HOLY PERSONS AND HOLINESS IN COLOSSIANS

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The subject of "holiness" has not received much attention, particularly with reference to Colossians. The aim of this study is to explore the significance of the use of holiness language, echoes, and allusions in the Epistle to the Colossians. This study also seeks to establish the value of such holiness texts for the interpretation of the epistle. The word ἅγιος is examined particularly with reference to its occurrences in the Epistle to the Colossians.

Key Words: holiness, holy persons, warnings, expositions, Colossians, ἅγιος

1. Introduction

The focus of scholarly investigation on the Epistle to the Colossians has been on task of unmasking the "heresy" that the author had in view, as a result this subject has occupied the center of numerous discussions on the epistle.[1] However, there are other related interpretational issues within the epistle that invite the attention of biblical scholars. For example, the use of the word ἅγιος in Colossians may promise a fertile ground for investigation and open possibilities for interpretation that deserve attention.[2] There is a

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[1]   There are numerous views that have been proposed. For the summary of the arguments see Richard E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy* (JSNTSup 96; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994). Compare also Christian Stettler, "The Opponents at Colossae," in *Paul and His Opponents* (ed. Stanley Porter; Pauline Studies 2; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 170, who states that "scholarship is still far from a consensus about the character of the Colossian 'heresy.'" It must be noted that not all scholars accept the notion that there is reference to heresy in Colossians. See Morna D. Hooker, "Were there False Teachers in Colossae?" in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: In Honour of C. F. D. Moule* (ed. B. Lindars and S. Smalley; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 315–31.

[2]   A study on ἅγιος in Colossians may contribute to the ongoing discussions on Colossians. One possibility that seems to suggest an emphasis on the word ἅγιος in Colossians is a comparison with other epistles, for example, Galatians. None of the forms of the word ἅγιος is used in Galatians. What makes this point even more significant is the fact that both epistles deal with opponents. In Galatians the author is rebuking the addressees who have been persuaded by μή τινές "certain persons" (1:6–7) and in Colossians the author is giving a warning in chapter 2 against μή τις "anyone" (2:4, 8, 16, 18).

growing interest on the subject of "holiness" among biblical scholars, after decades of a lack of serious attention given to the subject particularly in New Testament studies.[3] Among those who have discussed this subject in past decades, the lack of consensus is still glaring.[4] No serious attention has been given to the meaning of ἅγιος in the epistle to the Colossians. This study explores the importance of ἅγιος and related holiness texts within the context of the epistle to the Colossians. The issues of background and authorship are adequately dealt with in the work of James Dunn.[5] Therefore there will be no need to touch on these issues for the purposes of this study.[6]

[3]   This is evidenced in a dissertation by Jay Kim and an article by Sharon Ringe which have a clear focus on the subject of holiness in the New Testament. Kim observes that there is a vast array of literature on the theology of Paul, while recognizing that very few scholars have seen the need to give attention to Paul's concept of holiness. Cf. Jay J. Kim, "The Concept of Holiness in the Pauline Epistles" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004); Sharon H. Ringe "Holy, as the Lord Your God Commanded You: Sabbath in the New Testament," *Int* 59.1 (2005): 17. Ringe discusses the issue of Sabbath observance and points out that the observance of the Sabbath by the Jews in the Old Testament reflected the observance of divine holiness, but in the New Testament the command of Sabbath observance is expanded to encompass all of life. The Sabbath rather than a matter of ritual is planted at the heart of the gospel message. Her article touches on matters of holiness and ritual, but is only limited to the Gospels although the title promises to cover the entire New Testament. A good example of another oversight is the work of James Dunn who has written 808 pages on the theology of Paul but has nothing on Paul's concept of holiness. See James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). A more recent publication on the subject edited by Brower and Johnson makes further progress than the already discussed publications. It covers holiness in the Gospels, Acts, Pauline epistles (both disputed and undisputed), Petrine epistles, Jude, and Revelation. However, there is no particular treatment of holiness in Colossians in this important work. See Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson, *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

[4]   Harrington sums up the various views on holiness into four categories: moral, social, religious experience and a state of being outside of the norm. See Hannah K. Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism and the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[5]   The authorship of the epistle to the Colossians has been debated recently after a long traditional view that has been held that it was Pauline. There are still many scholars who accept the traditional view that the author is Paul. The most convincing argument is its link with the epistle to Philemon which is a generally accepted Pauline epistle. Cf. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 38.

