

Visual Exegesis: Images as Instruments of Scriptural Interpretation and Hermeneutics
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Visual Interpretation: Blending Rhetorical Arts in Colossians 2:6-3:4

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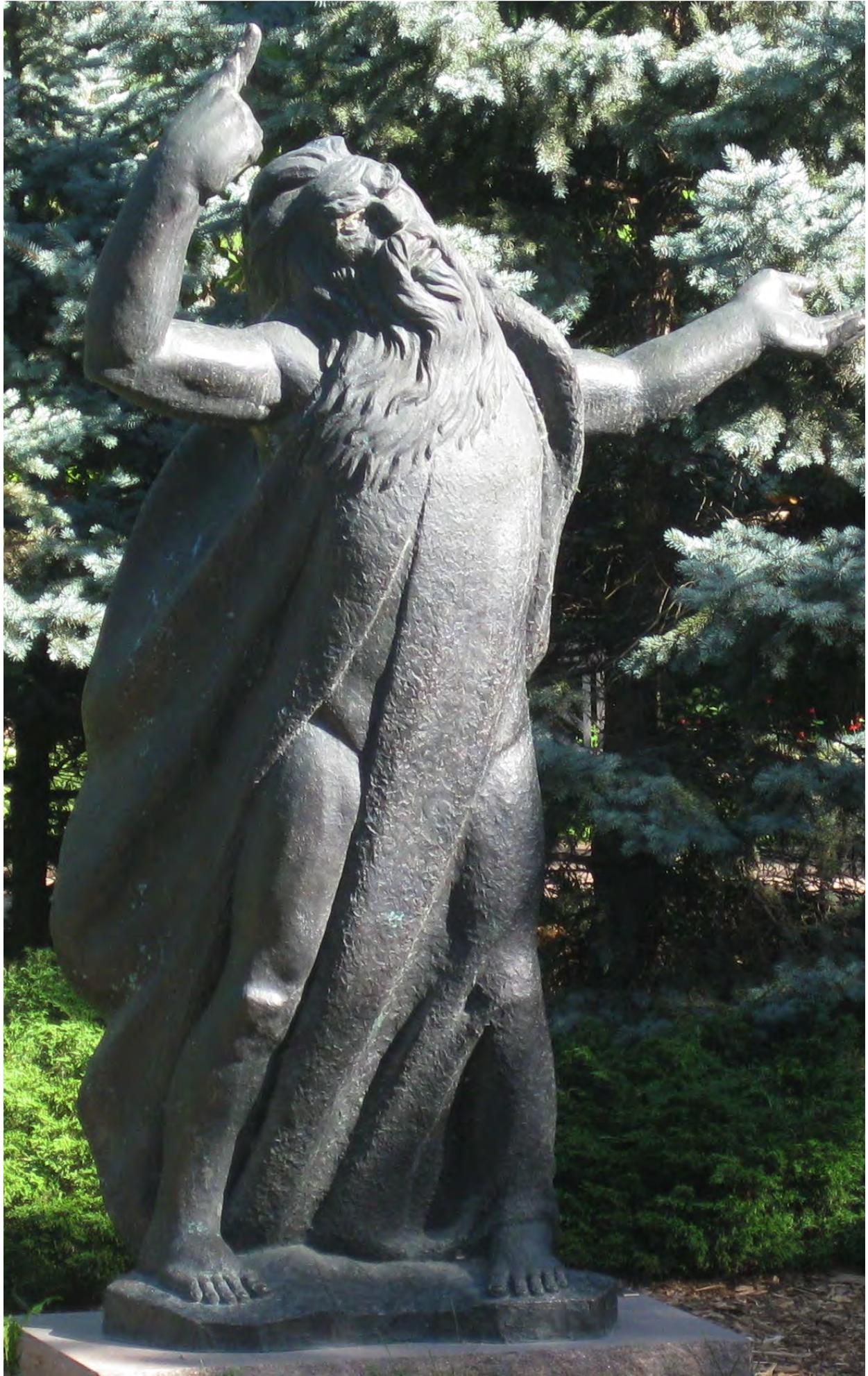
I begin with a photograph, a “writing of light” (φωτός + γραφή),¹ which is, of course, like a movie screen, only two dimensional, having only length and width, not depth. But I ask you to allow your eyes and your imagination (i.e., your brain) to visualize the illusion of depth, of the third dimension, as we humans easily and normally do when we look at photographs or films. Allow your mind to enter the symbolic world, to grasp and understand the geometry of space, of three dimensions.

This is Moses (Leo Mol [1915-2009]):

¹ Where φωτός is the genitive of φῶς.









¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "[Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?](#)" ¹² He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

¹³ But Moses said to God, "[If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?](#)" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations. ¹⁶ Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷ I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.' ¹⁸ They will listen to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God' (Exod 3:10-18).

Then Moses answered, "[But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'](#)" ² The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff."

³ And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. ⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail"-- so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand-- ⁵ "so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

⁶ Again, the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. ⁷ Then God said, "Put your hand back into your cloak"-- so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body-- ⁸ "If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. ⁹ If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

¹⁰ But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." ¹¹ Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." ¹³ But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." ¹⁴ Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. ¹⁶ He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him (Exod 4:1-16).

Reality is a slippery thing. What we might wish for and aim for, based on an historical critical paradigm, is certainty or at least a high level of certainty. We wish to understand reality. But reality (like human life) is very slippery, and things cannot be easily grasped and they move off in uncontrolled and unexplainable directions that are both wondrous and troubling. What we must do, therefore, is what we actually always do: we must interpret. Moses is interpreted by the artist as/like innumerable images have been used to interpret the Bible or parts of it. We must interpret at least in part by considering the imagery that our scriptural texts evoke in listeners' and readers' minds.

Visible, written texts, comprised of recognizable letters of alphabets shaped into words, and grammaticalized into clauses, sentences and paragraphs, and the sounds that correspond to the words, sentences and paragraphs when they are read aloud or heard, are things that we learn to understand from childhood onward. What we see in texts with our eyes (or hear with our ears) is interpreted by our minds to have meaning values that can be articulated. When people read (or listen to) literature of all kinds—such as novels, dramas, short stories, poetry, non-fiction, biographies, letters, technical materials, but, in our case, biblical texts—they are drawn into the

visuality, into what amounts to *the visual art*, of the texts. They “see” scenes and visualize persons, places and things, they “hear” sounds, notice colours, they visualize and hear and feel the emotions.² These things contribute to their understanding of the text and the information (meaning) it conveys. The written art (words) and the visual art (pictures) intersect in the mind, in the visual imagination.³ This visual space in the mind is often blurred or muted because interpreters become conditioned to analyze the words and to avoid the images evoked in the mind. Content becomes separated from form. There are nevertheless spaces of rhetorical blending, an “intermedia,”⁴ of words and pictures, that call us to examination and analysis. Texts are themselves visual things⁵ that, when they are most effective, evoke or cause the mind to recall the visual. Interpretation of the imagery is visual exegesis.

There are many questions to ask in the process, but I suggest that the overarching ones are “Where does the visual evoked by texts *take* people?” “What is the visual meant to *do*?” “How can interpreters go about their interpretive task?” In what follows, I attempt to do two things. First, I offer a theoretical foundation for the visual in NT texts, so far as I have come to understand it (and have time to talk about it). Second, I present a visual description and interpretation of Colossians 2:6-3:4. I am interested in trying to “see” what images a biblical text places in the imagination and what they do and where they lead.⁶ The text itself is the primary source and the conveyer of images that are recognized by audiences. What I do *not* do here is consider the intertextual connections with other texts or the social and cultural intertextures of visual material realia of the time of the letter.⁷

Aristotle

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle speaks of employing metaphors that “set things before the eyes” (*Rhet* 3.11.1), in order to create a sense of reality in audience members minds. He had in mind the

2 There are exceptions (e.g., James Currie). Apparently a small percentage of people do not “see” things in the visual imagination when they read or listen to texts. For example, some have *prosopagnosia* or “face blindness” that prevents them from recognizing faces visually.

3 See my essay “Blending Two Arts: Rhetorical Words, Rhetorical Pictures and Social Formation in the Letter to Philemon” in *Sino-Christian Studies*, 5 (June 2008): 9-38.

4 Norman Schmidt. See “Blending Two Arts,” n 2.

5 Particularly for modern people who generally read texts individually and silently. The first recipients of NT texts heard them read aloud.

6 At least that is what I am doing today. I am also interested in Intertextual images from around the time of the production of the texts and how they assist interpretation and understanding.

