

THE POLITICS OF EPHESIANS AND THE EMPIRE:
ACCOMMODATION OR RESISTANCE?

Nijay K. Gupta and Fredrick J. Long

Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY

If, in the 1970s through the 90s, the ‘New Perspective on Paul’ was the topic that generated the most intense discussion and debate among Pauline scholars, one could say that from the 1990s to the present it is the matter of ‘Paul and Empire’. More specifically, questions have been raised regarding the inherent political nature of religion in antiquity and how this affects the interpretation of Paul’s letters. Put otherwise, if the New Perspective asked, ‘What was Paul’s attitude towards Judaism and Torah’, the Paul and Empire discussion asks, ‘What was Paul’s attitude towards the Roman Empire’.¹ The conclusion that many scholars have reached is that Paul was critical of the Empire and its promises of peace, justice and divine blessing.² This conversation, however, has not been

1. The bibliography on this subject is growing rapidly, but a representative list would include D. Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul’s Praxis and Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1991); R. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); *idem* (ed.), *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000); *idem* (ed.), *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2004); J. Crossan and J. Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’ Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); H. Maier, ‘A Sly Civility: Colossians and Empire’, *JSNT* 27 (2005), pp. 323-49. See especially the important recent monograph of Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010) and its favorable review by Vernon K. Robbins in *RBL*; see <http://www.bookreviews.org> (2010).

2. See especially N.T. Wright, *Paul: Fresh Perspectives* (London: SPCK, 2005), pp. 59-79; during the debate with J.M.G. Barclay (SBL Session on Pauline Theology, 18 November 2007), Wright’s general position was affirmed by R. Jewett (moderator/respondent), who concluded ‘there is, in fact, despite the appearance of this debate, a growing emerging consensus that the Roman imperial setting needs to be taken into account in a careful way when interpreting Paul’s letters’.

limited to the study of Paul. Similar reflections have taken place with respect to Matthew,³ John⁴ and the book of Revelation,⁵ to name only a few.

Although some commentary writers have explicitly noted the political import of *parts* of Ephesians—e.g. Marcus Barth, and more recently and extensively, Charles H. Talbert⁶—fuller treatments of this dimension tend to be restricted to 2.11-22 as seen in Peter Stuhlmacher, Eberhard Faust, Gosnell Yorke and Te-Li Lau.⁷ Still, complete treatments

3. See W. Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001).

4. See W. Carter, *John and Empire* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008).

5. See W. Howard-Brook and A. Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Rereading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); S. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

6. See, e.g., the sporadic comments on the more politically explicit material in Ephesians (Christ seated at the right hand, Christ bringing peace, etc.) in M. Barth, *Ephesians 1–3* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1974), as he explores various possible backgrounds; also C.H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), interprets in ancient political terms Christ's bringing peace as Augustan-like (p. 82), the body/head language as used by Seneca and Rome/Nero (pp. 86-88), the Christian community's growth into Christ as the ideal ruler (pp. 115-17); however, while discussing the Greco-Roman background to the household codes (pp. 136-39) and the donning of God's armor (p. 159), Talbert does not sufficiently correlate these themes to the larger political thrust of Ephesians, which he certainly understands: 'Ephesians sets forward the Christian community as equivalent to the state, a counterculture over against the state...' (p. 88). Lacking in Barth and Talbert is an understanding of how Ephesians addresses the socio-religious-political needs of Christ followers in Asia Minor in the mid-first century.

7. Peter Stuhlmacher, "'He is our Peace' (Eph. 2:14): On the Exegesis and Significance of Ephesians 2:14-18', in his *Reconciliation, Law, and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 182-200; Eberhard Faust, *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris: Religionsgeschichtliche, traditionsgeschichtliche und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Epheserbrief* (NTOA, 24; Freiburg: Freiburg Universitätsverlag, 1993), who views Ephesians as pseudepigraphic and dated at the end of the first century; he concludes that the political background and nature of 2.11-22 comes from Jewish-gnostic influence (in comparison with Philo), but then is constructed in view of Roman imperial ideology (see esp. pp. 221-314; cf. Rainer Schwindt, *Das Weltbild des Epheserbriefes: Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie* [WUNT, 2.148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002], and Gerhard Sellin, *Der Brief an die Epheser* [MeyerK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008], who both likewise understand the epistle as deuterio-Pauline); Gosnell Yorke, 'Hearing the Politics of Peace in Ephesians: A Proposal from an African Postcolonial Perspective',

of the politics of Ephesians are rather rare.⁸ Furthermore, the fact that Ephesians is generally considered by scholars to be pseudonymous has often obviated its treatment as a representation of Paul's thought.

Most notable among these latter interpreters is Neil Elliott, who describes Ephesians (as well as Colossians and the Pastoral Epistles) as part of a 'canonical betrayal' whereby later Paulinists framed the apostle to be a social conservative with the purpose of conforming to the values and structures of the Roman Empire.⁹ Elliott is not alone in holding this negative political evaluation of Ephesians.¹⁰ If the question were posed, 'Does Ephesians promote accommodation or resistance to the Empire?', many scholars would claim the former without hesitation. Appeal for this position is quickly made to the presence of a household code (5.21–6.9) and to issues such as the cosmological focus and the ostensible absence of overt subversive political language. However, labeling Ephesians as 'accommodationistic' is quite simplistic, and can only be sustained by holding to a superficial reading of the text.¹¹

In this article we wish to argue that, when a close reading of Ephesians is sustained on its own terms and not as part of a deutero-Pauline canon,

JSNT 30 (2007), pp. 113-27; Te-Li Lau, *The Politics of Peace: Ephesians, Dio Chrysostom, and the Confucian Four Books* (NovTSup, 133; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009), whose study of peace and unity extends beyond 2.11-22 and who holds to Pauline authorship in the early 60s, although methodologically due to the letter's general nature does not attempt any historical reconstruction (p. 25).

8. But, see J. Bird, 'Ephesians', in F. Segovia (ed.), *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), pp. 265-80; and F.J. Long, 'Ephesians: Paul's Political Theology in Greco-Roman Political Context', in S. E. Porter and A. Pitts (eds.), *Christian Origins and Classical Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* (E.J. Brill, forthcoming).

9. See N. Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), particularly pp. 25-54; see also *idem*, 'The Apostle Paul and Empire', in R. Horsley (ed.), *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), pp. 97-116.

10. Cf. A.K. Grieb, 'Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles', in W. Howard-Brook and S.H. Ringe (eds.), *The New Testament—Introducing the Way of Discipleship* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 148-67; Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*; Bird, 'Ephesians'.

11. This is seen, e.g., in Bird, 'Ephesians', who insightfully sees many of the political parallels to Roman imperial ideology, but fails to understand how these are subverted by the argumentation of Ephesians. Instead, Bird interprets Ephesians as re-inscribing empire and hierarchy and thus, e.g., the perpetual subordination of women to men.

the evidence for accommodation is not as secure as Elliott and others have indicated. In fact, the particular language of Ephesians shows many signs of counter-imperial resistance by affirming the establishment of an alternative political identity in the church assembly around Jesus Christ as the one Lord (4.5). Such a God-ordained body politic with its reigning Lord trumps, while subverting, Roman imperial prerogatives, positions and even specific titulature. These claims are supported through studying closely the precise language, structure and rhetoric of Ephesians and considering how the original author would have intended readers to recognize allusions to imperial themes, titles and cultic imagery, which merged spiritual-heavenly and earthly realms. Through considering the Household Codes (5.23–6.9) and those passages referring to rule(rs) and authorities that disclose a cosmology and an apocalyptic worldview (1.15–23; 2.1–3; 3.10; 6.10–13), we will argue that Ephesians provides both a trumping critique of Roman imperial ideology and an ethical critique of the predominant social values.

