The Divine Father

Religious and Philosophical Concepts
of Divine Parenthood in Antiquity

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THE DIVINE FATHER OF THE UNIVERSE FROM THE PRESOCRATICS
TO CELSUS: THE GRAECO-ROMAN BACKGROUND
TO THE “FATHER OF ALL” IN PAUL’S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

George H. van Kooten

1. INTRODUCTION

As Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann have argued, the common Christian designation of God as “Father” does not primarily derive from the Jewish Scriptures, where it is infrequent, but arose with Jesus. Moreover, the two scholars highlight the remarkable resemblance with the frequency of the term in the contemporary Graeco-Roman world.¹ In this paper, I trace how this characterization also came to be applied to God in a cosmological sense, in the designation of God as the “Father of all” (πατήρ πάντων) in the Pauline letter to the Ephesians. When, well into the letter, the author reminds his Christian readers of the new way of life they have adopted, and exhorts them “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:1–3), he summarizes the main tenets of their new calling as follows:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (εἰς θεὸς καὶ πατήρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν). (Eph 4:4–6)²

As I will argue, this designation of the one God as the “Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” has its roots in a long tradition of Graeco-Roman thought.

In the letter, the epithet comes as a bolt from the blue, but the author’s hymnic prayer earlier in the writing (3:14–21) does herald this view of God as the origin of cosmic reality. The author bows his knees...

¹ FELDMEIER and SPIECKERMANN (2011, 51–91), esp. 85–89.

² The biblical writings are normally quoted in the New Revised Standard Version, passages from classical literature are quoted after the English translations in the Loeb Classical Library series, unless otherwise noted, and early patristic literature after the Ante-Nicene Fathers series, with small modifications when necessary.

...before the Father (πατήρ), from whom every lineage or “fatherhood” (πατριά) in heaven and on earth takes its name (πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, ἐξ οὗ πάντα πατριά ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς ὀνομάζεται). (Eph 3:14f.)

In this phrase, we have the long, descriptive form of what is later, in good Greek fashion, condensed to πατήρ πάντων, the “Father of all.” The concise term is then embedded in the terminology of what Gregory Sterling has styled Greek “prepositional metaphysics”: the Father of all is the one ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν (“who is above all and through all and in all”).³ In his designation of God as the Father (πατήρ), from whom all cosmic fatherhood (πατριά) takes its name, the author seems to be unique: I have not found any comparable expressions in the surviving literature that combine πατήρ and πατριά in this way. This could be taken as a sign of how intensely the author had appropriated the Greek view of God as the cosmic Father of all. The subsequent prayer shows the comprehensiveness of the reality of which he believed God to be the father. Not only does he pray that God grant that his readers may “be strengthened in the inner being with power through his spirit (κραταιωθῆναι διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον)” (3:16) and that Christ may dwell in their hearts (3:17), but also that they may “comprehend... what is the breadth and length and height and depth (καταλαβέσθαι... τί τὸ πλάτος καὶ μήκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ βάθος)” (3:18). The whole of reality extends from the microcosmos of “the inner being,” man’s innermost identity, expressed in the vocabulary of Platonic anthropology,⁴ to the macrocosmic dimensions of the universe, stated in the language of Greek astrology.⁵ And this whole range consists of “patriarchic family lines,” which issue forth from the divine Father, the “Father of all.”

In this paper, I briefly sketch the emergence of the term “Father of all” from Homer onwards, and then focus on its appropriation and development by the Greek philosophers up to the second century C.E. I go on to examine how Jews of the Graeco-Roman period adopted this terminology, comparing the use of the term by Philo of Alexandria and the author of Ephesians, in particular. I conclude, finally, with some reflections on the debate between Christians and pagan philosophers about the status of the “Father of all,” as revealed in the polemics between Origen and Celsus.

³ STERLING (1997).

⁴ Cf. VAN KOOTEN (2008, 358–370).

⁵ Cf. VAN KOOTEN (2003, 179–183).

2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE DIVINE EPITHET “FATHER OF ALL” AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TERM IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY

2.1. *Emergence in the Homeric Literature*

The depiction of God as the “Father of all” (πατήρ πάντων) seems to have its roots in the Homeric literature. The epithet “Father of men and of gods” (πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε) is applied to Zeus, the prime divinity of the pantheon, in Homer’s *Ilias* and *Odyssea* (on the fatherhood of Zeus in Greek epic, cf. the contribution by Heinz-Günther Nesselrath to this volume).⁶ The term also occurs in Hesiod’s *Theogonia* (542), meaning that it is attested in the two main representatives of early epic. As yet, however, there is no explicit reference to the comprehensive scope of Zeus’ rule, to him being the “Father of all.” In the fifth century B.C.E., the Athenian tragic playwrights Euripides, Sophocles, and Critias broadened the scope of the epithet by adapting it to “Father of all gods” (θεῶν δὲ πάντων πατήρ).⁷ The full “Homeric” form (in inverted order), “Father of all gods and of men” (ὁ δὲ πάντων θεῶν πατήρ καὶ ἄνδρων), is only attested once, in the writings of Lucian of Samosata in the second century C.E.⁸ What is most important for the subsequent philosophical appropriation of the epithet “Father of all” (πατήρ πάντων), however, is its emergence in authors such as Pindar (*fl.* 5th cent. B.C.E.), the female lyric poet Corinna (Pindar’s contemporary and—as tradition has it—rival), Pseudo-Dionysius of Halicarnassus (post-1st cent. B.C.E.), and, again, Lucian.⁹ Pindar attributes this divine epithet to Cronus, whereas the others apply it to Zeus. As we shall see, it is in this form—πατήρ πάντων—that the epithet becomes susceptible for a philosophical, cosmological interpretation.

⁶ See the occurrence of the epithet πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε in *Ilias* 1.544; 4.68; 5.426; 8.49, 132; 11.182; 15.12, 47; 16.458; 20.56; 22.167; 24.103; and *Odyssea* 1.28; 12.445; 18.137.

⁷ See Euripides, *Fragmenta* 591 (Nauck), 15b (Page); Sophocles, *Fragmenta* 752 (Radt); Critias, *Fragmenta* 1 (Snell), 16 (Diels & Kranz).

⁸ Lucian, *Gall.* 13 ll. 16–17.

⁹ See Pindar, *Ol.* 2 l. 17 (Χρόνος ὁ πάντων πατήρ); Corinna, *Fragmenta* 1a col./subfrg. 3 l. 13 (Δεὺς πατεῖ[ρ πάντων]ν βασιλεύς); Ps.-Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Rhet.* 2.2 (πατήρ καλεῖται πάντων); and Lucian, *Bis acc.* 2 (Zeus: ἐγὼ δὲ αὐτὸς ὁ πάντων βασιλεύς καὶ πατήρ). Cf. also the epithet πατήρ φυτῶν πάντων (“Father of all plants”), attributed to Zeus in Valerius Babrius’ *Mythiambi Aesopici* 2.142: ὦ Ζεῦ, γενάρχῃ καὶ πατήρ φυτῶν πάντων (not later than the 2nd cent. C.E.).

