

Comparing Pauline christology in the disputed and undisputed letters

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One of the main issues in debates about the authenticity of the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians is their high christology in comparison with the undisputed Pauline letters, especially as portrayed in Colossians 1:15–20 and Ephesians 1:20–23. In this contribution, the main question that is asked is whether the christology in the undisputed material matches that of the disputed material, and if so, how it influences aspects of debates on authenticity.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This is done by comparing the christological content of Colossians 1:15–20 and Ephesians 1:20–23 with the main christological passages in the undisputed Pauline letters, especially Romans 8:34; 10:6–13; 1 Corinthians 8:5–6, 15:24–28 and Philippians 2:6–11.

Keywords: Pauline theology; Pauline corpus; christology; authenticity; authorship; disputed.

Introduction

Passages such as Colossians 1:15–20 and Ephesians 1:20–23 are traditionally considered to convey a high christology. According to Colossians 1:15–20 (cf. Col 2:9–10, 15), which is widely considered as an early Christian hymn, Christ is presented as pre-existent, as involved in creation and as positioned above all created things, including 'thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities'.¹ In him all things hold together, he is the head of the body of believers, the fullness of God dwells in him, and through him all things are reconciled to himself. According to Beale (2019:91), in this passage, Christ's 'sovereignty over the cosmos' and his rulership over all things are epitomised (Beale 2019:91).

Similarly, according to Ephesians 1:20–23, Christ is presented as eternally seated at God's right hand (cf. Ps 110:1) in a position 'above all rule and authority and power and dominion', above every name. All things are put under his feet (cf. Ps 8:6) as the head of the Church, the body. This position of Christ conveys more than Christ's 'messianic reign' (Baugh 2016:124). In fact, Christ is presented as 'superior to all of his supernatural enemies' (Arnold 2010:112).

In scholarship about authorship and authenticity, these passages in Colossians and Ephesians often play an important role in arguments against Pauline authenticity. So, for example, Lohse (1971:179) argued that the christological statements in Colossians 1:15–20 go beyond statements about Jesus' superior position in Philippians 2:9–11. Similarly, Dunn (1996:36) held that the christology that is expressed in Colossians 1:15–20; 2:9–10 and 15 'looks to be further along the trajectory ... than that of the undisputed Paulines'. Similar arguments are advanced by Kümmel (1973:343, 360), Lincoln (2000:577–583), Wilson (2005:158), Talbert (2007:7–11, 191–194) and Foster (2016:79–80). Van Kooten (2003) specifically argues that these passages in Colossians and Ephesians display a Graeco-Roman cosmology and cosmic christology that postdate Paul (cf. Best 1998:50; Käsemann 1964). It has to be pointed out here that christology cannot be confined to the passages mentioned here. So, for example, the idea of the 'one new man' [καὶνὸν ἄνθρωπον] and the reconciliation of people into 'one body' [ἐνὶ σώματι] in Ephesians 2:15–16 can also be related to christology in that it constitutes the corporate expression of christology (Son 2009:19). Yet, in this article, the focus is on what can be considered as direct or primary christological passages as well as passages that most often feature in the debates about authenticity.

On the other side of the debate, scholars who defend Pauline authorship of Ephesians and/or Colossians in respect of their high christology often perceive the undisputed Pauline letters as

1. All translations are author's own.

displaying the same level of christology or as expressing the same ideas as Colossians 1:15–20 and Ephesians 1:20–23. In approximate order of importance, the main passages from the undisputed material that are normally argued to display a comparable christology to that of Ephesians and Colossians are 1 Corinthians 8:5–6, Philippians 2:6–11 and Romans 10:6–13 (e.g. Beale 2019:3; McKnight 2018:13–14; Moo 2008:33²; cf. Dunn 1996:36³; Kümmel 1973:343⁴). Two other undisputed Pauline passages that can be mentioned in this regard are Romans 8:34, which is comparable to Ephesians 1:20 (cf. Ps 110:1), and 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, which is comparable to Ephesians 1:22 (cf. Ps 8:6).

The aim of this article is to reconsider whether the christology in the undisputed material (Rm 8:34; 10:6–13; 1 Cor 8:5–6; 15:24–28; Phlp 2:6–11) matches the level of christology conveyed by Colossians and Ephesians, and if so, how it influences debates on authenticity. Of course, focusing on christology only conveys one aspect of the author-debate. The intention in this article is thus not to rehearse the whole debate of the authorship of Colossians and Ephesians but to compare the christology of these two letters with the undisputed Pauline material. This will be done by first probing the christology of Colossians 1:15–20 (cf. 2:9–10, 15) and Ephesians 1:20–23 and then do the same with Romans 8:34; 10:6–13; 1 Corinthians 8:5–6, 15:24–28 and Philippians 2:6–11. The findings will then be compared, after which an evaluation of the levels of christology will follow. The point of departure in this comparison is that if the level of christology in the disputed and undisputed material is found to be on the same level, it would contribute towards viewing the disputed material as authentic.

Colossians 1:1–20; 2:9–10, 15

Colossians 1:1–20 is considered to be ‘one of the christological high points of the New Testament’, providing a ‘critical basis for the teaching of the letter’ (Moo 2008:107; cf. Wilson 2005:123–124). Since the volume of literature on this passage is enormous (see Wilson 2005:124), the discussion here will only focus on some of the main aspects in this conversation, especially as they pertain to christology. Certain stylistic features and unusual vocabulary within this passage lead most scholars to see this passage as quoting from a hymn or confession about Christ.⁵ The exact wording of such a hymn cannot be established beyond doubt, however. More important would be to identify the origins of the ideas contained in such a hymn, especially whether the writer would slavishly follow such ideas or whether he modified them for his own purposes.

2. Moo contends that the christology of Colossians and Ephesians does ‘move beyond’ the undisputed letters but argues that texts such as 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Philippians 2:5–11 ‘clearly anticipated this direction of thought’. He eventually argues for Paul being the author of both Colossians and Ephesians (Moo 2008:37–41).