Cosmology and Apocalyptic Worldview in Ephesians

One major plank in Elliott's argument that Ephesians is imperially accommodationistic involves the letter's cosmological and apocalyptic perspective. Elliott highlights, first, that one could perceive of the constant appeal to spiritual powers in Ephesians as supporting a kind of transcendentalism that makes the enemies non-earthly and, thus, believers should not bother being concerned with the emperor. But, secondly, even if the earthly powers are being implicated in the language in Ephesians, the notion that all are currently 'subject' to Christ could lead one to believe that what is happening in the empire is under the authority of Christ. Elliott explains it in this way:

[The theology of Ephesians and Colossians] is inherently liable to an otherworldly spiritualization that distracts us from the web of this-worldly power relations, or baptizes those power relations as already 'obedient' to Christ.¹²

The consequence [of the influence of these texts] is that the language of Christ's present lordship over the powers *now* too readily yields the interpretation that the Powers somehow enjoy God's blessings now.¹³

12. Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, p. 120.

13. Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, p. 120.

In order to evaluate Elliott's claims, we need to discuss those passages in Ephesians that refer to 'rulers' and 'powers'; namely, 1.15-23, 2.1-3, 3.10 and 6.10-13.

In Eph. 1.19-21, mention is made of the power of God that raised Christ up to be seated in the heavenly places 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come' (1.21 NRSV). At first glance, one may assume that this list involves spiritual forces that hold sway over the world.¹⁴ However, an important point should be made about the worldview of most people in the ancient world: 'Nothing in heaven can happen without profound repercussions on earth; indeed, that is the way true change on earth is brought about.'¹⁵ That is, the 'happenings' of heaven and earth are so intertwined that one can hardly refer to one without drawing in the other. Indeed, when one looks closely at the terminology used in 1.21 over which Christ Jesus is set—'above every ruler, authority, power, and lordship and every name being named' (ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου)—the language is, first of all, inclusive in scope ('every') and thus applicable to human and spiritual entities. Secondly, such terms as ἀρχή, ἐξουσία and κυριότης would have commonly and easily evoked images of earthly governance.¹⁶ Put another way, given the use of these terms in legal

14. See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC, 42; Dallas: Word, 2002), pp. 62-76; and C. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 107.

15. W. Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 60.

16. The first two listed positions—ἀρχή and ἐξουσία—are well-known terms of earthly political import, being part of equivalent Greek expressions of Latin ones referring to Roman imperial power, governing officials and political positions; see David Magie, 'I. Index Vocabulorum Graecorum (Index of Greek Words)', in his *De Romanorum Iuris Publici Sacrique Vocabulis Sollemnibus in Graecum Sermonem Conversis* [*On the Customary Nomenclature of Public and Religious Authority of the Romans Translated in the Greek Language*] (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana; Lipsiae: Teubner, 1905), pp. 155-76 (156 and 160 respectively). This is a list that allows one to locate the specific Latin equivalents and their sources in inscriptions and literature. For a chart of these occurrences and Greek and Latin titles, see F.J. Long, 'Roman Imperial Rule under the Authority of Jupiter-Zeus: Political-Religious Contexts and the Interpretation of "the Ruler of the Authority of the Air" in Ephesians 2:2', in S.E. Porter and A. Pitts (eds.), *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History and Development* (Linguistic

and political discourses more generally, the author of Ephesians, even when referring to spiritual powers, ‘may have thought specifically of their earthly representatives’.¹⁷

The trumping nature of God’s work is evident in Christ’s position ‘far above’ (ὑπεράνω) every position and every ‘name being named’ (1.21). The supremacy of Christ’s rule using ὑπέρ or ὑπεράνω continues in 1.22, 4.10 and 5.20, just as does God’s supremacy of power (1.19; 3.20) and ‘wealth of favor’ (2.7). Indeed, God the Father is presented as the greatest benefactor (1.3-14; 2.4-10, etc.), which would have challenged any human or deity from making that claim. The possession and bestowal of wealth, grace/favor and mercy were especially the jurisdiction of the gods and the emperor. Indeed, it was argued that ‘Caesar owned all things’ (Seneca, *Ben.* 7.5.3); ‘whatever exists beneath Jupiter on high, Caesar possesses’ (Ovid, *Fast.* 2.138), ‘for the emperor *is* the state’ (Ovid, *Tris.* 4.15).¹⁸ Augustus listed his benefactions in thirty-five paragraphs in his *Res Gestae*, published on his dual-columned memorial. Philo (*Flacc.* 74) could call Augustus ‘savior and benefactor’ (ὁ σωτήρ καὶ εὐεργέτης Σεβαστός). The role of being the greatest benefactor of the human race was continued in the Caesar Nero, who at Ptolemais in 60–61 CE was praised as ‘the savior and benefactor of the inhabited world’ (τῶι σωτήρι καὶ εὐεργέτηι τῆς οἰκουμένης).¹⁹

Furthermore, the ‘naming’ of Eph. 1.21 relates to social constructs of identification.²⁰ As Wesley Carr argues, the use of ὄνομα/ὀνομάζω

Biblical Studies; Leiden: E.J. Brill, forthcoming). For ἀρχή and cognates see also H.J. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions: A Lexicon and Analysis* (American Studies in Papyrology, 13; Toronto: Hakkert, 1974), pp. 110-15, 138-40, and for ἐξουσία, pp. 132-34. The term κράτος ‘might’ in Eph. 1.19 is also used of ‘the Roman *imperium* (power)’: τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων κράτος and τὸ κράτος τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων (Magie, *De Romanorum*, p. 58).

17. Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, p. 174; see pp. 171-76. Similarly, see P.T. O’Brien, *Ephesians* (Pillar; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 144.

18. Texts quoted from R. MacMullen, ‘Personal Power in the Roman Empire’, *AJP* 107 (1986), pp. 512-24 (520 n. 24).

19. *OGIS* 668; cf. discussion in J.J. Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism* (Missoula, MT: SBL, 1974), pp. 81-82.

20. Except for Acts 19.13 (in which the verb and noun are used with a magical sense), all other New Testament instances of the verb ὀνομάζω involve social and moral constructs of identification (Mk 3.14; Lk. 6.13-14; Rom. 15.20; 1 Cor. 5.11; Eph. 1.21; 3.15; 5.3; 2 Tim. 2.19).

signifies ‘title’ or ‘dignity’ in an abstract sense, and this sense would apply to the other terms in the list.²¹ When ‘naming’ is associated with titles of political position, such naming arguably refers to the publically visible and widespread onomastic practice of amassing (repeated) and diverse titles to the emperors on monumentation and coinage. For instance, Augustus’s last complete title was *Imperator Caesar Divi Filius Augustus, Pontifex Maximus, Consul XIII, Imperator XXI, Tribuniciae Potestatis XXXVII, Pater Patriae*—the Roman numerals indicating the number of times each title was credited. The citizenry was ever accustomed to this practice applied to the emperors. Likewise, for example, Alexandrian coinage (*billon tetradrachm*) in 58–59 CE depicts on the obverse Nero with laureate head and ΝΕΡΩ ΚΛΑΔ ΚΑΙ ΣΕΒΑ ΓΕΡ ΑΥΤΟ (‘Nero Claudius Caesar Sebastos Germanicus Autokrater’) and on the reverse a picture of the Agathodaemon serpent and ΝΕΟ ΑΓΑΘ ΔΑΙΜ (translated ‘New Good Spirit’).²²