2.2. *The Philosophers' Interpretation of the Epithet πατήρ πάντων*

2.2.1. *The Presocratics Heraclitus and Pythagoras*

The first philosophical appropriation of the divine epithet under consideration is already attested in the surviving fragments of Heraclitus of Ephesus (*fl.* ca. 500 B.C.E.), in his well-known statement that Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι ("War is the Father of all" [no. 22 B 53 Diels & Kranz]), which expresses his view that the cosmic order is a constant process of change, and that change is essential to its maintenance. This is also the way the term is understood by the middle-Platonist philosopher Plutarch, who underpins his own conviction that the cosmos "has come about as the result of two opposed principles and two antagonistic forces" (*Is. Os.* 369C) with a reference to Heraclitus:

Note also that the philosophers are in agreement with this; for Heraclitus without reservation styles War "the Father and King and Lord of all" (*Ἡράκλειτος μὲν γάρ ἀντικρυς* [B 53] "πόλεμον" ὀνομάζει "πατέρα καὶ βασιλέα καὶ κύριον πάντων"), and he says that when Homer prays that "Strife may vanish from the ranks of the gods and of mortals" (*Σ* 107), he fails to note that he is invoking a curse on the origin of all things, since all things originate from strife and antagonism (B 94). (Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 370D)

This shows that Heraclitus, writing contemporaneously with the first attested use of the epithet πατήρ πάντων in fifth-century B.C.E. authors such as Pindar (see above), already used it in a cosmological sense, referring to the entire cosmos.

Later neo-Pythagorean traditions of the Hellenistic period, however, credit another Presocratic philosopher with the designation of God as the "Father of all": Pythagoras, also from the sixth/fifth century B.C.E. but slightly earlier than Heraclitus. In a text fragment preserved in Pseudo-Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria (among others), God is clearly characterized as the πάντων πατήρ:

God is one (ὁ μὲν θεὸς εἷς); and He is not, as some suppose, outside this frame of things, but within it; but, in all the entirety of His being, He is in the whole circle of existence, surveying all nature, and blending in harmonious Union the whole,—the author of all His own forces and works, the giver of light in heaven: and Father of all,—the mind and vital power of the whole world,—the mover of all things (καὶ πάντων πατήρ, νοῦς καὶ ψύχωσις τῷ ὅλῳ κύκλῳ, πάντων κίνασις). (Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 6.72.4)¹⁰

¹⁰ Cf. Ps.-Justin Martyr, *Cohortatio ad gentiles* 19.2 (= THESLEFF [1965, 186]); Clement attributes the passage to "the Pythagoreans," Pseudo-Justin to Pythagoras himself.

This is the same and simultaneous assertion of God as one, and as the Father of all, that we encounter in the “confessional” statement of Eph 4:4–6: “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πασιν)” (see above). No wonder then that Clement, having referred to such passages in the Pythagoreans and other philosophers, goes on to conclude: “For the knowledge of God, these utterances, written by those we have mentioned through the inspiration of God, and selected by us, may suffice even for the man that has but small power to delve into truth” (*Protr.* 6.72.5).

Strikingly, it is also Clement who seems to link the above findings that the epithet πατὴρ πάντων occurs both in Pindar and in the Pythagoreans, by stating that Pindar himself was a Pythagorean and by continuing to credit him with the view of the fatherhood of the one creator.¹¹ Clement first gives an example to illustrate his statement that “the Zeus celebrated in poems and prose compositions leads the mind up to God,” and then carries on with a reference to Pindar:

And more mystically the Boeotian Pindar, being a Pythagorean (ὁ μὲν Βοιωτίας Πίνδαρος, ἅτε Πυθαγόρειος ὢν), says: “One is the race of gods and men, | And of one mother both have breath” («ὓν ἀνδρῶν, ἐν θεῶν γένος, ἐκ μιᾶς δὲ ματρὸς πνέομεν ἄμφω»), that is, of matter; and names the one creator of these things, whom he calls Father, chief artificer (παραδίδωσι καὶ ἕνα τὸν τούτων δημιουργόν, ὃν «ἀριστοτέχνην πατέρα» λέγει), who furnishes the means of advancement on to divinity, according to merit. (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.14.102.2)

Again, we note the close connection between a terminology which emphasizes the oneness of God, the unification of god(s) and men, and the creator’s divine fatherhood; this is what we also encounter in Eph 4:4–6.

2.2.2. *Plato*

The cosmological understanding of God as the “Father of all” also occurs in Plato. It is not clear, however, whether Plato was influenced by such Pythagorean traditions as we have just discussed, if they had already arisen prior to the Hellenistic age, or whether, as Charles H. Kahn puts it (with reference to the work of Walter Burkert), “the conception of

¹¹ Pindar’s depiction as a Pythagorean is a characterization which only seems to occur in Clement, followed by Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 13.13.27, but cf. also *Scholia in Pindarum (scholia vetera)* O 2, scholion 123e, ed. DRACHMANN (1903–1927).

Pythagorean philosophy preserved in later antiquity was the creation of Plato and his school.¹²

The term *πατήρ πάντων* occurs literally, in a rather awkward passage in Plato's *Euthydemus*; even here, however, the term's potential for a broader, cosmological interpretation is evident. In this dialogue, in which Plato sketches Socrates' exposure of the artificial argumentation of two sophists, Euthydemus, one of the sophists, applies a spurious reasoning, based on a distinctive, idiosyncratic meaning of the term "father," which precludes that someone else can also be "father." Euthydemus argues that Chaeredemus, the father of Socrates' half-brother Patrocles, by virtue of being a "father" is necessarily also the father of Socrates; he discounts the fact that Socrates and his half-brother share only the same mother, Socrates' natural father being Sophroniscus (297E–298B). Similarly, Euthydemus argues, against another participant in this dialogue, Ctesippus, that Euthydemus' own father is also the father of Ctesippus, and in fact of everybody else (298B–C). Ctesippus, on the other hand, points out that this is a false line of reasoning, by which two different things are wrongly treated as the same:

"Perhaps, Euthydemus," said Ctesippus, "you are knotting flax with cotton, as they say: for it is a strange result that you state, if your father is father of all (δεινὸν γὰρ λέγεις πράγμα εἰ ὁ σὸς πατήρ πάντων ἐστὶν πατήρ)." "He is, though," was the reply (Ἀλλ' ἔστιν, ἔφη). "Of all men, do you mean? (Πότερον ἀνθρώπων;)" asked Ctesippus, "or of horses too, and all other animals?" "Of all," he said (Πάντων, ἔφη). (Plato, *Euthyd.* 298C)

Although it is clear that the term *πάντων πατήρ* in this passage in Plato's *Euthydemus* is only part of a comic satire in which the quibbles of particular sophists are made fun of, it nonetheless shows Plato's acquaintance with the terminology under consideration. This seems important to emphasize, because when Plato does employ this terminology in a far more serious context, in his *Timaeus*, he uses a slightly different phrase, that of God as *πατήρ τοῦδε τοῦ παντός* ("the Father of this universe"). Having stated that "that which has come into existence must necessarily, as we say, have come into existence by reason of some Cause," Plato utters the following exclamation:

Now to discover the Maker and Father of this universe were a task indeed; and having discovered Him, to declare Him unto all men were a thing

¹² KAHN and GRAF (2003).

impossible (τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς εὐρεῖν τε ἔργον καὶ εὐρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν). (Plato, *Tim.* 28C)

