1:12–20 as a prime example of an early Christian hymn.¹⁰ Norden immediately qualifies his discussion by saying this passage shows no signs of “Hellenistic style.”¹¹ Instead, he argues for several features indicative of a hymn, including the opening εὐχαριστοῦντες (v. 12), parallelism throughout, and lines of relative clauses and substantival participles.¹² He manages his analysis without appealing to excisions or additions as later scholars will.¹³ He concludes that Colossians 1:12–20 is a doxology to God, distributed (“verteilt”) between the Father and the Son, and influenced primarily by Hellenistic Judaism, yet with a few properly Greek influences (e.g., the “stoic formula” in 1:16; “visible and invisible”).¹⁴

⁶ Lightfoot, *Colossians*, 138.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 140, in which he comments on τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ in 1:13, “thus these words are intimately connected with the expressions which follow...[in] ver. 15.”

⁹ T.K. Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians*, ICC (New York: Scribners Sons, 1909), lx. Abbott divides the passage: 1:13–14, 15–17, and 18–20. He also notes the oddity of τῷ πατρὶ without qualification in 1:12 and mentions the fact that older commentators separate 1:12 from what precedes (205).

¹⁰ Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede*. Second Edition. Reprint (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956). 250–54. Robinson, “Formal Analysis,” 270 postulates that Norden was motivated by the recent publication of Mithraic texts and the Odes of Solomon in the first decade of the twentieth century which provided a base of comparison for his study.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 250–51. NB: Norden considers Colossians (but not Ephesians) to be authentically Pauline (251, n. 1).

¹² *Ibid.*, 253. For Norden’s treatment of parallelism, see his fifth appendix, pp. 355–64; on relative clauses and participial phrases in New Testament hymns, see his eighth appendix, pp. 380–87.

¹³ He thinks his analysis may rule out seeing any words or phrases in this unit as later glosses. *Ibid.*, 152, n. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 153–54. For the stoic formula, see his preceding discussion, pp. 240–50. He cites Plato, *Phaedo*, 79A and *Timaeus*, 51A as examples of the “visible and invisible” idiom.

Following Norden, several scholars undertook further analysis of the hymn. Ernst Lohmeyer (1930) thought 1:13–20 presented an early Pauline liturgy related to Logos theology and the Day of Atonement.¹⁵ Martin Dibelius (1913; 1947) initially thought the passage was a Christological confession composed by Paul, but in a later edition accepted Norden’s formal analysis.¹⁶ Ernst Käsemann (1949) saw 1:12–20 as a baptismal liturgy composed by the author of Colossians (not Paul), which took over a previously composed, Gnostic hymn for the material in 1:15–20.¹⁷ Several other scholars followed up with various arrangements of the lines and strophes.¹⁸ James Robinson (1957) provides a detailed formal analysis, using Norden’s arrangement as a starting point. But he hones in on 1:15–20, resolved, based on Käsemann, that “clearly vss. 15–20 form a unit for analysis prior to and at the basis of any discussion of a broader liturgical context.”¹⁹ However, as many have recognized, Robinson’s scissors and paste approach stretched the limits of form and redaction criticism.

For Käsemann, 1:12–20 was a pre-Colossians Christian hymn that added an introduction (1:12–14) and emendations (esp. in 1:18a, 19–20) to a pre-Christian hymn with some kind of Jewish-Gnostic origin.²⁰ Käsemann makes some constructive formal and exegetical observations in the first part of his article, including a defense of the unity of the passage and the reasons for starting at 1:12. However, he takes up most of his article discussing potential parallels between Colossians 1:15–20, ancient Judaism, and a Gnostic redeemer myth that supposedly predated

¹⁵ Robinson, “Formal Analysis,” 270.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 270–71. Ernst Käsemann, “A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy,” in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W.J. Montague, *Studies in Biblical Theology* 41 (London: SCM, 1964), 149–68, orig. published in German in *Festschrift Rudolf Bultmann zum 65. Geburtstag überreicht*, ed. E Wolf (Stuttgart, 1949), 133–48.

¹⁸ Pierre Benoit (1949), Charles Masson (1950), G. Schille (1952), and Christian Maurer (1955). See James M. Robinson, “A Formal Analysis of Colossians 1:15–20,” *JBL* 76, no. 4 (1957): 270–87, esp. 271.

¹⁹ Robinson, “Formal Analysis,” 274.

²⁰ Käsemann, “Baptismal Liturgy,” 152–54 (rationale for including 1:12 and general thesis), 154–59 (argument for origins in a Hellenistic Jewish Gnostic redeemer myth).