One complicating factor is that Ephesians appears to refer to hostile powers ‘in the heavenly places’ (6.12; cf. 3.10). This ostensibly refers to spatially-removed entities that are distinguished from this-worldly enemies. But this view represents only half of the story. The descriptor ‘heavenly’ (ἐπουράνιος) found five times in Ephesians (1.3, 20; 2.6; 3.10; 6.12) was used of Caesar Augustus while alive and after his death. Such ascription affirmed Augustus’s place among the gods, from which he was argued to have come and to which he departed in apotheosis at death. Thus, at Erythrai, a coastal Ionian city of Asia Minor, a dedication

21. A.W. Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning, and Development of the Pauline Phrase hai archai kai hai exousiai* (SNTSMS, 42; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 99. C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 54, adjudges that the comprehensive nature of the supremacy of God over even ‘every name being named’ (παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου) in 1.21 indicates a reference to a magical power context, because Ephesians has the highest incidence of ὄνομα ‘name’ and ὀνομάζω ‘I name’ of the Pauline letters, and naming of spiritual powers was important in magic as indicated in the high incidence of ὄνομα in the Greek magical papyri (nearly 400 occurrences). However, ὄνομα is important in the (political) inscriptions (more than 2000 occurrences) calculated using the online PHI database as of July, 2010 at <http://epigraphy.packhum.org/inscriptions/>, which is still incomplete in its sources.

22. J.G. Milne, *Catalogue of Alexandrian Coins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), catalogue number 180; cf. 203, 306. Information from <http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/nero/t.html>.

is offered of uncertain date, ‘The demos to Gaius Julius Augustus Caesar heavenly god’ (ὁ δῆμος Γαίωι Ἰουλίωι Σεβαστῶι Κάισαρι θεῶι ἔπουρανίωι).²³ Dating from 45–54 CE is another inscription from Pontus and Paphlagonia (northern Asia Minor) that starts by acknowledging the peace (εἰρήνη) of Augustus and offering honor to Caesar Claudius before turning to speak of Gaius Aquila as ‘the high priest of the heavenly god Augustus [ὁ τοῦ ἔπουρανίου θεοῦ Σεβαστοῦ ἀρχιερεὺς]’.²⁴ Furthermore, Nero is hailed ‘heavenly Zeus’ (οὐρανίωιο Διός) (62 CE), in an epigram of Leonides of Alexandria, one of Nero’s flattering clients;²⁵ this same Leonides gave (c. 63 CE) a celestial globe or ‘heavenly model’ (οὐράνιον μείμημα) to ‘Poppaea, wife of Zeus [= Nero], Augusta’ (Ποππαία, Διὸς εὐνι, Σεβαστίας).²⁶ In Ephesians, the use of ἔπουράνιος as a sphere over which God rules in Christ effectively trumps ‘heavenly’ affirmations made about the gods and the new earthly gods on the block, the Roman Caesars. This usage again reflects the dual understanding of heavenly beings affecting earthly rule.

Thus, one should not be too quick to press this ‘heavenly view’ as indicating a spiritualization of the Christian faith, if not also because the church, an earthly assembly (at least in part), is paradoxically blessed in this realm while embodied for mission and service on earth. T.Y. Neufeld explains:

the author of Ephesians would not have seen these [heavenly and earthly] as alternative categories, but as diverse manifestations of a seamless web of

23. Text of inscription Erythrai 63 is from the PHI database at <http://epigraphy.packhum.org/inscriptions/main>.

24. Christian Marek, ‘Katalog der Inschriften von Amastris’, in *Stadt, Ära und Territorium in Pontus-Bithynia und Nord-Galatia* (Istanbuler Forschungen, 39; Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1993), Appendix 5, pp. 157-89, entered as Marek, Kat. Amastris 1,c (cf. 1,a) in the online PHI database. The opening of the Greek version is as follows: ‘On behalf of the peace of Augustus and for the honor of Tiberius Claudius Germanicus Caesar Augustus, the high priest of the heavenly god Augustus for life Gaius Aquila, praefect twice...’. The Latin inscription makes no reference to ‘heavenly’ and simply has *divi Augusti* ‘divine Augustus’, which likely points to the importance in the Greek worldview of associating Augustus with the ‘heavenly’ in support of divine status.

25. D.L. Page, *Further Greek Epigrams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 533, no. XXIX, translated in Robert K. Sherk, *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian* (Translated Documents of Greece and Rome, 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 110, no. 70A.

26. Page, *Further Greek Epigrams*, p. 535, no. XXXII.

reality hostile to God. After all, as we are seeing, his understanding of the church participated as well in this mix of human and the divine, the earthly and the heavenly.²⁷

So then, when asking the question of whether Ephesians is interested in positioning Christ above the earthly powers (as well as the spiritual/heavenly), 1.19-21 makes it clear that he is far above any earthly potentate. But we should not conclude from this that the weak Christ has given way to an imperial one in the mimicked propaganda of Ephesians,²⁸ because Christ in Ephesians is a bloodied, sacrificed Messiah (1.6-7; 2.13; 5.2), an incarnated body on a cross (2.15-16), a Messiah to learn from and imitate with the Jewish name ‘Jesus’ (4.20-24; 5.2); and this Messiah’s proponent, Paul, is identified as an imprisoned proclaimer (δέσμιος, 3.1; 4.1) and paradoxically an ‘ambassador in chains’ (πρεσβεύω ἐν ἀλύσει, 6.20). If an imperial informant were to read this document, arguably 1.19-23 could *not but* be taken as a diminution of the emperor, if not implicitly a critique.²⁹

Ephesians 2.1-3 is used to support a spiritualized reading of Ephesians. It describes Gentiles sinfully living ‘according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, who is the spirit working in the sons of disobedience...’ (κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ νῦν ἐνεργοῦντος ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας). Commonly, the evil agent is viewed as one spiritual entity, Satan.³⁰ However, F.J. Long has provided extensive argumentation that two entities are in view—a human ruler (ἄρχων), and a spirit, ‘the authority of the air’, under whose authority the human ruler operates:³¹

27. T.Y. Neufeld, *Put on the Armor of God* (JSNTSup, 140; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 124.

28. Bird, ‘Ephesians’, p. 266, maintains that ‘The message of Jesus’ identification with the weak has been transformed into a ruling Christ to whom all things, and thus all people, are subject (1.22). Weakness is a human issue and is not an aspect of this ruler in the heavenly empire. In the process of the exaltation of Christ, Jesus loses that which made him human, and his followers are simply trading in one ruler for another!’

29. Again, Neufeld, *Armor*, p. 123, considers 1.91-21 alongside 6.12 as evidence for an attitude of opposition towards ‘the spirit of empire’.

30. For example, R.G. Bratcher and E.A. Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians* (UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), p. 41, assert, ‘This “spirit” is clearly the Devil, the ruler of all evil spiritual forces’.

31. Long, ‘Roman Imperial Rule’.

In Mediterranean society, this age was under the particular guidance and influence of the Roman Emperor who is described as ‘the ruler’ (at the time of writing, Nero). Roman rulers were under the jurisdiction of the patron god of Rome, Jupiter-Zeus, a god identified with ‘air’ and as having authority over that domain. Moreover, beginning with Augustus, emperors were at times publically characterized as Jupiter-Zeus as *Triumphator* in association with Jupiter Capitolinus, if not even perpetually in statuary in temples (e.g. Caesarea Maritima) or on coinage or jewelry (e.g. *Gemma Augusta*).

