

1:15–23 THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by^a him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

²¹And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation^b under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

OVERVIEW: This extraordinarily rich passage of New Testament Christology occasions reflection on the incarnation and the two natures of Christ. This passage exemplifies the Reformation slogan “Christ alone”—leading to practical implications, for example, Wolfgang Musculus using the idea of Christ as the true image of God as a reason for denying the place of images in the church, as Christ alone is the true image of God. Several authors stress that it is only in Christ that we know God’s mercy—outside of Christ, God appears uncaring, distant or wrath-

ful. In Christ we see his warmth and true heart, although the commentators emphasize different aspects as to why this is the case—whether because of human sin being unable to see God’s goodness, or God’s deliberate will in hiding his goodness apart from in Christ. Christ’s preexistence and his distinction from a creation which is decidedly *not* divine are emphasized here.

1:15–20 *The Person and Work of Christ*

CHRISTOLOGY. PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: Christ is God and human truly and in nature. Here he is called the image of the Father, and in the letter to the Hebrews “the very stamp of the substance of the Father.” If a parallel may be permitted, this means that he is born of the Father in the same way that its light is related to the sun. As the older writers put it, he is light of light. Therefore he is also called in the letter to the Hebrews, *apaugasma* [radiance]. He is also the image, because he is the Word. For just as words are used by us as representations of realities, so the Son is the true likeness of the Father, born from the Father’s mind. The Son, the Word made flesh, expounded on earth the Father’s will to us, as it is written in John 1:18, “The Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him to us.” NOTES ON PAUL’S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS 1:15.¹

CHRIST THE IMAGE OF GOD AND ASSURANCE OF SALVATION. JOHANNES BUGENHAGEN: Christ is the head and beginning of all things. Whether you look at the work of creation or the work of the new creation and redemption, Christ himself is the firstborn ahead of all creatures. He is

^a That is, by means of; or in

^b Or to every creature

¹ Melanchthon, *Colossians*, 38 (MWA 4:221.13–25), quoting Heb 1:3; cf. Tertullian Apology 21.12–14 (CC 1:124–25; ANF 11:93).

the Author and Lord of all. He is truly the first-born, glorified before all creatures. He is the first to be glorified by resurrection, the Author and Lord of the new creation, the head of the body of the church. Because he pleased the Father (lest any merits be attributed to human beings), all things are in Christ, through whom all things were made. Through him the broken and lost are brought to new life by the blood of the cross and his assumption of a mortal body. This fact totally persuades and confirms our faith. Does not the Father tell us to rest assured in that he gave us his Son, and with him everything that is his? This is the same Son he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ANNOTATIONS 1:15.²

CHRIST THE IMAGE OF GOD. PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI: Writing to the Colossians, Paul calls him “the image of the invisible God.” This is appropriate, in view of his sanctity and excellence. Has there ever been, or will there ever be, a son who is a more perfect image of his father? We acknowledge and confess him as the only Son of God, truly God and truly man. As to his divine nature, he has no brothers. He is the one and only divine Word of whom we speak. Also among men—even though he has many brothers by adoption—he stands alone in the excellence of his grace, most pleasing to God. He is the perfect portrait and likeness of his eternal Father, so that he can be called truly unique. Whether it is on account of his sinlessness, or because he is filled with the riches of the divine treasury, he is worthy to be called our Lord. COMMENTARY ON THE APOSTLES’ CREED.³

THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD. KASPAR OLE-

² Bugenhagen, *Annotationes*, 37r–38v, alluding to Rom 8:32; Heb 1:2.

³ PMR 13.

VIANUS: Since the apostle has declared that it is in him that we possess a ransom

(*apolytrōsin*), he thereby reveals who that Man is. He does so first so that he might teach that God offers himself to be recognized in no other way than in Christ and, second, at the same time also that complete salvation from God is offered and gifted to us in this Christ, so that nothing might be sought beyond him and that in him the consciences of the faithful might be able to rest safely. So afterward he concludes that “it pleased God that all fullness should dwell in him.”