3. Dunn mentions these passages to be the closest to that of Colossians 1:15–20 and Ephesians 1:20–23, even though he eventually argues for Timothy to the author of Colossians under Paul’s direction.

4. While Kümmel argues against Pauline authorship, he contends that the ideas in Colossians 1:15–20 find their antecedents in these undisputed passages.

5. This was extensively argued by Norden (1956). See also Wilson (2005:124–127). Moo (2008:108) points out, however, that the stylistic features are more evident in vv. 15–18 than 19–20.

While some scholars seek the origins of the hymnic material behind Colossians 1:15–20 in Graeco-Roman cosmology (e.g. Käsemann 1964; Van Kooten 2003; cf. Best 1998:50), others argue that such ideas and the general structure of such a hymn stem from the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Moo 2008:114; Wright 1993:107–108; cf. Gordley 2018:112). Psalms that display such monotheistic confessions include Psalms 96:5 and 146:5–6 as well as Isaiah 40:12–31 to a certain extent (Wright 1993:107). According to Wright (1993:108), even the structure of Genesis 1–11 and 12–50 ‘seems designed to say that Israel’s God is to be identified as the creator of the whole world, and *vice versa*’. Wright thus finds the precedent for the hymnic material in Colossians 1:15–20 in the monotheism that underlies the Hebrew Bible.⁶ In the same way, Wright (1993:109) finds parallels between the exodus and the statements in 1:12–14 (cf. 1:21–23) about the Father who delivered [ῥύομαι] his people and transferred them to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom believers have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. Since certain opponents can be identified within the letter to the Colossians (see esp. Col 2:8) and the letter thus also has a polemic edge, it is likely that the writer of Colossians specifically tailored ideas about the supremacy of Christ as found in Colossians 1:15–20 in his polemic against his opponents. While this passage might have been based on a hymn, it was probably modified to serve the author’s rhetorical aims (cf. Moo 2008:110).

Regarding the christology of Colossians 1:15–20 itself, it is clear that Christ is presented as preeminent (πρωτεύω) v. 18, *hapax legomenon* in both creation (vv. 15–17) and the ἐκκλησία [church], which represents the new creation (vv. 18–20). Some terms that occur in this passage do need some unpacking. The reference to Christ being the ‘image’ [εἰκών] of the invisible God (v. 15) likely here refers to his preincarnate state and thus Jesus’ eternal past (Beale 2019:81–82). This notion is parallel to the idea that Jesus was in the ‘form’ [μορφή] of God before his incarnation in Philippians 2:6 (Beale 2019:83). In Colossians 1:15 and 18, the term πρωτοτόκος [‘firstborn’] is applied to Christ. Since verse 16 asserts that ‘in or by’ [ἐν] him all things were created and that all things were created ‘through’ [διὰ] him and ‘for’ [εἰς] him, πρωτοτόκος could hardly mean that Christ himself was a created being. In verse 18, the term is used for Christ being the ‘firstborn’ from the dead. Πρωτοτόκος in verses 15 and 18 is used metaphorically in both instances, a usage that corresponds to Exodus 4:22, where God refers to Israel as his ‘firstborn’ (Ex 4:22) or to Psalm 89:27 in which David is called to be God’s firstborn. In Colossians 1:15 and 18, πρωτοτόκος thus rather means ‘supreme over’ (Moo 2008:119–120, cf. Bruce 1984:59; Lohse 1971:48–49; Pao 2012:100), expressing subordination (Wallace 1996:104). According to the Bauer lexicon, πρωτοτόκος in this context pertains to ‘having special status associated with a firstborn’ (Bauer et al. 2021:793, §2). Apart from the idea that Christ’s involvement in creation implies his pre-existence (Beale 2019:96; Bruce 1984:60–61), the statement that ‘he was before all things’ and the propositions used in verse 16

6. Cf. Lohse (1971:48) who draws parallels between the pre-existent Christ, being the firstborn of creation, with Hebraic wisdom material, such as Proverbs 8:22; Sirach 1:4; 24:9; Wisdom of Solomon 9:4, 9.

[ἐν, διὰ, εἰς] suggest that Christ is both the agent and the goal of his own creation (Beale 2019:95).

In verse 18, it is stated that Christ is 'preeminent' [πρωτεύω] in everything (Capes 2018:167; Moo 2008:128; English Standard Version). According to Bauer et al. (2021:791), the verb means 'to hold the highest rank in a group', to 'be first' or to 'have first place'. In context, Christ's preeminence does not only pertain to creation (vv. 1–17) but also to the new creation, for verse 18 states that he is the head of the body, the church [ἐκκλησία]. It is often argued that in the undisputed Pauline material, the term ἐκκλησία is for the most part used in connection with the local congregation, whereas in Colossians and Ephesians the term is universalised to point to the global believing community (e.g. Dunn 1996:95; Lincoln 1990:70–71; Moo 2008:127; Thielman 2010:110). Such a distinction is not so clear, however. As for the use of ἐκκλησία in all the Pauline material, under the heading 'people with shared belief, community, congregation', Bauer et al. (2021:269, §3) distinguish between denoting 'Christians in a specific place or area' (§3b) and 'the global community of Christians, (universal) church' (§3c). In the section 'Christians in a specific place or area', they list Romans 16:4, 5, 16, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 11:18; 14:4, 12, 19, 28, 33, 35; 16:1, 19; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 8:1, 18, 23; 11:8, 28; 12:13; Galatians 1:2, 22; Philippians 4:15; Colossians 4:15, 16; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 2 and 1 Timothy 5:16. Bauer et al. (2021:269, §3c) ('the global community of Christians, [universal] church'), list Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:4; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 12:28; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; Ephesians 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 27, 29, 32; Philippians 3:6; Colossians 1:18, 24; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4 and 1 Timothy 3:5, 15. Hoehner (2002:287) also lists 1 Corinthians 12:28; 15:9; Galatians 1:13 and Philippians 3:6 under this latter category (cf. Campbell 2023:110).

