Contextualising the potentates, principalities and powers in the Epistle to the Ephesians

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ABSTRACT
The concept of 'power' is vitally important in all human societies. The nature of this 'power' varies according to sociocultural setting. One's perspective is also influenced by one's worldview and value system. These general principles are relevant to the study of potency in religion on account of the supernatural dimension involved. To communicate any religious message effectively it must be adequately 'contextualised' within the conceptual framework of its intended receptor group. The fact that this process was also carried out to a greater or lesser degree with respect to the literature of the Bible is frequently taken for granted, but not always fully investigated. This study represents an effort towards this end with regard to the general semantic field of 'power' in the book of Ephesians. The aim is twofold: (a) to call attention to the notion of spiritual power(s) in the text of Ephesians, and (b) to suggest some of the ways in which the writer appears to have contextualised his message in order to give his instruction and encouragement a greater measure of literary and rhetorical impact and situational relevance.

1 THE 'POWER'(S) IN EphESIANS
Any careful reader (hearer) will be struck by the number of words pertaining to 'power' in Ephesians; indeed, this lexical field is a prominent feature of the epistle's total verbal inventory. Thus one finds a variety of terms having either a literal or a figurative reference to the concept of some personal or personalized potency, whether human, divine, angelic, or demonic. On several occasions, most significantly near the beginning, middle, and ending of the discourse, namely, at 1:21, 3:10, and

1 In the absence of what I consider to be sufficiently convincing evidence to the contrary, I will adopt the traditional, 'given' position that the author of both the letters addressed to the 'Ephesians' (1:1) and the closely related 'Colossians' (1:1) was the Apostle Paul (cf Arnold 1992a:171; 1993:240–242; Guthrie 1990:496–528; McKay 1996:205–207; Roberts 1991:25–26; Fee 1994:659–660; contra, among others, Lincoln 1990:ix–ixxxi; Perkins 1997:15–19). I will accordingly refer to 'Paul' as being the author throughout the present study. I also view the disputed locative phrase εν Ἕφεσις as being a possible, though admittedly difficult, reading of the original text of v 1 (for a discussion of this issue, see Arnold 1993:244–245; Graham 1997:14). Even if this text was intended to function as a 'circular' (or even a 'synodical') letter to the various churches situated in the Roman province of Asia (cf Wood 1994:749; Guthrie 1990:530–531; Perkins 1997:33), certainly the congregation(s) present in Ephesus, dominant city of this entire region, would have been included in this group, perhaps even the first to receive it. Hence it is not out of place to designate the recipients as the 'Ephesians'.
6:12, a noticeable concentration of such terminology appears, here with a connotatively negative force in the unfolding exposition. In these contexts and others—notably those that reflect a contrastive, positive theological implication, for example, 1:19, 3:16, 6:10—the individual words do not appear to have been chosen with any specific denotive senses in focus (assuming that these can be determined with certainty in any case). Instead, they are effectively used in concert to complement one another semantically as a literary means of encompassing the entire complexity and diversity of the wicked spiritual realm that is arrayed in this world (the present age) against Christ, the individual Christian, and the Church of Jesus Christ (cf 1:15—2:10). As will be shown below (section 2), the lexical field pertaining to potency, good as well as evil, performs a vital role in the development of Paul's threefold didactic, panegyric, and paraenetic message, both for the 'saints' originally residing in Asia Minor and also for those living in various world regions today, Africa in particular.

The three terms used in the title of this paper illustrate some of the problems which face the serious lexicographer as s/he attempts to come to grips with the Pauline usage found in Ephesians (for example, cf also Colossians, e.g, 2:10, 15). As one reads the scholarly literature on this subject, one is soon forced to conclude that any member of the representative set of Greek 'power' language words—namely, ἐνέργειαι, ἀρχαι, ἐξουσίαι (all three normally found in the plural)—could be rendered as 'potentates', 'principalities', and/or 'powers', depending on the source of the definition and the particular Scripture text being referred to. No neat designative set of distinctions can be reliably posited, for example, viewing the first of those mentioned above as referring to a certain abstract or inanimate force, the second to human authority, and the third to a particular spiritual being or class of them, or alternatively, seeing these vocables arranged in some sort of ascending or descending angelic hierarchy (according to Alford, cited in Earle 1989:297; cf also Turner 1981:349).

Rather, in many contexts, certainly so with reference to various anti-Christian forces, these (and related) words must be taken together as a rhetorically motivated, representative and collective summary of the diverse forms of malevolent, demonic beings that follow the leadership of Satan, 'the ruler of the kingdom of the air' (2:2).

Such emphatic, all-encompassing usage parallels that found in other Pauline writings, e.g, Rm 8:38—39a; 1 Cor 15:24; Col 1:16; 2:10,15. Not all commentators take 'the ruler of the realm of the air' as a reference to Satan, or the 'devil' (cf Eph 4:27; 6:11; Lincoln 1990:95—96). Perkins, for example, feels that 'Eph 2:2 attributes human sinfulness to the rulers of the sublunar region' (1997:59). For a defense of the former position in relation to other expressions in this verse that may also refer to Satan, see Page 1995:185—186; the author observes that 'the picture of the air as Satan's abode points to the pervasiveness of his influence and his proximity...
In other words, 'the terms are always plural in reference [though not necessarily in form, e.g., 1:21] and seem to be used, particularly together, to cover an area of meaning [i.e., diabolical, superhuman agents] rather than as a precise identification of specific personalities' (Pattemore 1994:127). The situation with respect to definition may therefore be summarised as follows:

[These] lexical items [refer] to supernatural powers believed to be active as elemental spirits exercising control over man's fate. Though [they] may have certain special features associated with them and though in extrabiblical literature they may represent various grades of supernatural power, there seems to be no way in which they can be clearly distinguished on the basis of NT usage (Louw & Nida 1988:147).

We are thus confronted with another subtle instance of the important notion of 'unity in diversity' which characterises this encouraging epistle also on the macro-thematic level (e.g., with regard to both the mystical 'God-head'—Father, Son, and Spirit, 1:11–14—and also the divinely created/animated Church, 2:11–18). However, it is important to point out that Paul was undoubtedly using these Greek words denoting the 'powers' within a field of reference that also reflected, or even highlighted, a contemporary Jewish perspective on the spirit world, that is, as denoting either angelic or demonic spiritual beings.5

There are several other significant expressions in Ephesians that belong to this particular lexical set or semantic field. Subsumed under their distinct and personal diabolical head, the 'devil' (διαβόλος, 6:11), they all function in a similar way with collective malignant import and referential significance, for example: 'dominions', whether angelic or demonic (κυριότητος, 1:21), 'name' (δύναμις, 1:21, i.e., referring metonymically to the many 'names' of various supernatural creatures and illustrious personages [deceased] that were invoked in the widespread practice of magic), 'world rulers' (κοσμοκράτωρς, 6:12), 'spiritual forces' (πνευματικὰ, 6:12). The inclusive nature of these terms is emphasised in climactic fashion in a passage such as Ephesians 1:21 where they are followed and incorporated under the term 'all things' to the humans over whom he exercises his wicked rule'.

4 Pattemore (1994) provides a concise comparative study of these terms both in relation to one another and also with respect to the New Testament context in which they occur. Fernando calls attention to the distinct 'rhetorical effect' that is created as a result of their varied combination in the Pauline writings (1997a:22).