To summarize Long’s evidence, several considerations must be held together. First, ‘ruler’ in the Pauline letters and Acts refers to human rulers (see esp. 1 Cor. 2.6, 8; Rom. 13.3).³² Paul urges Christians to submit to these rulers as ‘higher authorities’ (ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις) and as those to whom God has appointed ἐξουσία ‘authority’ (Rom. 13.1-3). They are described as rulers of ‘this age’ (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) (1 Cor. 2.6, 8), who have a ‘human wisdom of this age’ (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) (1 Cor. 2.6, 13) in relation to ‘the spirit of the world’ (κόσμος) (1 Cor. 2.12). One sees, then, that in Paul’s construct of political governance, he speaks of human rulers and authority of this age, related to the spirit of the world. Interpreters must consider the tension that exists between 1 Corinthians and Romans; in consequence, some interpreters have recently attempted to see in Romans an anti-Roman sentiment.³³ Also in tension with Romans 13 is Eph. 2.1-2, which effectively critiques and demonizes Rome’s emperor as a negative example of how to live in this age; believers should not imitate him, but rather God in Jesus Christ (4.32–5.2).

Secondly, there are numerous ancient references that identify Jupiter-Zeus as ‘air’ or ‘having authority over the air’. He is associated with

32. See the excellent treatment by Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 3rd edn, 2002), pp. 84-93. When one expands to the broader Jewish world in the first century, virtually the same results are seen. After Wink’s study of ἄρχων, he concludes: ‘Apart from four passages in Philo, in the LXX, Philo, and Josephus, *archōn* is used exclusively for an incumbent-in-office and, with sole exception of Daniel 10 and 12, for human agents’ (*Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], p. 13). Josephus, *Ant.* 19.261, uses ἄρχων of the emperor Claudius, and Plutarch, *Galb.* 4.4, uses ἄρχων for the ultimate position of Rome embodied in the emperor.

33. See especially Neil Elliott, ‘Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda’, in Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire*, pp. 184-204.

thunderbolts, storms and rain. Jupiter was the predominant god in the western empire, as was Zeus in the Greek east, where the inscriptions make reference to Zeus two and a half times more than to any other deity.³⁴ Jupiter was, moreover, the *interpretatio Romana* of other foreign sky gods.³⁵ If one were to create a pyramid of ancient deities in the Mediterranean world, ‘There is a clear summit to this pyramid, Zeus = Jupiter.’³⁶

Thirdly, if one were to envision a corresponding human pyramid, the pinnacle would have been the reigning emperor.³⁷ For this reason, it is not surprising that the emperors associated themselves and were associated with the gods and with godlike attributes,³⁸ but especially Jupiter/Zeus, who granted Roman kings their rule.³⁹ It is clear that emperors, especially in the Greek world, intended such association to be made by the citizens

34. R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 6-8.

35. For this and the rest of this paragraph, Herbert J. Rose, ‘Jupiter’, *OCD*, II, p. 569.

36. MacMullen, *Paganism*, p. 7.

37. Carter, *John and Empire*, pp. 65-57; cf. MacMullen, *Paganism*, pp. 7-8, who begins to speculate about a corresponding pyramid that would have included ‘senators, governors, legionary commanders, and in short almost every single name to be found in the ancient historians lying at the absolute tip, that is, the upper 1 percent’ (p. 7).

38. Augustus was identified as the god Mercury, the ἄγγελος τοῦ Διός ‘the angel of Zeus’; see A.D. Nock, ‘Notes on Ruler-Cult I-IV’, *JHS* 48 (1928), pp. 21-43 (33), who cites Horace, *Carm.* 1.2. So also was Nero, who was considered νέος ἥλιος ‘a new sun’, νέος ἀγαθὸς δαίμων ‘a new good spirit’, νέος Κάβειρος ‘a new Cabeirian divinity’, Ἀπόλλων κτίστης ‘Apollo Founder’, and Ζεὺς Ἐλευθέριος ‘Zeus the Deliverer’ (Nock, ‘Notes on Ruler-Cult’, p. 34; references are provided in nn. 57, 65 and 68). See also A.D. Nock, ‘Studies in the Graeco-Roman Beliefs of the Empire’, *JHS* 45 (1925), pp. 84-101 (94 n. 84), in which Nock states: ‘Accordingly when Horace speaks of Augustus as Mercury in human form [*Odes* i 2, 41]...he is not uttering the casual flattery of a Court poet, but rather what would in the Greek East be a commonplace’.

39. For extensive discussion of the topic, see J.R. Fears, ‘Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology’, *ANRW* II.17.1 (1981), pp. 3-141; on Jupiter establishing and maintaining Roman kingship, see pp. 68-71.

of the empire.⁴⁰ Augustus strategically identified himself with Jupiter,⁴¹ and after his death this continued such that his temple and statue within were designed after the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.⁴²

Thus, when these points are all taken together, the Gentile audience(s) would have been well acquainted with Jupiter-Zeus and the emperors' co-identification, and thus would have recognized the somewhat veiled reference in Eph. 2.2 as referring to the ruling emperor behind which was a spiritual force of evil, whom Jews and Christians elsewhere identified with Satan or the devil. This kind of ideological move in Ephesians accords with resistance tactics, and has great similarities with Jewish resistance to Rome as seen in Qumran's War Scroll, which employs labels and coded language of 'sons of darkness', Kittim (= Romans) and Belial (Satan//Jupiter?) (1QM 1.1, 6, 12-13; cf. 1QS 1.10, 22-24).⁴³

The third passage referring to rulers and authority is Eph. 3.10, which speaks of 'God's manifold wisdom being made known through the church assembly to the rulers and to the authorities in the heavenly realms' (ἵνα γνωρισθῆ νῦν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ). Careful attention to the Greek grammar reveals that two distinct entities are in view (both are articular), and thus the prepositional modifier 'in the heavenlies' delimits only the second noun, 'authorities'. The implication

40. See Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (trans. Alan Shapiro; Jerome Lectures, 16; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), pp. 230-38. See also the tracing of the numerous direct associations linking Augustus (and subsequent Caesars) to Jupiter in Duncan Fishwick, 'On the Temple of Divus "Augustus"', *Phoenix* 46 (1992), pp. 232-55.

41. Richard F. Thomas, 'Torn between Jupiter and Saturn: Ideology, Rhetoric and Culture Wars in the "Aeneid"', *The Classical Journal* 100.2 (2004-2005), pp. 121-47, who concludes, 'in Greece and the East as early as the 30's BCE Augustus was suggesting for himself an identity with Jupiter. The deceptive Jupiter and the deceptive Aeneas would in the decades that followed be seen in the form of Augustus, who succeeded in perpetrating the greatest political fiction of the West, that an absolute monarchy was in fact a pure republic. It is my view that Virgil saw what was going on' (p. 146). Cf. Fishwick, 'On the Temple of Divus "Augustus"', pp. 239-42.

42. For the temple structure, see Fishwick, 'On the Temple of Divus "Augustus"', pp. 235-36; Fishwick very reasonably, with good evidence, argues that the cult statue imitated Jupiter.