As can be seen from these two subcategories, both uses of ἐκκλησία [local and universal] occur right through the Pauline material, including the undisputed letters. It is especially noteworthy that there are quite a few occurrences in the undisputed Pauline letters where ἐκκλησία cannot be confined to any specific local church but has to pertain to the universal church. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul states that God appointed in the ἐκκλησία 'first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating and various kinds of tongues' (McKnight 2018:157; Trebilco 2012:178–180). Three other pertinent examples include 1 Corinthians 15:9, Galatians 1:13 and Philippians 3:6, in which Paul mentions his persecution of the ἐκκλησία before his Damascus experience, which clearly cannot be confined to a local church (cf. Campbell 2023:110; DeSilva 2022:102; Hoehner 2002:287). It is noteworthy that in both 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Galatians 1:13, Paul refers to the ἐκκλησία as the ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ ['the church of God']. In this regard, Best (1998:191) pointedly states that '[i]f a contrast then exists between the earlier epistles and Ephesians and Colossians in respect of emphasis it is not an absolute one'.

Christ's preeminence [πρωτεύω] is described in Colossians 1:18 in terms of superiority above the whole of creation, including things that are in heaven, on earth, things visible, invisible, thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities (v. 16), the church and the dead (v. 18). Pao (2012:97) and Moo (2008:122–123) argue that the thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities pertain especially to the spiritual world, including the entire angelic realm, which would correspond to the ancient worldview of spiritual beings or forces that influence human affairs (cf. Beale 2019:94; Bruce 1984:63–64). In addition, Christ's preeminence pertains to his 'supreme importance', which is also associated with his authority and rule above all things (Beale 2019:106; cf. McKnight 2018:159; Pao 2012:100). In terms of the new creation, Christ's preeminence also points to his reconciliation and restoration of all things (Beale 2019:111), which amounts to cosmic reconciliation (McKnight 2018:164–165).

The theme of Christ's supreme authority and headship reoccurs in Colossians 2:9–10 and 15. According to verse 9, the fullness of the deity dwells 'bodily' [σωματικῶς] in Christ, in which the writer seems to distance himself from dualism (Moo 2008:194). In verse 15, Christ is presented as disarming (Beale 2019:201; Moo 2008:213; Pao 2012:163) and triumphing over rulers and authorities. In these verses, Christ's supreme status above all other spiritual powers and authorities is thus reiterated.

Ephesians 1:20–23

Similar to that of Colossians 1:15–20, in Ephesians 1:20–23, Christ's rule, authority, power and dominion [ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος] over the spiritual world are expressed, including the universal ἐκκλησία. Verse 20 specifically states that after being resurrected, Christ is seated at God's right and in the 'heavenly places' [ἐπουράνιος], which clearly alludes to Psalm 110:1, confirming Christ's messianic reign (Arnold 2010:111; Baugh 2016:124; cf. Cohick 2020:177) and him being 'the exalted Lord', which accentuates his sovereignty (Hoehner 2002:275). In verse 21, Christ is pictured as supreme over all authorities. The terms ἀρχῆς, ἐξουσίας, δυνάμεως and κυριότητος can be considered as synonyms for authorities (Baugh 2016:125). According to Arnold (2010:112), Christ is portrayed here as 'superior to all of his supernatural enemies', which forms part of Christ's supremacy over all spirit beings, including the angelic realm (Arnold 2010:114; Campbell 2023:106; Hoehner 2002:279–280; Lincoln 1990:63).⁷ In the latter part of verse 21, it is added that Christ's authority is 'above every name that is named' [παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου] in this age and the age to come, which declares Christ's kingship and preeminence over all things, including creation and the new creation (Baugh 2016:127–130). According to Hoehner (2002:280), Christ's exaltation above every name indicates that 'every name that God cites is under Christ's authority', which for Lincoln (1990:65) involves Christ's rule over 'any imaginable cosmic forces'. The 'age to

⁷In this regard, Lincoln (1990:64) points to 6:12 in which the writer states that believers' wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but cosmic powers and spiritual forces.

come' can be seen as the messianic age (cf. Mt 12:32; Mk 10:30) that has already come, in which the Messiah demonstrates his permanent position at God's right hand (Hoehner 2002:282). The idea of the new age that has dawned on believers is well established in the undisputed Pauline material (1 Cor 10:11; cf. Gl 4:4; 1 Cor 1:20; 2:6, 8; 3:18; 2 Cor 4:4; Rm 12:2, Lincoln 1990:65).

Lincoln (1990:62) argued that in the writer's presentation of Christ's exalted position, there is a shift in the centre of gravity from the realm of the earth to that of the heaven. Lincoln (1990) states that:

It is not that christology has been swallowed up by ecclesiology, but rather that what has happened to Christ becomes determinative for the Church in its relationship to the heavenly realm. (p. 62)

Whether these notions in Ephesians indeed convey a shift or even a departure from the undisputed material has to be determined by probing the undisputed material in this regard, as will be done later in the discussion.

In verse 22, it is stated that Christ has put everything under his feet, which alludes to Psalm 8:6. Arnold (2010:114–115) points out that where 'all things' [πᾶς] refer to the created world, here in this verse, the scope of application is more universal, which includes the hostile angelic realm (cf. Hoehner 2002:283–284). Christ's universal lordship is hereby confirmed. As with Colossians 1:18, the ἐκκλησία is here identified with the 'body', which points to the universal church. The image of headship conveys that of leadership and authority (Arnold 2010:115; Hoehner 2002:286; cf. Bruce 1984:274).

Verse 23 ends with a statement that qualifies the body, namely, 'the fullness of him who fulfils all in all' [τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου]. While the grammar of this clause has been much disputed (see Arnold 2010:116–120; Best 1998:183–184), it most likely means that the exalted Lord fills the church with power and sovereign reign (cf. Arnold 2010:120) or that 'God's fullness which is filling Christ is filling the church' (Hoehner 2002:299). For Fee (2007:354), the notion that Christ fulfils all things in all places 'presupposes his full deity', constituting a very high christology.