[6]   It suffices to provide an outline of the letter:

    1:1–2   Greetings
    1:3–14   Prayer and Thanksgiving
    1:15–23   Exalting Christ and the ministry of reconciliation
    1:24–29   Paul's ministry

2. Lexical Analysis of ἅγιος

2.1. The Use of ἅγιος in the LXX

In the Septuagint of the Pentateuch the word ἅγιος generally means "holy" or "sacred."[7] The word is used with reference to people and things.[8] The use of the word with reference to people is relevant for this paper because of its usage in Colossians. In the writings of the prophets the word is used with reference to God, people and things. Holy people are dedicated to God.[9] In a narrow sense this lexical information gives an indication of the semantic range of the word under consideration. An examination of the NT usage reveals a similar trend of usage.

2.2. The Use of ἅγιος in the New Testament

In the New Testament the word ἅγιος is used in a cultic sense to refer to someone or something that is dedicated to God and his service. It may also have a nuance of something or someone pure, perfect or worthy of God. The word may also be used as a substantive to refer to that which is holy: God, angels or believers.[10]

The forms of ἅγιος that are found in Colossians appear in the NT with the following numbers of occurrences: ἁγίοις (19x); ἁγίους (12x); ἁγίων (34x); ἅγιοι (6x). A majority of versions are consistent in the way they translate the word-forms listed above. Due to lack of space only the following versions were examined: American Standard Version (ASV); English Standard Version (ESV); King James Version (KJV); New American Standard Bible (NAU); New International Version (NIV); New Jerusalem Bible (NJB); and Young's Literal Translation (YLT).

2:1–3	Purpose of writing
2:4–19	Body of the letter Part I: Warnings
2:20–4:6	Body of the letter Part II: Exhortations
4:7–18	Epilogue and final Greetings

This is a suggested structure that seeks to recognize parts of the epistle within its genre type.

[7] Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, Chiefly of the Pentateuch and the Twelve Prophets* (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 4.

[8] See Exod 22:31; Lev 19:2 and Deut 7:6.

[9] See Hos 11:12; Am 4:2; Zech 14:5. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 3.

[10] *BAGD* 10. See sanctuary, Heb 8:2; 9:24; angels, 1 John 2:20; Rev 3:7; 1 Thess 3:13; believers, Acts 9:13, 32; Rom 8:27.

It may be observed that of the 19 times that ἁγίοις appears in the NT all the above versions translate the word to mean "saints." In all these references it is in the introduction section of an epistle that this translation is given. If this translation is correct it may call to question the understanding that the use of this word was formulaic.

The form ἁγιους appears 12 times in the NT and except for Eph 1:4 it is always translated "saints." In the case of Eph 1:4 all the versions cited above translate the word to mean holy. The entire phrase is rendered "be holy and without blemish."

Another variation may be observed with the form ἁγίων which appears 34 times. The form takes the nuance of "saints" except in Heb 8:2; 9:8; 10:19 where the reference is clearly to the sanctuary.

A comparison done on the form ἅγιοι, appearing 6 times in the NT, reveals that all versions translate the word to mean "saints." Other variations are consistent in all versions, 1 Peter 1:15 "be ye holy," and Heb 3:1 "holy brothers."

What should be underscored from the above findings is the importance of focusing on the context in which words are found for purposes of interpretation. We now look at the various forms within the context of the Epistle to the Colossians.

2.3. The Use of ἅγιος in Colossians

The term ἅγιος appears six times in the epistle to the Colossians in four adjectival forms: (a) ἁγίοις (1:2, 26); (b) ἁγιους (1:4, 22); (c) ἁγίων (1:12); and (d) ἅγιοι (3:12).

It may be noted that the word ἅγιος appears five times in the first chapter. It appears once in the third chapter and makes no appearance in both the second and the fourth chapters. The author first addresses the recipients as holy persons (vv. 2, 4), which may be seen as a conventional address in a greeting formula, from a casual reading of the text.[11] According to Moule