This utterance has become one of the passages of Plato most commonly cited (or alluded to) in ancient philosophy,¹³ early Judaism¹⁴ and early Christianity (on Plato's *Timaeus* 28C, and its subsequent reception history, cf. the contribution by Franco Ferrari to this volume);¹⁵ it is one of the key passages in Antiquity for the notion of God's fatherhood over the cosmos.¹⁶ Hence it is not surprising that in some quotations and allusions, the phrase πατήρ τοῦδε τοῦ παντός ("the Father of this universe") is freely changed into the divine epithet πατήρ πάντων ("Father of all"), as instances from the works of Platonists such as Xenocrates, a direct disciple of Plato, and Plutarch reveal.¹⁷

Against the background of the subsequent history of the reception of Plato's writings, I refer briefly, finally, to another passage in Plato's *Leges*, in which Plato establishes a correspondence between the worship paid to the gods, and the honours paid to parents:

The ancient laws of all men concerning the gods are two-fold: some of the gods whom we honour we see clearly [i.e., the stars (cf. 821B)], but of others we set up statues as images, and we believe that when we worship these, lifeless though they be, the living gods beyond feel great good-will towards us and gratitude. So if any man has a father or a mother, or one of their fathers or mothers, in his house laid up bed-ridden with age, let him never suppose that, while he has such a figure as this upon his hearth, any statue could be more potent, if so be that its owner tends it duly and rightly. (Plato, *Leg.* 930E–931A)

¹³ See, e.g., Aristotle, *Fragmenta varia* 1.2 frg. 30 (apud Alexander, *In Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria* 1, 6. 988, 11, p. 45, 8); Xenocrates, *Testimonia, doctrina et fragmenta* frg. 115; Alexander, *In Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria* p. 59; Celsus, *Ἀληθῆς λόγος* 7.42.

¹⁴ See esp. Philo, *Opif.* 7, 10, 21, 77; *Post.* 175; *Conf.* 144, 170; *Her.* 99, 200, 236; *Fug.* 84, 178; *Abr.* 9, 58; *Mos.* 1.158; 2.48, 256; *Decal.* 51, 64, 105; *Spec.* 1.35; 2.6, 256; 3.178, 189, 199; 4.180; *Virt.* 34, 78; *Praem.* 24, 32; *Contempl.* 90; *Aet.* 15; *Legat.* 115, 293; *QG* 2.34. But also Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.224.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Ps.-Clement, *Homiliae* 4.13.3; Justin Martyr, 2. *Apol.* 10.6; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 6.2; Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 6.68.1; *Strom.* 5.12.78.1, 5.14.102.4–103.1; Origen, *Cels.* 7.42–44; Ptolemy the Gnostic, *Epistula ad Floram* 3.2.

¹⁶ On the history of its interpretation, see NOCK (1962).

¹⁷ See Xenocrates, *Testimonia, doctrina et fragmenta* frg. 115 (apud Syrianus, *In Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria* p. 141 [... τῷ τε <πατρί> καὶ ποιητῇ τῶν πάντων]); and Plutarch, *Quaest. plat.* 1000E (ZHTHMA B'. "Τί δήποτε τὸν ἀνωτάτω θεὸν πατέρα τῶν πάντων καὶ ποιητὴν προσεῖπεν;" [Plato, *Tim.* 28C al.] πότερον ὅτι τῶν μὲν θεῶν τῶν γεννητῶν καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πατήρ ἐστιν). Cf. also Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.2.7.1 (... ὁ ποιητὴς τε καὶ πατήρ πάντων).

Although in Plato's own wording the comparison is between the gods (οἱ ἔμψυχοι θεοὶ) on the one hand, and mortal fathers (πατέρες) and mothers (μητέρες) on the other, in the ensuing reception interpreters define this analogy more narrowly, as a similitude between the human fathers and the divine father, who is the father of all. Examples can be drawn both from pagan authors, such as Plutarch, and from Jewish authors such as Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus. According to Plutarch, men used to say that Zeus...

... was guardian of those who lived an orphaned life, thinking him to be the father of all (πατέρα νομίζοντες πάντων) and in particular of those who have no human fathers (καὶ ὧν οὐκ εἰσιν ἄνθρωποι πατέρες), and that he came to the aid of fathers who were injured by their children. For human fathers are the images of the universal father, Zeus (ἀγάλματα γὰρ εἰσιν οἱ πατέρες τοῦ πάντων πατρός, τοῦ Διός). (Plutarch, *Fragmenta* 46)

The same perspective is implied in Philo's portrayal of the two tablets of Moses' Ten Commandments, the first tablet of which begins with the divine father and ends with human parents:

Thus one set of enactments begins with God the Father and Maker of all, and ends with parents who copy His nature by begetting individual persons (ὥς εἶναι τῆς μιᾶς γραφῆς τὴν μὲν ἀρχὴν θεὸν καὶ πατέρα καὶ ποιητὴν τοῦ παντός, τὸ δὲ τέλος γονεῖς, οἱ μιμούμενοι τὴν ἐκείνου φύσιν γεννώσι τοὺς ἐπὶ μέρους). The other set of five contains all the prohibitions, namely adultery, murder, theft, false witness, covetousness or lust. (Philo, *Decal.* 51)

Similarly Flavius Josephus, in his comments on a passage in the laws of Moses in which the community is ordered to inflict capital punishment on rebellious children who cannot be disciplined (Deut 21:18–21), says:

God also is distressed at acts of effrontery to fathers (εἰς πατέρας), since He is himself Father of the whole human race (ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς πατὴρ τοῦ παντός ἀνθρώπων γένους ἐστὶ) and regards himself as a partner in the indignity done to those who bear the same title as himself, when they obtain not from their children that which is their due. (Josephus, *A.J.* 4.262)¹⁸

These examples demonstrate two things. First of all, they show that the divine epithet "Father of all" spread not only through Graeco-Roman philosophy, but also, as we shall see in more detail further below, through

¹⁸ Cf. also Josephus' rewriting of Gen 44:18–34, Judah's plea to Joseph for Benjamin's release because otherwise his father, Jacob, will die. In his coverage of this passage in *A.J.* 2.140–158, Josephus supports Judah's appeal for compassion towards his father with a reference to God as "the Father of all" (2.151f.).

Graeco-Roman Judaism. Secondly, they reveal that this term had become so widespread that it imposed itself even on ancient texts where, technically speaking, it had not occurred: this is clear, for instance, from the wording of the analogy between gods and human parents in Plato's *Leges*. Where the Letter to the Ephesians is concerned, too, it seems likely that this comparison between the divine "Father of all" and human fathers may have been at the back of the author's mind. It is very striking that he not only employs the divine epithet *πατήρ πάντων* (4:6) and the notion of "the Father (*πατήρ*), from whom every lineage (*πατριά*) in heaven and on earth takes its name" (3:14f.), which do not occur in the Letter to the Colossians on which his writing is heavily dependent, but also seems deliberately to add the explicit injunction to honour one's father and mother (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16) to his letter (Eph 6:2f.). This, too, is entirely absent from his literary model (cf. Eph 6:1–3 with Col 3:20).¹⁹

2.2.3. *The Stoics*

We have seen above that Presocratic and Platonic philosophy are relevant for our full appreciation of the divine epithet *πατήρ πάντων* as it occurs in Eph 4:6. It is also important, however, to consider the Stoics' understanding of the term, since this makes us more aware of the extension the epithet receives in Eph 4:6: the author goes on to describe this Father of all as the one "who is above all and through all and in all" (*εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατήρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν*). This extension reads as a characteristically Stoic enrichment of the epithet *πατήρ πάντων*, as we can surmise from the following fragment from the Stoics, preserved in Diogenes Laertius. According to Laertius,

The deity, say they, is a living being, immortal, rational, perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil [into him], taking providential care of the World and all that therein is, but he is not of human shape (*μὴ εἶναι μέντοι ἀνθρωπόμορφον*). He is, however, the artificer of the universe and, as it were, the father of all (*εἶναι δὲ τὸν μὲν δημιουργὸν τῶν ὅλων καὶ ὥσπερ πατέρα πάντων*), both in general and in that particular part of him which is all-pervading (*κοινῶς τε καὶ τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ τὸ διήκον διὰ πάντων*), and which is called many names according to its various powers. They give the name *Dia* (*Δία*) because all things are due to (*διὰ*) him (*Δία μὲν γάρ φασι δι' ὃν τὰ πάντα*). (Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 7.147 [cf. SVF 2.1021])

¹⁹ Cf. VAN KOOTEN (2003, 147–149) on the literary dependence between the two writings.