Romans 8:34

In Romans 8:31–39, Paul contemplates Christ's loving sacrifice for believers and his work of justification. In verse 34, he mentions Jesus' death and resurrection and states that he is at the right hand of God, interceding for believers. In this regard, Romans 8:34 shares the allusion to Psalm 110:1 with Ephesians 1:20. In Psalm 110:1, Yahweh says to 'my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool'. The imagery of being at God's right hand is thus closely associated with victory over enemies. Jewett (2006:542) explains that 'at the right hand of God' is a technical expression, indicating 'the highest place of honour' (cf. Dunn 1988:503). Whereas in Ephesians 1:20 Christ is

declared to be 'seated' [καθίζω] at God's right hand, Romans 8:34 simply declares that Christ 'is' [εἰμι] at God's right hand from where he intercedes. Murray (1960:329) argued that Christ's position here implies his 'sovereignty and dominion with which he is invested, the glory with which he is crowned'. According to Moo (2018:564), Paul's reference to Jesus being at God's right hand points to Christ being 'elevated to the position of "vice-regent" in God's governance of the universe' (adopted by Middendorf 2013:717), although in this context it is applied to believers. For Thielman (2018:424), the idea of Christ at God's right hand who intercedes for believers is close to the idea in Ephesians 1:20–23 in which God gives the resurrected, enthroned and victorious Christ as the head over all things to the church. Porter (2015:176) reasons that the reference to Jesus being at God's right hand is pertaining to his 'position of power and perhaps even of equality with God in his judging capacity'.

Romans 10:6–13

In Romans 10:6–13, Paul explains the inner workings of righteousness and salvation by faith. The intricacies surrounding Paul's remarks about the ascent or descent of Christ (vv. 6–7) will not be unravelled here. The focus is rather on the extent of the christological statements. More important is the notion that Paul establishes Christ as mediating salvation by faith (v. 9). The reference in verse 11 to everyone who believes in 'him' that will not be put to shame, alludes to Isaiah 28:16 (cf. Rm 9:33). In Isaiah 28:16, Yahweh is one in whom people trust, which implies that Paul identifies Christ with Yahweh. Similarly, in verse 13, Paul quotes Joel 2:32: 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'. Here again, Yahweh (κύριος in the LXX) is identified with Christ. According to Moo (2018:678), Paul's language in verse 12 about Jesus Christ being Lord of all is based on 'an early Christian acclamation of Jesus as "Lord of all"'. The idea of 'calling on the Lord' (v. 13) was probably adapted by Early Christians and was used in reference to both God the Father and to Christ (Moo 2018:678). The identification of Christ with Yahweh (cf. 1 Cor 2:16; 1 Th 5:2) constitutes a 'high view of Christ' (Moo 2018:679) or a 'high christology' (Schreiner 2018b:548), which was common in the early church (Moo 2018:679; cf. Fitzmyer 1993:593). Schreiner (2018b:549) goes further and argues that the identification of Christ with Yahweh shows that 'Jesus was fully God' (cf. Fee 2007:259).

1 Corinthians 8:5–6

Within Paul's discourse on food offered to idols, in 1 Corinthians 8:4–5, he states that there is but one God, the Father, and that idols do not really exist (v. 4). In verses 5–6, Paul continues that although there are many so-called gods in heaven or earth, there is one God, the Father 'from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through or by whom all things are and through or by whom we exist' [ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν, καὶ εἰς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς δι' αὐτοῦ]. The idea that all things exist through Christ is closely parallel to

similar ideas expressed in Colossians 1:16–17, which states that all things were created through or by [διὰ] him and for [εἰς] him.

Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 8:6 is considered as one of his most significant christological statements (Schreiner 2018a:171). The notion that there is one God alludes to the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4, in which Paul glossed 'God' with 'the Father' and 'Lord' with 'Jesus Christ' (Tilling 2012:83; cf. Bruno, Lee & Schreiner 2024:88–89; Schreiner 2018a:171). According to Fee (2014:413), this is one of three 'expressly monotheistic' texts in Paul (cf. Gl 3:20; Rm 3:29–30; cf. Fee 2007:90). Some scholars consider Paul's statements here as part of a pre-Pauline Hellenistic creedal formulation (e.g. Conzelmann 1975:144), but that cannot be established beyond doubt (Fee 2014:413; Schreiner 2018a:171). In fact, Tilling (2012) argues that the 'relational institutions of Jewish monotheism' must be taken more seriously in assessing Paul's christology. He states, for example, that Paul often uses the 'God-relation pattern to describe the Christ-relation quite deliberately', such as in 1 Corinthians 8–10, and that Paul 'did this not atomistically, as if he were only using such God-language in terms of Christ occasionally'. Tilling thus upholds a divine Pauline christology (cf. Bauckham 1999; Hurtado 2003; Wright 2013:690–728). Similarly, in a recent study by Bruno et al. (2024), by evaluating various approaches to Paul's christology, pointing out strengths and weaknesses in them and by doing exegesis of the relevant Pauline texts themselves, they have concluded that Paul:

[V]iewed Jesus as the Lord, the one God of Israel, who is the God of the world and who became a Jewish man in order to fulfill his covenant promises to the world. Because of this, he is worthy of worship. (p. 145)

By using the prepositions διὰ and εἰς in 1 Corinthians 8:6, there is definitely a close relationship between God the Father and Christ's role in creation. Yet most scholars are reluctant to assign full creator-status to Christ. For Fee (2007:91), Paul presents Jesus as the 'agent of creation and redemption' while the Father is considered to be 'the ultimate source and goal or purpose of all things' (cf. Capes 2018:166). Thiselton (2000:636) sees Christ pictured as the means or mediator of our existence (cf. Conzelmann 1975:144–145), while Tucker (2024:212) merely states that Paul's use of διὰ implies that Christ was 'involved in creation' (cf. Perkins 2012:114). Ciampa and Rosner (2010:384) go further, arguing that Paul highlighted Christ's role in both creation and the new creation (cf. Conzelmann 1975:145; Fitzmyer 2008:343). The idea of Jesus as agent or mediator of creation also implies his pre-existence (Conzelmann 1975:144–145; Fee 2007:91; Fitzmyer 2008:343). In fact, for Gardner (2018:373), this is indeed one of Paul's clearest statements about Jesus' pre-existence. In addition, Bauckham (1999:37–40) argues that this kind of interchange of prepositions in itself fully identifies Christ with God (cf. Ciampa & Rosner 2010:382; Fee 2007:92).⁸

8. As Fee (2007:93) points out, some scholars hold that Paul here identifies Christ with 'Jewish wisdom', but adds that 'such an assertion will have to remain in the category of scholarly discovery, not Pauline disclosure'.