The first limb of this verse contains these words: “who is the image of the invisible God.” God certainly does not communicate himself by any other means than through knowledge, and indeed knowledge of the kind by which human beings might not flee God but approach him, have confidence in him and expect good things from him. As [Jeremiah 31](#) puts it, “from the least to the greatest they shall know me”; or [Hosea 2](#): “And you will know YHWH.” But God in his own bare essence is invisible to us, which is to say that he can be seen by the eyes neither of the body nor of the mind.

1. That it is not possible for God to be seen is clear from [Exodus 33](#): “You are not able to see my face, for no man can see me and live” (hence that cry among the people of Israel whenever they had caught even a glimpse of the glory of God: “We will die, since we have seen God.” For this is how great the incomprehensible majesty of God is.

2. Further, it would not be of any benefit if God could be known without Christ. For what would such knowledge bring about, other than that we should flee more and more from God? For when we hear that God is merciful, and

meanwhile indeed that he is just, since his goodness does not pour itself out on anyone before his justice is satisfied, are we not rather hurled into despair by that great justice of God which punishes any and every sin, than that we carry back some fruit other than Christ? Thus should you be aware that God is holy. And by this you will feel all the more that you are unclean. As Isaiah puts it: “Woe, woe to me, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.” Therefore God not only cannot be known by any means other than Christ, but this would not be of any benefit if it were the case. NOTES ON [COLOSSIANS 1:15](#).⁴

WORSHIPING THE IMAGE OF GOD. WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: Pictures and statues are made in the image of old men and the flesh. The papist idolaters honor and adore these in temples instead of worshiping the image of the Father. Truly Augustine says in Epistle 119.11: “Nobody owes honor to an image of God, except that image which is what he is. That image must not be worshiped instead of him but with him.” It is wicked for Christians to place such an image of God in a temple and to exchange the glory of the invisible and incorruptible God for the likeness of corruptible men. The papists complain that in our church nobody prostrates themselves to images of God, Christ and the saints; to a picture or sculpture of wood, stone, bronze, silver and gold. Thus they defame our church, because they are not holy but profane.... The image of God truly lives in the church, when Christ the unbegotten dwells there. ON PAUL’S LETTER TO THE [COLOSSIANS 1:15](#).⁵

⁴ Olevianus, *In Epistolas Pauli*, 87, alluding to [Jer 31:34](#); [Hos 2:20](#); [Ex 33:20](#); [Is 6:5](#).

⁵ Musculus, *In Divi Pauli Epistolas*, 127.

CREATED BY THE FATHER AND HIS WORD. JOHANN AGRICOLA: Through the Word we were all created. In the Word we were before we existed. In the Word we are sustained while we exist. In the Word we are sustained, after we are no longer. The Word is our beginning. The Word is our end. The Word is our middle. Now here the first article of faith is confirmed: I believe in God who is able to help me, a Father who wants to, to whom by his grace through the Word I have been born as heir and child. The one and only Creator of heaven and earth who has already proven that he wants to and is able to help, because he created heaven and earth. I confess that I exist in the Word. I was nothing, but now I am sustained in the Word, so long as I exist and live on earth and look up to heaven. And I will be ushered back to the Word when I cease to live and can no longer see heaven and must depart from all creatures. SERMON ON [COLOSSIANS 1:16–17](#).⁶

IMAGE OF GOD AND FIRSTBORN OF CREATION. HULDRYCH ZWINGLI: But lest the Son of God who shed his blood be perceived to be of inadequate dignity, he is here called the image of God. By image it means the *exact* image. That is, he resembles the Father in everything, and not merely like an engraving or a picture.