Christianity. Although now known to be anachronistic, this pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer myth theory was initially influential.²¹

Emerging Consensus

Käsemann's 1949 article seems to mark a turning point in the literature. While the pre-Christian, Gnostic hymn thesis eventually fell away, Colossians 1:15–20 began to be seen more strictly as a unit of its own. For Käsemann, this was a matter of the terms, themes, and theology present in the passage more than specific structural features. Most significantly, this portion of the hymn appears to focus exclusively, in cosmic proportion, on Jesus Christ (who of course is not mentioned within 1:15–20, but is introduced as τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ, “the Son of his love,” in 1:13). Exegetes discussed the Christology of these verses long before Norden's hymn hypothesis, but now the Christological discussion had come into parley with a new set of texts, contexts, and questions.

Following Käsemann, Reinhard Deichgräber's *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus* (1967) treats 1:12–14 and 1:15–20 as two hymns, the first to God and the second to Christ, which were subsequently brought together by the writer of the letter to the Colossians.²² Jack Sander's monograph on the New Testament hymns (1971) essentially attempted to put Käsemann's Gnostic Redeemer myth theory on better footing by comparing it with other New Testament hymns, the *Odes of Solomon*, the Nag Hamadi texts, and early Jewish wisdom literature. As

²¹ See, e.g., Pheme Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 93–108 and Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis and the Pauline Letters* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1975), 137–39. Cp. Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical and Religious Background*, SNTS 15 (Cambridge: CUP, 1971), inspired, as it were, by Käsemann and others, gives an alternate approach, which argues that the Christianity of the first century and the Gnosticism of the second century share a background in Jewish speculative philosophy. Somewhat similarly, Ben Witherington III, in *Jesus The Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 249–294 shows how wisdom Christology could have developed ideas already present in the ongoing development of the idea of God's personified Wisdom and the divine Logos in texts like the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, and Philo.

²² Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit. Untersuchungen su Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen*, SUNT 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1967).

such, Sanders and Deichgräber focused on 1:15–20, but still considered 1:12–14 as part of the hymn as it stands in the text of the letter to the Colossians.²³

A consensus seems to have been developing based on Käsemann’s development of Norden’s thesis. Eduard Lohse (1968) gives a helpful treatment of the whole passage 1:12–20, in line with Käsemann but giving detailed attention to how 1:12 may function as an introductory formula along the lines of thanksgiving Psalms and the Qumran *Hodayot*.²⁴ Yet he gives special attention to 1:15–20 as an earlier, preformed hymn. Ralph Martin (1973) and Eduard Schweizer (1976) treat the hymn very similarly. All three take εὐχαριστοῦντες in 1:12 as an imperatival infinitive.²⁵ Schweizer argues it serves as both a subordinate adverbial participle flowing out of Paul’s prayer for the Colossians (1:9–11) and an imperatival participle “summoning” the Colossians to praise.²⁶

As with the period following Norden, several schemes for the exact lineation of the passage arise with varying degrees of commentary following Käsemann. The difference is almost all only attempt to delineate 1:15–20 into stanzas following Robinson’s treatment. That is, although most of the commentators tend to agree that 1:12–20 is a hymn or at least a poetic “liturgical piece,” poetic analysis is being done *only* on 1:15–20. Furthermore, much of the

²³ Sanders, *Christological Hymns*, 1–4, 75–87.

²⁴ Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1971), 3, 32ff.

²⁵ Appealing to BDF 486.2. See Lohse, *Colossians*, 32 n. 1; Ralph Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 53; Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, trans. A. Chester (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 47 n. 4 [G 1976].

²⁶ Schweizer, *Colossians*, 47. Cf. Petr Pokorny, *Colossians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 50 [G 1987]. Though writing later, Pokorny treats the basic aspects of the hymn in the same way as Käsemann, Lohse, Martin, and Schweizer, including arguing for an imperatival participle in 1:12. This differs from the few clear examples of imperatival participles in the New Testament, which are hortatory, or ethical, imperatives, calling the hearers of the letter to take a particular action *after* hearing the letter (e.g., Rom 12:9–19; 1 Pet 2:18; 3:7). What these writers envision here seems to be an invocation for the congregation to sing along *as the letter is read*. This may make sense in light of the performative nature of publicly reading letters, cf. Loveday Alexander, “Ancient Book Production and the Circulation of the Gospels,” in *The Gospel for All Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 86, but see Daniel B. Wallace, *An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 650–652, who does not treat this verse, but cautions that imperatival participles are extremely rare in the New Testament.

discussion relies heavily on Norden without much explanation. Käsemann, Lohse, and Schweizer all give detailed explanations for the hymn's boundaries, terminology, and conceptual parallels. But, outside of a footnote to Norden, these treatments tend not to validate their methodology or explain their terminology.²⁷ These two points conjoin to create confusion and difficulty.