In respect of christology, Tilling (2012:90–91) argues for Paul employing a relational christology in which the monotheistic 'knowledge' of the Corinthians is contrasted with the 'necessary' monotheistic love for God, in which Christ is included 'directly in this relational dynamic'. Fee (2007:303), who considers the letter to the Colossians as authentic, argues that 'the same christological point of view lies behind both' Colossians 1:16–17 and 1 Corinthians 8:6, of which Colossians 1:16–17 'expresses in greater detail what is already presupposed in 1 Corinthians'. Ciampa and Rosner (2010:383) consider Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 8:6 as conveying 'the highest possible christology imaginable'. Collins (1999:317) makes the interesting point that the association of the paternity of God and the lordship of Christ in 1 Corinthians 8:6 can also be observed in Romans 15:6, in which Paul states that believers should glorify 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' [τὸν θεὸν καὶ πατέρα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] and 2 Corinthians 1:3, in which Paul starts by writing 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' [Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ]. The same is the case in Philippians 2:6:11, which will be discussed later (cf. also 1 Th 1:10; 3:11–13). Collins (1999) argues that for Paul:

[T]he christological title of Lord is principally associated with Jesus insofar as he has been raised by the Father. It is also associated with his role at the parousia. Each of these correlative realities reveals God as Father. (p. 317)

1 Corinthians 15:24–28

In 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, Paul contemplates the consummation when Jesus will deliver the kingdom to God the Father 'after destroying every rule and every authority and power' [πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δύναμιν]. Two of the words, ἀρχή and ἐξουσία, correspond to the words used in Colossians 1:16 (εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι). Although the powers and authorities that constitute Christ's enemies are not specified, Thiselton (2000:1232) argues that they probably point to 'agencies beyond this world'. Ciampa and Rosner (2010:768–769) point out that the words ἀρχή and ἐξουσία also occur in the LXX of Daniel 7:27, in which all kingdoms will be subjected to the holy people of the Most High and in which all rulers will obey him. Regarding 1 Corinthians 15:24, the other important question is to whom the 'he' refers to in the verb καταργήσῃ (third person singular). While it is grammatically ambiguous, it probably makes best sense that the same subject, Jesus, who delivers the kingdom to the Father, also destroys the rules and authorities (Fee 2007:108–109; Fitzmyer 2008:574).

In 1 Corinthians 15:25, Paul goes further, stating that Christ must reign 'until he has put all enemies under his feet', thereby alluding to Psalms 110:1 and 8:6, which in turn corresponds to both Romans 8:34 and Ephesians 1:20. For Paul, the last enemy to be destroyed is death itself (1 Cor 15:26). In verse 27, Paul then makes his point even more clear:

For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when he says, all things are put in subjection under him, it is clear that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him.

In verse 28, Paul concludes this notion by stating that when all things are subjected to Christ, the Son himself will also be subjected to him (the Father) who put all things under subjection to him (the Son), ‘that God may be all in all’ [ἵνα ἢ ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα ἐν πασιν]. The notion that God may be ‘all in all’ corresponds with both Ephesians 1:23 and Colossians 3:11. In Ephesians 1:23, it is somewhat ambiguous if it pertains to God the Father, Christ or both, but as discussed previously, a combination of both is probably intended. In Colossians 3:11, it refers to Christ specifically, but the context is that of the unity of believers.⁹ Here in 1 Corinthians 15:28, although God the Father is expected to be ‘all in all’, the Son, being the one who destroyed every rule, authority and power (v. 24), is part of the equation, which in itself implies an elevated position within God’s governance (cf. Moo 2018:564).

For Fee (2007:110), Christ is pictured here as the ‘current reigning King’ who will destroy all powers that stand against him, fulfilling the messianic Psalm 110:1. It can be noted that Colossians 1:13 has the reference ‘Son’ as referring to the King, similar to how Paul refers to the Son here in 1 Corinthians 15:28 (Fee 2007:110). Fee (2007:110) argues that the christological point here is ‘the ease with which Paul can interchange this kingdom language’ and the fact that, other than in traditional messianism, the ‘king’ who reigns, now reigns from on high ‘thus assuming the role of God himself in doing so’. Another important point that Fee (2007:110–111) advances is that, similar to Ephesians 1:20, Paul here understands Psalm 8 in the light of Psalm 110, and both as messianic, based on the common denominator of ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ (see Ps 109:1, LXX; Ps 8:7, LXX; cf. Fitzmyer 2008:573–574). What seems to be unique in Paul’s interpretation is that the enemies are seen as ‘all enemies’ (Fee 2007:111), which probably refers to ‘cosmic governing entities’ (Fitzmyer 2008:574; cf. Collins 1999:553; Hays 1997:265).¹⁰

Philippians 2:6–11

In Philippians 2:6–11, Paul writes about Christ being in the ‘form’ [μορφῇ] of God and of his ‘equality’ [ἴσος] with God, not as something to be ‘grasped’ or ‘exploited’ ([ἀρπαγμός] v. 6).¹¹ Yet Christ ‘emptied’ [κενόω] himself, taking on the form of a servant, born [γίνομαι] in the likeness [ὁμοίωμα] of people (v. 7), humbling himself in human form, becoming

9. Paul also uses similar language in 1 Corinthians 8:6 of the Father, in Romans 9:5 most likely of Christ and in Romans 11:36 of God (cf. Conzelman 1975:275). Bruno et al. (2024:113) recently argued that there are at least two grammatical reasons that Paul refers to Christ’s deity in Romans 9:5: (1) the word order and replacement of the relative pronoun suggests that θεός most naturally refers to Christ. (2) Virtually every doxology in Greek literature begins with a blessing (εὐλογητός), making it unusual to begin a doxology otherwise. Both these observations make it unlikely that θεός refers to the Father here.