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[11]   According to James Dunn, addressing the first readers as saints, was a common Pauline feature appearing in his salutations (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Eph 1:1; also Col 1:2; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1 [without reference to the church]). While Dunn views the reference in Colossians as a formulaic feature he adds that this was historically a Jewish designation. Paul uses it to also include Gentiles who have been incorporated into Israel by baptism and not circumcision. See James Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 48. What Dunn claims as an inference, namely the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God, may be substantiated from the text (cf. Col 1:12, 21, 22). Charles D. Moule on the other hand argues for an adjectival form of ἅγιος in Col 1:2. He claims that "to treat τοῖς ἁγίοις as a noun, 'the members of God's people,' and the rest as descriptive,

the Greek grammatical structure of the sentence in Col 1:2 does not seem to support the substantival form of ἅγιος translated "saints," which is found in greeting formulae of other epistles.[12] In this occurrence one rather finds the adjectival form translated "holy brothers." The next occurrence seems to suggest that the addressees have been qualified ἱκανώσαντι "by the Father to share in the inheritance of the holy persons" (v. 12 [my own translation]).[13] This is followed by another reference that indicates how they were qualified: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (vv. 21, 22 [NIV]).[14] The word ἀνεγκλήτους seems to resonate thematically with κρινέτω "judge, pass judgment on, or condemn" (2:16),[15] where reference is made to holy institutions.[16] The reference to holiness found in Col 1:26 seems to be uniformly

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would probably require the repetition of the article." Moule further observes that the formula ἐν Χριστῷ (Col 1:2) is used by Paul to depict the Christians as incorporated in Christ and joined to the body to which they belong. See Charles D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 45. The claims that Moule makes are based on the text. Many commentaries and scholars seem to follow the Pauline traditional greeting and translate the word ἅγιος in Col 1:2 as a substantive. On the other hand there is also support for Moule's view. For example, the NIV translates ἅγιος in Col 1:2 adjectivally as "holy and faithful brothers." An observation made regarding other Pauline writings reveals that in "the major letters which are generally recognized as authentic (Rom, 1 and 2 Cor, Gal, 1 Thess and Phil), all the formulae are subtly different: Paul does not repeat the same form mechanically every time." R. Wilson McLachlan, *Colossians and Philemon* (ICC; London: T & T Clark, 2005), 65. In Col 1:4 the reference is clearly substantival, an understanding which is generally not contested.

12 Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon,* 45.

13 The aorist tense suggests a completed action; therefore their qualification has been achieved by God. "The saints have, in effect, already been granted entrance into the kingdom, since they are 'in Christ'…" Robert W. Wall, *Colossians & Philemon* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 55. It has been suggested that the "holy ones" here could refer to angels. However, the context seems to support the notion that the believers are in view here. See Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon,* 76–77. Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Sacra Pagina 17; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000), 50, supports the view of angels being referred to in Col 1:12, although she admits that it is not an easy matter to decide.

14 It has been suggested that the repetition of the word καί suggests three distinct descriptions. Compare Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 59. This may suggest an effort on the part of the author to highlight holiness.

15 Holy institutions are mentioned in this passage: eating and drinking, a religious festival, a new moon and a Sabbath day. Cf. Exod 23; Num 28 and 29.

16 These observations need further in-depth study, especially with reference to 2:16.

translated as "saints" by most translations, or "holy ones" (NAB) and "holy people" (NJB). Murray Harris identifies several possibilities for the interpretation of ἅγιος in Col 1:26: holy apostles and prophets (Eph 3:5), gentiles (Col 1:27b) or all believers (Col 1:2; 3:12). For Harris the latter is more probable, and agreeably, it is also supported by the context within the theme of holiness.[17] The last explicit ἅγιος reference in Col 3:12 is considered as adjectival clustered with ἠγαπημένοι in the same verse to demonstrate God's view of the believers. Therefore, the references to ἅγιος in Colossians deserve more than a casual look.

The concentration of "holiness" terminology in Colossians needs more than a casual treatment that has been given in many commentaries. This leads to a pertinent question: is there any evidence beyond the use of the specific terminology within the Epistle to the Colossians that points to the holiness theme?

3. The Holiness Theme in Colossians

The occurrences of the word ἅγιος in Colossians have been noted briefly in the foregoing discussion, now a more elaborate discussion of selected references follows. In Col 1:22 ἅγιος is couched in ritual language. There is a reference to the physical death of Christ as a means of holiness.[18] It is in this section that the holiness theme seems to resonate with the theme of the entire epistle, i.e., being "in Christ." The section comes after the christological hymn (Col 1:15–20).[19] In v. 21 there is a change of subject from Christ in the third person to the first readers in the second person. The word ποτε suggests a situation that prevailed before. The addressees have previously been alienated (ἀπηλλοτριωμένους) and were considered enemies (ἐχθροὺς) which was evidenced by their evil deeds (ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς). The pre-

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[17] Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 69.