7 I address these things at length in my forthcoming RRA Series commentary on Colossians.

notion that words, rhetoricized combinations of words, have a visual aspect and a visual function, that elicit mental images that human minds employ for understanding.

I mean that things are set before the eyes by words that signify *actuality* (ἐνέργεια, Arist. *Rhet.* 3.11.2).

Words can convey both actuality and metaphor according Aristotle (3.11.2), and he provides a series of examples (3.11.3-4). The idea is that words “...give movement and life to all, and *actuality is movement* (κινούμενα γὰρ καὶ ζῶντα ποιεῖ πάντα, ἢ δ' ἐνέργεια κίνησις, 3.11.4). This means that things are *seen* in the imagination to be energized, working, functioning, active.⁸ When he begins his discussion of style (λέξις), Aristotle states that it is necessary to give attention to it in order to make things clear, visible, by presenting φαντασία, that is, a show, an impression, an appearance in the imagination (*Rhet* 3.1.6). This is to say that, in Aristotle's view, rhetoric, words and literature, elicit visual images in the mind that are linked, indeed necessary, to understanding (belief) and action (behaviour). Much later, when Quintilian addressed how eloquent speech functions, he spoke of the importance of awakening the emotions of the audience so that they are drawn into symbolic worlds where they understand ideas (Quint. *Inst.* 6.2.24-36). How is this accomplished? Quintilian says:

The prime essential for stirring the emotions of others is, in my opinion, first to feel those emotions oneself (6.2.26).

Consequently, if we wish to give our words the appearance of sincerity, we must assimilate ourselves to the emotions of those who are genuinely so affected, and our eloquence must spring from the same feeling that we desire to produce in the mind of the judge (6.2.27).

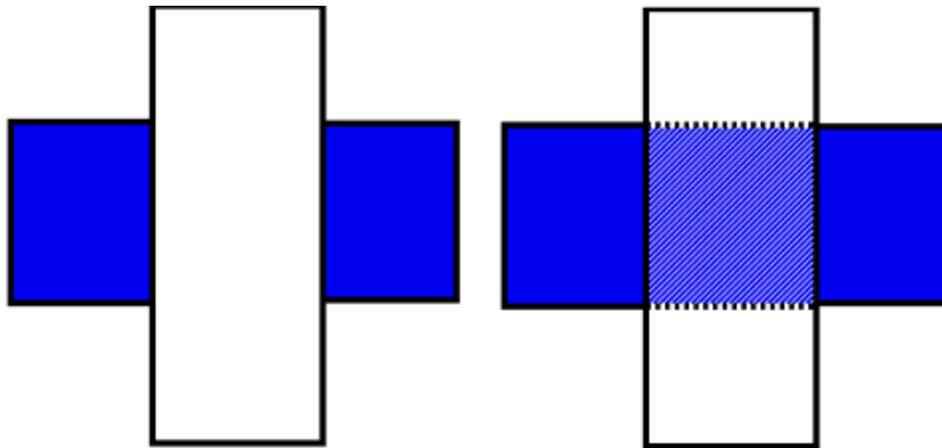
How can these emotions be produced in the speaker? Quintilian goes on to say:

There are certain experiences which the Greeks call φαντασίαι, and the Romans visions (*visiones*), whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be before our very eyes (6.2.29).

From such impressions arises that ἐνέργεια which Cicero calls illumination and actuality, which makes us seem not so much to narrate as to exhibit the actual scene, while our emotions will be no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence (6.2.32).

⁸ ἐνέργεια, appears as “actuality” in the LCL version translated by J.H. Freese quoted here. The word means activity, energy, working, function, action.

In a convincing essay (from which some ideas here are drawn), Ned O'Gorman demonstrates, by reading Aristotle's *Rhetoric* together with *De Anima* (Περὶ Ψυχῆς; *On the Soul*), that there is a visual aspect to Aristotle's rhetorical theory.⁹ According to *De Anima*, sight is the most developed sense (3.3). *Phantasia* (φαντασία), brought on (primarily)¹⁰ by visual perception, conveys understanding to the mind and, indeed, to the soul (ψυχή).¹¹ *Phantasia* brings what is not seen in visual reality to the human mind in the visual imagination.¹² By it things are interpreted to be meaningful, to be right or wrong, and it is critical to perception, deliberation, and understanding (*De Anima* 428a-431b).¹³ It seems obvious that *phantasia* does not always “see” things correctly and what is seen might be distorted or misleading. The human mind (νοῦς) supplies, sometimes mistakenly, things not actually there, or leaves out things that are there. This indicates, actually very helpfully, that human minds are not passive, but are active interpreters of information. The following illustrations point this out:¹⁴



This looks like a white vertical rectangle on top of a blue horizontal rectangle, although in actuality it's simply a white vertical rectangle with two blue squares on either side. The brain constructs a way to unify the two squares as is shown in the diagram to the right.

9 Ned O'Gorman, “Aristotle's *Phantasia* in the *Rhetoric*: Lexis, Appearance, and the Epideictic Function of Discourse” in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 38/1 (2005): 16-40.

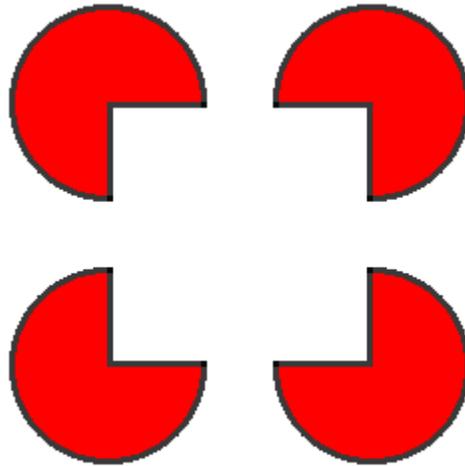
10 But also by the senses of sound, smell, taste, touch. The sensibilities affected are visual, oral, aural, olfactory, tactile, gustatory, textual, prosaic, poetic, and intellectual (on these see my forthcoming commentary on Colossians). See O'Gorman, 19. Sound is particularly important for ancient Mediterranean documents since they were first spoken, then transcribed, then read aloud to their audiences. Sound evokes the visual.

11 O'Gorman, 17.

12 O'Gorman, 20.

13 O'Gorman, 20-21.

14 These illustrations are taken (borrowed?) from <http://perseus.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/GreekScience/Students/Tom/drawings.html>.



Here the brain "sees" or constructs an "invisible square" in the middle.

This does not mean, however, that the visual interpretation is not necessary or by any means wholly unreliable. Lack of exact correspondence to reality does not prevent the mind from engaging in careful and rational reasoning while taking *phantasia*, metaphor and imagery, into account.¹⁵ This is art as much as (more than?) it is empirical analysis.

According to Aristotle, style (λέξις) evokes *phantasia* for the purpose of clarity of idea and understanding ("but all this [i.e., style] is appearance/imagery for the listener/audience"; ἀλλ' ἅπαντα φαντασία ταῦτ' ἐστὶ καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἀκροατήν, *Rhet.* 3.1.6).¹⁶ Style is what brings things before the eyes. The mind visualizes and blends scenes, persons, actions and material things that appear to be, but are not, material realia. Such mental imagery and blending has a rhetorical function. It has emotional, *pathos* effect that leads to the development of opinion. It is an integral part of persuasion and the development of correct judgments and correct behaviours.

Ezra Pound—*Phanopoeia*

In 1927, poet and critic Ezra Pound wrote an essay titled "How to Read"¹⁷ in which he describes

¹⁵ Interpretation is always a multiple accounts evaluation.

¹⁶ See O'Gorman, 22-27. The LCL translation by J.H. Freese mistakenly renders the line "But all these things are mere outward show for pleasing the hearer."