5 Arnold gives documentary evidence of 'Judaism's intense interest in the spirit realm around the time of the first century, which resulted in the development of elaborate demonologies with long lists of angelic names and categories' (1992a:53; cf Arnold 1996a:101–102; Kittel 1964:85). Similarly, Wink concludes that 'the fall, mischief and judgment of the angels is one of the chief preoccupations of inter-testamental Jewish literature' (1984:25). Keener adds that 'Jewish people especially viewed these heavenly powers as "angels of the nations," spiritual beings who stood behind earthly rulers and guided their rule (cf Dan 4:35; 10:13)' (1993:543). For a survey of 'Jewish views of the afterlife' in the apocryphal literature and in rabbinic Judaism, see Raphael 1994 chapters 4–5.
(πάντα—twice in v 22).\(^6\) This vocabulary denoting the virulent personal powers which threaten the saints is closely associated with other expressions, now of a more impersonal nature, referring to additional evil forces, corrupt motivations, and immoral influences that infect or impinge upon the lives of believers, such as 'the lusts of the flesh' (ταίς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκός, 2:3), deceptive 'doctrines' (διδασκαλία, 4:14), 'hard hearts' (τὴν πόροσιν τῆς καρδίας, 4:18), 'the old [pagan] man/nature' (τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον, 4:22), the wicked world of 'darkness' (σκότος, 5:8), and finally, 'the day of evil' (τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ πονηρᾷ, 6:13).\(^7\)

In decided and decisive contrast to this prominent display of negative, diabolical power-terminology in Ephesians is an even more impressive array of positive, God-directed vocabulary pertaining to characteristic divine super-strength. Such attributive (non-personal) usage is pointedly introduced before the counterparts of evil might are mentioned in 1:19: '[God's] surpassingly great power' (τὸ ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ). This power-packed concentration is immediately augmented by another potent cluster, 'the working of the strength of his might' (τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἵσχυος αὐτοῦ), which emphatically refers to the divine 'energy' that was manifested in a special way at the resurrection of Christ and his subsequent exaltation 'at [God's] right hand in the heavenly real' (ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις, v 20). It is both rhetorically and thematically significant that these positive terms are always stated in such a way and stylistically situated so as to foreground the superiority of God, and his Christ in particular, over the individual as well as the combined forces of the Devil. Thus the latter are suggestively circumscribed in the text, for example, by the references to God-Christ's supreme strength at the close of Paul's initial doxology of thanksgiving, namely, 1:19–20+22–23 versus v 21 (cf also 6:10–11+13 versus v 12).

2 THE IMPORTANCE OF 'POWER'(S) IN EPHESIANS

As the preceding cursory lexical overview has indicated, the semantic complex of potentates, principalities, and powers appears to play an important role in the composition of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. In the present section I will investigate this role more fully with regard to the extratextual and the textual aspects of the original religious act of communication: first of all, by surveying some influential factors in the immediate situational environment which may have given rise to this special

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6 The double mention of πάντα in v 22 highlights and augments a twofold individualistic usage of 'every' (παν-/-παν-) in the preceding verse.

7 Another important Pauline power term not found in Ephesians, namely, στοιχεῖ-α, may possibly be distinct in denoting a more non-personal, even inanimate, type of negative supernatural force, e.g., GL 4:3, 9; Col 2:8 (see the discussion, for example, in Turner 1981:88–91). Arnold, however, marshals considerable evidence in support of the position that this word too is 'best interpreted as evil spirits equivalent to the "principalities and powers"' (1996b:75).
emphasis on demonic potency and influence; secondly, by examining the prominence of 'power' vocabulary within the structure of the letter as a whole and with specific reference to the rhetorical development and practical import of the overall pastoral message that it conveys.\(^8\) I will conclude with a summary of the apostle's apparent strategy of 'contextualisation', that is, how he seemingly shaped and adapted his theological and ethical content to suit the circumstances of its reception, that is, to give it more immediate 'relevance' in the technical sense of offering greater cognitive-emotive 'gain' (in terms of conceptual acceptance and applicability) for less mental processing 'cost', or difficulty (Gutt 1991:30). This can serve as a model both for better understanding the import of the text as written and also for contextualising in turn its essential message in other cultural settings and religious situations of the world, for example, the various peoples of southern Africa.

2.1 In the contextual setting of the composition

It would be no exaggeration to say that the leading city of Ephesus,\(^9\) as well as the surrounding areas of Asia Minor, were 'possessed by the powers' at the time that Paul's general letter was written (sometime during the early 60s of the first century CE). Unfortunately for the multitudes who were afflicted with such pervasive superstitious beliefs, these powers were neither visible nor inclined to be benevolent, but they were rather spiritual in nature and more often than not perceived to be diabolical in action and intention. They therefore had to be continually placated, counteracted,

\(^8\) I wish to acknowledge in this section my debt to Arnold's groundbreaking research in the field (1992a [1989]; all references to or citations of this major work in the present section, as well as the included quotations, will be noted with a simple page number in parentheses). Arnold's conclusions have been criticized for being too one-sided and for 'making the cosmic powers too much in the foreground rather than the background of the writer's concerns' (Lincoln 1990:lxxxi; Perkins [1997] counters with an emphasis on Essene parallels based on the writings from Qumran). But 'the evidence of the letter itself' (Lincoln :lxxxi) does appear to support the attention that Arnold devotes to this subject (i.e., it is not a minor or 'background' matter in the writer's mind), although it must be granted that the letter evinces several other prominent themes as well, e.g., the wisdom, grace, and glory of God as these essential notions pertain to the overall unity of his universal Church and all of its members in loving relation to one another. In view of the great divergence of opinion on such thematic issues, I have by and large adopted Arnold's perspective (cf also O'Brien 1993:119 n 19; Fee 1994:725; Turner 1994:1223–4), since it is the one that is most amenable to a contextualized 'African' interpretation and application of the Ephesian epistle (for a similar conclusion, see Wood 1997:149). This is a 'primary' perspective, however, in that I do not go on to speculate concerning the possible secondary, or derived, relationship(s) between evil spiritual beings and certain contemporary social institutions and political structures that are alleged to be demon-inspired and controlled (cf Wood :150; Keener 1993:543).

\(^9\) 'Ephesus functioned as a strategic center for Asia Minor—commercially, economically, in communications, and not the least of all, in terms of its religious influence' (38).
and/or combated by supernatural means, namely, through a diverse range of magical practices and via various appeals to Artemis (also known as Diana), the chief goddess of the region who is frequently associated with fertility and 'Mother' nature (:25–26). Thus Ephesus was both a center of the magical arts, a home for 'magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts' (:14), and it was also the home base for the prestigious cult of Artemis, which was manifested in particular by a magnificent temple dedicated to her honor, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (cf Ac 19:19, 27–28). It is interesting to note that these strong beliefs in magic and the occult were clearly just as prevalent among Jews as Greeks during the Hellenistic period, with certain distinctions of course (as reflected in esoteric Hebrew terminology and in ethnically oriented religious texts such as the Testament of Solomon), but also reflecting a great deal of conceptual commonality and overlapping in practice (:51–54).

Arnold describes the tense, fear-laden interaction between the unseen world of spirits and the practice of magic on the part of the masses as follows:

The overriding characteristic of the practice of magic throughout the Hellenistic world was the cognizance of a spirit world exercising influence over virtually every aspect of life. The goal of the magician was to discern the helpful spirits from the harmful ones and learn the distinct operations and the relative strengths and authority of the spirits. Through this knowledge, means could be constructed (with spoken or written formulas, amulets, etc) for the manipulation of the spirits in the interests of the individual person (:18).