He is the firstborn of creation. That is, the Son of God is before all creatures, but nevertheless, he is not to be numbered among created beings. Because if you want to talk about him in relation to all creatures, now he would just be one particular creature born among the many. But the prior sense is much more pleasing. For all things are created *in him*. Created things are made by another—and because this would indicate a defect in relation to Christ, it therefore

⁶ Agricola, *Die Epistel an die Colosser*, F7r.

does not apply to him. ANNOTATIONS 1:15.⁷

FIRSTBORN OVER ALL CREATION. GASPARO CONTARINI: It is not the case that a creature is born of God like a daughter, and that Christ himself was just born earlier, so that he is related as a brother. For the Word proceeds from the Father, so that he is begotten from his substance. A creature appears, created from nothing.[†] But Christ himself was begotten before all creatures, that is, before the creation of every sort of creature, because everything was created *by* him. NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTERS—**COLOSSIANS 1:15**.⁸

CHRIST AND CREATION. PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: Now this is an important point, teaching the doctrine that all things were fashioned through the Son, and that all things continued to exist through him. The same statement comes in the letter to the **Hebrews 1:3**: “Upholding all things by the word of his power.” From it we learn what creation means. For realities are not so made, that they can continue in existence without God's help; rather, God governs them, and constantly keeps them in being. As Paul says in **Acts 17:28**, “In him we live and have our being and move.” That realities endure, that we breathe, that we live, that we eat, that we speak, that we perform our natural capabilities, are all works of God. Nor should we suppose that God will dissociate himself from what he has made. He is not like a carpenter, who hands the ship he has built over to the crew, and goes away. In my opinion, this knowledge is useful for the nourishing of faith and fear. NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE **COLOSSIANS 1:15**.⁹

⁷ Zwingli, *Annotationes*, 512.

[†] *Facta ex nihilo*.

⁸ Contarini, *Opera*, 497.

DID GOD CREATE EVIL? PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: But here it is usual to ask: if God maintains nature, is he not the author of ills and sins? It is impossible to deal at length with this question here. It is enough to grasp this: God preserves nature and makes it effectual. As it says here, *Whether they be thrones, or dominions, or powers, all things consist in him*. That is to say, whatever is powerful and effectual derives its power and its efficacy from God. It is God who pours out life and strength and wisdom and riches. But since Christ himself says, “When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own,” I do not make God out to be the author of sin. Rather, he is the one who preserves nature, and who imparts life and motion: a life and motion which the devil and godless people do not use correctly. NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE **COLOSSIANS 1:15**.¹⁰

DID GOD CREATE FREE WILL? PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: It should also be asked here whether, if God is indeed the mover of all creatures, there is no freedom for our will?... When the question is raised as to the faculty and powers of the free will, one should not ask whether it resides in our power to eat, drink, walk, see, hear and perform similar natural actions. The question is, whether we are able to fear God, to believe in God, to love the cross, and so forth, without the Holy Spirit. To put it another way, the question is not concerning the created order, as to the way in which God is the mover of all creatures, of trees, beasts and people. But it is to do with justification and sanctification, with those actions which do not fall within the sphere of one's natural life that

⁹ Melanchthon, *Colossians*, 38 (MWA 4:221.25–222.6).

¹⁰ Melanchthon, *Colossians*, 38–39 (MWA 4:222.7–19), quoting **Jn 8:44**.

is imparted by God to good and bad alike. What we must hold is, that one's nature cannot bring forth out of its natural abilities, true fear of God, or true trust in God, or any of the other spiritual dispositions and movements.... We are told in clear statements that the human will has no such freedom as can bring forth Christian, or spiritual righteousness. And so we learn that Christian righteousness is not merely social behavior (*civilia opera*), or behavior of the kind that the reason produces on its own. It is a new kind of life, wholly unknown to the ungodly. We learn too that we need the Holy Spirit, who renews and purifies us. Therefore, it is not hard for anyone who looks at what is lost to human nature, to understand that the human will has no freedom. One should look, not at what one still has as a child of Adam—to go this way or that, to like these clothes or those—but at what pertains to recreation or the new birth, which the Holy Spirit effects. What need would there be for the Holy Spirit, if the human will could by its own abilities fear God, trust God, put down concupiscence, love the cross? In a word, what is it but arrogance, not to seek the Holy Spirit's help, when Christ promised, indeed commanded it, and instead to seek help in our own abilities? This, then, is what reason cannot effect by itself. NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE [COLOSSIANS 1:15](#).¹¹