[18] The word παραστῆσαι (Col 1:22) is used once in the gospels, twice in Acts and four times in the Pauline epistles. In Luke 2:22 (cf. Exod 13:2, 12) it is used with reference to the dedication of the first born son as holy to the Lord. Rom 12:1 also uses ritual language with παραστῆσαι, followed by an exhortation not to conform to the pattern of the world (see Col 3:1–3). 2 Cor 11:2 uses the word παραστῆσαι in the context of a conflict with the false apostles (similar to Col 2:4–23), while 2 Tim 2:15 makes reference to Paul's exhortation to Timothy to present himself as one approved. This is also in the context of a confrontation with false teachers (see v. 16 and holiness language appears in v. 21). The reference to the death of Christ in Col 1:22 is also discussed in Col 1:20, 24; 2:12–15, 20.

[19] See Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 83; and more recently Matthew E. Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context: An Exegesis in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Hymnic and Epistolary Conventions* (WUNT II/228; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

sent reality is introduced by the adversative conjunction δέ "but" and the adverb νυνί "now." The subject in v. 22 is not explicit. There are two possibilities for the antecedent, i.e., Christ or God the Father as the subject of the main verb. Both nouns are masculine singular; so the verb ἀποκατήλλαξεν "he reconciled" could go with either of them. From the context it may be observed that in v. 3 of this section, thanks is given to God; God's grace and truth are highlighted in v. 6; growing in the knowledge of God explicitly makes reference to God the Father; and again in v. 12 thanks is given to God, and this is another holiness passage where God is depicted as the one who qualifies the believers. Therefore the context seems to point to God as the one who reconciles those who were formerly alienated and enemies. This is achieved through the death of Jesus Christ. The purpose is to present (παραστῆσαι) the believers holy and blameless, and without reproach in his presence (ἀγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλήτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ).[20]

There are also some allusions and echoes that point to the theme of holiness in the Epistle to the Colossians. It has already been noted that Col 1:22 uses ritual language with the specific key words.[21] The holiness theme extends further through these echoes and allusions to Col 2.[22] The argument of chapter two seems to form a chiastic structure (Col 2:4–19).[23] The parallels

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[20] See also 2 Cor 5:18–19 and Heb 2:17 where God is the initiator of reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

[21] Relevant terminology includes θανάτου "death," παραστῆσαι "present," ἀγίους "holy," ἀμώμους "blameless," and ἀνεγκλήτους "above reproach." See also Col 1:20 where a reference is made to εἰρηνοποιήσας "making peace" and αἵματος "blood."

[22] Terminology suggesting holiness language include περιετμήθητε "you were circumcised" (2:11, 13; the word appears four times in these two verses, cf. 3:11); δόγμασιν "ordinance" (2:14); βρώσει ... πόσει "eating and drinking," μέρει ἑορτῆς "a festival," νεομηνίας "new moon," σαββάτων "Sabbath days" (2:16); θρησκείᾳ "worship," and ἀγγέλων "angels" (2:18). Klingbeil makes reference to "celebration of sabbaths or other holidays" (Col 2:16) in his discussion of ritual in the New Testament. He also observes that "ritual serves as an underlying connector between Old and New Testaments." See Gerald A. Klingbeil, "'Empty Forms or Vital Teacher?' The Role of Ritual in Spiritual Growth and Nurturing," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 9 (2006): 166. The cluster of ritual elements in Col 2:16 may also reflect this link with the Old Testament, see also Richard Lemmer, "Why Should The Possibility of Rabbinic Rhetorical Elements in Pauline Writings (e.g., Galatians) Be Reconsidered?," in *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 131; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 161.

[23] There are some scholars who have identified chiasms in this section. For example, Ian Thomson, "Colossians 2:6–19: A Key Passage in a Complex Letter," in *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; JSNTSup 111; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 156. Admittedly, the complexity of the discussion in this passage is also reflected in the complexity that attends the formulation of its structure. In his chiasm Thomson leaves out the first warning. Thomson, "Colossians 2:6–19," 154, makes a relevant point that "chiasmus provides the skeletal framework of a passage, rather

displayed in this study follow a focus on the passage that has been recognized by scholars as the key issue in the chapter or the whole book, namely the focus on the philosophy and the philosophers.