¹⁷ The exact date of writing is uncertain. According to a footnote in a volume edited by T.S. Eliot (*Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, New York: New Directions, 1954, 15) it was first published by the *New York Herald* in 1927 or 1928. It has been republished a number of times. The text used here is Ezra Pound, *How to Read*. (New York:

his understanding of how language is “charged” or “energized” in three fundamental, rhetorical ways. Pound calls these features *melopoeia*, *phanopoeia* and *logopoeia*.¹⁸ Pound was strongly critical of those whom he thought did not know how to read literature properly.¹⁹ He believed that “Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree”²⁰ and that to understand it one should “chuck out the classifications which apply to the outer shape of the work, or to its occasion” and “look at what actually happens.”²¹ *Melopoeia* is musical or sound orchestration that directs the flow of meaning by the appeal of sound. *Phanopoeia* is “the casting of images upon the visual imagination.” *Logopoeia* is the implicit meanings or allusions of words that exist in audience members memories.²² *Melopoeia* and *phanopoeia* have sensory effects on audiences and Pound claimed that they could evoke a psychological event in audience minds where meaning is grasped and a mindset or way of seeing things (“to give people new eyes”) is produced.²³ *Melopoeia* can arouse the “aural imagination” to expect the rhythmic sounds to continue and to direct meaning.²⁴ *Phanopoeia*, according to Pound, is meant not only to provide a word picture or representation, but is the employment of evocative imagery that can “create a flash of understanding,” “an affective psychological event,” that provides growth and helps audiences move ahead.²⁵ *Logopoeia*, in contrast to *melopoeia* and *phanopoeia*, has a contextual and intertextual effect. It depends upon the audience’s recognition of words previously heard or read, on the knowledge of rhetorical usage and reading experience in a text.²⁶ The appearance of previously known words and ideas will bring out the memories and comparisons with the memories in people’s minds.

Pound’s concern was with the question of how language functions. He decried what he termed the “loose use” of “bloated” words that do not add to meaning.²⁷ He seems to have believed that literature has a moral purpose:

Haskell House, 1971).

18 Pound, *How to Read*, 25-26. See also Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Reading* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 37.

19 See especially *How to Read*, 5-11, 21, 49-50. Pound (1885-1972) had a reputation for being a strongly opinionated, acerbic, and difficult person.

20 Pound, *How to Read* 21.

21 Pound, *How to Read* 25.

22 Pound, *How to Read* 25-26.

23 Marianne Korn, *Ezra Pound: Purpose, Form, Meaning* (London: Pembrige Press, 1983), 91-92.

24 Korn, *Ezra Pound* 68-69.

25 Korn, *Ezra Pound* 78.

26 Korn, *Ezra Pound* 93.

27 Pound, *How to Read* 18.

It appears to me to be quite tenable that the function of literature as a generated prize-worthy force is precisely that it does incite humanity to continue living; that it eases the mind of strain, and feeds it, I mean definitely as a nutrition of impulse.²⁸

He claimed, too strongly, that all writing is made up of *melopoeia*, *phanopoeia* and *logopoeia*, along with the form of an entire work.²⁹ However, his basic concern was “the art of getting meaning into words.”³⁰

Phanopoeia demonstrates and examines how mental imagery induces an emotional response that moves people toward understanding and action. The *ethos* of the visually energized language elicits a *pathos* response.³¹ Images generate an emotional disposition of mind in audiences that leads them to recognize and practice particular points of view, beliefs, and behaviours.³² In Pound's view, the *phanopoeia* elicited by texts needs careful reading and observation precisely because of its power to evoke sensory effects on audiences.³³

Vernon K. Robbins—Rhetography

Vernon Robbins employment of the coining “rhetography” (an elision of “rhetoric” and “graphic”) struck me as having a meaning very close to Pound's *phanopoeia* when I first heard him using the term. Robbins explains rhetography fully and clearly in his article “Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text” where he defines it as “...the graphic images people create in their minds as a result of the visual texture of a text.”³⁴ He links the visual to “context”

28 Pound, *How to Read* 16.

29 Pound, *How to Read* 28. Although Pound was primarily concerned with poetry, he recognized that *melopoeia*, *phanopoeia* and *logopoeia* occur in prose and spoken language, but require a greater amount of language to convey the same power (*How to Read* 27-28).

30 Pound, *How to Read* 39.

31 Thomas H. Olbricht, “*Pathos* as Proof in Greco-Roman Rhetoric” in Thomas H. Olbricht and Jerry L. Sumney, eds., *Paul and Pathos* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001 7-22), 7, has pointed out that there is very little available from scholars on how *pathos* may be analyzed.

32 This is the sort of thing that Aristotle discussed in *Rhet.* 2.1.3-4, 8-9 and 2.2.27. Audiences need to be led to take on a frame of mind that is part of what persuades them to take a particular point of view or decision and to act on it.

33 For more on Pound's views see my essay “Melody, Imagery and Memory in the Moral Persuasion of Paul” in Anders Eriksson and Thomas H. Olbricht, eds., *Rhetoric, Ethic and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse*. (New York/London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 160-178.

34 Vernon K. Robbins, “Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text” in *Words Well Spoken: George Kennedy's Rhetoric of the New Testament*. C. Clifton Black and Duane F. Watson, eds. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), 81-106, 81.

by stating that “A speaker or writer composes, intentionally or unintentionally, a context of communication through statements or signs that conjure visual images in the mind which, in turn, evoke 'familiar' contexts that provide meaning for a hearer or reader.”³⁵ The employment of language, oral or written, presupposes the spatial context of the speaker or writer and of the listener(s) or reader(s). This contextualization has implications for the rhetoric and the reception of the language that can be analyzed by interpreters.³⁶ Robbins goes on to point out that a major function of rhetography is that it reveals the spaces or “social-cultural-ideological locations”³⁷ in which early Christian and NT argumentation occur, and the kinds or “modes” of discourse typically employed and blended in those spaces. These spaces, in early Christian and NT context, have moved beyond the classical rhetorical locations of judicial, political and ceremonial discourse.³⁸ As Robbins points out, the spatial and discursive contexts are “...available to us through the rhetography of the discourse, provide the cultural frames for understanding and negotiating the meanings in early Christian argumentation.”³⁹ Rhetography is about how these rhetorical contexts are envisioned in the mind by speakers/authors of the texts, and by listeners/hearers who encounter them.⁴⁰ A rhetograph will have, like all visual spaces, a foreground, a mid-ground and a background, and characters and objects may be situated at the centre, at the sides, or above or below the plane of observation. It can display multiple images individually or simultaneously. It will portray a story or narration that will indicate life and activities. It will have multiple effects on audience members. Characters and objects may move or be moved, communicate, indicate ethos, show emotion, or engage in any activity. The visual presentation, what is cast on the imagination, can, as we will see later, itself make an argument that can be understood by someone visualizing it. This now suggests that interpretation is not flat, is not a two dimensional, length and width, undertaking, but is genuinely geometric, three dimensional, where depth must be taken into account.⁴¹ We must therefore ask, what does the

35 Robbins, “Rhetography,” 81. Robbins notes significant supporting bibliography, 81-82.

36 Cf. Robbins, “Rhetography,” 83.

37 Robbins, “Rhetography,” 86.

38 That is, of judicial, deliberative and epideictic discourse or oratory.

39 Robbins, “Rhetography,” 86-87.

40 The spaces and discourses (which Robbins and SRI call *rhetorolects*) are at least these six (there are more): earthly kingdom—prophetic rhetorolect; the imperial court—apocalyptic; the human body—miracle; the family household—wisdom; the imperial household—precreation; sacrificial-temple—priestly. See Robbins, “Rhetography,” 87-98.

41 Geometry has to do with the shape, size and relative position of figures, and the properties of space (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geometry>).

rhetography *do* to its audiences? What images are evoked? What kinds of rhetorical discourse are brought into view? What are the features of the visual rhetoric that are socially or religiously formative and bring about reader/listener responses?

Margaret Visser—Geometry

In her wonderful book *The Geometry of Love: Space, Time, Mystery and Meaning in an Ordinary Church*,⁴² Margaret Visser gets at visual exegesis and interpretation by examining art in the form of the architecture of an ancient church, Sant'Agnese fuori le Mura, in Rome.⁴³ Here the geometry is filled out into a complete interpretation. She begins with the visual and moves toward the written text the visual evokes (i.e., her book), while interpreters of the Bible can begin with the text that evokes the visual.⁴⁴ A major concept that Visser teaches us is that we must learn to see what we are looking at, at what visual art or texts or anything visual has to teach us.⁴⁵ She pushes/persuades us to see and interpret and understand what we see. “Learning to ‘read’” what is seen or visualized is foundational to understanding the rhetoric.⁴⁶ We can refuse to see the images or fail to interpret them, but only to our own loss and the loss of those who might learn from us.

Visser points out that the usual critical questions like “When was it written/made?” “What are the dimensions?” “What are the features or textual items of particular note?” “Who is the author/artist/maker?” “Is it genuine?” “Is it pseudonymous?” “What is the occasion or *Sitz im Leben*?” “How long is it?” “Does it present or reflect real historical events?” while critically important, can miss the point:

I remember sitting at the back of a tiny, isolated church some years ago, on top of a hill in Spain. A Japanese tourist was driven up to the front door and led around the building by a guide he must have hired in the town some distance away. The guide told him, in English, the dates of various parts of the building and then proceeded to dilate upon the

42 Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2000.