In Stoic thinking, God, as the Father of all (πατήρ πάντων), pervades everything (διὰ πάντων). This is the point of view that is clearly taken in Eph 4:6: God, as the Father of all, is not only above all (ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων), but also through all (καὶ διὰ πάντων), and hence also in all (καὶ ἐν παντί).²⁰

2.2.4. *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy*

In post-Hellenistic philosophy in the period of the early Roman Empire, contemporaneous with the emergence of early Christianity, God continues to be characterized as the Father of all. The varying ways in which this terminology is employed provide further insight into how God's fatherhood is perceived in the Letter to the Ephesians. These sources seem to open at least three viable perspectives, by putting this divine epithet into the larger contexts of the discussion of (a) the continuum between God and both animate and inanimate creation, (b) the full consequences of God's universal fatherhood for individual and ethnic dissimilarities, and (c) the moral and providential nature of God's fatherhood.

(a) *The "Father of All," Father of Animate and Inanimate Creation?*

The writings of the middle-Platonist Plutarch of Chaeronea (ca. 50–120 C.E.) help us to become aware of the following issue. Plutarch shows himself familiar with the well-known passage on "the Maker and Father of this universe" (ὁ ποιητής καὶ πατήρ τοῦδε τοῦ παντός) from Plato's *Tim.* 28C. He also reflects on the two epithets "maker" and "father," suggesting the possibility that the first title, "maker," denotes God's relation to the inanimate world and irrational beings, whereas the second title, "father," indicates his connection with the animate world of gods and humans:

"Why ever did he call the supreme god father and maker of all things?" ("Τί δήποτε τὸν ἀνωτάτω θεὸν πατέρα τῶν πάντων καὶ ποιητὴν προσεῖπεν;" [Plato, *Tim.* 28C]) Was it because he is of gods, the gods that are engendered, and of men father, as Homer names him (πότερον ὅτι τῶν μὲν θεῶν τῶν γεννητῶν καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πατήρ ἐστιν, ὥς Ὅμηρος ἐπονομάζει), but maker of irrational beings and of inanimate things (ποιητής δὲ τῶν ἀλόγων καὶ ἀψύχων;)? For not even of the placenta, says Chrysippus, though it is a product of the seed, is he who provided the seed called father [SVF 2.1158]. Or is it by his customary use of metaphor that he has called him who is responsible for the universe

²⁰ This specific Stoic theology tunes in with Ephesians' generally Stoicizing views on God, cosmos, and community (cf. VAN KOOTEN [2003, 159–166, 175–179]).

its father? (ἢ τῇ μεταφορᾷ χρώμενος, ὥσπερ εἴωθε, τὸν αἴτιον πατέρα τοῦ κόσμου κέκληκεν;) (Plutarch, *Quaest. plat.* 1000E–F)

Plutarch seems to leave the question open, and even offers two alternative answers (see 1001A–C), but his reflections on the relation between God and inanimate and animate nature draws our attention to the question of how the author of Ephesians perceives God's fatherhood. He does not characterize God with a second epithet, but depicts God as "the Father (πατήρ), from whom every lineage or 'fatherhood' (πατριά) in heaven and on earth takes its name" (3:14f.), and as the "one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατήρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν)" (4:4–6). The apparently Stoic-influenced elaboration of the divine Father in the latter passage as being "above all and through all and in all" shows that the whole of creation, both animate and inanimate, is thought to be permeated by God (cf. §2.2.3 above). This is confirmed by the fact that, in the former passage, the author does not hesitate to characterize the whole of creation, both human beings (3:16) and apparently also all the other animate and inanimate objects that populate "the breadth and length and height and depth" (3:18) of the universe, as "lineages" (πατριά) which proceed from the divine Father (πατήρ). It seems that the relation between God the Father of all and creation is a continuum of animate and inanimate entities that descend from God and constitute lineages which can be traced back to God.

This notion of a continuum is also present in other pagan writings. This allows us to see not only the similarities between Ephesians and contemporary thought, but also the way in which the author adapted his material. First, there is a passage in Aelius Aristides' *Εἰς Δία* (*Or.* 43) which is helpful in this respect. In a very similar manner to what we have seen, Aristides (117–after 181 C.E.), a representative of the Second Sophistic, emphasizes the essential, congenital relation between Zeus, as the Father of all, and the whole of animate and inanimate creation. According to Aristides,

After he [i.e., Zeus] had separated matter and had prepared the Universe, he filled it with different kinds of life, creating them all in turn with a view to their harmony and with the care that there be no omission to prevent everything from being perfect and suited to each other, as he was the very creator and founder of the Universe, holding the ends of being and of power. Therefore each one of all of the tribes of the gods has an effluent from the power of Zeus, the father of all things (Ὡς δὲ καὶ θεῶν ὅσα φύλα ἀπορροήν τῆς Διὸς τοῦ πάντων πατρός δυνάμεως), and indeed like Homer's cord (*Ilias* 8.19), all are attached to him and fastened from him (ἕκαστα ἔχει καὶ ἀτεχνῶς κατὰ

τὴν Ὀμήρου σειρὰν ἅπαντα εἰς αὐτὸν διήρηται καὶ πάντα ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἐξήπται), a linkage much fairer than if it were golden or whatever other kind one would conceived of. (Aelius Aristides, *Εἰς Δία* 15 [Or. 43] [trans. Behr])²¹

Having first emphasized that Zeus has fully filled the whole cosmos with all kinds of life, so that it forms an entirely coherent whole, Aristides concludes that “(t)herefore each one of all of the tribes of the gods has an effluent from the power of Zeus, the father of all things (ἀπορροήν τῆς Διὸς τοῦ πάντων πατρός δυνάμεως).” All are indeed “attached to him (εἰς αὐτὸν) and fastened from him (ἐξ αὐτοῦ)” —terminology which, prior to the Letter to the Ephesians, is already used by Paul when he describes God as the “one God, the Father, from whom (ἐξ οὗ) are all things (τὰ πάντα) and to whom (εἰς αὐτόν) we exist” (1 Cor 8:6: εἰς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ, ἐξ οὗ τὰ πάντα καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς αὐτόν), thus preparing for the use of the appellation πατήρ πάντων in Eph 4:6. Near the end of his oration, Aristides returns to this depiction of Zeus as “the Father of all,” and expands on this notion in the following way:

Zeus is the father of all, heaven, earth, gods, mankind, rivers and plants (Ζεὺς πάντων πατήρ καὶ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς καὶ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων καὶ ποταμῶν καὶ φυτῶν). And through him we see and have all that we have. He is the benefactor, overseer, and patron of all. He is the president, governor, and steward of all being and of all things coming into being. He is the giver of all things, he is the creator of all things. When he grants victory in the assemblies and in trials, he is called Zeus of the Assembly, but in battle, of the Rout. When he gives aid in disease and on every occasion, he is Zeus the Savior, he is Zeus of Freedom, he is Zeus of Gentleness, with good reason since he is also the Father (εἰκότως, ἅτε καὶ πατήρ). (Aelius Aristides, *Εἰς Δία* 29f. [Or. 43])²²

Indeed, Aristides’ depiction of Zeus as “the father of all (πάντων πατήρ), heaven, earth, gods, mankind, rivers and plants” shows he has the same understanding of the continuum of animate and inanimate creation with God as reflected in Plutarch and the author of Ephesians. Against this background, however, it becomes even clearer that the latter’s picture of “the Father (πατήρ), from whom every lineage or ‘fatherhood’ (πατριὰ) in heaven and on earth takes its name” (3:14f.) consciously omits “the gods” mentioned by both Plutarch and Aristides. As I mentioned above, nowhere else is such a continuity expressed between the divine πατήρ and

²¹ On the imagery of Homer’s golden chain, see LÉVÊQUE (1959). Cf. also LOVEJOY (1936).

²² Cf. also what Aristides says about Zeus in a different oration, *Αἰγύπτιος* (Or. 36): “we also call him ‘father of men and gods’ (ἐπεὶ καὶ πατέρα αὐτὸν ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε καλοῦμεν), and Homer uses this very expression ... Indeed, if Zeus is ‘the father of men and gods,’ he would also be the father of rivers and of whatever arises in this Universe (καὶ μὴν εἴ γε πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε ἐστὶν ὁ Ζεὺς, καὶ ποταμῶν ἂν εἴη καὶ τῶν γιγνομένων ἐν τῷδε τῷ παντί)” (*Αἰγύπτιος* 104–105 [Or. 36]).

the cosmic πατριά. The reason for the unique way in which this relationship is coined, in a terminological sense, seems to be that this enables the author of Ephesians to remove the gods from this close connection between God and cosmos. Notwithstanding this monotheistic criticism of pagan polytheism, however, he entirely endorses the view that there is an immanent continuum between the divine Father of all and creation, both with regard to animate and inanimate entities; they are nothing less than his πατριά, his lineages.

This impression is strengthened when, in addition to the passages from Plutarch and Aelius Aristides, we take into account one of the orations of Maximus of Tyre (2nd cent. C.E.): the eleventh oration, in which he investigates Plato's teachings about God. Having just outlined that different groups, such as painters, sculptors, poets, and philosophers, and different ethnicities, such as Scythians, Greeks, Persians, and Hyperboreans, all disagree about the "concept of Goodness, or of Evil, or of Shame, or of Nobility," Maximus proceeds, despite this dissent about so many issues, to establish the universality of belief in "one God who is father and king of all":

In the midst of such conflict, such strife, such discord, there is the one belief, the one account, on which every nation agrees: that there is one God who is father and king of all, and with him many other gods, his children, who share in his sovereign power (ὅτι θεὸς εἰς πάντων βασιλεὺς καὶ πατήρ, καὶ θεοὶ πολλοί, θεοῦ παῖδες, συνάροντες θεῷ). This is what Greek and barbarian alike, inlander and coast-dweller, wise man and fool all say. (Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertationes* 11.5)

As regards its insistence on the oneness of the supreme God, its characterization of God as the "father (and king) of all," and its implied view of the continuum between God and the rest of creation, this paragraph is very similar to the cosmological theological passages on God's divine fatherhood in the Letter to the Ephesians, with its emphasis on the "one God and Father of all" (Eph 4:6), "from whom every lineage or 'fatherhood' (πατριά) in heaven and on earth" derives (3:14f.). At the same time, it emerges clearly that the early Christians differ from what Maximus of Tyre considers, amidst all disagreement, to be a universal consensus: that the "many gods," depicted as "God's children," are an integral part of this continuum. Instead of the term "gods" employed by Maximus of Tyre, and also by Plutarch and Aelius Aristides, the author of Ephesians seems to apply the term πατριά in an unfamiliar way, in order to merge the gods and the rest of creation into a new entity: "patriarchal lineages." These lineages are simultaneously both dependent on the divine Father and continuous with him in an uninterrupted cohesion and progression. This also provides the author

with the rationale of how the Church can address the cosmos (Eph 3:10) and make it grow up to Christ, its cosmic head (4:15).²³

(b) *The "Father of All," a Common Father of All Mankind?*

A second issue to emerge from the comparison with the discussion of the "Father of all" in philosophy contemporaneous with the New Testament writings is the question of whether God, as the "Father of all," is indeed radically conceived of as the common father of all mankind, or of some people in particular. What are the full consequences of the notion of God's universal fatherhood in the face of individual and ethnic dissimilarities? This problem comes up in Plutarch's discussion of the figure of Alexander the Great. According to Plutarch, in his biography of the great leader, although Alexander agreed that God was the "common Father of all," he was convinced, because of his own exclusive, divine status, that "the noblest and best" of mankind were more properly speaking the children of God. Having just told us of Alexander's divinization, Plutarch writes:

We are told, also, that he listened to the teachings of Psammon the philosopher in Egypt, and accepted most readily this utterance of his, namely, that all mankind are under the kingship of God, since in every case that which gets the mastery and rules is divine. Still more philosophical, however, was his own opinion and utterance on this count, namely that although God was indeed the common father of all mankind, still, He made peculiarly His own the noblest and best of them (ὡς πάντων μὲν ὄντα κοινὸν ἀνθρώπων πατέρα τὸν θεόν, ἰδίου δὲ ποιούμενον ἑαυτοῦ τοὺς ἀρίστους). In general, he bore himself haughtily towards the barbarians, and like one fully persuaded of his divine birth and parentage, but with the Greeks it was within limits and somewhat rarely that he assumed his own divinity. (Plutarch, *Alex.* 27.6–28.1)

In this way, Alexander thus differentiates between all children of God, and God's noblest and best progeny, of whom he himself is an example.²⁴ It also appears that the full consequences of God's characterization as the "common Father of all" are not drawn with regard to ethnic differences, as the dissimilarity between Greek and barbarians is maintained. This is in marked contrast with the Letter to the Ephesians, where the author emphasizes that all nations, regardless of whether they are Israelite or non-

²³ Cf. VAN KOOTEN (2003, 172–174, 185–187).

²⁴ Cf. also Ps.-Plutarch, *Reg. imp. apophth.* 180D: "In the shrine of Ammon he [i.e., Alexander] was hailed by the prophetic priest as the son of Zeus. 'That is nothing surprising,' said he; 'for Zeus is by nature the father of all, and he makes the noblest his own' ('οὐδέν γε' ἔφη 'θαυμαστόν, 'πάντων μὲν γὰρ ὁ Ζεὺς φύσει πατὴρ ἔστιν, ἑαυτοῦ δὲ ποιεῖται τοὺς ἀρίστους')"

Israelite, have “full access to the divine Father (τὴν προσαγωγὴν... πρὸς τὸν πατέρα)” (Eph 2:18). In the past, the non-Israelites may have been, in political terms, “aliens from the commonwealth (πολιτεία) of Israel, and strangers (ξένοι) to the covenants of promise (ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας)” (2:12) and “outsiders (πάροικοι)” (2:19); now, however, they are full “fellow citizens (συμπολῖται) of the saints and kinsmen (οἰκεῖοι) in the household of God” (2:19). It is the divine Father, who is subsequently defined as “the Father from whom every patriarchal lineage in heaven and on earth takes its name” (3:14f.), the “Father of all” (4:6), who offers all ethnicities full access to himself, and bestows on them equal civic rights. One could say that the full implications of the notion of God’s fatherhood of all, which in Greek contexts were still hampered by the prevailing Greek-barbarian divide, were drawn in early Christianity. As we shall see in the next section, however, when it comes to the understanding of the moral and providential nature of God’s fatherhood, philosophical sources and the Letter to the Ephesians are again united.