> A μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς (2:4)
>> B μή τις ὑμᾶς (2:8)
>> B′ Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς (2:16)
> A′ μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς (2:18)

3.1. The Chiastic Structure of Colossians 2 with Reference to Holiness

In the outer parallel units of the structure A (2:4–7) and A′ (2:18–19) it is A′ that has the holiness allusions, and in the inner parallel units B (2:8–15) and B′ (2:16, 17), B′ has institutions of holiness and ritual echoes. The structure also brings out the clusters of philosophies that are divided according to the phrases repeated and paralleled as shown above. They are also clustered according to the content.[24] Figure 1 below reflects how the philosophies relate to the theme "in Christ."

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than a complete description of all its exegetical nuances and links." He also admits that "there are other verbal parallels here that do not fit within the chiastic framework" (ibid). The following section (i.e., Col 2:20–3:4) has been identified by J. P. Louw, "Reading a Text as Discourse," in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. David Alan Black; Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 27, as a chiasm.

[24]   Smith observes that there are sections identified by key phrases in 2:8, 14, 16, 18, and from these sections there are themes that may be identified. Ian K. Smith, *Heavenly Perspective: A Study of the Apostle Paul's Response to a Jewish Mystical Movement at Colossae* (Library of Biblical Studies; London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 134. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 85, 117, also recognizes some structure that clusters these warnings, although he makes no mention of a chiasm.
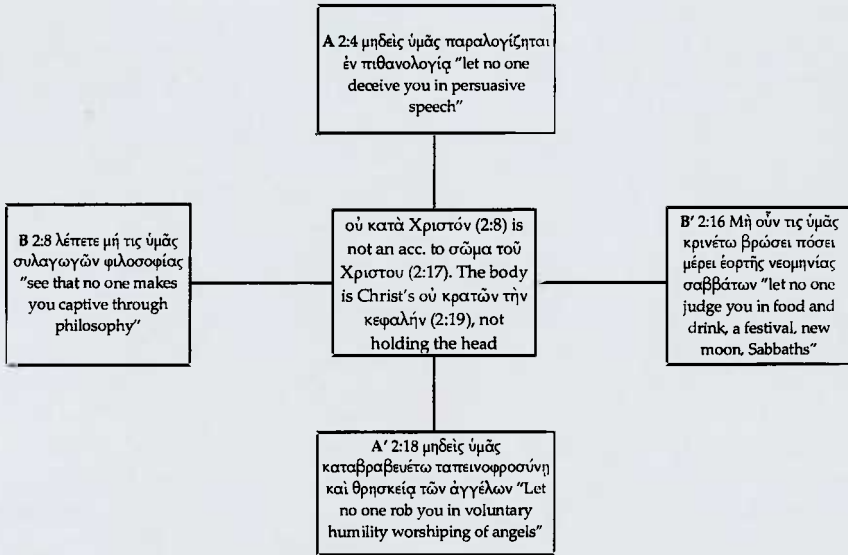
A 2:4 μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζηται ἐν πιθανολογίᾳ "let no one deceive you in persuasive speech"

B 2:8 λέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς συλαγωγῶν φιλοσοφίας "see that no one makes you captive through philosophy"

οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν (2:8) is not an acc. to σῶμα τοῦ Χριστου (2:17). The body is Christ's οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλήν (2:19), not holding the head

B′ 2:16 Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω βρώσει πόσει μέρει ἑορτῆς νεομηνίας σαββάτων "let no one judge you in food and drink, a festival, new moon, Sabbaths"

A′ 2:18 μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβευέτω ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων "Let no one rob you in voluntary humility worshiping of angels"

Figure 1: Holiness Allusions in the Context of Col 2

A close examination of the clusters may reveal that in A (2:4–7) there are elements of deception against which the recipients are warned.[25] The next cluster B (2:8) with the explicit reference to philosophy seems to focus on anthropocentric philosophical ideas. The repetitive phrase of the cluster μή τις ὑμᾶς (2:8) seems to suggest a different focus from the previous cluster (A). The emphasis given in Col 2:8, οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν, harmonizes with the description given in this cluster. The clusters in A and B do not contain any holiness clues. The next cluster B′ (2:16) is introduced by the phrase μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς (2:16). In this cluster James Dunn argues for a Jewish background and all the elements are Jewish elements.[26] Cluster A′ is also introduced by the phrase

25 A pre-Gnostic syncretism may be in view here, see Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 27.

26 The position that Dunn takes does not stand without opposition. Donelson claims that "Colossians 2:16 sounds like a nice summary of the law, although it could refer to Greek or Roman religious regulations as well." Lewis R. Donelson, *Colossians, Ephesians, First and Second Timothy, and Titus* (WBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 40. McLachlan, *Colossians and Philemon*, 217, states with reference to Dunn's claims: "He [Dunn] has to admit, however, that both ἑορτή and νεομηνία are somewhat less favourable to his position: festivals of various kinds, including that of the new moon, were observed by Gentiles as well as by Jews. When we recall that the evidence for the presence of Jews in Colossae is comparatively slight… it would seem advisable not to lay too much emphasis on the Jewish character of the false teaching, although there is undeniably a distinct Jewish element."

μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς (2:18). The elements clustered here are: ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων. There is a debate as to whether the last phrase should be taken as an objective or as a subjective genitive. When one considers this as a deviation or excess according to the context it may be regarded as an objective genitive.[27]

3.2. Holiness Allusions and Some Syntactic Observations on Colossians 2

The fact that the warning is against the philosophers, is buttressed by the indefinite nominative pronouns μηδεὶς in A and A′ and τις in B and B′. The focus here is clearly not only on the philosophy or the content of their teaching but also on the persons. This signified a real threat to the Colossian believers. While the characteristics of the teachings described in Col 2 may not be adequate for the purposes of fully identifying the philosophy or teaching, they do, however, give enough indication as to why the Colossians need to be warned against these philosophers.

The characteristics given not only categorize the persons but also their teachings. In A and A′ above, two words used also tie up the content of the teachings παραλογίζηται (2:4) and καταβραβευέτω (2:18), meaning to deceive and cheat respectively. Col 2:4 has reference to attractive but false arguments or persuasive speech. The warning is followed by an exposition (2:5–7) introduced by the conjunctions εἰ γὰρ (v. 5). Col 2:18 is another warning followed by an exposition (2:20–23) introduced by the conjunction εἰ (v. 20). The warning has reference to false humility and worship of angels. The phrase εἰκῇ φυσιούμενος (2:18) may mean "vainly arrogant." The Colossians were in danger of being deceived by the philosophers whose characteristics are summed up in 2:4 and 2:18–23.

In B and B′ above there are warnings against persons who adhere to teachings and institutions apart from Christ. In B their philosophy is characterized by κενῆς ἀπάτης "vain deceit," παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων "tradition of men," στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου "elementary principles of the world," and they do not adhere to Christ (2:8). Holiness in Col 1 is centered on Christ (1:22). Therefore, in Col 2 the holy persons are warned against holiness apart from Christ (2:8). This warning is followed by a long exposition (2:9–15) introduced by the conjunction ὅτι (v. 9). There may have been those who pursued holiness by adhering only to outward form of religion, food and drink, festival new moon Sabbath days (2:16). Without Christ these institutions are meaningless (2:17). The warning is followed by a brief phrase σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ introduced by another conjunction δέ (2:17). Holiness in

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[27] Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 121.

Col 2:4–19 therefore is not explicit as a theme, but the section carries the theme across by clear references to institutions of holiness (Col 2:16), as well as to worship and angels (Col 2:18). Col 2 warns against deviant forms of holiness that are not according to Christ (2:8, 17, 19).

3.3. The Theme of Holiness in Col 3

This chapter is preceded by Col 2:20–3:4, a section that is divided into two subsections, i.e., Col 2:20–23 and Col 3:1–4. Each of these subsections begins with the conjunction εἰ. In both sections there is a conditional sentence with a protasis and an apodosis. The first conditional sentence puts as a condition dying with Christ. It seems that this has already been established as a fact (Col 2:12).[28] In Col 2:20 there is a question in the apodosis with the verb δογματίζεσθε.[29] When one examines the following question within the context of the epistle, "Why do you submit to the rules as though you are in the world?" (Col 2:20), these rules may be seen as alternate means or supplementary means of holiness because they are apart from Christ. The point here is that you are in Christ now therefore no other rules of holiness apart from Christ should dictate the pattern of your life.[30] The second conditional sentence (Col 3:1–4) focuses on the resurrection as the central idea. In this case the protasis is followed by an apodosis that has an imperative ζητεῖτε (Col 3:1). This introduces the discussion of ch. 3 in which the believers are reminded of their status in Christ: ὡς ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιοι (Col 3:12). This reminder is followed by a series of imperatives intended to exhort the believers on how to pattern their lives in Christ.[31] So ch. 1 is an affirmation of the status of holiness in Christ. Chapter two alludes to other forms of holiness concerning which the Christians are warned not to conform with. Colossians 3 seems to point to moral holiness as part of the "holiness" theme.[32]

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[28] Dying with Christ implies that they are now reconciled to God through the death of Christ and are made holy, blameless, and free from accusation (Col 1:20, 22).