The potentially helpful spirits—a hodgepodge of major and minor deities, largely of Jewish, Egyptian, and Greek origin—were thus enlisted by means of magic, either directly or through certain ritual specialists (diviners, magicians, etc) in the aid of otherwise defenseless folk to provide the power necessary to protect them against both the covert influence and the overt attacks of virulent counterparts, or demons (i.e., apotropaic magic), as well as their human manipulators, that is, sorcerers. The assistance of these favorable personal (named) spirits was also magically sought to achieve other personal goals such as enrichment, social success, and political advancement. The practice of genuine 'religion', whereby adherents entrust themselves (and their future [after]life) into the protective care of a deity (or deities) who is (are) petitioned to attend to their welfare, was therefore very much in decline during this

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10 ‘... there appeared to be an ancient widespread tradition linking [wise] Solomon with magic and the manipulation of demons' (:33).
11 Evidence for Arnold's conclusion is derived from information contained in the so-called 'magical papyri' of mainly Egyptian, but more recently also of Greek, origin, as well as tabellae defixionum (conjuring or cursing tablets), amulets, ostraca, and actual ritual apparatus that have been discovered (:17). Ancient Jewish Pseudepigraphical writings that refer to magic, mysteries, and the occult, e.g., the Testament of Solomon and 1–2 Enoch, also serve to shed light on this dark subject. S Oosthuizen (1998) gives credence to Arnold's thesis in a more recent consideration of these magical papyri from a somewhat different perspective and frame of reference.
period throughout the Mediterranean region. In its place there entered into people's lives the largely non-sanctioned (i.e., by the established religious institutions of the day), 'fail-safe' methods of popular magic (charms, amulets, spells, divination, rituals of 'naming', tablets for 'cursing'), which were widely perceived to be much more immediate, successful, utilitarian, and hence also 'powerful' in actual practice.\textsuperscript{12}

In addition to and alongside the practice of magic was a corresponding appeal to the 'worship' of Artemis and related deities, especially Hekate, goddess of the Underworld, with whom the former is often associated and indeed at times identified (:22–23). Artemis was believed to possess supreme cosmic powers which enabled her to exercise absolute control over all demonic forces, including the malevolent spirits of the dead. It is no wonder then that she was enthusiastically worshipped and invoked by many of those residing in Asia Minor and beyond who were plagued by the constant fear of some spirit-related attack. There was a close link between this allegiance to Artemis and the practice of magic since people assumed that 'the might of Ephesian Artemis lay behind the ancient [apotropaic] formula, but, more than that, the power also of primitive magic and religion' (:23). Thus in this syncretistic age, one mode of pagan worship typically incorporated and complemented elements of another, with an appeal to Artemis for divine protection often appearing, for example, in some magical rite designed for the same purpose. This explains the connection that made Artemis also a prominent figure in the popular practice of astrology and angelology whereby believers attempted, again through various ritualistic techniques (ex opere operato), to alter their present undesirable state or a certain predicted fate by controlling the astral 'powers' of the universe (:28; cf Arnold 1996:20–31; Pattemore 1994:119). In this respect we frequently find contact with yet another popular form of pagan Hellenistic 'worship', namely, the many so-called 'mystery religions' in which adherents actively sought some manner of intimate mystical contact with the divine. These locally-colored, nature-based cults often highlighted the fertility function of Artemis (and other deities) in their orgiastic, sexually depraved rites and ceremonies (:26).

This then was the 'dynamic', but certainly depressing, socio-religious milieu that formed the background for an important part of Paul's message to the Ephesian (and related) churches. It was a world that was obsessed with mystical and/or spiritual power—that is, how to recognise, understand, access, control, and benefit from or defend against it in one's everyday life. The daily struggle for or against δύναμις thus determined the lives of the masses of Asia Minor, undoubtedly including a con-

\textsuperscript{12} Arnold presents a helpful discussion of the distinction between 'religion' and 'magic', including the influence from and within Hellenistic Judaism, in 1996a:11–20. Gill and Winter point out that 'magic was the opposite of 'normal' Roman religious practice' because it eliminated any need to participate in the elaborate (and presumably expensive!) sacrificial system of the latter (1994:91).
siderable number of those who would be hearing this letter, Christians who had not yet been fully delivered from these manifestations of Satan and his demonic forces. Paul had to make it clear that a definite choice was involved: who/what was it going to be—Artemis or Christ, magical ritual or a personal relationship with God, a supposed manipulation of the stars and non-human spirits or a studied, life-related application of the Scriptures, a total reliance on impersonal or personal potency? This was a 'power encounter' of the greatest magnitude and significance, for it involved not only the current spiritual well-being of believers (whether Jews or gentiles), but their eternal destiny as well. The battle was being waged against obvious external enemies, but it first had to be won on the inside, within the confines of the sinful human heart. How did the Apostle endeavor to 'contextualise' his communication in order to forcefully confront this crisis of faith? We can but briefly survey his rhetorical strategy of persuasion as this concerns first of all the larger structure and style of the Ephesian epistle, and secondly, in terms of its theological and ethical content as reflected in three primary texts.

2.2 In the structural organization and thematic development of the discourse

There are several prominent concentrations of 'power' terminology, whether divine or demonic in reference, which appear in Ephesians at key junctures in the organization of Paul's overall message to his intended recipients. These passages in fact form the structural framework of the entire epistle and thus function as the implicit or explicit background for everything that the Apostle has to say. In summary: the supreme God of surpassing power has totally defeated all hostile (diabolical) forces in the universe through his Son, the resurrected and exalted Lord Jesus Christ, and has at the same time effectively empowered his saints through the indwelling Holy Spirit to serve as his chosen witnesses in the world, that is, to carry out his gracious plans and predetermined purposes to the praise of his eternal glory and for the edification of his unified Body, the Church.

In terms of general rhetorical strategy, the first half of this letter (chs 1–3) gives evidence of a particular epidictic emphasis, as the Apostle endeavors to strengthen his addressees with respect to their adherence to certain fundamental values of the Christian faith, such as, the sovereign omnipotence of God, the certainty of their salvation, the unity of the 'body' of all believers in Christ, and the spiritual power that is

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13 Arnold describes this final polarity in terms of a 'substance' as opposed to what may be described as an 'essential' notion of potency, that is, the magical-mystical concept of power as being analogous to fluid or like electricity, in contrast to the biblical (Hebrew) prophetic, salvation-history viewpoint which trusts that all power originates in and is controlled by the personal, revealed God of Scripture, 'who used [and uses] his power to accomplish his own will and mediated his power to those who exercised faith' (:36), namely, in the promised Messiah, the one and only divine-human Mediator, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
at their disposal through the mediation of the Holy Spirit. The second half of the epistle then shifts to a form of rhetoric that is more deliberative in nature as the recipients are encouraged to put the aforementioned religious ideals into more potent (evident, convincing, active, etc) practice as they seek to 'live a life worthy of their Christian calling' (4:1), especially through a greater demonstration of mutual love. In short, all believers are exhorted to make more dynamic use of the divine power that is theirs by virtue of their election by the Father, their salvation by the Son, and their indwelling by the Spirit—both within the universal fellowship of 'saints' and also externally by means of a definite repudiation of their former belief, value, and behavior systems (i.e., their culturally-controlled world view and way of life), including the diverse hostile spiritual forces that dominated their daily experience.

The key topical-architectonic nodes of this epistle are rhetorically reinforced by a number of different stylistic devices. Most notable among these is lexical recursion—not exact repetition, but rather, an abundance of amplificatory restatement (especially in chs 1–3)—and also, as noted earlier (1.2), conceptual concentration, which is effected by several prominent collocations of related terms that operate together as a unit to present a fuller development of the specific aspect of potency being discussed, whether positive or negative in nature. A summary outline of this significant discourse feature is presented below. It serves both to accent the main contours of the epistle's construction and also to highlight this fundamental component of its thematic core, namely, the complete supremacy of Christ over any and all antithetical cosmic forces, especially those malevolent spirits that were commonly believed to trouble people most immediately in their everyday lives, both believers and non-Christians alike.

Although, as Arnold (1992a, 1992b) has shown, the language of power and related concepts (e.g., that of 'headship', 1:10,22; 4:15; 5:23) pervades the entire Ephesian epistle, from Paul's doxology (1:3–14) and prayer for the saints (1:15–23) to his request for prayers from them (6:19–20), both directly and by allusion (e.g., to the 'heavenly realms' έν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις, 1:3), it will not be possible to consider the entire relevant corpus here. Instead, we will focus on those special lexical concentrations that are especially obvious, for these were presumably most apparent also to the original receptors as they heard the letter being read aloud during public preaching, teaching, or testimony. Accordingly, there are seven topical clusters, or textual 'panels', that seem to stand out from the rest and hence are of the greatest structural and thematic importance. They assume the following patterned outline within the complete discourse:

14 "The power which God has displayed in acting in Christ and in changing the readers' status he has also made available to them to enable them to be the sort of people he wants them to be" (Lincoln 1990:lxvii).
A 1:19–23 = Christ’s elevation to cosmic supremacy by means of God’s ‘mighty strength’ (τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἱσχύος αὐτοῦ) in ‘heaven’ over all possible antagonistic powers (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις...ὑπεράνω πάσης ἁρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως...)