43 Ste. Agnes Outside the Wall.

44 Or that is what I am doing in this essay. Some begin with studies of material, political and social culture of the ancient Mediterranean and then apply it to the NT. This is a perfectly good way to approach visual exegesis, but not what I am doing here. See Harry O. Maier, ... and Rosemary Canavan, *Clothing the Body of Christ at Colossae*, (WUNT 334; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 31-41, 115-133. Many commentaries, beginning (in English) particularly with J.B. Lightfoot (1875) take the view that the historical situation must be understood first, before adequate interpretation can begin.

45 Visser, 11-12.

46 Visser, 4. Cf. above on Pound's ideas about how to read.

superb stone vaulting. The tourist did not even raise his head to look at this. He stared aghast—as well he might—at a horrific, life-sized painted carving of a bleeding man nailed to two pieces of wood. When the guide had stopped talking, the man gestured wordlessly towards the statue. The guide nodded, smiled, and told him in which century it had been carved.⁴⁷

Dates, historical circumstances and other measures are fundamental and indispensable, but they do not provide full access to what a text is about. With the visual, whether real or envisioned mentally, the questions and the analysis cannot be only about *what it is*, but about *what it says*, *how it says it*, and *what it does*.⁴⁸ Texts, whether heard or read, set images in the mind. What are the images saying? What is the geometry? All of this is, of course, about studying the rhetoric of the texts.

Those who see the *rhetographs* in their visual imaginations, the audiences or recipients (whether θεωροί, spectators, or κριταί, judges)⁴⁹ of the images, draw on their memories of things they have heard or seen before.⁵⁰ In other words, they recognize or at least are able to connect with the pictures via things they know. They are led by performance of texts (heard or read) or by actual objects. As such, they are active participants in the performance. They are not passive.⁵¹ They watch, listen, are moved emotionally and physiologically, and become engaged with the symbolic worlds of the imagery. But, unlike the theatre (or film or other visual, aural and other sensory arts) where there is a distance between the play (i.e., the performers and the words and images) and the audience that is increased after the play has ended and the audience is no longer engaged, the images cast in the mind by the NT (and no doubt other religious) texts are meant to stay with the participating audience members because “The whole point of the proceedings is to help them change the orientation of their souls, even though they are also confirming the foundation of their beliefs.”⁵² The words of NT texts are not meant to be

47 Visser, 1.

48 Visser, 2, points out that this means considering things such as history, politics, theology, anthropology, art history, technology, iconography, hagiography, and folklore. We could add to the list psychology, physiology, cognitive theory, spatial theory, geography, literature and literary theory, acting and theatre, and a range of other disciplines. Visser, 2-3, also claims that a subject must be investigated from the “inside,” not, as many claim, from the “outside” as a non-participant. “...it is no longer *de rigueur* to discount what the 'natives' are telling you you are going on. ...it is detrimental to truth to claim total objectivity.”

49 Audiences may be comprised of both spectators (θεωροί) and judges or critics (κριταί), sometimes in the same persons, who are affected by what they hear and see.

50 Cf. Pound's notion of *logopoeia*, implicit memories recalled by texts. Cf. Visser, 9.

51 See Visser's description of the theatre, 12-13.

52 Visser, 13.

observed from some “aesthetic distance,”⁵³ they are speaking to people's minds and hearts in order to orient them in particular directions.

The [text] is trying to speak; not listening to what it has to say is a form of barbarous inattention, like admiring a musical instrument while caring nothing for the music.⁵⁴

The texts communicate things beyond themselves *in what they picture*. The language is not only the language of words, it is the language of the visual imagination. This is the dimension beyond length and width. This points us to the full geometry of “sacred texture” that aims toward God, Christ and holy, faithful fellowship and behaviour. This geometry is the orientation toward getting people's lives to align with their beliefs, something very difficult to do consistently.⁵⁵ In the NT this is about believing and behaving in accord with the Christian understanding that Christ has changed the world.⁵⁶ In the Letter to the Colossians it means that Christ, not Caesar, is the image of God in whom God's fulness dwells (Col 1:15-20; 2:9-10) and that being raised and living with Christ alters both outlook and behaviour (3:1-4).

This is where Visser has helped me, I think immensely, even though she writes about the visuality (in its architecture, art and function) of an ancient church building, not an ancient Mediterranean religious text (though the building is itself a text). She shows that there is depth, a kind of third dimension, more than an elevation, rather a trajectory or a geometric space that extends out from the more linear “textures” described by Vernon Robbins.⁵⁷ The rhetoric of the NT (and, I suspect, of ancient Mediterranean religion more generally) was trying to take people toward the sacred. The rhetorolects, the emerging modes of discourse, have the same (kind of) function. It must be made clear, however, that the sacred dimension is about movement, outward movement, in multiple directions. It is not simple and straightforward depth; it is not static, but is a dynamic, kinetic trajectory that goes off in many directions. Not wildly or chaotically so, but in careful, logical directions. The pictures cast on the imagination reveal, show, hence are a *φαντασία*, that gives a vision of the sacred space and what things are like there.

53 Visser, 14.

54 Visser, 14. Rather than [text], Visser wrote “building”.

55 On the idea of “orientation” see Visser, 15-17.

56 Visser, 31-32, points out that, contrary to the Roman view of fate (Lat. *fatum*), that the things of one's life are bound to happen, that “An event that is fated cannot not happen,” that life is out of control, is replaced by Christianity with destiny. “...destiny is life with God, a personal God, who cares about what happens to human beings.” This is sacred texture.

57 Add in st abt textures fr *Tapestry* and *Exploring* and VKR NYC paper. Kahl, Canavan

Daniel Kahneman

An interesting and helpful psychological explanation of the visual force of words is presented by Daniel Kahneman in his book *Thinking Fast and Slow*.⁵⁸ While Kahneman's overall presentation is very complex, he does seem to demonstrate how words elicit visual and other mental and physiological responses.⁵⁹ Indeed, he points out that there is “..a complex constellation of responses...” that occur “...quickly, automatically and effortlessly” when words are observed and recognized. This is “associative activation” that occurs when “ideas that have been evoked trigger many other ideas, in a spreading cascade of activity in the brain.”⁶⁰ Words elicit memories⁶¹ which, in turn, arouse images in the mind and other physiological responses. The images cast on the mind by words of a text heard or read are an “attenuated version” or “attenuated replica” that are a visual interpretation of the situation under consideration.⁶² The mind and the body are trying to make sense of the situation.⁶³ What is seen, whether in actual or mental images, can influence behaviour.⁶⁴ Although the mental images are attenuated, they nevertheless are interpretations that lead people along to understanding and action. The more vivid the images become because of the vividness of the language that evokes them (ἐκφράσις) the more effective they become in affecting how people behave.⁶⁵

Below I offer a description and analysis of the visual images cast on, elicited in or evoked by the imagination—the rhetography or *phanopoeia*—of Colossians 2:6-3:4. I recognize that other interpreters and surely the intended and first audiences of this passage are likely to have “seen” things differently. Still, we can see enough to track the ideas and grasp the scene clearly in order to understand the argument being made.

58 Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011). As I was preparing this paper a colleague informed me of the work of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty who addressed visuality very extensively. I have not yet considered his work.

59 See particularly Kahneman's Chapter Four, “The Associative Machine,” 50-58. He places the words “Bananas” and “Vomit” visually next to each other (p. 50) and points out the range of responses people have to the arrangement.

60 Kahneman, 51.

61 Kahneman, 52, refers to “associative memory,” which seems like Pound's notion of *logopoeia*.

62 Cf. above, the section on Aristotle, which notes how the mind fills in images that may not exist in reality.

63 Kahneman, 50-51.

64 See Kahneman, 53-58.

65 Cf. Kahneman, 323-328.

Contextualizing the Visual Texture of Colossians 2:6-3:4

Col 2:5-3:4 is the Core Argumentative Rhetoric of the letter. It is here that it comes to its central concerns and argues for how they should be addressed and resolved. It is preceded by Introductory Rhetoric (1:1-2:5) that casts a comprehensive visual image on the minds of listeners to the letter. In the first section (1:1-2:3), listeners/readers observe a happy scene where Paul (and Timothy) addresses faithful, loving members of the church community in Colossae among whom the gospel is producing much fruit. Paul is observed in continuous prayer for these people, envisioning as he does so their ongoing fruitful lives and their growing knowledge of God. The lines of sight are drawn upward with the visualization of Jesus Christ, the preeminent, preexistent (precreational) son of God, who, strikingly, has in the death of his own flesh brought about the cheerful scene of reconciled persons. What has developed is a visual conception that draws audience members minds to a scene where the various players exist in a community where there are good relationships among all. These persons must be sure that they remain as participants in the scene that they are called to visualize. This introductory picturing sets the visual imagery for the letter.