43. On the identity of the Kittim, see H.E. Del Medico, 'L'identification des Kittim avec les Romains', *VT* 10 (1960), pp. 448-53; for a detailed discussion of these and other Jewish texts in relation to the specifics of Eph. 2.2-3, see Long, 'Roman Imperial Rule'.

is, then, that ‘rulers’ and ‘authorities’ need not both be entities ‘in the heavenlies’.⁴⁴ Thus, in Ephesians, it would seem that ἀρχή/ἄρχων is conceived of more in human terms than is ἐξουσία, which correlates with the evidence discussed above in reference to 2.2. Such a distinction is arguably the case also in 6.12.

This leads us, then, to consider the naming of the enemies in 6.12, which is regularly translated as indicating that the contest is *not at all* against flesh and blood (i.e. humans), but against ‘the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places’ (6.12), i.e. against all manner of spiritual beings.⁴⁵ However, there is good reason to support another way of viewing this text. It is common to take the ἀλλά in 6.12 as representing two mutually opposite options—the enemies are *not* flesh and blood, but they *are* spiritual. However, one might also consider the possibility that we have here what can be called a *contrast of significance*. Thus, the negation is more in terms of the relative value of the options—the enemies are not *merely* flesh and blood, but *more importantly* are the rulers and powers of the heavenly realms. This latter proposal has much to commend it, with good support from other cases of this use of ἀλλά.⁴⁶ H. Schlier explains it this way: ‘Naturally, blood and flesh can be found on the front lines. But the conflict runs much deeper. The struggle is finally against a myriad of tirelessly attacking opponents, too slippery to grasp, with no specific names, only collective designations.’⁴⁷

In addition to understanding the negation of significance, one must also observe that the list of entities is not in parallel as if they are equals and all spiritual, heavenly beings. Otherwise, one should ask, why would the qualification ‘spiritual’ (πνευματικά) be needed for the last designation? Rather, one clearly discerns in the list an escalating scale of wicked opponents. The point of 6.12 is rather that believers do not ‘wrestle’ individually (hence, πάλη) or merely against human beings or

44. Indeed, the cognate ἀρχή ‘rule’ and the term ἐξουσία ‘authority’ in 1 Cor. 15.24 arguably are paired to refer to human and spiritual forces respectively; so also the pairing of ἄγγελοι and ἄρχαί in Rom. 8.38.

45. See E. Best, *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2003), p. 318.

46. For other examples of negation of significance, see Mt. 10.20; Mk 9.37; 13.11; Jn 7.16; 12.44; Acts 5.4; 1 Cor. 7.10; 10.24; 14.2; Phil. 2.4.

47. H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1958), p. 291; translated by Neufeld (*Armor*, p. 123).

even in human terms (that is, with bloody warfare involving bloodshed of human flesh). Rather, they are engaged in ideological-spiritual conflict with evil human rulers and evil authorities in the heavenly realms. This interpretation is actually demanded by the whole context of the letter, in which the imperial human ruler in 2.2 is shown to be in cahoots with the evil spirit. The struggle of 6.12 will indeed require wise resistance both to people in positions of rule who set standards for imitation (like the *pietas* of the Roman emperors), as well as to the evil spiritual forces or authorities in and around them that promote evil in conduct through deception. This is why the letter encourages the church assembly to grow in truth and correct teaching in opposition to deceptive ‘human doctrine’ that uses deceitful scheming (4.14-16). Thus, the nature and kind of Christian resistance might very well involve imitating the example of the chief commander of the forces (the Messiah Jesus) and the appointed leaders (Paul in the letter), who would choose bold prophetic pronouncement, which might result in imprisonment in the face of death. However, wisdom is required (5.15-17).

At this point, having surveyed references to rulers and spiritual entities across the letter starting with Eph. 1.15-23, we can turn to address Elliott’s second concern, that 1.19-21 seems to present Christ as Lord of all authorities, earthly and heavenly, and thus puts his divine blessing on the acts and governance of the human rulers. However, 1.19-21 must be read together with 6.12, which is understood by many to represent part of the *peroratio* or summarizing conclusion to the epistle. Somehow, Ephesians depicts Christ as ruler of rulers, who has put all other enemies beneath him—even heavenly ones. And yet, the final chord struck in Ephesians is a brooding tone of conflict. Far from promoting a sort of mystical theology of spiritual pacification, Ephesians boldly asserts that, even in view of the supreme victory of God in Christ, ‘the heavenly places remain contested space’.⁴⁸

N.T. Wright explains this as *de facto* and *de jure* power, where the authorities of the present evil age have been defeated by the cross but there is still a ‘time-lag’—as in the well-known gap between D-day and V-day.⁴⁹ Ephesians encodes the author as Paul, the one who proclaims the

48. R. Foster, ‘Reoriented to the Cosmos: Cosmology and Theology in Ephesians through Philemon’, in S. McDonough and J. Pennington (eds.), *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (LNTS, 355; London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), pp. 107-24 (108).

49. See N.T. Wright, ‘The New Testament and the State’, *Themelios* 16 (1990), pp. 11-17 (14).

grand victory of Christ over all sovereigns, and also the political prisoner (3.1; 4.1) who asks for prayer that he may be bold in speech (6.20).

On a final note, in terms of the cosmology and apocalyptic worldview of the letter, the social-scientific perspective of Margaret MacDonald is illuminating. She argues that Ephesians bears the marks of promoting an introversionist⁵⁰ sectarian view: ‘Ephesians was in all likelihood composed in an atmosphere of great consciousness of evil and strong separation from outsiders’.⁵¹ The act of turning away from the abject world, and the focus on being seated and raised up with Christ (2.4-7), or the hope of the age to come (1.21) stand as a critique of the hopelessness of the human world order.⁵² Because these believers live in the Roman Empire, with its own promise of peace, security and prosperity, the decision to turn inward for such values would involve a distrust in such imperial propaganda.⁵³ Thus, while the history of the interpretation of Ephesians can be seen as a movement towards a more transcendental and mystical attitude towards religion, when read in its first-century context one can hardly associate the cosmology and apocalyptic worldview of Ephesians with conformity to imperial authority.

The Household Code in Ephesians (5.21–6.9)

Perhaps the household code (HC) beyond any other part of the letter has led scholars to believe that the author was attempting to support the social values of the Empire. This attitude comes, generally, from

50. She borrows this language from Bryan Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium* (London: Heinemann, 1975), pp. 23-24.

51. M.Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (SP; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), p. 349; see also pp. 238-40.

52. This view of MacDonald, however, is overstated, as has been shown in the critique of Roman imperial power throughout Ephesians above. See further discussion of MacDonald’s views below.