10. God’s action against hostile powers in an eschatological setting can also be found in Judean apocalyptic literature (e.g., 1 En 1:5; 6:1–10:17; 21:1–10, Collins 1999:553).

11. See Guthrie (2023:247) for a recent discussion on why these translations have become preferable.

obedient to the point of death on the cross (v. 8). Then in verse 9, Paul states that God has, therefore [διό], ‘highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name’ [αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα]. As a result, every knee would bow in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (vv. 10–11). While most scholars traditionally considered this passage as based on existing hymnic material from which Paul borrowed (e.g. Lohmeyer 1928:4–13; Martin 1997:25–28), Guthrie (2023:237) points out that this long-held perception has recently been called into question: (1) the style of this passage does not fit that well with the style or conventions of broader Semitic, Judean or Greco-Roman hymnody (e.g. Basevi & Chapa 1993; Edsall & Strawbridge 2015; Gordley 2018:79–110); and (2) this passage might just as well constitute a type of exalted Pauline prose or hymn (e.g. Bird & Gupta 2020:72–73; Fee 1992:30–31). What can be derived from this passage beyond a reasonable doubt is that it is reflective of early Christian worship (cf. Gordley 2018:109–110).¹²

With the idea that Christ was in the ‘form’ [μορφῇ] (v. 6) of God, his divine pre-existence or pre-incarnation is presupposed (Fee 2007:507; Guthrie 2023:245; Hansen 2009:141; Silva 2005:99; Thompson 2016:71), indicating Jesus’ ‘essential identity and ontology’ (Keown 2017:386). Yet despite his divine pre-existence, he took on the form of human likeness (Fee 2007:507). Guthrie (2023:247) argues that it was precisely Jesus’ pre-incarnate divinity that ‘uniquely qualified’ him to be the humble, sacrificial servant that he was, to execute God’s redemptive purposes.

Paul writes that Jesus was ‘highly exalted’ [ὑπερυψώω] (v. 9). The word ὑπερυψώω is a *hapax legomenon* and means ‘to raise to a high point of honor’ (Bauer et al. 2021:920). Hansen (2009:161) notes that this compound word is a superlative and indicates ‘the highest possible exaltation’, which he renders as ‘hyper-exalted’, indicating ‘the incomparable transcendence and absolute majesty of Christ’ (cf. Hawthorne & Martin 2004:125). In Psalm 96:9 (LXX), the word is used to indicate that Yahweh is the Most High over all the earth and exalted far above all gods.

The bestowal of a name on Christ (vv. 9–10) is echoed by Ephesians 1:21. Rather than referring to the name Yahweh, the name of Jesus is associated with κύριος (v. 11), which is used in the Septuagint to render the Divine Name. In other words, with Paul’s intertextual use of the Septuagint, especially Isaiah 45:23, he identifies κύριος (Yahweh in the LXX) with Jesus, which now becomes a title for the exalted Christ as ‘Lord’ (Fee 2007:564–565; Hansen 2009:162–163, 167; cf. Bird & Gupta 2020:85–86; Guthrie 2023:253). The giving of the name κύριος to Jesus (v. 11) also declares the divine identity of Jesus, especially if the monotheistic language of Isaiah 45:23, which Paul alludes to, is taken into account. With such an identification of Jesus with

12. Some see this passage as subversive in that Christ is established as lord or emperor like Caesar (e.g. Bird & Gupta 2020:73).

Yahweh, Jesus is not identified with the many Hellenistic gods of the pantheon and more than merely a political rival for Caesar (Hansen 2009:167).

The bowing of the knee (v. 10) implies worship and subjection to an authority (Hansen 2009:164). Every knee and tongue include 'all created beings: heavenly, earthly, and (probably) demonic' (Fee 2007:565; cf. Hansen 2009:164–165; Keown 2017:428). This speaks of the 'absolute' and 'comprehensive nature of Christ's lordship' (Guthrie 2023:255) over the entire created order (Fee 1995:223; cf. Hansen 2009:165). Since Jesus' honorary title and position happen as a result of his obedient servanthood (see διό, v. 9), Christ supremacy also encompasses the new creation. Christ's complete supremacy and lordship is thus cosmic (Keown 2017:428, 431). Hansen (2009:166) states that by 'giving Jesus the name *Lord*, God gave Jesus divine sovereignty over all creation so that every knee in all of creation would bow to him' (emphasis original).

The confession [ἐξομολογέω] (v. 11) of Jesus' name involves 'respect, praise and thanksgiving', which will 'serve to bring praise and glory to God' (Gupta & Bird 2020:86; cf. Hansen 2009:165). The confession is probably to be understood as a public rather than an inward confession, involving all of humanity bowing before Jesus Christ (Keown 2017:438). In fact, the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord [κύριος] was likely present within the early believing community, transferring the title κύριος to the risen Jesus (Fee 1995:225). In sum, the exalted Christ as pictured here represents a very high christology and asserts the divinity of Christ (Keown 2017:428; cf. Reumann 2008:374). In fact, Keown (2017:429) argues that the high christology in this passage 'calls into question seeing high christology as a late development, as it is almost certain that this passage predates the Gospels'.