(c) *The Moral and Providential Nature of God’s Fatherhood*

Despite some discrepancies regarding the equal status of the nations in relation to the “Father of all mankind,” Plutarch sketches a strongly moral picture of the divine Father. There is even an interesting difference in the evaluation of the sacrifice of a human victim by his father: whereas Flavius Josephus defends the intended sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, Plutarch takes a very different stance with regard to the human sacrifice requested of the fourth-century B.C.E. Theban general Pelopidas. According to Josephus, Abraham, in his speech to Isaac, justified his willingness to sacrifice his son in terms of the tender, careful transmission of the child from his own father to “the Father of all”:

Aye, since thou wast born [out of the course of nature, so] quit thou now this life not by the common road, but sent forth by thine own father (ὑπὸ πατρὸς ἰδίου) on thy way to God, the Father of all (θεῷ τῷ πάντων πατρὶ), through the rites of sacrifice. (Josephus, *A.J.* 1.230)

Plutarch, however, quotes those who regard such a sacrifice as contrary to the essence of God’s fatherhood of all. Pelopidas, being asked in a dream to sacrifice a virgin before a particular battle, was advised by some of his seers and commanders to obey this request.

Others, on the contrary, argued against it, declaring that such a lawless and barbarous sacrifice was not acceptable to any one of the superior beings

above us, for it was not the fabled typhons and giants who governed the World, but the father of all gods and men (οὐ γὰρ τοὺς Τυφῶνας ἐκείνους οὐδὲ τοὺς Γίγαντας ἄρχειν, ἀλλὰ τὸν πάντων πατέρα θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων). Even to believe in the existence of divine beings who take delight in the slaughter and blood of men is perhaps a folly, but if such beings existed, they must be disregarded, as having no power; for only weakness and depravity of soul could produce or harbour such unnatural and cruel desires. (Plutarch, *Pel.* 21.4)

Similarly to the story of Isaac's sacrifice, the human sacrifice is prevented because suddenly an animal presents itself, in this case a filly broken away from the herd of horses, which one of the seers points to as an alternative offered by Heaven (22.1f.). The clear view taken in this story is that human sacrifice is morally wrong, because it is unnatural and cruel, and goes against God's fatherhood of all.

Indeed, God's strongly moral nature as a Father is emphasized by Plutarch, who, in his criticism of the Epicureans in his *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum*, regards it as characteristic of the third and best class of men, in contrast with the views of the classes of the wicked and the majority, that...

...their beliefs about God are pure from error: that he is our guide to all blessings, the father of everything honourable (ὥς πάντων μὲν ἡγεμῶν ἀγαθῶν πάντων δὲ πατὴρ καλῶν ἐκείνός ἐστι), and that he may no more do than suffer anything base. "For he is good, and in none that is good arises envy about aught" [Plato, *Tim.* 29E] or fear or anger or hatred. (Plutarch, *Suav. viv.* 1102D)

The divine Father is completely good, "the Father of everything honourable." And, as the Pseudo-Plutarchian writing *De fato* puts it, within the various layers of divine providence, the "highest and primary providence is the intellection (νόησις) or will (βούλησις), beneficent to all things, of the primary God" (*De fato* 572F), i.e., "of the Father and Artisan of all things (τοῦ πάντων πατρὸς τε καὶ δημιουργοῦ)" (573B).

Similarly, in another middle-Platonist philosopher, Alcinous, a comparable intrinsic link is seen between God's fatherhood and his care, especially with regard to human beings. Alcinous, following Plato's *Timaeus*, states that at the creation...

... there was special concern on the part of the Father of all and of the gods who are his offspring for the human race, as being most akin to the gods (Ἐπεὶ δὲ περὶ τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου γένους ὡς συγγενεστάτου θεοὶς πάλιν φροντὶς ἦν τῷ τε πατρὶ πάντων καὶ τοῖς τούτου ἐκγόνοις θεοῖς). (Alcinous, *Epit.* 16.2)

This is the same moral, providential nature of God as Father as is emphasized in the opening eulogy on God in Eph 1:3–14. God's fatherhood is initially described as his being the father of Jesus Christ, but is then extended to human beings. Ultimately, in the fullness of time, its purpose is to gather up all things:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us (Εὐλογητός ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ εὐλογήσας ἡμᾶς)... just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου)... having destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ (προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν), according to the good pleasure of his will (κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ),... making known to us, with all wisdom and insight, the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). (Eph 1:3–10)

This passage makes frequent use of the providential terminology of God's choosing human beings even before the beginning of the cosmos, pre-determining them to become children of God. God's fatherhood of Jesus Christ is broadened to his fatherhood, by adoption (υἰοθεσία), of all human beings. Implicitly, God's fatherhood of all (Eph 4:6) is already in view here, as these predestined children of God gain knowledge of God's mystery that he will eventually "recapitulate all things" (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα) in Christ. In this way, one could argue, God demonstrates himself to be the πατὴρ πάντων, the "Father of all" (4:6). As in Pseudo-Plutarch's *De fato* (572F), where God's providence is seen either in terms of God's intellection (νόησις) or his will (βούλησις), "being beneficent to all things" (οὔσα εὐεργέτις ἀπάντων), here too God's providence is described either as executed through the bestowal of knowledge, or as in accordance with God's will. It seems that the author's view on God's fatherhood of all as involving a process of recapitulation of all things is not so much Platonically coloured, as Stoically. His view is not dissimilar to the Stoic ideas about the involvement of God in the process of the ἀποκατάστασις τοῦ παντός (SVF 2.625) or the ἀποκατάστασις πάντων (Acts 3:21; Hippolytus, *Haer.* 7.27.4). Such ideas were heavily criticized by Platonists such as Plutarch, who saw them as tantamount to blasphemy: in this way God would be implicated in the changes and vicissitudes of the cosmos, and would

thus become changeable himself (*E Delph.* 388C–389D, 393E–394A).²⁵ From a Stoic point of view, however, this way of thinking explains how God's providence extends throughout the cosmos. It is this conviction which seems to be expressed in the characterization of God in Eph 4:6 as the "Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (πατήρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν)—a depiction which, as we have seen, closely resembles the Stoic conviction that the Father of all pervades all things (*SVF* 2.1021; see §2.2.3 above).

3. THE USE OF THE EPITHET "FATHER OF ALL" IN EARLY JUDAISM

In his application of the divine epithet under discussion, the author of Ephesians does not differ from early Judaism. As we have seen, Jewish authors of the Graeco-Roman period, such as Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus, were also acquainted with the concept and terminology of the divine Father as the Father of all. Both Philo and Josephus, for instance, resemble Plutarch in their application of the moral implications of the analogy between the divine Father and human fathers, as drawn by Plato in his *Leges* (see §2.2.2 above). And as we have also seen, Josephus explained Abraham's consent to sacrifice his son Isaac in terms of transferring custody to the divine Father of all (see §2.2.4 above).