53. See D.R. Edwards, *Religion and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 134. Gerd Theissen argues that, particularly in Ephesians, the view of Christ as peacemaker and reconciler would have been a challenge to the agenda of the Flavians and their *pax* politics: ‘While around the turn of the century the “world rulers” were...taking the place of gods, little groups in the Roman empire were elevating an alternative ruler of the world over all other deities and attributing to him the subjection of all powers and authorities in heaven and on earth’; see Gerd Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* (London: SCM Press, 2003), p. 53.

research on the *Haustafeln* that places them within ancient discussions of οἰκονομία (as discussed by, e.g., Aristotle).⁵⁴ Concerning the purpose of these codes, David Balch has argued, especially in the case of 1 Pet. 2.11–3.12, that some early church leaders took an interest in conforming to the household norms of society in order to mitigate conflict.⁵⁵ The political relevance of adopting this view of the HCs is demonstrated by John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed:

What is most striking about these texts [HCs in Colossians and Ephesians]... is that, if you bracket their explicit Christian motivation, they emphasize general family values that would be quite acceptable across contemporary Roman social theory and practice. Augustus, were he still alive, would have been extremely pleased. It seems most likely, therefore, that their purpose was to insist that Christian families were not at all socially subversive, but were as good as, if not better than, the best of those around them.⁵⁶

This kind of perspective has led many to consider Ephesians non-Pauline in theology and sociological perspective since it is not in keeping with the radical egalitarianism found in passages such as Gal. 3.28.⁵⁷ It is unfathomable that the HCs are a working out of Paul's theology in any way. Why did the early Christians *not* promote the emancipation of slaves and the equality of women and men? James D.G. Dunn makes the excellent response to this concern that the direction the early church took may seem like a 'spineless conformity to the world', but that is only apparent to 'us' in our culture and in our time: 'Hindsight and the superior wisdom of the post-Enlightenment European [or American] is not a very good base for a criticism which attempts to censure first-century ethics'.⁵⁸

When addressing the primary concern of this article, Ephesians appears to be accommodationistic in view of the HC. But, as we have

54. See D. Balch, 'The Household Codes', in D.E. Aune (ed.), *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 25-50.

55. See D. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBLMS, 26; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

56. Crossan and Reed, *In Search of Paul*, p. 118.

57. So L.S. Cahill, 'Gender and Christian Ethics', in R. Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 112-24 (117), who argues that the patriarchalism of the HCs is 'contradicted by St Paul himself'.

58. J.D.G. Dunn, 'The Household Rules in the New Testament', in S.C. Barton (ed.), *The Family in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), pp. 43-64 (60).

been arguing all along, this is not an open-and-shut case. While the instructions in Ephesians resemble Greco-Roman HCs, due attention still needs to be given to the purpose of the HC in *Ephesians* and also the significant differences. When these elements are given full recognition, a simple answer of conformity is not warranted. Rather, we will argue that the HC in Ephesians represents a theo-politically centric, transformative, and missional conformity.

Placing the HC within the overall structure of Ephesians is difficult because debate continues over the central message and purpose of the letter. MacDonald offers an important sociological perspective when she argues that, although there is evidence that Ephesians calls for an introversionistic attitude (which distances the group from society), the readers are still called to maintain their existence *within* society.⁵⁹ Certainly this could be seen as merely self-serving. However, within the context of the letter as a whole, a theology is constructed that makes it difficult for believers to really trust the ways of the unbelievers, as stated earlier in 4.17-19: ‘Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη) live, in the futility of their minds’ (NRSV).

Moreover, there is a strong conversionist dimension in Ephesians that comes to a culmination just at the beginning of the HC, and then once again after it, with the call to prayer for Paul to speak the gospel boldly (6.18-20). Thus, in Ephesians 5, after exhorting believers not to participate with ‘the sons of disobedience’ (5.6, 7; cf. 2.2), the text next calls believers to ‘rebuke/refute the deeds of darkness’ (5.11-13). The meaning of this verb ἐλέγχω in relation to the sons of disobedience is ‘to bring a person to the point of recognizing wrongdoing, *convict, convince*’.⁶⁰ This confrontative and evangelistic use of ἐλέγχω is found in Paul elsewhere (1 Cor. 14.24-25).⁶¹ This missional call aligns well with the hymnic baptismal liturgy of 5.14:⁶² ‘Therefore it says, “Wake

59. See MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, pp. 336-42.

60. BDAG, p. 315 (second definition), which lists instead Eph. 5.11, 13 under the first definition ‘to scrutinize or examine carefully, *bring to light, expose, set forth*’.

61. The New Testament use of the word is either to confront a believer for the purposes of correction or restoration (Mt. 18.15; 1 Tim. 5.20; 2 Tim. 4.2; Tit. 1.9, 13; 2.15; Heb. 12.5; Jas 2.9; Rev. 3.19) or to confront an unbeliever, presumably for their conversion (Lk. 3.19; Jn 3.20; 8.46; 16.8; 1 Cor. 14.24; Jude 15). Talbert, *Ephesians*, pp. 127-28, agrees that the confrontation of unbelievers is in view.

62. See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 319, followed by John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2001), pp. 242-43.

up, O sleeper, and arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you”.’ Since the sons of disobedience are ‘dead in sin’ (2.1-2), this is a call for them to come alive and come into the light of Christ. This leads quite naturally to the admonition for believers to ‘live wisely making the most of the opportunity’ (5.15-16). The parallel text in Col. 4.5-6 is a call to evangelize. Ephesians 5.17 further calls believers to ‘understand what the will of the Lord is’. As stated clearly earlier in the discourse, God’s will is to adopt people into the divine family (1.5) and to have Christ sum up all in God’s economy of salvation for all (1.9-14). So, all this evangelistic context leads to the HC. Thus, the HC in Ephesians does not serve primarily the purpose of maintaining the standards of society; instead, it is missional.⁶³

While the similarities of appeal to submission and the sets of relationships addressed are easily recognized, the HC in Ephesians especially bears the marks of extensive modification, elaboration and transformation.⁶⁴ In the first place, these relationships are thoroughly recast in terms of Jesus as ‘Lord’ (5.22; 6.1, 4, 7-9) and ‘Messiah’ (5.23-25, 29, 32; 6.5-6). Furthermore, Jesus Christ as Lord indicates the basis, context or motivation for the commands; obedience to the HC is ‘in fear of Christ’ (5.21) and ‘in the Lord’ (6.1).⁶⁵ If we combine this re-contextualizing of the HC with the description of Jews and Gentiles in Christ forming a ‘household of God’ (οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ; 2.19), one can

63. That is not to say that the HCs demonstrate values that Jews and early Christians did not themselves hold. Indeed, E. Schweizer argues that the New Testament HCs hold some parallels to household discussions in Hellenistic Jewish literature, which have a distinct interest in the welfare of the weak and disadvantaged in society; see E. Schweizer, ‘Die Weltlichkeit des Neuen Testaments: Die Haustafeln’, in H. Donner *et al.* (eds.), *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie. Festschrift W. Zimmerli* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), pp. 397-413.

64. So modified and Christian are the codes that H.W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 724, argues that ‘there is little, if any, indication that the source of the NT household codes are the Hellenistic household codes’. Hoehner admits, however, that Paul would have known the codes, but argues, ‘Whereas in Hellenism the model was political, the Christian model is Christ himself, and he is also the motivating force’ (p. 725). As much as we agree with the distinctions in the Ephesians HC Hoehner observes, the essential problem with his view lies in not understanding the thoroughly ancient political nature of Ephesians.

65. So, Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 725, who also includes a chart describing the motivation.

hardly settle on this as purely a ‘paganization’ of Christianity.⁶⁶ Rather, following A. Lincoln, we would suggest that Ephesians is re-framing the *polis*–household relationship in society and applying it to the church—the Christian household is the ‘microcosm of Christian society’ where harmony is expected;⁶⁷ such ‘harmony’ supplants imperial attempts to achieve familial concord.⁶⁸

Reframing occurs with the treatment of wives and husbands first (breaking the typical order of household relationships treated; cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253b) and the clear presence of a *hieros gamos* theology in which the Yahweh–Israel holy marriage relationship is transformed to the Christ–church relationship. In particular, the comparison of husband/wife to Christ/church would have carried political connotations.⁶⁹ Here, a further trumping of Roman imperial propaganda exists around a central title of the emperor, σωτήρ.