The second section of the Introductory Rhetoric (1:24-2:5) focuses on Paul at the centre of the picture. He is seen in multiple roles or images: proclaimer/preacher/prophet; servant; sufferer; struggler; comforter; a working, struggling, very serious, committed person. He is committed to the apocalyptic vision of Christ as the revealed mystery. He proclaims this vision prophetically, but always with a view toward wisdom, that is, toward the knowledge and behaviour and maturation of people who, like the Colossians, have heard and received the proclamation. He is seen to be wary of false, anti-prophetic and anti-wisdom teachers and teaching. He sees and projects the complex imagery of Christ in the believers and the believers in Christ, and of Christ being the place of treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He rejoices in what he observes among his audience members. Paul says he is rejoicing at the beginning and ending of this section (Νῦν χαίρω, 1:24; χαίρων, 2:5), suggesting that a joyful person is to be imagined by his readers/listeners. The joyful Paul, however, cannot be separated from the prophetic Paul: each step in this section begins with prophetic, proclamatory language (1:24, 28; 2:1, 4).

Rhetography of the Core Argumentative Rhetoric 2:6-3:4

Step One 2:6-7

Paul continues to be seen and his prophetic voice continues to be heard, but he is seen and heard one step removed from his previous position due to a visual shift at this step from the first person focus on himself to the second person “you,” thereby bringing the letter’s recipients into the foreground. This shift brings wisdom rhetorolect and its emphasis on faithful activity into play.⁶⁶ There is a move from looking at the space occupied by Paul to the space occupied by the letter’s audiences. The viewers of the mental imagery see Christ Jesus the Lord once more (cf. 1:3, 10), though now they themselves are centrally visualized as people who have received this Christ Jesus (Ὦς οὖν παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον). This image of receiving will remind of, and so appear as, the earlier rhetographs of themselves in Christ and Christ in them (1:27-28), particularly because of the clause, “walk in him (ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε). The walking, a wonderful pictorial way of describing living or moving through life, is to be done “in him,” in Christ. This walking motion is given stability and strength by “being rooted and built in him” (ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ) and by “being confirmed [secured, established] in the faith” (βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει). The listeners observe themselves to be moving along very confidently because of their location in Christ. The horticultural (rooted) and construction (built) images show them to be well-founded and immovable in their connection with Christ. As persons who are well-established in their faith, confident in their faith, they are observed to be walking/living in Christ in accord with what they had been taught, perhaps bringing the image of Paul or Timothy or Epaphras or other teacher to the imagination again. As they walk they are observed to be engaged in an overflowing of thanksgiving (περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ). The rhetograph here presents an appealing scene of strong faithful people, encouraged now by what Paul is picturing to them of the wisdom life in the apocalyptic Christ Jesus. The abundant overflow of thanksgiving enhances the imagery by visibly indicating to all observers how thankful they are in their location in Christ. The visual scene itself makes an implicit visual argument: what they see mentally is what they must be in reality.

⁶⁶ The grammatical and structural shift is indicated in the words Ὦς οὖν.

Step Two 2:8-10

With this step the images in the picture are altered again with the listeners shifting their own vision, at Paul's call (βλέπετε), to a person⁶⁷ introduced into the scene for the first time. The new person in the portrayal is not recognized by physiological appearance or by name. Rather, this person appears in negative, possibly violent, imagery as someone who is attempting to capture the Colossians (βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν) by using "philosophy" and "empty deceit" (διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης), things that in this case operate "according to human tradition" and "according to the elements of the world" as over against things that operate "according to Christ" (κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν). This attempted action of capturing is visually instigated by a person, but is accomplished intellectually and emotionally by affecting how the audience members themselves think and act. This colouring immediately suggests the presence of danger.⁶⁸ The rhetograph displays a threat against believers in Colossae (and elsewhere) that aims to intimidate them with words or messages from some person other than Paul who addresses them persuasively with information counter to what they have learned about Christ (cf. 1:15-20, etc.), information that comes solely from human and cosmic sources.⁶⁹ The readers/listeners will appear to become wary of this person and the person's message. Also cast on the imagination are visualizations of "philosophy and empty deceit," "human tradition," and "the elements of the world."⁷⁰ These are abstract conceptualizations, but the implied emotional and intellectual power of the conceptualizations suggests images that are to be observed outside of Christ in whom listeners are located and who is located in them, and that they stand against both Christ and the audiences in an adversarial way. They are not "according to Christ" (καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν), thus they are adversarial notions and therefore have a threatening appearance. Each of these adversarial

67 The grammar is singular, a person. It may be likely, though is not necessarily the case, that in Colossae this "person" was a number of persons or false teachers.

68 The verb βλέπετε has the force of "beware".

69 Their information does not, therefore, come from the precreational or apocalyptic Christ source, which is the authority Paul recognizes (cf. 1:15-20).

70 Translation of τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in NRSV and other ETs is inaccurate and misleading. Greek does not say "the elemental spirits of the universe," it says "the elements of the cosmos". There is no fully compelling reason to add the notion of "spirits" here. The identity of the stoicheia is, of course, a matter of ongoing debate. But the proximity of the term to "philosophy and empty deceit" and "human tradition" in the larger context of Col suggest that they are connected with the *present age* issues that arise for humans: eat/don't eat; drink/don't drink; participate/don't participate; love/hate; love/not love; slave/free; circumcision/uncircumcision; Jew/Gentile; power/powerless; submit/don't submit, etc. See on this see J. Louis Martyn *Galatians* (AB 33A, New York: Doubleday, 1997) 389, 393-406.

images picture human, present age concerns, rather than the picture of the precreational and apocalyptic Christ and the focus on the heavenly hope that has been in view since 1:5 (cf. 1:12-13). What occurs in 2:8 is that the space of the audience members is blended with the space of the person attempting to capture them, to produce a third space of caution in the presence of a threat.

Christ, against whom the threatening ideas stand and in whom the listeners are located, is next portrayed as the one in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily (ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς, 2:9). In sight is the precreational Christ seen already in 1:15-18a and 1:19, now brought into focus again. This picturing of the precreational Christ—against whom stands the one threatening capture—shows him being inhabited by the fullness of deity, thus the image portrays Christ as the one who reveals everything about God to viewers and as the one who offers all that is needed to be known about life in the overall scene for them. Christ stands against not only the person attempting to capture the Colossians, but also against the intellectual, emotional, present age forces that are used to accomplish capture. The rhetograph makes it clear that the audience members should have their confidence in the precreational Christ—where deity fully resides—and not in the human and earthly teachings. With the inclusion of the word “bodily” (σωματικῶς) it becomes clear that the precreational Christ is portrayed in physiological form and is the apocalyptic Christ still now present. Christ is the apocalyptic one in whom precreational deity resides. To display the fullness of deity is to display the fullness of divine existence, here portrayed in the present. This bodily presence of the fullness of deity in Christ brings about the fullness of the audience members who are next seen in the rhetograph as those who are full beings in Christ (καὶ ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, 1:10).⁷¹ They are viewed as being full in the apocalyptic Christ who is full of deity bodily. Their fullness displays them as persons who should not be persuaded by the adversarial philosophy and empty deceit of human traditions and the elements of the world precisely because they have already been filled with all they need, namely Christ. Christ and the fullness they already display are all that is needed to make a complete and full picture. The picturing conveys the message that neither they nor Christ lack anything required for the continuation of their hope of heaven and their life in the kingdom.

This step is completed with yet another view of the precreational, apocalyptic Christ who

71 Perfect passive participle indicating they have already been made full in him.

now is seen as “head of every power and authority” (ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας). As “head” Christ is here to be seen as superior to and ruling over every (other) power and authority that can be visualized by the audiences. This is reminiscent of the picturing of 1:16 and 1:18 where Christ was seen to be superior to all powers and to be head of the body-church. It also previews the description of Christ’s apocalyptic work indicated in 2:15. The image is of the powerful, authoritative, superior Christ who is visibly sufficient, thereby indicating the insufficiency of the forces being used in the attempt to capture the faithful.