Comparing the disputed and undisputed christological material

After reviewing the christological content of disputed and undisputed Pauline material, the following observations can be made:

The themes in Colossians 1:15–20, 2:9–10, 15 and Philippians 2:6–11 display many similarities regarding Jesus' pre-existence and highly exalted position. The reference to Jesus being the 'Lord of all' [κύριος πάντων] in Romans 10:12 and Jesus destroying all rule, authority and power, placing all enemies under his feet in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28 can also be added to this list. Some scholars do seem to exaggerate the differences, though (e.g. Gordley 2018:111–112).¹³ Although Philippians 2:6–11 is perhaps less explicit than Colossians 1:15–20 about Jesus' pre-existence, in Philippians 2:6–8, such a notion can be derived from both Jesus' divine 'form' ([μορφή] v. 6) before his incarnation and the notion that he deliberately took on human form [ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων] (v. 7).

13. It has to be noted though that Gordley (2018:112) does presuppose the Pauline authorship of Colossians.

The notions that Jesus reconciled all things to himself and made peace by the blood of the cross occur in Colossians 1:20, but are not present as such in Philippians 2. Yet the idea that Jesus reconciled all things to himself is very similar to the notion that Christ reconciles the world to himself [κόσμον καταλλάσσω ἐαντῷ] in 2 Corinthians 5:19. Although the latter text does not feature the theme of peace, it can be seen as a logical consequence that is inherent to reconciling the world to himself.

Jesus' role in creation is explicit in Colossians 1:15–20. While not present in Philippians 2, a comparable idea is present in 1 Corinthians 8:6, although expressed in different terms. The idea in the latter text that all things [πάντα], including believers [ἡμεῖς], exist through [διὰ] Christ implies Jesus' direct involvement in both creation and the new creation.

As for Jesus' highly exalted position, the name that Jesus receives as 'Lord' and his cosmic position above the whole created order as expressed in Philippians 2:9–11 matches the idea that Jesus is the 'firstborn' [πρωτοτόκος] of all of creation in Colossians 1:15 or the 'firstborn' from the dead, which refers to his special status and preeminence (not to being a created being). It also matches Christ's authoritative position and triumph above dominions and authorities as it is portrayed in Colossians 1:16; 2:10 and 15. In other words, every knee in heaven and earth (and under the earth), including every 'tongue' that should bow to Jesus' authoritative position in Philippians 2:9–11, is comparable with the notion that all things created, including thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities, are created through Christ and for him according to Colossians 1:16 (cf. 2:10, 15). The idea that all things hold together in Christ in Colossians 1:17 is indeed unique to Colossians, but it is arguably a logical consequence of Jesus' preeminence in creation and his authoritative position in the cosmos. The idea that the fullness of God dwells in Jesus in Colossians 1:19 and 2:9, although expressed in different terms, is comparable to Jesus' pre-existent divine nature, being in the form of God before his incarnation, as is articulated in Philippians 2:6–8. The notion that believers are being 'filled in him' in Colossians 2:10 is comparable with the ideas in the undisputed material that believers are enriched in Christ (1 Cor 1:4–5), filled with the fruit of righteousness (Phlp 1:11), and that for Paul he does not live any more but Christ lives in him (Gl 2:20).

Regarding the notion in Colossians 1:18 that Christ is the head of the body, the universal ἐκκλησία, although a unique expression as such, it was already discussed that the term ἐκκλησία as such is also used in a universal sense in the undisputed Pauline material (esp. 1 Cor 12:28; Gl 1:13; Phlp 3:6). The idea that Christ is the head of the body of believers is quite clear in the undisputed Pauline material too. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:27–28 that believers make up the 'body of Christ' (v. 27), which is equated with the ἐκκλησία in which certain areas of service are appointed (v. 28). A similar idea is expressed in Romans 12:4–6, in which believers are said to be 'one body in Christ' who have different gifts. Lastly,

in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Christ is explicitly called the head of every man, the man the head of the wife and God as the head of Christ [παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ οὗ Χριστός ἐστιν, κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ, κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός]. While the context is different from Colossians 1:18, by implication, Christ is seen as the head of the believing community. If all the undisputed Pauline material is taken together in this regard, the notion that Christ is the head of the body, the ἐκκλησία, can be established.

The concept of Christ's rule and authority as expressed in Ephesians 1:20–23 displays close similarities with both Colossians 1:15–20 and Philippians 2:9–11. The notion in Ephesians 1:20 about Christ being seated at the Father's right

hand (cf. Ps 110:1) after his resurrection is shared with Roman 8:34. The idea of being at the Father's right in itself implies a position of authority and even divinity, as can also be derived from the context of Psalm 110:1. While Ephesians 1:20 focuses on Jesus' authority 'in heavenly places', in Romans 8:34, the focus is on Jesus' interceding role and his secure love for believers (Rm 8:35). While the two texts focus on different implications of being at God's right hand, they are pitched on the same christological level.

Ephesians 1:21 expounds on the nature of Jesus' authority as being above all rule, authority, power and dominion, which is shared with Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15; Philippians 2:9–11 and 1 Corinthians 15:24–25. Ephesians 1:21 continues with

TABLE 1: Shorthand comparison of the christology in the disputed and undisputed letters.