CREATED FOR CHRIST. JOHN DAVENANT: Christ possesses, and in all fullness, infinite glory from all eternity. But in creating the world he manifested this his glory to us and laid on all his creatures the obligation of glorifying him.... In creation, therefore, Christ intended

this glory not as the fee for his labor or as private advantage to himself but as being proper, decorous and strictly his due, and beneficial to the very creature itself. EXPOSITION OF [COLOSSIANS 1:16](#).¹²

JESUS THE CREATOR. JEAN DAILLÉ: Let us learn from this, first, to adore the Lord Jesus as Creator of the universe and to acknowledge by this work of his, his true and eternal divinity. Let no objection or carnal difficulty, let no heretical subtlety ever pluck up this sacred truth out of our hearts.... And admire we constantly the goodness and the wisdom of the Father, who gave us such a Savior as our necessity did require. For none was able to repair us but he who first made us; and the hand alone which created us could restore us to that blessed state from whence we had fallen by sin. And since God has given us for Mediator and the Prince of our salvation the same whom this great frame had for its Creator, let us embrace him with a firm belief. Be content with his fullness and regard none beside him, in heaven or in earth.... But it is not enough to confess that the Lord Jesus is the Creator of all things and to acknowledge him as our only Savior and Mediator; this faith must sanctify our affections and actions, arm us against all the temptations of the enemy, comfort us in affliction and assure us against every fear. For since Jesus has created this grand universe, since thrones and dominions are the work of his hands, since it is by his providence that all this subsists in the state it is, who does not see with what devotion we should serve so powerful a monarch? THE EIGHTH SERMON ON COLOSSIANS.¹³

¹¹ Melancthon, *Colossians*, 39–40 (MWA 4:222.20–223.29).

¹² Davenant, *Exposition*, 1:199–200.

¹³ Daillé, *Colossians*, 73.

THE PREEXISTENCE OF CHRIST. JOHN DAVENANT: Now he who made the world must have existed before the world, for he made it by granting existence to that which had no existence previous to its being created. From these two considerations therefore, both that he was begotten of God and that the world was made by him, it is proved that he is before all things.

This declaration of the apostle clearly refutes those who deny Christ to have had a personal existence before his incarnation. For how could he have been before all things if he was not before his incarnation? EXPOSITION OF [COLOSSIANS 1:17](#).¹⁴

CHRIST THE BEGINNING AND END. JOHN CALVIN: *He is the beginning.* Since *archē* among the Greeks sometimes means “the end” to which all things are referred, we might be able to understand it as meaning that Christ is in this sense *the end*. I prefer, however, to explain Paul’s words thus, that he is the *beginning*, because he is the *firstborn from the dead*. For in the resurrection there is a restoration of all things, and in this manner the commencement of the second and new creation; for the former had fallen to pieces in the ruin of the first human. Since then, Christ by rising again has inaugurated the kingdom of God, he is rightly called the *beginning*. For *after this* we truly begin to exist before God, as soon as we are renewed, so that we are new creatures. COMMENTARY ON [COLOSSIANS 1:18](#).¹⁵

FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD. KASPAR VON SCHWENKFELD: [Revelation 1:5](#) also reveals Jesus Christ as the firstborn from the dead, the

King of kings of the earth, who loves us and

who has washed our sins away through his blood and made us kings and priests before God his Father. As John soon adds, to him belongs all glory and power in all ages, Amen.

Some oppose this and say that Christ is in some lesser manner only human—the first-born from the dead—and not fully God. But I say that “begotten” is not “created,” and that he is begotten from the omnipotence of God the Father, and thus in this manner it is possible also to be a creature.

