

19.17

## Divine Wisdom and the “Colossian Hymn”

Colossians 1:15–20 describes the exalted Christ in words that probably derive from an early Christian hymn or confession:

<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

<sup>16</sup>for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created,  
things visible and invisible,

whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers

—all things have been created through him and for him.

<sup>17</sup>He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold  
together.

<sup>18</sup>He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the  
firstborn from the dead,

so that he might come to have first place in everything.

<sup>19</sup>For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

<sup>20</sup>and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all  
things,

whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the  
blood of his cross.

These verses also provide us with a clue as to how such an understanding of Christ might have developed in the early church. Many of the ideas attributed to Christ in Colossians 1:15–20 were

also attached to the personified figure of Wisdom in certain Jewish writings that were familiar to Paul and other Jewish Christians at the time. Look at these statements from the book of Proverbs and two writings from the Old Testament Apocrypha, Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon:

- Wisdom is “a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (Wis. 7:26; cf. Col. 1:15, 19).
- Wisdom was “before all other things” (Sir. 1:4; cf. Col. 1:17).
- Wisdom was present with God before creation (Prov. 8:22–31; cf. Col. 1:15).
- Wisdom served as God’s agent through whom everything in heaven and earth was made (Prov. 3:19; 8:27–31; Wis. 7:22; 8:4–6; 9:2; cf. Col. 1:16).
- Wisdom “holds all things together” and “orders all things well” (Wis. 1:7; 8:1; cf. Col. 1:17).
- Wisdom reconciles people to God, making them to be “friends of God” (Wis. 7:14, 27; cf. Col. 1:20).

This is poetic language, and we do not know how literally readers would have taken it (Did they believe Wisdom was an actual divine being?). Still, the words of what is sometimes called the “Colossian Hymn” (Col. 1:15–20) apply to Christ what these sacred Jewish texts said about Wisdom. This is a good indication of one prominent

resource that early Christians used in coming to understand who  
Jesus Christ was in relation to God and in relation to the world.