[29] This notion is expressed by James Dunn, observing that "for the first time a note of appeal seems to enter (as distinct from a warning or instruction)." Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 188. I fully agree with Dunn on the transition from v. 20. He adds, "and for the first time the suggestion is made that (many/some? of) the Colossian Gentile believers were finding, or beginning to find, the teaching of the Colossian Jews attractive and were (in danger of) being drawn into their practices."

[30] F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 124.

[31] See Col 3:5, 8, 12, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23.

[32] Some commentaries have expressed a disjointed view of the sections of the epistle to the Colossians. For example, Barclay in his commentary asks the question, "Is the material in ch. 1, for instance a quite innocent exposition of the gospel and the cosmic role

This chapter lists vices and virtues as demonstrated in Figure 2. The list of vices is complemented by a list portraying the old nature that must be put to death.[33]
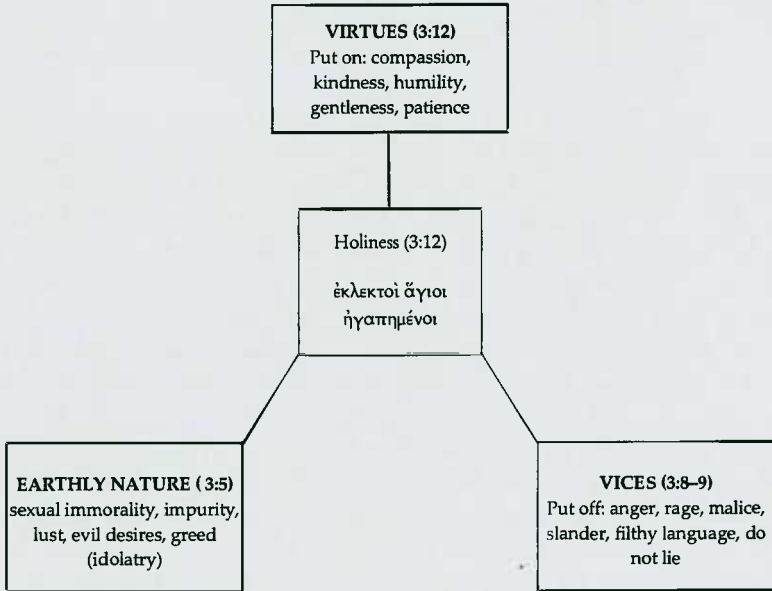


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              ┌─────────────────────────┐
              │     VIRTUES (3:12)       │
              │   Put on: compassion,    │
              │    kindness, humility,   │
              │   gentleness, patience   │
              └─────────────────────────┘
                          │
              ┌─────────────────────────┐
              │     Holiness (3:12)      │
              │                          │
              │    ἐκλεκτοὶ ἅγιοι        │
              │      ἠγαπημένοι          │
              └─────────────────────────┘
             ╱                          ╲
┌──────────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────┐
│  EARTHLY NATURE ( 3:5)    │   │     VICES (3:8–9)        │
│ sexual immorality, impurity,│ │ Put off: anger, rage, malice,│
│  lust, evil desires, greed │  │ slander, filthy language, do │
│        (idolatry)          │  │          not lie           │
└──────────────────────────┘   └──────────────────────────┘
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Figure 2: Holiness in the Context of Colossians 3

4. Linguistic Considerations for the Use of ἅγιος in Colossians

The word ἅγιος according to the Septuagint lexicon is rendered "holy" or "sacred."[34] The Patristic lexicon exhibits the following meaning for the word ἅγιος: "separated" or "holy."[35] In examining the meaning and use of the

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of Christ, or is it designed to stockpile the theological weapons necessary for the attack in ch. 2?" (John M. Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon* [London: T & T Clark, 2004], 37). He then proceeds to affirm the latter position. In the same vein, Barclay argues that it is less clear how the material in Col 3 and 4 relates to the battle played out in Col 2. Commenting on ch. 3 Wall states: "The moral result of salvation in the life of God's people is holiness. The catalogue of traditional virtues illustrates the character of holiness that grace creates in us..." Wall, *Colossians and Philemon*, 145, 146.

[33]   Cf. Eph 4:22, 24, 31, 32.

[34]   Muaraoka, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 3.