B 2:1–7 = The elevation (resurrection) of believers by God’s ‘grace’ (χάρις) from spiritual death and from Satan’s slavery to a position of power together with Christ ‘in the heavenly realms’ (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις)

C 3:7–13 = Paul’s own empowerment (μοι κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ) to testify to all hostile powers concerning the wisdom of God’s Mystery, which is manifested ‘through his Church’ (διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας); Paul’s present weakness (‘sufferings’) reveals the ‘glory’ (δόξα) of the Church

Da 3:14–15a = Paul ‘kneels’ before (prays to) the ‘Father’ (πατέρα) who ‘names’ (is the life-Source) of all believers (‘fatherhood’ πατριὰ — πατ). 

Db 3:15b–16 = ‘that’ (ὑπακοή) believers may be ‘reinforced with power’ (κρατεῖται) by the Spirit inwardly.

De 3:17 = and that Christ may ‘dwell’ (κατοίκησαι) in their hearts to establish their lives in his ‘love’ (ἐν αγάπῃ).

D’b 3:18 = ‘that’ (ὑπακοή) believers ‘may be strengthened to comprehend’ (ἐξερχόμενη καταλαβέσθαι) the dimensions of God’s power.

D’c 3:19a = and to ‘know’ (γνῶσις) the surpassing ‘love’ (αγάπη) of Christ.

D’a 3:19b = ‘that’ (ὑπακοή) believers may ‘be filled’ (πληρωθῆτε) with all the ‘fullness’ (πλήρωμα — παν) of God.

C’ 3:20–21 = Paul’s doxology of praise to the ‘glory’ (δόξα) of God, which cannot be measured; his power is at work (κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἐνεργούμενην ἐν ἡμῖν) in and on behalf of all believers ‘in the Church’ (ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ).

B’ 4:7–10 = The elevation of Christ ‘far above all the heavens’ (ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν) makes possible also the empowerment by God’s ‘grace’ (χάρις) of all believers, his Church (with spiritual gifts).

[Note: the satanic aerial ‘ruler of authority’, τὸν ἀρχόντα τῆς ἐξουσίας—2:2, is now himself being shamefully led by the Lord into ‘captivity’—4:8]

A’ 6:10–17 = With the spiritual weaponry provided by ‘the Lord’ [God=Christ] in his ‘mighty power’ (ἐν τῷ κράτει τῆς ἱσχύος αὐτοῦ) believers are encouraged to wage war against all possible ‘heavenly’ hostile powers (πρὸς τὰς ἁρχὰς, πρὸς τὰς ἐξουσίας...ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις).
Although I cannot claim that this complex, text-spanning palistrophic thematic pattern was consciously constructed by the author, it is indeed an interesting and significant compositional development. Thus it clearly indicates the overall prominence of the multifaceted 'power' theme within the epistle as a whole, for this is a constant motif (patently introduced already in the letter's opening eulogy, 1:10) that runs cohesively throughout this entire series of passages. The enveloping inclusio and the intricate conceptual core are particularly striking from a structural point of view. Also noteworthy is the fact that the topic of ἀγάπη—love, which is introduced in the center of the chiastic progression [Dc] and reinforced by references to its divine source and model [D'C], then becomes the focus of attention in the writer's subsequent paraenetic remarks (e.g., 4:2, 15; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; cf 6:23–24).

As the preceding discussion would suggest, in his circular letter Paul mounted a subdued, but incisive attack against the host of malevolent powers that were troubling the Christians at Ephesus and Asia Minor in general. He does not dignify the enemy by so much as mentioning them (any personal spiritual beings, e.g., Artemis) by name (not even 'Satan', cf 2:2, 4:27), but the various terms that he used would clearly indicate to his primary addressees who/what were meant. In contrast, the names and attributes of 'God' abound in the letter, especially those referring to 'Christ', the supreme victor over all diabolical forces (4:8) and the central character as it were of this epistle (being mentioned in over one-fourth of the total number of verses). It appears as if the Apostle adopted a dual rhetorical (epideictic-deliberative) strategy of laudation that would strongly emphasise the positive—that is, the supreme, total power of an omnipotent God, which was available to be accessed by any believer—and downplay, but not ignore, the negative, namely, the surrounding threatening forces and influences widely believed to 'possess' this world.

This prominent theocentric point of view is the inverse of that promoted by many African traditional religions, which foreground the anthropocentric world of spiritual beings, especially those of a malevolent nature, and relegate the 'supreme' deity to that of a rather obscure and remote personal force who has relatively little to do with human concerns and affairs. The Lord's ultimate sovereignty is thus displaced due to

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15 Other such chiastic patterns have been noted in Ephesians, including at 6:10–17 (see Lund 1942; Breck 1994). These may be viewed as being complementary to, or corollary to, other, more foundational structures, such as the basic binary division of the letter, i.e., chs 1–3: panegyric anamnesis ('reminder') ⇔ 4–6: paraenetic exhortation (with the break between the two announced by the initial Παρακαλῶ ouden of 4:1), and also the threefold, strategically placed emphasis on intercessory prayer, the first two by personal example (1:15–22, 3:14–19 [the initial blessing of 1:3–14 being rounded out by the doxology of 3:20–21] and the final instance by direct appeal (6:18–20).

16 Thus according to Lincoln's 'rhetorical outline' of the epistle, segment [A] occurs at the close of the exordium and [A'] at the onset of the peroratio (1990:xliii–xliv), while [D–D'] forms most of the transitus.
an overwhelming emphasis upon man’s presumed need for protection against the evil influence of angry spirits and antagonistic sorcerers who are perceived to be potentially present everywhere in the immediate local environment. So it is that ‘in the conception and practice of the adherents of African religions, it is the occult world of lesser spirits and witches and sorcerers which is of dominant spiritual and existential concern’ (Fernando 1996:122). Indeed, it would seem that the message of Ephesians would be of special relevance in such situations of overt demonic domination (in contrast to the covert diabolical control that is being exercised in the rationalistic, materialistic, secularistic, and anti-supernaturalistic West).

2.3 In three key power-oriented pericopes

How then did Paul ‘contextualise’ the ‘mystery’ of his gospel message to fit the Ephesian moral-religious situation, with special reference now to the diverse antagonistic ‘powers’ that were waging war against the Christian community, both from within (e.g., conceptual pressure from their pagan past) and without (i.e., the magic/spirit-obsessed sociocultural milieu)? We can merely summarise his approach as Paul presents it in three passages that form the essential structural-thematic bridge (beginning-middle-ending) of this magnificent epistle, which powerfully applies the significance of the Lord Christ both to his Church and to the daily life of the individual Christian.

2.3.1 Ephesians 1:19–23

The meaningful, A-B-A’ ring construction of this passage, the climactic conclusion of Paul’s initial prayer of thanksgiving on behalf of the Christians in Asia Minor, has already been noted. Here we have, not a power encounter, but a power entreaty—an appeal that believers would fully ‘know’ (realise and capitalise upon) the mighty resources that are theirs as members of the church of Jesus Christ. The omnipotence of God as revealed in Christ, which is operating in the universe on behalf of all ‘believers’, is highlighted by a superlative lexical force-field consisting of five terms (vv 19–20a). This divinely established protective potential is closely linked to the Lord’s resurrection and elevation to the position of supreme authority and rule in heaven at the ‘right hand’ of God (v 20). The total host of inimical spiritual forces (suggestively encompassed by an opposing set of five representative terms) is shown to be nothing at all by comparison, either now or in the future age (v 21).17 Christ’s exalted position of complete ‘head’-ship, or superiority (accented by the stem παρασύρων)

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17 The diabolical (as opposed to neutral, or even positive) nature of these forces is suggested by the fact that their mention is immediately followed by reference to their leader, ‘the ruler of the power of the air’, namely, Satan (2:2). Their totally iniquitous character is clarified beyond question in 6:12.
'all/every', 6×), is reinforced by figurative reiteration (v 22) and intimately associated with his 'body', the 'church' (vv 22b–23a).