The man Jesus Christ is by his nature the Son of God, the omnipotent power of the Word, with whom he has unity with God, in the glory and majesty of God the Father himself. By his resurrection from the dead and his sitting at the right hand of the Father, he is clearly begotten. To this end, the Scripture says, “You are my Son. Today I have begotten you.” He is thus the Prince of life, the eternal Priest, the Commander of the children of God and the Cause of our health. Indeed, truly he is the firstborn of a multitude of brothers, to whose image all the children of God must be conformed. A CLEAR TESTIMONY XXV.¹⁶

THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION. GASPARO CONTARINI: Many rose from the dead prior to Christ, including Lazarus, whom Christ himself raised. But they all rose to a mortal life, and they would all die again. Christ alone was raised to an immortal life over which death has no dominion. This is unprecedented. It will be observed in Scripture, that it speaks of resurrection in terms of generation—and if from a corpse, as it were, from a seed, as Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 15](#), it comes into being as an immortal body. Those who are born

¹⁴ Davenant, *Exposition*, [1:202](#).

¹⁵ [CTS 42:153](#)* ([CO 52:87](#)).

¹⁶ Schwenkfeld, *Clara testimonia*, XXV, quoting [Ps 2:7](#); [Acts 13:33](#).

again[†] will sit with the Son of man. NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTERS—[COLOSSIANS 1:18](#).¹⁷

DO NOT FEAR DEATH. JOHN DAVENANT: Since Christ is called the firstborn from the dead, we understand that death is not now to be feared by Christians, who are entitled to expect eventually a certain new and glorious resurrectional birth. For as Christ, on rising again, is called the firstborn from the dead, so all we, after rising again, shall obtain a certain new nativity. EXPOSITION OF [COLOSSIANS 1:18](#).¹⁸

CHRIST THE AUTHOR OF LIFE. LANCELOT RIDLEY: *He is the beginning, firstborn of the dead:* The Greek says he is the beginning and the first begotten of the dead, as you would say he is beginning, first fountain and author of our life, health, resurrection and salvation, having all goodness in himself and distributing it to others, and therefore not without a cause he is chief in all things, to him is due the chief place in all things, for he is equal to the Father in deity, substance and effect, in power and might and in all things. EXPOSITION OF [COLOSSIANS 1:18](#).¹⁹

THE SON THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH. KASPAR OLEVIANUS: He [Paul] shows the manner in which the eternal deity of Christ exists from the first creation and sustaining of things, so also from out of the new and more excellent creation, sustaining, governance and consummation of the new people—that is to say, of the church, which he builds and joins as if a body to himself—he sets forth at the same time his divinity and his eternal office. But it is in the

full resemblance to his headship that causation is expressed: that he brought from the beginning complete salvation to the elect, that he was appointed from eternity as priest and king of the church, and finally that he poured out from the beginning the fruit of his priesthood and kingdom on the elect like a head on the limbs arranged beneath it. This is the reason why it is the Son rather than the Father who is assigned to be the head of the church, because whatever the Father bestows which is of any good for the church, he bestows through and on account of the Son, so that its members might enjoy the benefits through and on account of the head to which they are joined. This, then, is the most powerful proof of the eternal divinity of Christ and of his eternal office, namely, headship of the church. It is not the case that the church finally came to have a head when Christ had been born of Mary. Rather, it is necessary for the Son to have existed as head even prior to the incarnation. NOTES ON [COLOSSIANS 1:18](#).²⁰

CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH. THOMAS CARTWRIGHT: Here then we learn that as we draw life, and all our life from him alone, so we are taught that he alone is the head of the church, as he has been proved before, by that he is the image of God and created all things. And therefore he that will challenge the Head of the church must challenge himself to be the image of God, must be before all things, must be he that has created all things. COMMENTARY ON [COLOSSIANS 1:18](#).²¹

FROM CLAY TO CHILDREN OF GOD. JOHANN AGRICOLA: The first birth of us creatures is so distant

[†] *in regeneratione*.