Criticisms of the Consensus

Little criticism of this approach to the hymn shows up in scholarship until the mid-1980s, but as early as Moule's commentary on Colossians, doubts surface about the hymn hypothesis. Although Moule does not actually question whether Colossians 1 contains a hymn, he does question whether it was a pre-Pauline composition with interpolations. He is the first I could find to be concerned about the apparent lack of a consistent meter in the passage.²⁸ Yet, ever since Norden's analysis, the factor of meter had been ruled out as significant since his research led him to see New Testament and other early Christian hymns as primarily following the models of near eastern poetry rather than using Greek quantitative meter. In their commentary, Barth and Blanke mount a significant but sober critique against redactional theories that see various interpolations into the passage by the letter writer.²⁹ They do not question that the passage is hymnic, but they do focus more exclusively on 1:15–20 since this is where others view redaction to be most in play.

²⁷ Thus, at this stage, things like "Semitic style," "participial predication," or "*parallelismus membrorum*" get tossed around routinely with very little explanation and examples are few to none (especially few outside the small, by now seemingly canonized, set of New Testament hymn fragments).

²⁸ C.F.D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, CGTC (Cambridge: CUP, 1957), 60–62. He seems, along with later scholars, to conflate discussion of 1:15–20 as a pre-formed hymn to be discussions of *the* Colossians 1 hymn, even though all the articles he refers to mention 1:12–14 attached to 1:15–20 as a larger hymn in 1:12–20.

²⁹ Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians*, trans. Astrid Beck, AYB (New Haven: Yale, 1994 [1964]), 172–3, 182–218, esp. 194, where they say, "vv 15–20 form a hymnic piece, which is introduced in 1:12–14... The hymnic glorification in 1:15(12)–20 is the high point of Col[ossians]." A similar approach is taken by later commentaries more sensitive to past scholarship or that treat 1:13–23 as a digression (e.g., Sumney, Foster, McKnight; cf. Pao).

John Balchin (1985) seems to be the first to counter the Colossian hymn hypothesis.³⁰ He mounts a formidable assessment of previous arguments for a hymn in Colossians 1:15–20, and his article illustrates several significant issues. However, in the end, Balchin misunderstands a number of the elements at work in analyzing the passage as a hymn, and this confusion may have contributed to later confusions. For example, Balchin confuses parallelism with repetition of elements across the passage, which is closer to responsion (e.g., ὅς ἐστίν in 1:15, 18b).³¹ He, in fact, grants that this passage exhibits parallelism akin to that found in the Psalms or the Hebrew Prophets, but then he argues that this does not indicate poetic or hymnic material since Paul utilizes parallelism elsewhere.³² Balchin also questions the use of the relative pronoun ὅς to mark the beginning of a hymnic passage since it makes grammatical sense in the passage.³³ But this reveals a growing misunderstanding of what Norden originally proposed, that relative clauses and substantival or adjectival participles, *in general*, characterize the opening and middle sections of hymns.³⁴ Balchin then quickly bypasses arguments for seeing εὐχαριστοῦντες in 1:12 as an introductory formula, mentioning no explanation for his view except that the subject has changed from God to Christ in 1:15.³⁵ But this contradicts his position elsewhere that 1:15–20

³⁰ John Balchin, “Colossians 1:15–20: An Early Christian Hymn? The Arguments from Style” *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985): 65–94.

³¹ Balchin, “Christian Hymn?” 67.

³² Ibid, 68. Balchin appeals to Turner’s grammar for evidence of parallelism throughout the Pauline corpus (Moulton, Howard, Turner, *Vol. 4: Style*, 96–97), arguing, “there has been no suggestion that because of this what he said must be regarded as hymnic or confessional. His employment of parallel statements is simply evidence that Jews brought up against an Old Testament background tended to think and teach in parallel forms, especially when they intended their words to be memorable, or when they were expressing religious truths.” This is true if one has in view a single set of parallel lines. However, what has been proposed for Colossians 1:12–20 is that the whole passage consists of an extended sequence of parallel lines, which would indicate poetry in the Hebrew Bible and other Ancient Near Eastern literature. cp. C.F.D. Moule, *Idiom Book of NT Greek* (Cambridge: CUP, 1959), 194–96.

³³ Ibid, 68–69.

³⁴ But cp. Käsemann, Deichgräber, and Sanders who all make various comments that may mislead the reader into thinking the specific form of the relative pronoun marks out hymnic material in some unique way.

³⁵ Ibid, 70. He also misconstrues Lohse’s comments on the relationship between vv. 12–14 and 15–20. Cp. Lohse, *Colossians*, 40 n. 63.

are smoothly and integrally linked to the preceding verses in which the author introduces the antecedent τοῦ υἱοῦ, “the son,” in 1:13.