The final statement of 5.23, αὐτὸς σωτήρ τοῦ σώματος ‘He being the Savior of the body’ is puzzling to interpreters; it is the only occurrence of ‘savior’ in Ephesians. J.P. Sampley laments that it breaks up an otherwise nice chiasmic structure in 5.23-24, and concludes that the phrase functions parenthetically to distinguish the husband/wife relationship from the Christ/church relationship.⁷⁰ However, Sampley is assuming that the chiasmic center has a *paired element*—in Ephesians this is repeatedly not the case.⁷¹ Rather, the center is singular and pivotal to Paul’s ideological point in context.⁷²

66. See Schweizer, ‘Weltlichkeit’, pp. 407, 410.

67. See Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 364.

68. Maier, ‘Sly Civility’, pp. 345-47, argues this very point for Colossians; many of the points made apply to the HC of Ephesians.

69. J.P. Sampley, “*And the Two Shall Become One Flesh*”: *A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33* (SNTSMS, 16; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 133 (cf. pp. 37-42) concludes, ‘It remains that the author’s predominant concern... is an explication of the relationship of the *hieros gamos* of YHWH and Israel.’

70. Sampley, *Two Shall Become One Flesh*, pp. 124-26.

71. For a chiasmic presentation of Eph. 2.11-22, see Long, ‘Ephesians: Paul’s Political Theology’; additionally, the chiasmic center of 4.4-6 is ‘One Lord’; the chiasmic center of 4.7-16 is in 4.13 ‘the perfect man’ within the complex of political titles ‘the Son of God, the perfect Man,...the Messiah’, into which the body politic of the church is to grow, employing ideal ruler ideology (so also, Talbert, *Ephesians*, pp. 115-17).

72. Cf. the chiasm of only five elements (vv. 23a, 23b, 23c, 24a and 24b) in Talbert, *Ephesians*, p. 140.

A 23 ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ
 B τῆς γυναικὸς
 C ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ
 D τῆς ἐκκλησίας,
 E αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος· [motivational basis]
 D 24 ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται
 C τῷ Χριστῷ,
 B οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες
 A τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί.

Note the paired elements: in A, ἀνὴρ; in B, γυνή; in C, Χριστός; in D, ἐκκλησία. In its placement, the σωτήρ clause, as the chiasmic center of 5.23-24, continues to build upon the prevalent head-body political metaphor.

The clause, then, involves a further politically subversive point by comparing Christ-Savior/church to Caesar-Savior/Roma. The emperor as savior (σωτήρ) had a *gamos* relationship with Rome, a city that was actively and strategically depicted as deified *Roma*.⁷³ The importance of this relationship, *Roma* with Caesar, was seen across the empire, for ‘in the provinces the regulation was that temples were acceptable only if Dea Roma shared in the cult’ with the emperor (Suetonius, *Aug.* 52).⁷⁴ In relation to Ephesus, Ronald Mellor summarizes,

Ephesus shows the clearest historical development of the cults of Roma: first, Roma alone; then Roma and [the Roman Proconsul Publius Servilius] Isauricus; then the provincial temple of Roma and Julius Caesar (29 BC); and finally, by 5 BC, a municipal cult of Roma and Augustus. The cult of Roma was important at Ephesus and a temple of the goddess is likely.⁷⁵

73. R. Mellor, ΘΕΑ POMH: *The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Hypomnemata, 42; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), p. 195, explains: ‘Suetonius [*Augustus* 52] tells us that this marriage [between Roma and Augustus] was required in provincial cults by imperial command, but a similar pattern filtered down to the municipal cults as well.’

74. Duncan Fishwick, ‘Dio and Maecenas: The Emperor and the Ruler Cult’, *Phoenix* 44 (1990), pp. 267-75 (270).

75. Mellor, ΘΕΑ POMH, p. 138. Mellor explains the history and religious significance of Roma (pp. 199-200): ‘The goddess Roma had always played a political role...Roma existed solely as a divine embodiment of the Romans themselves and thus would not be honored by them. ...she [Roma], like *patria*, symbolized Rome past as well as Rome present. This use of Roma enabled the destinies of the imperial house to be linked with those of the state—the title *pater patriae* is one expression of this and the association of Roma and Augustus is another. The goddess was represented

The two entities were joint religious figures, and their statues shared temples in Asia Minor as occurred in 29 BC with Roma/Julius at Ephesus and Nicaea and Augustus/Roma in Pergamum (see Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.37.4) and Nicomedia.⁷⁶ In Ancyra of Galatia, a cult to Caesar and Roma existed during the reign of Tiberius,⁷⁷ and an altar for the pair was found even in the small village of Choriani near Hierocaesareia.⁷⁸ Herod the Great also built a very notable temple at Caesarea Maritima with statues of Caesar Augustus (in imitation of Jupiter Olympius) and Roma (like Juno at Argos) that could be seen from the sea as one came into the harbor (Josephus, *War* 1.414; *Ant.* 15.339).⁷⁹ The apostle Paul was held at Caesarea Maritima when he appealed to Caesar (Acts 23.23; 25.8-12, 21; 26.32; 27.24; 28.19), the possible setting for writing Ephesians.

We may push further beyond this theo-political-centric re-ordering of the HC in Ephesians to a number of specific features that reflect a transformation of the expected social establishment. First, and perhaps most importantly, the HC is introduced with the implication that being filled with the Spirit involves ‘submitting to one another’ (ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ, Eph. 5.21). Schnackenburg refers to this as the ‘Leitsatz’ of the HC.⁸⁰ Thus, as Richard Hays concludes, ‘The conventional authority structures of the ancient household are thereby subverted even while they are left in place.’⁸¹

Secondly, a transformation takes place through a focus on reciprocity: It is not just those in ‘lower’ positions that are called upon to act (in obedience); those in power are also called to act with kindness and in holy fear of God. This becomes immediately evident in 5.25 where husbands are urged to love their wives ‘just as Christ loved the church and gave

as a traditional divinity. Sometimes a warrior, sometimes a mother-figure, she had always to draw on the attributes of other gods since she herself had no history, no myth.’

76. A.D. Nock, ‘Σύνναος θεός’, *HSCP* 41 (1930), pp.1-62 (43).

77. *OGIS* 533, translated by Sherk, *The Roman Empire*, pp. 73-75 (no. 38).

78. T.R.S. Broughton, ‘Roman Landholding in Asia Minor’, *TAPA* 65 (1934), pp. 207-39 (216).

79. Fishwick, ‘Dio and Maecenas’, p. 270; Kenneth G. Holum, ‘Caesarea’s Temple Hill: The Archaeology of Sacred Space in an Ancient Mediterranean City’, *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67 (2004), pp. 184-99.

80. R. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), p. 242; also Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, p. 610. See also R.B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 64.

81. Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 64.

himself up for her'. To this believing community, there would be the immediate recognition that Christ intentionally lowered himself and bore great shame and humiliation on behalf of 'the church' (1.4-8; 2.12-14; 4.32-5.2; cf. Phil. 2.1-11). This Christ-church paradigm re-designs the husband-wife relationship in a way that would have challenged traditional Greco-Roman social norms.⁸²

Thirdly, in 6.9 the masters are commanded to 'do the same things' to the slaves (τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς) as the slaves were commanded to do for the masters (6.5-8). This is absolutely stunning, for such would involve offering service to Christ with sincerity of heart (6.5) as slaves of Christ doing God's will (6.6), serving Christ with good will (6.7), and knowing that the Lord will give due recompense 'to slave or freed person' (6.8).