¹⁷ Contarini, *Opera*, 497–98.

¹⁸ Davenant, *Exposition*, [1:226](#).

¹⁹ Ridley, *Colossians*, [E5r–v*](#).

²⁰ Olevianus, *In Epistolas Pauli*, 93.

²¹ Cartwright, *Colossians*, 68–69.

from the one who begot us, God, that we are not able to reach him, nor to come to him, as unlikely that clay and pot might become the potter. Rebirth, however, brings us close to the Creator, close to God, so that we clothe ourselves in God, becoming with Christ a lord over the first birth, sharing, indeed being filled with all the benefits that God himself has, and becoming one substance with God. The first birth belongs to hell. The second birth reigns over hell and places us at the right of God through Christ. SERMON ON [COLOSSIANS 1:18](#).²²

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE CHURCH. JOHN DAVENANT: This external calling through the proffered grace of the gospel, and this external adoption and proclamation of Christianity under legitimate pastors, constitutes the outward and visible church, and those who profess Christianity are visible members of the church. But there is also another more effectual calling joined to this external one, in some persons, namely, by grace implanted and impressed through the power of the Spirit in the hearts of the called, by means of which they not only enter on the external proclamation of Christianity but are joined to Christ himself by the internal bonds of faith and the Spirit. EXPOSITION OF [COLOSSIANS 1:18](#).²³

THE FULLNESS OF GOD IN CHRIST. JACOBUS ARMINIUS: For God has unfolded in Christ all his own goodness. “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell” and that the “fullness of the Godhead should dwell in him,” not by adumbration or according to the shadow but “bodily.” For this reason he is called “the image of the invisible God,” “the

brightness of his Father’s glory and the express image of his person,” in whom the Father condescends to afford to us his infinite majesty, his immeasurable goodness, mercy and philanthropy, to be contemplated, beheld, and to be touched and felt; even as Christ himself says to Philip, “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.” For those things which lay hidden and indiscernible within the Father, like the fine and deep traces in an engraved seal, stand out, become prominent and may be most clearly and distinctly seen in Christ, as in an exact and protuberant impression formed by the application of a deeply engraved seal on the substance to be impressed. [ORATION ON THE OBJECT OF THEOLOGY](#).²⁴

FULLNESS IN CHRIST: TWO PERFECT NATURES IN ONE PERSON. SCOTTISH CONFESSION: When the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, his eternal Wisdom, the substance of his own glory in this world, who took the nature of humanity from the substance of woman, indeed, a virgin, by the working of the Holy Ghost. And so was born the righteous seed of David, the angel of the great counsel of God, the true Messiah [who was] promised, whom we confess and acknowledge [to be] Emmanuel, true God and true man, two perfect natures united and joined in one person. By this, our Confession, we condemn the damnable and pestilent heresies of Arius, Marcion, Eutyches, Nestorius and such others who either denied the eternity of his Godhead or the truth of his human nature or confounded them, or else divided them. CHAPTER 6, THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST JESUS.²⁵

²² Agricola, *Die Epistel an die Colosser*, F8r.

²³ Davenant, *Exposition*, 1:218.

²⁴ Arminius, *Works*, 1:69, quoting [Heb 1:3](#); [Jn 14:9](#).

²⁵ Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:443–44*.

THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST. KASPAR OLEVIANUS: The immutable decree of God springs from the pinnacle of wisdom and mercy. It is to this wisdom of God we ought to submit ourselves so that in the end we might possess glory as the angels declared at his birth. Let us first see how all fullness dwells in Christ by reason of his person: for divinity in the person of the Logos is joined “hypostatically” with the human nature of Christ. Thus divinity dwells in no other creature, angel or man in such a way that the Logos and human nature also may be a single person. This also is something which Justin Martyr expresses in a very beautiful simile when he teaches that the rays of the sun are conjoined in one way to the sun and in another to the eyes, since these are joined with the sun in such a way as to be part of the sun and never to be separated from the sun; they are indeed joined to my eye in such a way that my eye can enjoy them, yet they are not part of the eye, nor are they joined to the eye by a special bond. NOTES ON [COLOSSIANS 1:20](#).²⁶