Step Three 2:11-15

Although the sentence that began at 2:8 continues through to 2:15, there is a shift or a step in the progression of images here. Christ is pictured again as the one “in whom” (ἐν ᾧ) the listeners are located, but this image is elaborated (ἐκφράσις) very graphically by casting the visualization of circumcision on their imaginations. The faithful have been circumcised in Christ (ἐν ᾧ καὶ περιετμήθητε). The result of the physical surgery of circumcision can be readily visualized by people (if probably not literally examined in a church setting) and would likely be recognized as the Jewish covenantal sign (or, by Gentiles, at least as a Jewish peculiarity). The circumcision seen here, however, is visualized in a different way because it is “made without hand” or “not hand made” (περιτομῆ ἀχειροποιήτω),⁷² but nevertheless involves the imagery of circumcision in the stripping off of the body of flesh (ἐν τῇ ἀπεκδύσει τοῦ σώματος τῆς σαρκός). “Flesh” here quite clearly is not the physical flesh of the foreskin, but is the metaphorical—but still visualized—cutting away of the body of flesh that is meant to portray the removal of the life of the former time in darkness and the transfer into the kingdom of God’s son in whom is redemption and forgiveness of sins (1:13-14). The former life has been cut away and the life of fullness in the apocalyptic Christ is now in view. This particular image of “circumcision” is “the circumcision of Christ” (ἐν τῇ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ), that is, it is brought about by the apocalyptic work of God in Christ. Thus, while the listeners recognize that the rhetograph describes what has happened to them, they also see, as they have before, that Christ is at the centre foreground of the portrayal and is the active figure in bringing about their circumcision. His apocalyptic presence is the visual indicator of the reality of their circumcision.

Overlaid on or interwoven with the picture of “circumcision” is the picture of burial and

72 NRSV mistranslates with the interpretive rendering “with a spiritual circumcision”.

resurrection of the audiences with Christ, which picture itself is interwoven with the image of their baptism (συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε). The circumcision of Christ not made with hands, the stripping off of the body of flesh, is seen together with the burial of the listeners with Christ's burial and resurrection⁷³ (their death is implicit here, but comes explicitly into view in 2:13) and is visualized in the recollection of the concrete reality of their baptism. In the visualization of their baptism they will also now see their resurrection with Christ. Death, burial and resurrection with Christ are seen as a complex unity in and necessarily with Christ.⁷⁴ The actual burial and resurrection (i.e., the circumcising, saving work) is brought about "through the faith of the [i.e., the faithful] action of God who raised him [Christ] from the dead" (διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν).⁷⁵ The image of the circumcision made without hands is here visually explained: it is the action of God, performed in the same way that God raised Christ out of death. The baptism of the recipients of this rhetograph analogously lays out the reality of God's action and of the circumcision of Christ.⁷⁶

There is an amazing blending of images in this picture. Physical circumcision is blended with a non-physical circumcision and with the cutting away of the former existence in darkness. Non-physical circumcision is blended with the audience members burial and resurrection with Christ brought about by God. The imagery of burial and resurrection is blended with baptism. This blending produces a quite marvelous visualized space where the circumcision-stripping off of the body of flesh-burial-resurrection sequence is seen comprehensively and at once. The comprehensive vision is imagined to be located in Christ and brought about by the working of God. The imagery is highly complex, but the complex picture presents a reality that audiences of Col will grasp. It can be understood precisely because it is a picture to be visualized. In other words, the picture makes the argument directly.

The image of death becomes explicit finally in 2:13. The Christ-believers in Colossae

73 Cf. the death of Christ mentioned already in 1:20-22.

74 Contra a frequent interpretation, the pronomial phrase ἐν ᾧ in verse 12 should not be understood as "in which" (i.e., in baptism), but as a repetition of "in whom." Baptism stands here (and in Rom 6:4) for burial, that is, for *immersion*, and not for resurrection, that is, for *emersion*. Cf. Dunn, *Colossians* 160; Lincoln, "Colossians" 624. Baptism symbolizes union with Christ in death and burial.

75 The line διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ is taken here as a subjective genitive: through the faithful activity of God; *not* through faith in the activity of God. This fits context where all the saving activity is performed by God in Christ.

76 If the recipients are wondering about a need for circumcision they should stop. They have been circumcised by the action of God.

remain at the centre of the visualization, but now are viewed in their former condition—that is, prior to being raised with Christ—as dead and, following the circumcision imagery, they are viewed in their former condition of being “uncircumcised” by the circumcision of Christ (καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας [ἐν] τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν). Death and dead bodies in the Greco-Roman era were considered to be repugnant and defiling.⁷⁷ Family members were responsible to look after their own dead. The former condition of being dead envisions this detestable condition and, simultaneously with the uncircumcised condition, is seen as being “in trespasses,” that is, in sins that “cause one to lose footing.”⁷⁸ The entire picture of 2:13 implies that they are alive in a present view. This implication is immediately explicit in the image of the audience having been “made alive with” Christ (συνεζωποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ). The audience is viewed distinctly as being alive, although in another view of the same tapestry they are seen to have been dead. The image of being made alive “with him” corresponds to the continuing overlaid image of Christ and believers. The now living Christ and the now living believers go together inseparably. The complexity of the scene increases with the addition of the image and tone-colouring of forgiveness of trespasses (χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα) that contrasts with the more sinister images of “in trespasses” and “uncircumcision.” Now the visualization brings Paul (and Timothy and, presumably, others) back into direct focus along with the audience with the reappearance of the plural pronoun ἡμῖν. The broader focus on “we” and “us” pictures the forgiven senders of the letter and its audiences as liberated people in a liberated setting where no authoritative record or authoritative powers (cosmic or human-political, cf. 1:16) stand against them or make requirements of them (ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ’ ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸ ἦρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ· ἀπεκδυσάμενος τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐδειγμάτισεν ἐν παρρησίᾳ, θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ). The record of human actions that people imagine to stand against them is seen to have been erased—there is a blank space where the record was set previously—and the powers have been disarmed. The action of the erasure is visually described as accomplished by God’s action of removing the record (αὐτὸ ἦρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου, literally “he took it out of the middle” thus, idiomatically, “he removed it,”) by “nailing it to the cross” (προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ). The cross and nailing imagery places Christ at the

77 See the discussion in Visser, 48-52. Interestingly, people did like to visit and care for the graves of family members.

78 παραπτώμα, literally “beside the body.”

centre of the scene (since it is obvious in context that Christ was the one nailed to a cross) and imagines the action of nailing as the metaphor for the action of erasure or removal of the record of rules that stood against people. This vivid activity (nailing, crucifying, erasing, removing) is simultaneously visualized as a “disarming” and a “disgracing” of and a “triumphing over” the adversarial “powers and authorities”. Once again the complexity of the picture is striking, with several actions being viewed simultaneously. The composite image indicates the work of God, the power of the cross, the liberty of people and the powerlessness of the things and beings that stand against humans. The picture indicates, in a complex artistic way, that the threat of violent capture (2:8) is to be observed and resisted because the powers it attempts to use to perform the capture are impotent. The powers appear to be dramatically weakened and to be in a state of disgrace. For the pictured listeners to succumb to such impotent powers would be tragic and unnecessary. They are visualized in a position of strength. God in Christ has provided everything required for liberty. No further human action of any kind is required; the picture is complete as it stands. The argument is clear in the picture itself.

This step presents a complex blending of images from multiple spaces that is founded in apocalyptic action and discourse. Argumentatively, the very highly rhetographic images of 2:11-15 are apocalyptic images using. The addressees (“you”) are the recipients of God’s apocalyptic work in Christ that has brought about the current scene where records of their observance of rules and various powers and authorities are irrelevant and the listeners are free and should not surrender to any lingering pressure to conform to the former “uncircumcised,” unresurrected, unbaptized, dead condition. They are now “full” in Christ (2:10). The persuasive imagery of 2:11-15 displays this reality, sets it before the eyes. The blending brings in metaphorical and literal aspects of the listeners/readers lives: the metaphorical/theological spaces of the circumcision of Christ, death in sins, burial and resurrection with Christ; and the literal/theological space of their own baptism, an event that would be clear in memory. The complex yet focused imagery conveys a clear notion: God through Christ has brought about the new envisioned and sacred situation; no one and nothing else is necessary or helpful in the Christian walk.