It is easy to exaggerate, however, the radicality of the Christian HCs. From a practical perspective, the Christian household would apparently operate in a way similar to the secular one in the Empire.⁸³ This, essentially, is the point that Crossan and Reed are making regarding the approval of Augustus of the HCs if the 'Christian motivation' was removed. However, when we treat the issue of 'resistance' versus 'conformity', we must take into account both deeds *and* words. Thus, it might be helpful to imagine Augustus's reaction to the Ephesian HC *as is*. Several features of the particularized Ephesian HC are striking. First, already explored above, is 5.23 where Christ is called the 'savior'—a title used of Augustus himself as benefactor of the people. Whether he would have interpreted this as an affront personally is hard to say, but when coupled with Jesus as 'Lord' (5.22; 6.1, 4, 7-9) and 'Messiah' (5.23-25, 29, 32; 6.5-6)—the same person who *was* punished by Roman authorities and given an execution method often reserved for the members of society's lowest in social status precisely because of his political affront to Rome (see esp. Lk. 23.2, 14; Jn 19.12)—there would be great reason for his alarm. Secondly,

82. See MacDonald, *Ephesians*, p. 328.

83. John Barclay notes, in respect to Colossians, the *prima facie* reading of the HC: 'Here...the social and domestic *status quo* is not only unchallenged, but, worse, legitimated by the addition of a Christian rationalization. From this perspective, Colossians has simply wrapped a fundamentally non-Christian product in a thin layer of Christian packaging'; see J. Barclay, 'Ordinary but Different: Colossians and Hidden Moral Identity', *AusBR* 49 (2001), pp. 34-52 (39). Barclay does not ultimately endorse this perspective, but focuses on the 'hidden moral identity' of believers that the author encodes into the rhetoric of the letter.

there is mention of the one God (Eph. 6.9). It was a societal expectation that every family had ‘standing obligations’ to their native and ancestral gods and that Christians became ‘the objects of local resentments and anxieties precisely because they were not honoring gods upon whom their city’s prosperity depended’.⁸⁴ Thirdly, Augustus would surely have objected to the idea that God (or ‘the gods’) showed no favoritism (Eph. 6.9). Augustus would have believed himself to be deeply favored by the gods.⁸⁵

In the end, we are arguing for a recognition of both similarity and difference between the HC of Ephesians and the ideals of household management in the Greco-Roman world. If this can be understood as ‘civility’, it is better described, to borrow an expression made popular by Homi Bhabha, as a ‘sly civility’.⁸⁶ From a perspective of the relationship between the colonized and colonizer, sly civility involves the production of ‘a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative “unpicking” and incommensurable, insurgent rethinking’.⁸⁷ This type of resistance, though not overtly hostile, is still resistance.⁸⁸ James Scott uses the language of ‘hidden transcripts’ where the message of resistance is coded.⁸⁹ Ephesians seems to support

84. Paula Fredriksen, ‘Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go’, in D.B. Capes *et al.* (eds.), *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), pp. 25-38 (33). Jerry Sumney refers to the appeal to the one God in the Colossians HC as ‘countercultural’ and ‘ominous’; see J. Sumney, *Colossians* (NLT; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 143.

85. See Valerius Maximus 1.7.1.

86. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Oxford: Routledge, 1994); also Maier, ‘Sly Civility’, who consciously follows Bhabha’s notion in his exposition of Colossians, and in particular, the HC there.

87. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, pp. 184-85.

88. David Horrell, in respect to 1 Peter, calls this ‘polite resistance’; see D. Horrell, ‘Between Conformity and Resistance: Beyond the Balch-Elliott Debate towards a Postcolonial Reading of 1 Peter’, in R.L. Webb and B. Bauman-Martin (eds.), *Reading First Peter with New Eyes* (LNTS, 364; London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), pp. 111-43 (143).

89. See James Scott, *Hidden Transcripts: Domination and the Art of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 5. Barclay, ‘Ordinary but Different’, pp. 45-46, highlights the epistemological significance of the Christian adaptations of the HC (in Colossians): ‘To conceive of life ἐν κυρίῳ is...to place it within a different framework: far from being empty, the formula is a verbal and conceptual symbol which, like many sacred symbols, evokes a whole worldview and invests a

the same kind of idea that the colony of heaven could be integrated into the earthly society.⁹⁰ It is for this reason that we have labeled the HC of Ephesians as a theo-politically centric, transformative, and missional conformity. The choice to support this household system was probably practical to some degree. But that should not necessarily put it at odds with the message of the Paul of the undisputed letters. Rather, one can accept that a decision was made to transform society *within* the existing structures to a certain degree: ‘Christianity recognised that it had perforce to live and witness within [its inevitably flawed and imperfect] society by combining the proven wisdom of that society with commitment to its own Lord and the transforming power of the love which he had embodied’.⁹¹

Conclusions

In the course of this article, we have engaged passages in Ephesians that have been problematic insofar as they have been interpreted to support an accommodationist reading of the letter. Specifically, we have investigated those passages concerned with rulers and authorities (1.15-23; 2.1-3; 3.10; 6.10-13) and the Household Code (5.15–6.9). Certainly other texts could have been included in our analysis. Our conclusion is that far from supporting the status quo, Ephesians often confronts and trumps imperial prerogatives and titles while also subverting conventional wisdom about household relations. This is achieved by featuring as the head of the church body a political leader and ruler, Jesus Messiah Lord, who himself modeled sacrificial love (1.4-8; 3.15-19; 5.2, 25, 29) and expects such from his followers (4.20-24; 4.32–5.2; 5.25-29).

We have considered specific philological data from the first centuries that could situate Ephesians within the socio-religio-political milieu

routine act or object with profound religious significance.’

90. Looking at the rationale and ideology of asceticism, MacDonald argues, with respect to Ephesians, that ‘The heavenly body is one that might be secretly integrated within household quarters and, hence, carefully hidden from a householder who would resist such an invasion’; see M.Y. MacDonald, ‘Citizens of Heaven and Earth: Asceticism and Social Integration in Colossians and Ephesians’, in L.E. Vaage *et al.* (eds.), *Asceticism and the New Testament* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 269-354 (291).

91. Dunn, ‘Household Rules’, p. 61. Similarly, see M. Volf, ‘Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation between Church and Culture in 1 Peter’, *Ex Auditu* 10 (1994), pp. 15-30 (18): ‘Christians are insiders [of their social home] who have diverted from their culture by being born again.’

of the mid-first century; a failure to see this partially explains why some interpreters have understood Ephesians as ‘accommodationist’. However, upon closer examination, one finds deliberate and pervasive ‘trumping’ of Roman imperial titles and claims, and a vision of an alternatively established community, the assembly of those trusting in Jesus Messiah as Lord. This community can boast of God’s benefactions and supply of mercy and favor for the purposes of racial inclusivity and a radical mimesis centered around God in Christ (5.1-2). This dimension of mimesis is critical in Ephesians, for it understands the Mediterranean fascination with earthly political rule, as well as affirming the existence of evil spiritual entities behind them. The relationship enjoyed by political rulers and their subjects is one of imitation—a relationship that has been completely redefined in Ephesians. Christ’s suffering rule of forgiving love is radically distinguished from immorality, paganism and power-mongering, which were so prevalent in the Roman world. When all of the evidence is considered, Ephesians cannot be neatly categorized as accommodationist, but stands, within the history and the emergence of early Christianity, as a testimony to the complex position of the followers of Jesus who sought to understand and establish their communal identity within, but not wholly of, the Roman Empire.