Paul's purpose is to emphasise the matchless spiritual strength that is available to believers in Christ so that they need fear nothing hostile or harmful in this world. By grace they have been saved from each and every diabolical force and raised with Christ by faith above them all 'in the heavenly realms' (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις 1:20; cf 2:6). The partially synonymous terms that Paul selects to designate the total array of evil, anti-Christian powers (ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος) were well-known in both Jewish and Greek religious circles (Lincoln 1990:63), especially in the practice of magic, divination, and sorcery (Arnold 1992a:73–75). Paul does not deny or debate the ontological existence of such wicked powers (their negative nature being suggested retrospectively by the contrastive development which follows in 2:1–6). They were awfully 'real' enough for the majority of his receptor audience. Thus he simply lumps them all together (πάντα)—personal and impersonal, proximate and remote, high and low—and places them under the subjugating 'feet' of Christ (v 22; cf 4:7–10; Dan 7:13–14). There was no other 'name that could be named' (v 21), that is, no other being—good or bad—which did not fall under his supreme authority and control. The semi-religious practice of 'name-calling' (ὄνοματος ὀνομαζόμενου) was an indispensable aspect of most magical and exorcistic rites of that time, for 'supernatural 'powers' were called upon by name through these means by one who desired access to their power and assistance' (Arnold:54; cf Reid 1993:749). 'Magicians could use the knowledge of such [angelic or demonic] names to enlist the aid of cosmic powers' (Perkins 1997:54).

In dramatic contrast to such foolish and futile heathen rituals, Paul has already forcefully declared that the personal, all-surpassing power of God is mediated by the Holy Spirit through just one 'name', namely, that of his Son, Jesus Christ, and this 'mighty strength' is immediately available to each and every believer (vv 17–19). In his implied, contextualised polemic against prevailing pagan beliefs and practices, Paul

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18 Fee makes a strong argument for including the Holy Spirit and his gifts of 'wisdom and revelation' (1:17) as being an integral part of such strength-provision (cf 3:16): 'Paul sees the closest kind of relationship between the presence of the Spirit and the concomitant presence of God's power' (1994:678).

19 The comprehensive expression 'in the heavenlies' refers to Jesus' enthronement as cosmic ruler who is given the place of honor ['at (God's) right hand'] in the heavenly circle... Jesus has not been removed from earthly influence by ascension, precisely the opposite: he has been moved to the place of ultimate influence over matters on earth' (Turner 1994:1228, cf Keener 1993:541)—for the eternal benefit of his body, the church (1:22–23).

20 By implication of the psalmic citation here (Ps 8:6), every believer in the resurrected Lord may appropriate this same victorious power (cf 1 Cor 15:20–28) over what in this context as elsewhere (e.g, Eph 6:11–12) must surely refer to hostile (not benevolent or ambiguous), demonic forces (Lincoln 1990:64; par Carr 1981:90–92).
thus draws attention to three key differences in outlook (Arnold:75): the source of genuinely superior power, the means for gaining such power, and the goal for acquiring it (i.e., for the 'Christ'-ian through mutual and active ἀγάπη- 'love', the last by implication under the benefactive phrase τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ; cf 2:10, 3:15–19). By clearly demonstrating the pre-eminence of Christ here at the beginning of his epistle and in a cosmic context, Paul 'is laying a foundation for the Ephesian believers to see how effective Christ's power is in them, and is preparing them for the challenge to engage in spiritual warfare...'. (Moreau 1990:53), which is given at the letter's climactic conclusion (6:10–20). Conversely, they needed to be convinced, or simply reassured perhaps, 'that this world was not simply a continual battleground of warring forces where the hostile powers were in control and needed to be placated' (Lincoln 1990:79).

At the close of his prayer for power (i.e., for its recognition and realisation) on behalf of his addressees, Paul interacts contextually with two other important expressions which reflect antithetical beliefs concerning spiritual potency: First is the 'head-body' metaphor (κεφαλή-σώμα) in vv 22–23a which occurs also in many magical papyri of the time. It appears here, no doubt reflecting both current Jewish religious notions as well as Greek medical and socio-political thought, to refer to 'the head as "the inspiring, ruling, guiding, combining, sustaining power, the mainspring of [the body's] activity, the centre of its unity, and the seat of its life"' (Arnold:81, citing Lightfoot). The second term is that of 'fullness' (πληρωμα), which is a prominent power concept in this epistle (cf also 1:10, 3:19, 4:13; cf Col 1:19, 2:9) denoting the divine essence, presence, potency, and energy.21 By virtue of Christ's indwelling, this supremely protective and motivating resource is available also to his 'chosen ones' (1:11), the Church—on the one hand as a victorious testimony to the forces of Satan concerning God's incomparable wisdom (3:10), and on the other to manifest to the world the practical working out of the all-encompassing and unifying love of God (3:19–20, 4:12–13). Thus on account of an integral connection with their divine 'Head' (1:19,22; 2:6), 'Christians are not subject to powers that must be overcome as was the case for those who thought that heavenly powers stood between the soul and salvation in the heavens' (Perkins 1997:54). In the light of such a dynamic and optimistic message concerning the present state and future destiny of the corporate body of believers, the current pagan 'gospel' of mindless and manipulative religious machination should have paled to insignificance by comparison. The same outcome may be anticipated by any similar, biblically-based 'power-engagement' with the various non-Christian religious alternatives for strength and vitality today, whether traditional or modern in origin.

21 We note the special emphasis on this term that is conveyed by alliterative paronomasia: τὸ πληρωμα τοῦ τα πάντα εν πᾶσι πληρομένου.
2.3.2 Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul's intercessory prayer in this section is in essence a further development of the one he penned on behalf of the Ephesians (and others) in chapter one (vv 15–23). Its start is delayed (from v 1) as the apostle briefly reviews his ministry (vv 2–12), with special emphasis upon his commission to proclaim the divine 'wisdom' of the gospel 'mystery' so that it may be 'made known' to various human groups and also as a convicting, victorious testimony to all the wicked (implied) 'rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms' (ταίς άρχαις καὶ ταίς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις, v 10, a clear back-reference to 1:20–21; cf 1 Pt 3:19–22). In this well-placed digression (dissertatio), Paul heightens the persuasive force of his message by indirectly reminding his addressees of his apostolic authority and by appealing to their goodwill through a poignant reminder of his 'suffering' in bonds on their behalf (vv 1,13; inclusio).22 He proceeds in his subsequent entreaty to focus once again on the crucial theme of saving divine 'power' (δύναμις, 3:16, 20) as it relates practically to the Christian life, especially here now in the present age as manifested by the love of Christ' (3:19a). The key expression τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ is linked to two concepts that were also conspicuous in the former prayer, namely, to a 'surpassing knowledge' (ὑπερβαλλομένῳ τῆς γνώσεως, 19a) of God's loving plan of salvation and to the related notion of unity within the Church of 'all saints' (σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀγίοις, 18a; cf 1:17–18a), which is the Spirit-driven outworking of the fullness of God' (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ, 3:19b; = Christ, cf 4:13, 1:23). As Fee aptly notes in this connection, 'This prayer thus serves as the transition between these two expressions of love: God's love for us in Christ, and ours for one another in Christ' (1994:694). It is this divine 'mystery' concerning the manifold wisdom of God as revealed in the Church of Christ that loving believers are to strongly bear witness to in faith and life, according to God's 'power that is working within us' (κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἡμῖν—v 20b). Such testimony is to take place in relation to the world in which we live, especially the fellowship of believers (4:1–6:9), and in rigorous opposition to all the hostile 'rulers and authorities' of the heavenly realm (6:10–20; cf 3:9–10).