Even the Septuagint translation of Malachi seems to show closely parallels with the terminology of the Father of all. The passage known as the Third Disputation (Mal 2:10–16) is an invective against Judah and Jerusalem as a whole and opens with the accusation that the inhabitants' behaviour has not lived up to the implications of having one God and father:

Has not one God created you? (Οὐχὶ θεὸς εἷς ἔκτισεν ὑμᾶς;) Have you not all one father? (οὐχὶ πατήρ εἷς πάντων ὑμῶν;) Why then has each left behind his brother, profaning the covenant of your fathers (τοῦ βεβηλῶσαι τὴν διαθήκην τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν)? (Mal 2:10 LXX)

Strikingly, here in the LXX, but also in the Hebrew text, a contrast is made between the divine Father and the ancestral fathers, on the one hand, who are both portrayed as in unison, and the present generation, on the other hand, who have disturbed this long established harmony by forsaking their brothers, the other sons of their divine Father. It might be interesting to speculate about the uncertain date of the Hebrew book of

²⁵ Cf. VAN KOOTEN (2003, 164).

Malachi, which is estimated anywhere between the fifth century B.C.E. and 350 B.C.E.²⁶

Another (considerably later) text that contains a reference to the Father of all is the *Vita Adam et Evae*, which may be either Jewish or Christian. When, as an old man, Adam becomes terminally ill, Eve is asked to pray to God until Adam's departure so that they can meet their maker. She addresses God as the "Father of all" (ὁ πάτερ τῶν ἀπάντων), confesses her sin and repents, expressing full awareness of the fact that "all sin in creation has come about through me" (*Vita Adam et Evae* [sub titulo *Apocalypsis Mosis*] 32). It is Eve's recognition of the full cosmic repercussions of her deed that prompts her to invoke God as the Father of all, in a plea for his forgiveness. In a comparable way, the author of Ephesians starts his prayer for his readers with the invocation of "the Father from whom every lineage in heaven and on earth takes its name" (3:14f.).

Before commenting on Philo's extensive use of the epithet of God's divine fatherhood, I shall refer briefly to the singular, but very important occurrence of this epithet in the introductory part of Josephus' *Antiquitates judaicae* (on Josephus' view on God's fatherhood, cf. the contribution by Mladen Popovic to this volume). After he has outlined his motives as a historian, the origin of his work, and the involvement of his patron, and has mentioned the inspirational models for his undertaking and the moral lessons implied in his history, Josephus draws his readers' attention to Moses, as the Jewish lawgiver whose writings are interwoven in Josephus' own narrative (1.1–18). In the opinion of Josephus, it is no coincidence that Moses, although his writings are primarily concerned with laws and historical facts, starts off with an account of God's creation of the universe. The reason for this, Josephus suggests, is that Moses used the study of the nature of God and of his works of creation as a moral paradigm, set up both for himself and for his readers:

Be it known, then, that that sage [i.e., Moses] deemed it above all necessary, for one who would order his own life aright and also legislate for others, first to study the nature of God (θεοῦ πρῶτον φύσιν κατανοῆσαι), and then, having contemplated his works with the eye of reason (καὶ τῶν ἔργων τῶν ἐκείνου θεατὴν τῷ νῷ γενόμενον οὕτως), to imitate so far as possible that best of all models (παράδειγμα τὸ πάντων ἄριστον μιμεῖσθαι καθ' ὅσον οἶόν) and endeavour to follow it. For neither could the lawgiver himself, without this vision, ever attain to a right mind, nor would anything that he should write in regard to virtue avail with his readers, unless before all else they were taught that God, as the Father and Lord of all who beholds all things (πάντων

²⁶ Cf. ROGERSON (2001, 615).

πατήρ τε καὶ δεσπότης ὁ θεὸς ὧν καὶ πάντα ἐπιβλέπων), grants to such as follow Him a life of bliss, but involves in dire calamities those who step outside the path of virtue. (Josephus, *A.J.* 1.19f.)

In this passage, Josephus adopts the Stoic view that man (in this case Moses), by imitating the paradigm of the cosmos, becomes more perfect. According to the Stoic Balbus in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, "man himself... came into existence for the purpose of contemplating and imitating the world" (2.37; cf. 2.140), and in this way also attains to a knowledge of the gods:

And contemplating the heavenly bodies the mind arrives at a knowledge of the gods, from which arises piety, with its comrades justice and the rest of the virtues, the sources of a life of happiness that vies with and resembles the divine existence. (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.153)

This is exactly how Josephus portrays Moses' view of the moral foundations of this universe, a moral order which ultimately derives from, and is maintained by God himself, "the Father and Lord of all who beholds all things."

Besides Josephus, Philo too makes significant use of the epithet of God's fatherhood. Not only does he frequently quote, or allude to the famous passage from Plato's *Timaeus* about the arduous task of discovering "the Maker and Father of this universe" (*Tim.* 28C; see §2.2.2 above), but the epithet also occurs very often elsewhere in Philo's writings.²⁷ These passages are particularly useful for a better understanding of the ways in which the epithet could be employed. First of all, Philo's application of the epithet shows that this topic is part of a larger issue, that of the kinship (συγγένεια) between God and humankind. Secondly, it reveals how the topic relates to the debate on the nature of God which raged between the philosophical schools at the time. Thirdly and lastly, some of Philo's passages also offer direct parallels for the use of the epithet in the Letter to the Ephesians. I will briefly address these various kinds of passages.

To begin with, the notion of God's fatherhood of all necessarily implies that a kinship (συγγένεια) is supposed between God and human beings; they are regarded as συγγενής (of the same kin), as belonging to the same γένος, the same race or kin. In many passages above we have seen that the epithet "Father of all" is indeed often explicitly combined with the

²⁷ See, among many other passages, Philo, *Post.* 175; *Ebr.* 42; *Mut.* 45.

terminology of kinship. As stated by Alcinous, “there was special concern on the part of the Father of all and of the gods who are his offspring (περὶ τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου γένους ὡς συγγενεστάτου θεοῖς), for the human race as being most akin to the gods” (*Epit.* 16.2; see §2.2.4 above). And we have it on the authority of Clement of Alexandria that Pindar already connected his view that “One is the race of gods and men (ἐν ἀνδρῶν, ἐν θεῶν γένος)” with the depiction of God as Father (*Strom.* 5.14.102.2; see §2.2.1 above). Similarly, Josephus portrays God as the “Father of the whole human race (πατήρ τοῦ παντός ἀνθρώπων γένους)” (*A.J.* 4.262; see §2.2.2 above)].