Step Four 2:16-17

Argumentatively, this step draws a conclusion (Μῆ οὖν) based on the foregoing picturing. But it

pictures Paul at centre stage again, calling to his audience to refuse to allow anyone to judge them (μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω)⁷⁹ with regard to their eating and drinking, or in their non-observance of feasts or new moons or sabbaths (ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων). This recalls and reinforces the imagery of 2:8-10, where Paul calls for them to “look” so that no one would capture them (βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν). The view shifts from Paul to the listeners who are now to see themselves resisting such a judge, who is visible along with them in the picture. It becomes clear as the picture is envisioned that the judge expects people to practice the observances related to eating and drinking, participation in (probably specific) feasts, monthly (lunar?) cycles, and in sabbath practices.⁸⁰ The pressure imposed by the judge to practice the observances is resisted by the audience because, as Paul portrays in an additional image, the observances are “a shadow⁸¹ of the coming [time]” (ἃ ἔστιν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων), not realities of the time that has arrived, that is, of the apocalyptic time of Christ, the time of existence in the kingdom of God’s son, in redemption (1:13-14). The actual “body” in view, to which the shadow envisioned alludes, is Christ himself, now brought into central focus again (τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ). The audience, at Paul’s direction, is observed to be standing against the “shadow,” not participating in it. They stand in light, not in darkness (cf. 1:12-13) and so are portrayed avoiding the shadow.

The picturing of shadow and body is very complex. The body of Christ casts the shadow while, at the same time, the shadow alludes to Christ. The pressure to focus on the shadow (i.e., to accept the judge’s demands to practice the observances) is to be resisted, thus the shadow itself, while indicating that a “body” casts it, is not, at least not now in the arriving apocalyptic time, important. Only the “body” itself is now important as the focus of concern in this particular image. The apocalyptic language ἃ ἔστιν σκιά τῶν μελλόντων, τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ has in view the incarnate, bodily formed Christ (Jesus) who has in fact always been visible in the portrayal (since 1:1). The precreational Christ was already casting the shadow/allusion (1:15-18a, 19; 2:9), indicating protologically the presence of God and the redemptive activity of God in the creation. Now in 2:17 Paul elicits the visualization of the bodily formed Christ, with whom the audience has been raised (2:12) and in whom they live, to

79 A singular judge; cf. above on 2:8.

80 Because 2:17 states that such observances are “a shadow,” it is clear that this shadow is one about which the judge pressures the Colossians. The implication is that neither the observances nor the judge are as important as the judge thinks.

81 Singular noun.

convey the understanding that judgments regarding shadow observances are inconsequential and to be refused.

Step Five 2:18-19

The call for resistance against the pressure to conform to “shadow” practices continues, but it shifts in this step from the previous images of attempts at capture (2:8) and judgment (2:16) to the image of attempts to cheat or rob the listeners of a possession (μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύτω).⁸² Paul is in the direct line of sight again, calling for the Colossians to resist the efforts of anyone attempting to cheat them, anyone gaining satisfaction or taking pleasure in their apparent religious condition and activities (θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνη καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἃ ἐόρακεν ἐμβατεύων, εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ), rather than maintaining the correct focus on the head, Christ (καὶ οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν). But the cheater/thief is also visible.⁸³ This person appears as one who takes an implicitly perverse pleasure in promoting the humility and worship and religious visions of people like the Colossians, doing so for his own conceited self-satisfaction (εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος)⁸⁴ based on “the mind of his flesh” (ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ), that is, from selfish motives. Being defrauded in this way would make the Colossians to appear to be very religious, but it would be merely an appearance, an artifice, intended for the pleasure of others. The cheater is envisioned as a moralizer of the worst sort. He is a moral, behavioral, religious power figure who does not have the interests of the Christ-believers genuinely at heart. The tone-colouring of the rhetography portrays this shrewd person very negatively, darkly. The readers/listeners are viewed brightly, in resistance to the pressure.

While the false piety indicated by the humility, the worship of angels, and the experience of visions can appear to be attractive because people practicing these things are imagined to be adding to their redemption, helping themselves, doing the right things, the actual visible result is seen in the “puffing up,” the inflation, of the cheat. This person is not “holding to the head” (οὐ κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν), a statement that refocuses sight on Christ. The rhetograph here is moving toward a head and body imagery that now takes over the central space of the picture. The head (i.e., Christ, 1:18) is now centrally in sight and it is out of this head that the entire body is

82 Καταβραβεύω, a *hapax legomenon* here in the NT meaning cheat, rob, defraud, is being used in parallel to the verb κρίνω in 2:16.

83 Singular, a person.

84 Literally “puffed up without cause”.

nourished, with a view toward the growth of the body (ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τῶν ἀφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων ἐπιχορηγούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον αὖξει τὴν αὖξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ). The picturing now is a visualization of Christ's head and body.⁸⁵ This body is, as it is being viewed, growing the growth of/from⁸⁶ God (αὖξει τὴν αὖξησιν τοῦ θεοῦ), visibly supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews (διὰ τῶν ἀφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων). The problem visualized in the picture is that the cheat is not holding to or grasping the head, not appropriately honouring the head, thereby presenting a dangerous situation for the Colossians. The Colossians are viewed as standing against the cheat, refusing to be cheated by him.⁸⁷

This step, like the previous one, has a wisdom concern. Paul does not want the readers/listeners to be cheated by the selfish actions of a false teacher who demands adherence to particular religious observances. The observances appear to be pious and important, but the picturing shows that their net result is the loss of something important for the audience members, and envisions the artificial inflation of the promoter of the observances. Paul will not stand for the self-righteous moralizing religion promoted by the cheater. The listeners should avoid it, too. Blending of the at first attractive space of the observances and the space of the cheater produces a third space where both observances and cheater are to be resisted.

Step Six 2:20-23

This step begins with an apocalyptic image and then shifts to a wisdom image. The apocalyptic statement *Εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου* re-envision images already evoked by 2:8-10 and 2:11-15, where the audiences appear in apocalyptic space as people who are full in Christ and who are raised and alive with him and exist beyond the power of all cosmic and human authorities over which Christ has triumphed.⁸⁸ In this scene, the Christ-believers are reapprised of the image of their separation from (ἀπό) the adversarial “elements of the world” (τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου, cf. 2:9) by means of their death with Christ. This brings Christ's body, his death on the cross, the nailing, and the condition-altering effects of these things

⁸⁵ Cf. 2:17. There is a repetitive texturing of τὸ σῶμα, 2:17, 19.

⁸⁶ With τοῦ θεοῦ understood as an ablative, from God.

⁸⁷ Who is the cheater? Is he a real person? Are real, known, self-centred persons in view in 8, 16, 18? Are these characters currently (at the time of writing) real and active persons in Colossae? They might not be real persons, but appear as a feature of broad wisdom discourse warning against the possibility.

⁸⁸ And, looking ahead slightly, the *Εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ* clause that begins Step Six here is paralleled by *Εἰ οὖν συνηγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ* at the beginning of Step Seven in 3:1. See Step Seven, below.

back into central view, along with the audience's own participation in these images. They are visualized as having died with Christ and therefore now stand in Christ, nourished from his head, free from the former life scene where sin and the things of the cosmos prevailed. This apocalyptic imagery also continues to view them in a space of resistance against any who are attempting to deceive them or cheat them or bind them to the things of the present age. This apocalyptic—but still very real—image evokes a question (τί ὡς ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ δογματίζεσθε;) that visualizes the ongoing existence of the audiences. They are seen resisting the things of the present age, the “elements of the world” (ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου) but at the same moment they are seen to be “living in the world” under some specific restrictions (ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ δογματίζεσθε).⁸⁹ The active resistance is visualized simultaneously with a passive submission to restrictions⁹⁰ that creates a slightly disorienting angle on the picture: since people are presented as free from rather dangerous and restrictive influences, why (τί) are they seen to be living with some specified restrictions? “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch” (Μὴ ἅψη μηδὲ γεύση μηδὲ θίγης). The readers/listeners are now observed in a narrow, forbidding light where they are being very cautious, avoiding participation in anything that might be thought to be questionable according to present age, elements of the earth ideology. The portrayal reveals a puzzling and biting irony: resistance to the present “world” with simultaneous obligation to the present “world.” Viewers of the picture are to be shocked and to ask why it is so. The very actions/behaviours that readers/listeners are seen to be obligated to avoid are distinctly visualized as being consumed with a view toward their destruction (ἃ ἔστιν πάντα εἰς φθορὰν τῇ ἀποχρήσει). They are human precepts and teaching (κατὰ τὰ ἐντάλματα καὶ διδασκαλίαι τῶν ἀνθρώπων), so are visualized as coming from human sources like those whom the audience is to resist (2:8, 16). Humans can be observed, somewhere away from the centre of the visualization, where they are calling out, “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” This is meant to stir up rhetorical concern and questioning: why are people seen to accept the call to obligations and restrictions? The imagery implies that they should not accept it. The reasoning for refusing it is clear. They visualize themselves as having died with Christ, as raised with Christ, as circumcised with the circumcision of Christ. The shadow is seen to be only a representation of Christ in whom they now exist. They live in the kingdom of God's son (1:13). There is no need for them to be visualized as they are, living with narrow restrictions.