What Paul is simultaneously proclaiming as he prays is this: His hearers were seemingly unduly concerned about the matter of 'power' and their apparent lack of it

22 For an overview of the rhetorical development of this section, see Lincoln, who views the intercessory prayer-report and the doxology...as the transitus between the narratio of 2:11–22 and the exhortatio of 4:1–6:9, and as functioning as a new exordium (171). Furthermore, we note that 'rhetorically, the account of Paul's ministry serves to establish the character of the speaker [i.e., eisegė]...[and] the exhortation not to lose heart over his sufferings (v. 13) adds an element of pathos to the relationship between Paul and his audience' (Perkins: 80). Thus the sincerity of his 'kneeling down before the Father' in prayerful intercession on their behalf (v 14) along with the significance of the content of his prayer (i.e, for spiritual power to be manifested in Christ-like love) is duly impressed upon them.
in view of the many potent magical and spiritual enemies that threatened them on every hand. The Apostle counters this potentially paralyzing fear by prayerfully underscoring and worshipfully professing (cf 1:19–22) the incomparably superior divine force that is available to them (indeed his own source of strength, cf 3:7) by virtue of their relationship to Jesus Christ and to one another as fellow members of his ‘body’ (1:23). Paul will go on to show how this Christ-based power can be put into action externally by engaging in vigorous spiritual combat with an ever-present diabolical enemy on the attack (6:10–17). But he first wishes to establish a principle of equal importance, namely, the need for members to demonstrate the supreme power of Christ’s love operating within the Church (3:18,20) by living lives of purity (e.g., 4:1,17,22–24,32; 5:8–10,15) and, in telling contrast to the introspective, self-centered motivation of magical practice, by selflessly loving one another (4:1–6:9, especially 4:2 and 5:2).

Lest the recipients begin to worry about this awesome spiritual task and the tremendously broad scope of his pastoral agenda, Paul concludes with a stirring doxology that reinforces the theocentric emphasis of the entire epistle (even in the predominantly paraenetic portion, e.g., 4:6, 13, 15, 24, 30; 5:2, 5–6, 20, 23, 25; 6:6, 9, 11, 17–18). This is indeed a power-filled word of encouragement to believers: It is not their own, or indeed any human, resources that they need depend on in their daily religious ‘walk’ (4:1). Rather, they must simply put their complete trust in ‘the [all] Powerful One’ (τις δυνατένων), namely, the Father (3:14), who is constantly working his divine ‘power’ (τιν δύναμιν) within them (3:20) through the indwelling Christ (3:17) as mediated by the Holy Spirit (3:16; cf 1:13–14, 2:22 in contrast to 2:2)—a truly plenipotentiary Trinity!

Once again in this section we note several important expressions that Paul may have chosen specifically to counter certain pagan beliefs that were commonly associated with them. Paul addresses his prayer on behalf of believers ‘to the Father (προς τὸν πατέρα) from whom every fatherhood (πᾶσα πατριὰ) in heaven and on earth (i.e., every ‘family’, whether human or angelic) is named (ὀνομαζέται)’ (3:14–15). This familiar ‘Father of fathers’ is the one who is above and who bestows ‘each and every name that can be named’ in the universe (παντὸς ὄνοματος ὄνομαζομένου; cf 1:21), thus declaring himself to be their only true life Source and Sustainer, hence also Sovereign. As was mentioned above, the naming of what were believed to be spiritually potent names, whether for good or evil, was a vital element in the practice of Hellenistic magic, for by this ritual means the namer sought to mystically direct and control these personal forces for his own benefit and destiny. The point, Paul seems to be saying (praying) here, is simply this: why bother with all these shamefully inferior authorities and influences when Christ has made it possible for you to go directly right to the top? Such practice is not only foolish, but it also constitutes, in effect, a serious insult to the God who possesses and controls all power(s)!

Paul prays that his Ephesian circle of believers would ‘be strengthened with power’ (δυνάμει κραταιωθῆναι, 3:16) a Semitically-flavored expression of potency
which, as Arnold suggests, may be a deliberate paronomastic denigration of the underworld goddess Hekate (often closely associated or identified with Artemis/Diana), to whom the epithet 'the powerful female' (κρατασίη) was often ascribed (:88). This infusion of strength is to be effected 'through his Spirit' (διὰ τοῦ πνεῦματος αὐτοῦ), who is frequently associated with power in the Pauline corpus (e.g., Rm 15:13; 1 Cor 2:4; 2 Cor 6:6-7; 1 Th 1:5; cf Lincoln 1990:205). The Apostle proceeds with a second request, one that issues from the former, namely, from the indwelling presence of Christ (v 17) to a cognizance of his unfathomable love (v 19, this being a rhetorical oxymoron). Once more there is an obvious emphasis on the acquisition and exercise of divine power (v 18): 'that you may be thoroughly empowered' (εξισχύσητε), a verb whose usage in this context (i.e., together with καταλαβέσθαι 'to comprehend*) is paralleled in the pagan magical papyri, but with a contrastive sense.23

The object of the saints' discernment is spatially described as 'what is the breadth and length and height and depth' (τί τὸ πλάτος καὶ μήκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ βάθος, v 18). This enigmatic fourfold description appears to lack a logical referent. Most English versions either leave the text literal and ambiguous (e.g., NRSV, NJB) or attach the phrase to the love of Christ (e.g., NIV, GNB; cf v 19).24 Arnold turns again to his ancient Greek magical papyri, where these same four dimensional terms also occur sequentially (but not in the same order),25 to suggest another possibility, namely, a figurative and formulaic reference to the infinite, cosmologically unbounded power of the true (triune) God (cf 3:14–19), as opposed to the fickle, feckless gods of magic and sorcery. Indeed, a clear correspondence with the prayer discourse of chapter one (vv 18–19) and the parallelism that is evident also within the present text (i.e., the coordination of power and love in the twofold petition of vv 16–17 and 18–19), coupled with several pertinent intertexts (e.g., Rm 8:39 and Phlp 3:10), would tend to support Arnold's conclusion that 'the four dimensions...function in the prayer as a dynamic, rhetorical expression for the vastness of the power of God' (:95), here manifested in relation to his Church, the communion of saints (vv 18a, 21a). Surely those who put their complete trust in such a preeminent and predominant deity need fear nothing that exists within the seemingly endless bounds and scope of his

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23 *The phrase is used after the revelation of a certain magical formula to convey the thought that 'not even kings have sufficient power or authority to grasp the significance of the solution found in the given formula** (Arnold :90).

24 The CEV offers this explanatory (?) footnote: 'This may refer to the heavenly Jerusalem or to God's love or wisdom or to the meaning of the cross'. Quite a range of hermeneutical possibility there!

25 They are found in a reiterated incantation formula designed to manifest the secret of the magical power of the 'all-powerful' (pantokrator) god Albalal: 'Let there be light, breadth, depth, length, height, brightness ... and let him who is inside shine through ...' (Arnold :91; cf Betz 1986:57; for a reasonable alternative interpretive proposal, see Lincoln :209–213).
creation—whether good or evil, seen or unseen, natural or supernatural, conceivable or beyond even the realm of human conception and comprehension (3:20).

To climax his powerful prayer in request of spiritual power for his letter’s recipients, Paul again turns to the alliterative language of ‘filling’ and ‘fullness’ (πληρωθείτε εἰς τὸν πληρωμα, v 19b)—seemingly composed as a deliberate parallel to 1:23; cf 4:13) to stress both the protection that believers have against any malevolent counter force on earth (3:10) and also the divine potential which they possess as his loving emissaries in the world (4:1ff). Many pagan religions, including the ecstatic ‘mystery’ sects of New Testament times as well as the ubiquitous ancestral (affliction) cults in Africa, actively promote a ‘full possession’ by some known or unknown spiritual force on the part of certain ‘chosen’ adherents in order to achieve a variety of supernatural purposes, for example, mental enlightenment, social enhancement, or some other special personal enablement. But what is this, Paul argues, in comparison with the immeasurable, unimaginable things that God can do in and through his Spirit-endowed, Christ-indwelt people (vv 16–17, 20)?