Balchin’s criticisms echo into later scholarship, but few completely embrace his perspective. Even Gordon Fee’s now infamous article questioning the hymnic character of Philippians 2:5–11, although arguing along similar lines, makes arguments of comparison dependent on the assumption that Colossians 1:15–20 is a hymn.³⁶ More importantly, Balchin shows how the center of gravity has shifted to an exclusive focus on 1:15–20 and concerns over whether this “hymn” existed prior to the writing of the letter.

From here, a few differing responses and approaches emerge. Some attempt to show 1:15–20 embodies Jewish style, themes, and language, especially chiasm.³⁷ These include articles by Steven Baugh (1985) and N.T. Wright (1990) and the monographs of Christian Stettler (2000) and Vincent Pizzuto (2006).³⁸ Others assume the validity of some criticisms but defend the hymnic character of 1:15–20 by expanding the definition of a hymn. For example, Stephen Fowl (1990) focuses on broad hymnic features but equivocates on whether the passage

³⁶ Gordon Fee, “Philippians 2:5–11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?” *BBR* 2 (1992): 29–46.

³⁷ For some reason, parallelism is often ignored even though these authors seem to be influenced by a new wave of scholarship focusing on the Jewish precedents of NT hymns, e.g., Martin Hengel, “Hymns and Christology,” in *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003 [1980]), 78–96; James H. Charlesworth, “A Prolegomenon to a New Study of the Jewish Background of the Hymns and Prayers in the New Testament,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982): 265–85.

³⁸ Steven M. Baugh, “The Poetic Form of Col 1:15-20,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 47, no. 2 (1985): 227–44; N.T. Wright, “Poetry and Theology in Colossians 1.15-20,” *New Testament Studies* 36, no. 3 (1990): 444–68; lightly updated and expanded in *Ibid.*, *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 99–119; Christian Stettler, *Der Kolosserhymnus: Untersuchungen zu Form, traditions-geschichtlichem Hintergrund und Aussage von Kol 1,15–20*, WUNT² 131 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Vincent Pizzuto, *A Cosmic Leap of Faith: An Authorial, Structural, and Theological Investigation of the Cosmic Christology in Col 1:15–20*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology 41 (Louven: Peeters, 2006).

is strictly poetic,³⁹ while Gordley (2007) advances the idea that Colossians 1:15–20 might be a Greek-style prose-hymn.⁴⁰

It is commendable that most of these more recent studies attempt to analyze the passage as it sits in the letter to the Colossians rather than trying to reconstruct a preformed hymn that may have been redacted when incorporated into the letter. (Though some, like Gordley, considers possible redactional elements.) However, all of these studies focus on 1:15–20 exclusively and neglect previous discussions about the place of verses 12–14. When, or if, they discuss the “contextual dislocation” of 1:15–20, attention goes not to previous research by Norden, Käsemann, and Lohse but the change in person from second and first-person in 1:3–14 to third-person in 1:15–20 back to second-person in 1:21ff.

On the surface, this argument appears significant, but it is suspect on several grounds. Käsemann, who initially made this argument, still saw the two sections as integrally related within the text as it stands. So this argument doesn’t necessarily stand against 1:12–20 functioning as a unified piece in the letter. Moreover, 1:15–20 are directly connected and subordinate to 1:12–14 and thus include implied first and second-person referents, however distant these may be. Finally, if there is a significant change in person, it is from the *exclusive* first-person in 1:1–11 to the *inclusive* first-person in 1:12 or 13.⁴¹ Finally, as Käsemann has pointed out, the somewhat unique way of employing the relative pronoun ὅς begins in 1:13, and thus this feature in 1:15 cannot distinguish the two sections.

³⁹ Stephen Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus*. JSNTS 35 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990).

⁴⁰ Matthew Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context: An Exegesis in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Hymnic and Epistolary Conventions*, WUNT² 228 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

⁴¹ This does involve a thorny TC issue where the manuscripts are split over whether ἡμᾶς or ὑμᾶς should be read in 1:12.

To wrap up, the impulse to examine the passage as it stands in the letter to the Colossians and to take Jewish influences more seriously should remain a priority in scholarship. However, further research should not overlook the insights on the overall nature and scope of the passage originally advanced by Norden and supported by several subsequent studies. Further study should seek to confirm whether a solid argument can be made to bifurcate between 1:14 and 15, and if so, what function 1:12–14 serves in relation to 1:15–20 and the argument of the letter. On the other hand, if Norden remains, in the main, correct, further studies of 1:12–20 should analyze this passage as a whole to confirm in what ways it may be called hymnic.