[35]   Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 18. The word could refer to: (1) God as the essence and source of holiness; (2) the church, its worship and Scripture; (3) the worshipers of the true God, both in

word ἅγιος it may be important to recognize its wider use, namely, that it may refer to God, persons or things.[36]

The meaning of ἅγιος in Colossians signifies persons being chosen, and dedicated to God.[37] The use of the word ἅγιος in Colossians therefore points to an emphasis on the holiness of persons. Covenant language is also used to express the meaning of this status.[38] Expressed this way, holiness in Colossians goes beyond mere adherence to a set of rules.[39] The rules of holiness the Colossians are urged to follow must be within the ambit of that covenantal relationship. To clear any misconceptions, this life of holiness (3:12) is couched in a series of exhortations that are relevant to the situation facing the Colossian believers (3:5–4:6).

5. Theology and Holiness in Colossians

The main theological theme in Colossians is the exaltation of Christ as portrayed in Colossians 1:15–20.[40] At the heart of the hymn (Col 1:15–20) there is a frequency of reference to creation and reconciliation through Christ.[41] The theological connection that links the hymn to the theme of holiness is described by Lincoln and Wedderburn: "Thus, while the hymn is in essence truly universal in scope, the concerns of the author of the letter narrow this scope down and focus upon the reconciliation of human beings accom-

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heaven (i.e., the angels and the faithful departed) and on earth (i.e., the faithful in general).

[36] See *BDAG* 10–11. The study of the semantic range of ἅγιος is important for understanding its meaning. See Susan Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew* (Waynesboro: Paternoster, 2003), 115. Even beyond the words, phrases, and grammar there is room for further explorations of linguistic links. See David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphors, Semantics, and Divine Imagery* (Brill Reference Library of Ancient Judaism 4; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 7. This study has attempted to demonstrate how "holiness" fits in the broader context of the letter. More can be done in the area of linguistics in order to elucidate meaning.

[37] See Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians* (AB 34B; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 186. There is an ongoing debate concerning Col 1:12 whether it refers to saints or angels. According to Barth and Blanke the context does not support the notion of angels as referents in Col 1:12. However, Dunn makes reference to Col 2:18 as a possible link to similar phrases in the Qumran literature. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 76; cf. Wis 5:5 and 1QS 11:7–8. Moreover, Dunn himself perceives this view as untenable.

[38] Col 2:11; 3:12; cf. Exod 19:5, 6; 1 Pet 2:9; Jer 31:33; see also Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 122.

[39] See Col 2:20–23; cf. Gal 4:8–11.

[40] Andrew T. Lincoln and A. J. M. Wedderburn, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23.

[41] See Col 1:16, 18, 20.

plished in Christ."[42] It is this work of reconciliation that offers a new status of holiness to the previously alienated (1:22). The hymn depicts cosmic powers (1:16) and the church (1:18). The cosmic powers are disarmed (2:15) by Christ in his conquest against them. But this comes later in the picture. The emphasis seems to be on the reconciliation of the human race to God in order to restore them to the state of holiness (1:22).[43] There is therefore a resounding resonance between the theological heart-beat of Colossians (1:15–20) and the theme of holiness in Colossians.

6. Conclusion

The references to holy persons, holiness allusions and echoes are embedded in the very fabric of the epistle's message and theology. Rather than forming a theme of their own the holiness texts are used to further develop the theme of the epistle "in Christ." The believers are holy only *in* Christ and *through* him. The believers are warned against philosophies or any other means of holiness outside of Christ.

The frequent use of the adjectival form of the word ἅγιος in Col 1 is significant for the interpretation of Colossians. It sets the tone within the context of the theme "in Christ" for the next chapter where the warning is given against philosophers who have a different view of holiness resulting in a distorted view of Christ. Col 1 has an introductory greeting (1:1, 2) in which the saints are addressed as holy ones (v. 2) and an extended thanksgiving section(1:3–14) in which the corporate view of the holy ones is given (v. 4) and the believers' qualification for sharing in the inheritance of the saints (v. 12) is mentioned. Christ's supremacy is highlighted in Col 1:15–20. The former life of the Colossians is depicted as a life of alienation from God (Col 1:21). "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Col 1:22, NIV). The mystery of Christ is revealed to the holy ones (1:26). The word ἅγιος sets the stage for the warnings in ch. 2, and the exhortations in ch. 3. This may explain the purpose of the extended introductory section of the letter.

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[42]   Lincoln and Wedderburn, *New Testament Theology*, 40.

[43]   Ibid., 48.