2.3.1 Ephesians 6:10–20

Paul begins the final and apical section of his epistolary paraenesis (in the summary peroratio of his letter; Lincoln 1990:438) with yet another intensive appeal to his addressees to put all their trust in the powerful protection of God. The very position of this tripartite admonition (concerning the enemy [10–13], our armament [14–17], and the need for intercession [18–20]) within the letter attests to its rhetorical significance in the apostle’s message as a whole (cf O’Brien 1993:120; Turner 1994:1242)—‘the whole rest of the epistle has been preparing his readers for this exhortation’ (Moreau 1990:55). The problems posed by widespread syncretistic beliefs in protective magic, malicious sorcery, malleable deities, and pernicious spirits were a grave threat to the strength and unity of the Church of Jesus Christ and thus as potentially divisive as the erstwhile cleavage that existed between Jews and Gentiles (2:11–22). Paul rhetorically heightens his words in typical fashion through lexical synonymy/semantic redundancy: ‘be ye empowered in the Lord and in the might of his strength’ (ἐνυπναμοῦσθε ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ ἐν τῷ κράτει τῆς ισχύος αὐτοῦ, 6:10).

26 Fee too notes the importance of this text: ‘Given the nature of ancient rhetoric, in coming to this final section of the letter we also most likely are coming to Paul’s primary concern for his recipients. That is, Paul’s placing this material in the emphatic final position suggests that he has been intentionally building the letter toward this climax right along. The “powers” have been a concern from the opening words of the berakah in 1:3...’ (1994:723). For a good summary of this power-focus in relation to the thematic development of Ephesians, see Lincoln :438–439. In this connection, we might also note that ‘the Pauline letters refer much more frequently to the dangers Satan poses for believers than to his power over unbelievers’ (Page 1995:186).
Such a vital preparatory procedure would enable Christians ‘to take their stand’ (στῆναι)—continuously, without fail (this crucial stem is reiterated four times)—against any and all of the malevolent forces which they believed to be arrayed against them in life.

This hellish host (note the explicit association with διαβόλου in v 11, as in 4:27, and πονηροῦ ‘evil one’ in 6:16; cf also 2:2) is representatively or summarily enumerated (v 12) in terms similar to those listed in the corresponding passage of 1:21, but in a rather different topical setting and rhetorical context (i.e., now deliberative—exhorting spiritual conflict, not epideictic—extolling Christological supremacy). The commonplace ‘power-word’ pairing of ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι (in this order when plural) probably functioned as a conventionalised and condensed way of referring to the whole lot (Pattemore 1994:121–122). For good measure, however, a new pair of synonyms is added here in the form of descriptive expansions, namely, ‘the world-rulers (κοιμωκράτορες) of this darkness’ and the all-encompassing ‘spiritual forces (πνευματικά) of evil in the heavenly realms’. The entire ungodly set is no doubt ‘equivalent to other descriptions of evil powers in Jewish apocalyptic’ (Perkins 1997:145); however, the point is not precision but inclusiveness: Although such nefarious cosmic forces may pervade the universe, they are unable to defeat the one who relies for his/her protection upon the Lord (v 10). The use of several terms here serves to draw sober attention to the real danger of the enemy but also to stress the completeness of their conquest by Christ.28 Although they may still inflict damage upon believers, both physical as well as spiritual, ‘it is made clear that the operations even of supernatural beings hostile to God proceed only by his permission and within limitations he defines ... (as in, for example, Job 1–2; Lk. 22:31; 2 Cor. 12:7; Rev. 9:1–11; 13:5–7; 16:13)’ (Fernando 1996:123).

The term κοιμωκράτορες is of special interest from the point of view of Paul’s apparent policy of contextualisation, that is, to polemically employ various magical or occultic expressions that his hearers would immediately recognise as belonging to the pagan, or at best parallel and ‘alternative’, non-Christian spirit realm. Arnold presents...
evidence which suggests that ‘world ruler’ was most likely a conventional designation in the religious texts of magic and astrology during the first century as one of the more familiar “‘names which are named’ (1:21)” in rituals of conjuration (:67) as well as mantic prediction (cf Lincoln 1990:444). In the singular it seemed to act as a generic reference to one or another of the regional gods (no doubt including ‘Artemis’) who were appealed to for both protection and provision—that is, to promote a favorable destiny for people.29 By pluralizing and lumping all such ‘world-potentates’ together with the lesser demonic ‘rulers and authorities’ and putting them in league with ‘the devil’, Paul pointedly demotes and denigrates these deities and further demonstrates their utterly malignant character. Christians, be warned, he seems to be saying; lurking behind the so-called ‘gods’ that you worship, the appealing mystery cults, and all the spiritual ‘powers’ you desire to control for your own benefit is none other than the ‘evil one’ (TOU ΠΟΥΡΟΥ) himself (v 16).30 It is under the noxious ‘authority’ (ἐξουσία) of this wily ‘ruler’ (ἄρχων 2:2; here this significant word pair has a singular reference; cf 1:21) that all those who ‘disobediently follow the ways of this world’ place themselves—that is, in the ‘darkness’ (σκότος, 4:17–19, 5:8ff), to their ultimate defeat (as rebels against God) and damnation (2:3). It is clearly a case of guilt by association: anyone who fears, worships, serves, or compromises in any way with any one of the anti-Christian ‘powers’ either mentioned or implicated in the all-inclusive catalogue of 6:12 (note the final, incorporative expression ‘spiritual forces of evil’) automatically becomes a disciple of Satan (v 11, cf 2:2) and of his diabolical surrogates (cf 1 Cor 10:19–21).

According to Paul, there is really only one way to win this life-death struggle with Satan and his infernal army, and that is to ‘be strong in the Lord’ (ἐνδυναμούσθη ἐν κυρίῳ, 6:10a; cf 3:16, 1 Cor 16:13, 2 Tm 2:1). In other words, it is not possible to overcome on the basis of one’s own physical, psychological, magical, or spiritual resources, but only by tapping into the surpassing store of strength that Christ freely supplies by faith (v 10b), including the presence of the divine antidote—the Holy Spirit’ (πνεῦμα 6:18; cf 3:16; Fee 1994:725). This supreme potency which was put on public display at his resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to/in glory (1:19–20, is described in the former text by the same two terms, κράτος and ἰσχύς; cf 4:8–10; Is 40:26,29). This alone will make it possible for one to ‘stand firm’ against all attacks (as

29 Arnold cites this example (:66): ‘I call on you, lord, holy ... kosmokra&twr, Sarapis; ... [I know] your true name ... I hymn your holy power ... Protect me from all my own astrological destiny ... apportion good things for me in my horoscope; increase my life ... for I am your slave ... ’ On the possible reference to Artemis here, see Turner 1994:1228.

30 Central African traditional religion has no real equivalent to Satan. The closest that one comes to the concept of an ultimate personification of absolute evil is humanised, multiple, and relatively minor in iniquitous potency (but not infamy) by way of comparison—namely, the so-called ‘night witch’. And even this prominent representative of wickedness is not found in some local casts of occult characters, e.g, the Tonga (cf Wendland 1992:211).
well as all attractions to religious syncretism or outright apostasy), and only on that basis can the imperative which constitutes the central admonition of this section be given (στθ = τε, v 14). Indeed, such vigorous encouragement to spiritual action reflects once again one of the primary purposes of this dynamic Pauline epistle.