89 Note repetitive texturing of the word κόσμος.

90 δογματίζεσθε is a passive form of δογματίζω. A “permissive passive” BDAG.

Overlaid with this imagery, paradoxically and simultaneously again, the restrictive obligations appear to present a logic (λόγος) that has wisdom in the ways that it provides visual impressions of self-imposed piety, humility and unsparing treatment of body (ἄτινά ἐστιν λόγον μὲν ἔχοντα σοφίας ἐν ἐθελοθησκία καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνη [καὶ] ἀφειδία σώματος). The readers/listeners who are seen to observe the restrictions do, from a human point of view, appear to be very religious and very cautious of the *body* dangers of handling, eating and touching.⁹¹ “Body” just here is envisioned in a very questionable light as part of the “world” that requires restrictions. The picture portrays, however, the reality that these restrictions have no value relative to the gratification of the flesh (οὐκ ἐν τιμῇ τιμι πρὸς πλησμονὴν τῆς σαρκός). Though they seem to indicate appropriate religious observance, they do not demonstrate real results. Nothing happens. The vision of real results is found in the dying, rising, crucifying, nailing, baptizing, circumcising images of Christ seen previously. The pressure to observe the restrictions is a visual reminder of the cheater seen in 2:18. Self-imposed or deceiver-imposed observances are ineffective. The visible action of Christ and the unity of believers with and in him is what works in this picture.

This step shifts from an apocalyptic space, where believers in Christ are observed again to have died with him, to a wisdom space, where restrictions against certain behaviours are seen to be ineffective. Although the restrictions appear to be attractive, they have no real value. Paul wishes for the audiences to continue their resistance to the pressure to conform to humanly contrived rules—just as in the imagery of 2:8-10 and 2:11-16—and to know that the apocalyptic actions of Christ who existed precreationally is what actually frees them from all authorities and obligations.

Step Seven 3:1-4

This final pictorial step in the core argumentative rhetoric of Col is visually parallel but also directionally opposite to the previous one. The parallel picturing is indicated explicitly in the language employed in 2:20 and 3:1, both of which begin with εἰ οὖν, “since therefore,” and both employ the preposition σύν.⁹² The directional movement appears differently in each parallel statement because the action in 2:20 is envisioned as dying with Christ, while the action in 3:1 is

91 Handling, eating, touching might be metaphors for participation in, behaviour, actions of many kinds.

92 The wording is structured only slightly differently.

envisioned as being raised with Christ (Εἰς οὐν συναγέρθητε τῷ Χριστῷ).⁹³ This step, then, in parallel yet with an opposing motion, pictures the Colossians being raised out of death with Christ and impresses that vision on the mind as the apocalyptic, argumentative base (as in 2:20) for the wisdom statements that follow. Paul and the Colossians are now again visualizing the scene indicated in 2:12-13. Their raised and living location with (and in) Christ is clearly in sight. This apocalyptic, raised positioning places them in a location where they can be directed to see themselves seeking “the things above” (τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε). This view looks up to the highest possible location, to where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God (οὗ ὁ Χριστός ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενος). The visualization is thus drawn upward from seeing the image of the readers/listeners moving from death to life in resurrection with Christ, to seeing Christ in exalted position alongside God. The directive τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖτε in this way pushes the visioning upward to apocalyptic, exalted space. The view elicits a parallel wisdom scene that portrays a “thinking” rather than “seeking” image where readers/listeners observe themselves thinking of “the things above” (τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε) rather than thinking about things on the earth (μὴ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). The visualization does not explicate “the things above” that are to be sought and thought about, although it does show Christ sitting on the preeminent right side of God. The nature of the imaging, however, clearly colours the things above as good, as things that do not need to be resisted and that pose no danger to the audience. The things above are also set in visual contrast to “the things on the earth.” The downward view that thinks about and visualizes the things on the earth, observes images of evil things in the imagination—things that are not made explicit until the contrasting material of the next section (3:5-17) comes into sight⁹⁴—and, though the downward view is possible, it is not one that should be taken.

The wisdom exhortation to seek and think of the things above is continued with a visual and apocalyptic rationale in the next two clauses that re-envision something the audiences have already seen, that they have died and that their lives are now hidden with Christ in God (ἀπεθάνετε γὰρ καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέκρυπται σὺν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ). This brings into the foreground yet again the image of dying with Christ (cf. 2:12-13) and now embellishes the visual nature of the raised life the recipients now live in Christ (and Christ in them) by adding to the picture the vision of them being “hidden” with Christ who is in God. This is a complex image that does not *visibly* portray the readers/listeners, although they know that they are hidden in the

93 Dying is active, being raised is passive.

94 Where specified evil behaviours that are visible “on the earth” are to be “put to death.”

picture, but does portray Christ in a new visual way, located “in God.” This visioning of the recipients and of Christ opens the way for a futuristic, apocalyptic visualization of the revealing of Christ (ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῆ). This draws the mind’s eye to the expectation of an implied return of Christ, a revealing of him in some clear way that people anticipate will occur. This expectation is here visualized and enhanced with the thought that Christ is “your life” (ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν). When people here visualize themselves they also visualize Christ as their very own existence.⁹⁵ Christ represents their own lives. The image of the future revealing of Christ coincides with the revealing of themselves in glory (τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ). The glorious apocalyptic Christ and the apocalyptic image of the audience in glory are seen together. The pictorial narration of this step closes with apocalyptic images that transcend the images of caution and resistance against the dangerous persons and ideas of the present.

This step moves through an apocalyptic-wisdom-apocalyptic sequence. The apocalyptic reality of being raised with Christ presents the visual case for the wisdom behaviour of seeking and thinking about the things above. The space above is the apocalyptic location of Christ, sitting at the right hand (side) of God. The apocalyptic space/reality is blended with wisdom space/reality to produce a third space where the apocalyptic reality of being raised with Christ is lived out in the present alongside pressures against it, even while anticipating the apocalyptic revealing of Christ and believers in glory. The space of death moves to the space of resurrection and anticipates the space of revealing and glory. The constant in every space of blending is that the believers are always “with” (σύν) Christ.

Conclusion

Examining the images cast on the imagination by a biblical text and engaging in visual exegesis does not provide a full interpretation. There is more to do. But the pictures evoked by the text do provide a clear and visible way into a text in which humans characteristically, apparently naturally, engage. Humans “see” things in texts whether they read them as individuals or hear them read aloud. Seeing the graphic nature of the text provides contextualization and actual understanding through the visualization of the creative *poieia*, the *phanopoeia* or rhetography presented to the imagination. What occurs is that the text, comprised of grammaticalized and nuanced words, when read or heard read aloud, converges and blends with pictures it evokes in

95 This matches the previous imagery of the audience “in Christ” and “with Christ.”

the mind to produce new meaningful spaces (mentally envisioned spaces that transfer to real, physiological spaces in the cosmos) where the affective, emotional and intellectual force of the blending leads to corresponding behaviour. The texts communicate beyond themselves in the pictures they set in human imaginations. The complex pictures themselves can and frequently do make the argument directly. The argument, certainly in Col but also in other NT texts, is about social formation where Christ-believers, on the one hand, live faithfully with heaven and good behaviour in mind and, on the other hand, resist pressures to conform to the unnecessary and unhelpful behaviours demanded by some who wish to capture, judge and cheat them. The visual argumentation therefore aims audiences toward the vision of the *wisdom* space of fullness in Christ that they already inhabit. This space of fullness negates any need for anything else. The argumentation has a moving, sacred texture that moves people to sacred understanding. The precreational and apocalyptic Christ Jesus presented in Col has rendered all opposing persons and powers impotent.