RECONCILIATION IN CHRIST THE HEAD. JOHN OWEN: This, then, is that which the apostle declares in these words, “To gather together in one all things which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Christ.” And so he again expresses it here in [Colossians 1:20](#), “To reconcile all things to himself in him, whether they are things in earth, or things in heaven.” All things were fallen into disorder and confusion by sin; they were fallen off from God into variance among themselves. God would not restore them into their first order, in an immediate dependence on his divine perfections. He would no longer keep them in two distinct families, but he would, in his infinite wisdom

and goodness, gather them up into one common head, on whom they should have their immediate dependence and be reconciled again among themselves. This new head, wherein God has gathered up all things in heaven and earth into one, one body, one family, on whom is all their dependence, in whom they all now consist, is Jesus Christ the Son of God incarnate. MEDITATIONS AND DISCOURSES ON THE GLORY OF CHRIST.²⁷

GOD WILL RECONCILE THE WHOLE OF CREATION THROUGH CHRIST. THOMAS CARTWRIGHT: “All things.” *Question:* Why not “all human beings”? For human beings only are saved and reconciled unto God, having been his enemies. *Answer:* True, for it is not meant of the angels or of the other creatures. And yet all these dumb and unreasonable creatures have restoration by the death of Christ. For the heavens and earth and all things shall be renewed, and the sun shall have double the light it has, and therefore the virtue of Christ’s sufferings reaches even to them. But these cannot be said to be reconciled to God, because they were never his enemies, although by reason of the sin of humanity they were partakers with him of the curse of God. But by reconciling “all things” is here meant all the children of God who are already in heaven or in earth or shall be to the end of the world. COMMENTARY ON [COLOSSIANS 1:20](#).²⁸

PEACE IN HEAVEN AND EARTH THROUGH CHRIST ALONE. PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: No sacrifice and no works can make satisfaction for our sins, except Christ alone.... What Paul writes here about all things being reconciled through

²⁶ Olevianus, *In Epistolas Pauli*, 112–13.

²⁷ Owen, *Meditations*, 370–71, quoting [Eph 3:15](#).

²⁸ Cartwright, *Colossians*, 71*.

Christ is on the same subject. So are the words *Having made peace in heaven and earth: In heaven*, because God is now appeased towards us. He has become our father, has forgotten our misdeeds, and rules us and saves us.... And peace is made *in earth*, because we in our turn love God, and believe in him and trust his mercy. For the flesh on its own can only hate God, when it sees what punishments are hanging over us for our sins, and when it sees us exercised by many disasters in this life. Considering these things, the human understanding decides that God takes no interest in human affairs. As a result, it either despises him, or decides that he is cruel and seems to find our misfortunes amusing. In consequence, it forms a grudge against him, because it deems him unfair. But once we have heard that we are forgiven for Christ's sake, and believe, then we experience what it is to be received into grace; we experience God's care for us; that we are ruled and defended by him, and troubled by adversities for our good. As a result, we think well of God, we acknowledge him as merciful and righteous, and we both seek for and expect help from him. This is the true peace towards God, which Christ accomplishes *in earth*. It is clearly eternal life itself, and a supreme and ineffable solace in every distress. It is such a peace, that it also brings about peace towards others. For, after they have received the Holy Spirit, there springs up in them all the fruits of the Holy Spirit—love, patience, and so on. This is how I understand the saying in [Luke 2:14](#), “Glory to God in the highest, and in earth peace and goodwill towards men.” NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE [COLOSSIANS 1:20](#).²⁹

²⁹ Melancthon, *Colossians*, 42–43 ([MWA 4:226:8–227:13](#)), alluding to [Eph 1:10](#); [1 Tim 2:5–6](#); [1 Jn 2:2](#); [Jn 1:29](#); [Mal 3:17](#).