Various manifestations of divinely-provided ‘strength’ and ‘standing firm’ are metaphorically depicted by means of the extended imagery of a typical Roman soldier’s armor that believers are exhorted to ‘put on’ (εὐθύγασθε, v 11+vv 13–17; probably more allusion to Isaiah,31 e.g., 59:17), both defensive and also offensive weapons (O’Brien 1993:124–125; Perkins 1997:142–143). In addition to such encouragement, there is also a strong evangelistic thread that runs throughout and unifies this passage, which resembles a pre-battle military pep-talk (Lincoln :433; Turner 1994:1242), with the mention of several of the key terms of Paul’s ‘gospel-mystery’ (notably ‘peace’, ‘faith’, ‘salvation’, ‘Spirit’—as outlined in ch 2; cf 3:2–12). This typical vocabulary also draws attention to the essential moral and spiritual nature of the conflict being waged. Although there frequently are painfully overt, physical consequences, such symptoms are really secondary to the fundamentally religious character of this conflict along with its potential outcome and implications for the Christian (cf 4:26–27 in the wider context of 4:17–5:20).32

The striking catalogue of spiritual armament concludes in a non-figurative mode with Paul’s reference to the catalytic power of prayer, which is emphasised by means of exact and synonymous repetition as well as by direct appeal in vv 18–20, reflecting the prominent role it has played within the entire epistle (including the author’s actual illustrative practice in 1:15–23 and 3:14–21). This return to the practice of Spirit-directed prayer, with which Paul began his epistle (ch 1, =inclusio), not only rounds out his central message rhetorically, but it also reminds us once more that the believer’s strength—now, in particular, to make a fearless testimony to the truth of God’s word—depends not on him/herself, but solely on the Lord (v 10). The reference to quiet, interpersonal intercession here also brings hearers down from the emotional ‘high’ generated by all the vivid battle imagery and back to the reality of the present circumstances, both in relation to their own socio-religious situation and that of the imprisoned apostle who was so concerned about their spiritual welfare in the ongoing

31 The rhetorical function of the OT intertextual allusions to ‘divine warrior’ imagery, especially in Isaiah (cf also Is 49:2 and 52:7 in LXX), is to provide ‘scriptural confirmation for the writer’s contention that believers have at their disposal not just any armor or weapons but those of God himself’ (Lincoln :437).

32 ‘In biblical understanding, the human dilemma is not perceived essentially in terms of physical evils inflicted by spirits or witches [e.g., sickness, barrenness, famine, poverty, and ultimately death], but in terms of sin, rebellion against a sovereign creator, and consequent spiritual lostness and death. Accordingly salvation means primarily the overcoming of sin and its consequences in order to effect [and enjoy] the restoration of fellowship with God’ (Fernando 1996:126).
warfare with dangerous devilish forces (another significant appeal to *pathos* as well as *ethos*).

Paul's inspired and instructive exhortation is highly relevant to all Christians, but it is especially helpful in situations of rapid church growth among contemporary societies that have a strong perception and appreciation of the dynamic supernatural and/or spiritual dimension of the cosmos. The tense rhetorical setting in Asia Minor as Arnold describes it would thus be largely applicable to many analogous situations in Africa today:

Many converts were streaming into the churches — converts who were formerly affiliated with the Artemis cult, practiced magic, consulted astrologers, and participated in various mysteries. Underlying the former beliefs and manner of life of all these converts was a common fear of the demonic 'powers' (:122).  

These adversaries are admittedly powerful, plenteous, and omnipresent in the world, but the point, as Paul stresses time and again, is that they are a totally defeated foe—though in virtual reality now, thus necessitating continued warfare (6:11-12), final victory is guaranteed (1:22-23; cf Isa 24:21). Therefore Christ is in complete control and acting to provide a ready defense for all those who put their trust in him and exercise his sort of selfless love towards one another (6:23-24; cf 4:15).  

3 CONCLUSION: THE CRUCIALITY OF (RE)'CONTEXTUALISATION'

On the basis of the preceding textual and contextual study, we may conclude that the theme of *power*—divine as infinitely superior to demonic—appears to 'energise' all of the other important religious or ethical concepts that are considered in the Ephesian letter (which may be summed up under the term gospel *mystery* μυστήριον—1:9; 3:3-6,9; 6:19), for example, the unity of Church and family (and the God-head!), the

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33 In Zambia, for instance, instead of the Artemis cult, we find the ritualized veneration of human 'ancestors' (e.g., Tonga: *mizimo*); in place of astrologers, there are 'diviner-medicine (wo)men' (*bong'anga*); the ecstasy of 'spirit possession' (*mazyabe*) replaces the mysteries; and for demonic powers we have the greatly feared 'sorcerers' (*balozi*) and 'malevolent spirits' (*zzwaa/zyeelo*).

34 Arnold summarises the implications for believers of the 'power-motif' in Ephesians in terms of several principal teachings, which I might paraphrase as follows: (1) the total superiority of the power of God and the supremacy of Christ over all defeated, but still dangerous, satanic forces, no matter in what guise they may be manifested or how greatly they may have been formerly feared; (2) the immediate access of the believer in Christ to the full protective and energising power of God; (3) the need for maintaining a vigilant defense and a gospel-motivated offense against all the forces of evil in the world; and (4) a positive purpose for acquiring divine strength, which is to enable the Christian to more effectively manifest a Spirit-led lifestyle and the power of love in his/her life, especially towards fellow members of the army of the Lord, his Church (:168-170).
wisdom/plan/foreknowledge of God, activity of the Spirit, salvation by grace not works, brotherly love and moral purity as the primary exponents of the Christian life, and the real potential for complete victory by faith in the exalted Lord. A captivating servile fear of, or syncretistic trust in, any antithetical force—whether natural, supernatural, human, spiritual, magical, divine, or whatever—results in a 'religion' that manifests the height of folly in terms of ignorance (in contrast to the 'wisdom' of God), uncertainty (in contrast to the certainty of our election), work-righteousness (in contrast to salvation by divine grace), disorganised individualistic disunity (in contrast to the corporate unity and communion of the Church), worldly selfishness (in contrast to the selfless, other-oriented love of true believers), and ultimate weakness (in contrast to the supreme greatness and glory of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

The only solution to such an emaciated spiritual condition and power-less character, according to Paul and his approach of indirect polemical confrontation (so as not to give the enemy too much 'PR' as it were), is the total conceptual transformation made possible by a proper understanding of the true strength of the revealed God of Scripture. Our 'Lord' is not only the gentle Saviour-Redeemer and Paraclete of the New Testament, but he is also the almighty Sovereign Creator and Controller of the universe, as emphasised in the Old Testament. By virtue of the soteriological Christ-event, this divine potency—whether for defensive or offensive purposes—is immediately available to every believer personally, and it is manifested corporately in and mediated through the local fellowship of believers (cf 6:21-24; as part of the universal family of faith, 5:22-33). The effect is guaranteed both here on earth within the bounds of time and space, but more importantly also in perfect realization for timeless eternity above and beyond even 'the heavenly realms' (1:19-20; 3:10, 20-21; 6:10-12). But Paul also stresses the fact that only practical way of dealing with malevolent forces on the outside is to first confront and conquer personally captivating sin on the inside—that is, within the individual heart or the spiritual fabric of an entire church fellowship. This can and must be done by tapping into the power-resources that our Lord freely supplies through his Spirit, that is, to effect sincere repentance and complete conversion, a confident faith, and also a loving determination to promote ever greater unity and harmony within the Body of Christ (e.g., 1:19, 2:3-4, 2:10, 2:13-14, 3:17-18, 4:1-3, 4:16-17, 4:22-24, 5:8-11, 5:15-16, 6:16-17).35

Our ultimate communicative objective is to follow Paul's example and to persuasively (2 Cor 5:11) 're-contextualise', as it were, his powerful, Christocentric mes-

35 For an excellent discussion of the nature of our 'spiritual warfare' as being primarily and in the first place moral—that is, a divine rescue from Satan who incites and promotes our sinful nature—see Fernando 1997b:132-136. The Church must ever focus its proclamation and ministry upon the message about Christ's death 'for sins', since it is through salvation from sins that deliverance from Satan, demons and powers takes place' (133).
sage to the 'Ephesians' concerning spiritual powers, both good and evil, so that it is more clearly understood, precisely examined, and pervasively applied to a contemporary environment, religious as well as secular. Strictly speaking, a re-contextualization is involved because Paul has already provided the original pattern and an excellent model for us to follow in terms of form (a dynamic, captivating literary style), content (focused upon the strength to be found in union with Christ and one's fellow-Christians), function (featuring integrated instruction, admonition, encouragement, appeal), and method (supremely need-related and relevant to everyday life) when dealing with the various critical issues that can arise whenever biblical text and teaching confront a vigorous local context and worldly culture. But above all, amidst all the careful strategy and planning for more effective communication, it is important to keep in mind where the real source of empowerment lies—in the Apostle's words: τοῦ λοιποῦ, ἐνδυναμοῦσθε ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ ἐν τῷ κράτει τῆς ἱσχύος αὐτοῦ (6:10)!

**WORKS CONSULTED**