Notions	Disputed	Notions	Undisputed	Comment
'Image' of God	Colossians 1:15	'Form' of God	Philippians 2:6	Closely comparable.
'Firstborn' (supreme over) of all creation and of the dead.	Colossians 1:15,18	Highly exalted; cosmic Lord over whole created order.	Philippians 2:9–11	'Firstborn' borrowed from OT (e.g. Ex 4:22; Ps 89:27). Different expressions, same christological level.
'Preeminent' in all things.				
All things created in or by [ἐν] him.	Colossians 1:16	One Lord Jesus Christ 'through [διὰ] whom are all things and through [διὰ] whom we exist'.	1 Corinthians 8:6	While Jesus' role in creation is more explicit in Colossians, it is equally implied in 1 Corinthians. Same christological level.
All things created though [διὰ] and for [εἰς] Christ.				
All things visible and invisible 'whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities'.	Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15; Ephesians 1:21	All of creation ('in heaven and on earth and under the earth') and new creation bow the knee before Christ as 'Lord'.	Philippians 2:9–11; Romans 10:12; 1 Corinthians 15:24–28	Shared terminology, esp. regarding Jesus' authority over rulers, authorities, powers.
The head of 'all rule and authority'.		Christ as 'Lord of all'.		Same basic concept and same christological level.
Disarming 'the rulers and authorities', putting them to shame and disarming them.		Christ destroying all 'rule, authority and power', placing all enemies under his feet.		
Far above all rule, authority, power and dominion.				
'Before' all things.	Colossians 1:17	Jesus' in the 'form' of God before incarnation, deliberately taking on human 'form'.	Philippians 2:6–8	Pre-existence underlying both ideas.
All things 'hold together'.	Colossians 1:17	-	-	A logical consequence of Jesus' preeminence and authority.
Christ as 'head of the body, the (universal) church'.	Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22–23	Christ as 'head of every man'. The (universal) 'church' being the 'body of Christ'.	1 Corinthians 11:3; 12:27–28; Romans 12:4–6; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6	Different contexts and formulations, same basic notion.
'Head over the (universal) church, which is his body'.		Believers being 'one body in Christ'. The 'church' as universal.		
All the 'fullness of God' dwells in him and through him.	Colossians 1:19–20	Jesus' pre-existent divine nature, being in the 'form' of God before incarnation. Equality with God.	Philippians 2:6–8	Expressed in different terms but comparable christology.
'Reconcile' all things in heaven and earth to himself.	Colossians 1:20	Christ reconciling the 'world to himself'.	2 Corinthians 5:19	Different terms but same basic idea.
'Making peace' by the blood of the cross.	Colossians 1:20	-	-	Logical consequence and inherent to reconciling the world to himself.
'Fullness of deity dwells bodily'.	Colossians 2:9	Christ as 'God over all'. Jesus being in the 'form' of God.	Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6	Different terms, same basic idea.
Believers have been 'filled in him'.	Colossians 2:10	Believers are enriched in Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness. Christ lives in believers.	1 Corinthians 1:4–5; Philippians 1:11; Galatians 2:20	Different aspects of fulfillment that believers experience in Christ.
'Seated' at God's right hand 'in the heavenly places' after resurrection.	Ephesians 1:20	Jesus who was raised 'is at the right hand of God'.	Romans 8:34	Both allude to Psalms 110:1. Exact same idea.
Above 'every name that is named'.	Ephesians 1:21	The 'name above every name'	Philippians 2:9	Very similar. Same basic idea.
'in this age and the age to come'.	Ephesians 1:21	Jesus' divinity stretches over time, from before the incarnation until the eschatological end.	Philippians 2:6–11	Different expressions but same basic idea.
'All things' put 'under his feet'.	Ephesians 1:22	'all enemies under his feet'.	1 Corinthians 15:25	Very similar. Exact same idea. Alluding to Psalms 110:1; 8:6.
'The fullness of him who fills all in all'.	Ephesians 1:23	God may be 'all in all'.	1 Corinthians 15:28	Whether the One who fills all in all is the Father or Christ is not clear in Ephesians. Son part of the equation in 1 Corinthians 15:28. Same basic idea.

the idea that Jesus' position is above every name that is named in this age and the age to come, which is closely parallel with Philippians 2:9. In the context of Philippians 2:6–11, Jesus' divinity stretches over time, from before the incarnation until the anticipated eschatological situation in verses 9–11. The notion in Ephesians 1:21 that Jesus' name is established over all ages thus corresponds to Jesus' position over time as expressed in Philippians 2:6–11. The mention of everything that is put under Jesus' feet (cf. Ps 8:6) according to Ephesians 1:22 closely corresponds to the same concept in 1 Corinthians 15:25–28, which also speaks of Jesus' supreme authority over all evil forces.

While Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 1:22–23 both share the idea that Jesus is the head of the ἐκκλησία, which is the body, as already discussed, this idea can be established in the undisputed letters as well, although not phrased in this exact manner in any specific text (esp. 1 Cor 11:3; 12:27–28; Rm 12:4–6). In other words, the idea that Christ is the head of the ἐκκλησία, which is the body, does not transcend Paul's discourse on Christ's headship or the ἐκκλησία as the body as such. In verse 23, Christ as head of the body is further qualified by the somewhat ambiguous words: 'the fullness of him who fills all in all'. Whether it refers to God's fullness, Christ's fullness or a combination of both (most probably), the specific formulation is unique. Yet a similar idea is conveyed in 1 Corinthians 15:28, in which Paul states that all things are subjected to Christ, that Christ is subjected to the Father and that God may be all in all. Although in this text God is explicitly indicated as being all in all, Christ, who is at God's right hand, is part of the equation here. The basic idea behind the formulation in Ephesians 1:23, although being unique, thus cannot be established as surpassing Paul's frame of mind in the undisputed letters.

Conclusion

To conclude, while some of the christological statements in Colossians 1:15–20; 2:9–10 and 15 and Ephesians 1:20–23 are very similar and contain statements that are formulated in a way that differs from the undisputed Pauline material in some instances, in other instances, there are many parallels and similar formulations in the undisputed letters. If all the parallel statements and ideas in the undisputed letters are considered, it cannot be established that the level of christology in Colossians and Ephesians surpasses the christology of the undisputed letters. Neither can Colossians 1:15–20; 2:9–10, 15 and Ephesians 1:20–23 be seen as any significant further development in Pauline christology.

As regards the authorship debate, this contribution is not intended to settle the authorship debate surrounding Colossians and Ephesians, but merely to indicate that the christological statements in Colossians 1:15–20; 2:9–10, 15 and Ephesians 1:20–23 are consistent with the christology of the undisputed Pauline letters, especially as portrayed in Romans 8:34; 10:6–13; 1 Corinthians 8:5–6, 15:24–28 and Philippians 2:6–11. In fact, especially in respect of the identification of Christ with Yahweh as 'Lord', the christology in the

undisputed letters is arguably even higher in certain instances than what is conveyed by the christological statements in Colossians 1:15–20; 2:9–10, 15 and Ephesians 1:20–23.

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