It is Philo, however, who renders this logic explicit in several passages. In Philo’s view, this kinship exists not only between God and humankind, but also between God and such excellent creatures as the heavenly bodies: they too have been endowed with mind, so that there exists a kinship (συγγένεια) between them and “God the Father of all (ὁ πάντων πατήρ θεός)” (*Opif.* 74). Normally, however, this terminology of kinship seems to be reserved for the special relations between God and humankind. With regard to this divine-human kinship, Philo mentions Moses as an exemplary figure “who has had no eyes for kinship to created being (τὴν πρὸς γένεσιν . . . συγγένειαν), but has given himself to be the portion of Him who is ruler and Father of all” (*Mut.* 127). Another exemplary figure, of course, who exhibits the same kinship with God, is Abraham, who left his country of origin, and his own kin, knowing himself absolutely and solely dependent on the God the Father of all:

Would you not say that this lone wanderer without relatives or friends was of the highest nobility, he who craved kinship with God (τῆς πρὸς θεὸν συγγενείας ὀρεχθέντα) and strove by every means to live in familiarity with Him, he who while ranked among the prophets, a post of such high excellence, put his trust in nothing created, but rather in the Uncreated and Father of all (πιστεύσαντα δὲ μηδενὶ τῶν ἐν γενέσει πρὸ τοῦ ἀγενήτου καὶ πάντων πατρός). (Philo, *Virt.* 218)

Although, formally speaking, all human beings should be regarded as belonging to the same kin as God, the latter two passages in Philo show that the kinship between God and humankind needs to be effectuated on the individual level of each human being. In Philo’s view, Abraham and Moses are moral prototypes of such a trust in God. And Philo’s description of Abraham and Moses bears a strong resemblance to the way the Stoic philosopher Epictetus draws his public’s attention to the example set by the demi-god Heracles in his wanderings over the earth. Epictetus, in an attempt to counter the popular reputation of Heracles as a wandering

philanderer who fathered countless children, gives the following moral explanation for his conduct:²⁸

He was even in the habit of marrying when he saw fit, and begetting children, and deserting his children, without either groaning or yearning for them, or as though leaving them to be orphans? It was because he knew that no human being is an orphan, but all men have ever and constantly the Father, who cares for them (ἀλλὰ πάντων ἀ[ι]εὶ καὶ διηγεκῶς ὁ πατήρ ἐστίν ὁ κηδόμενος). Why, to him it was no mere story which he had heard, that Zeus is father of men, for he always thought of Him as his own father, and called Him so (οὐ γὰρ μέχρι λόγου ἡκηκόει, ὅτι πατήρ ἐστίν ὁ Ζεὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅς γε καὶ αὐτοῦ πατέρα ᾤετο αὐτὸν καὶ ἐκάλει), and in all that he did he looked to Him. Wherefore he had the power to live happily in every place. (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.24.15)

This view that the well-known, yet often undervalued and disregarded belief that God is the “Father of men” needs to become lived out in individual lives comes very close to Philo’s conviction that the kinship between God and humankind is not an accomplished fact, but rather something to be striven for, something that is already exemplified in the commendable lives of particular figures.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, despite its sustained focus on God’s fatherhood, the broader notion of the kinship between God and humankind does not feature. Within the New Testament writings, the notion does emerge in Luke-Acts, in Paul’s well-known quotation from the third-century B.C.E. Stoic poet Aratus in his speech for the Council of the Areopagus. Here he cites the congeniality between God and mankind as the reason why one should not worship images:

For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are his offspring (Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν).” Since we are God’s offspring (γένος οὖν ὑπάρχοντες τοῦ θεοῦ), we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. (Acts 17:28f.)

The quotation from the poets is clearly taken from Aratus’ *Phaenomena* (v. 5a: Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος εἰμέν), but as Johan Thom has observed, a very similar verse also occurs in Cleanthes’ *Hymnus ad Iovem* (v. 4a: Ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ γένος ἐσμέν / γενόμεσθα). It is very possible, as Thom suggests, that Paul’s reference to “some of your own poets,” in the plural, indicates that

²⁸ For the attempts of pagan philosophers to moralize Heracles’ life, and for the ensuing polemics between Christians and pagans about Heracles and Christ, see VAN KOOTEN (2010, 25–29).

he had the *Hymnus ad Iovem* in mind as well.²⁹ This quotation is not the only attestation of the notion of the congeniality of God and humans in Luke-Acts; the concept is also implied in Luke's genealogy of Jesus, which eventually goes back to Adam, "the son of God" (Luke 3:38). I would suggest that the idea of "the Father (πατήρ), from whom every patriarchal lineage (πατριά) in heaven and on earth takes its name" in Eph 3:14f. comes close to this notion of the kinship between God and humankind. An important reason, however, for the author of Ephesians' unusual coining of the term πατριά in a cosmological sense may have been that he was not solely interested in the fate of human beings; rather, the focal point of his interest was the cosmic recapitulation of all things, the process of ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα (Eph 1:10). In this sense, a focus on the kinship between God and the human world would have been too narrow for him, prompting him to articulate a direct connection between the Father and "every patriarchal lineage (πατριά) in heaven and on earth," animate and inanimate, nothing less than τὰ πάντα, the entire cosmos.

Secondly, Philo's writings not only make us aware of how the notion of God's fatherhood of all ties in with the related concept of divine-human kinship; they also provide us with insight into the context of the inner-philosophical debates in which these notions were discussed. Above, in our consideration of the moral and providential nature of God's fatherhood, we saw that Ephesians' view on God's recapitulation of all things resembles Stoic ideas about God's reconstitution of the cosmos, an opinion severely criticized by the Platonists because they regarded such a close interaction of God with cosmic processes as an infringement of God's unalterable nature (see §2.2.4 above). This kind of criticism also emerges in Philo's *De aeternitate mundi* with regard to the divine epithet "Father of all." In an account of the various arguments used by the Platonic-Aristotelian proponents of the eternity of the cosmos against the views of the Stoics, Philo presents the following attack on the Stoics:

Moreover if all things (τὰ πάντα) are as they say consumed in the conflagration, what will God be doing during that time? Will He do nothing at all? That surely is the natural inference. For at present He oversees and governs each thing, as though He were indeed legitimate Father of all (ὅτι μὲν γὰρ ἕκαστα ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντων οἷα γνήσιος πατήρ ἐπιτροπεύει), guiding in very truth the chariot and steering the bark of the universe (τὰ σύμπαντα), the defender of the sun and moon and stars whether fixed or wandering, and also the air

²⁹ For the sources of this quotation, and for other references to the συγγένεια between God and humankind in Graeco-Roman sources, see THOM (2005, 34.62f.65).

and the other parts of the World, cooperating in all that is needful for the preservation of the whole and the faultless management of it which right reason demands. But if all things are annihilated (πάντων δ' ἀναιρεθέντων) inactivity and dire unemployment will render His life unworthy of the name and what could be more monstrous than this? I shrink from saying, for the very thought is a blasphemy, that quiescence will entail as a consequence the death of God. (Philo, *Aet.* 83f.)

This anti-Stoic polemic clearly shows that there was intense debate between the philosophical schools about how God as the true Father of all (πάντων... γνήσιος πατήρ), “belonging to the (same) race,” actually oversees and guards the cosmic order. As we have seen, the term “Father of all” is neither specifically Platonic or Stoic, but is used by all philosophical schools, including the Stoics (see §2.2.3). It is not the epithet that is at stake, then, but the differing underlying views about how God exerts his rule as the Father of all. As we have seen, the author of Ephesians takes a more dynamic, Stoic view of God: as the “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατήρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν)” (Eph 4:6).

However, despite these quarrels between Platonists and Stoics, the real controversy about the divine epithet “the Father of all,” as we can also glimpse from Philo’s writings, was with the Epicureans. They categorically denied that anything such as God’s providence existed, and therefore rejected the epithet altogether. In the introductory part of Philo’s *Legatio ad Gaium*, before his accounts of the anti-Jewish tensions in Alexandria, and of Gaius Caligula’s attempts to set up his statue in the temple of Jerusalem, Philo draws attention to the debate with the Epicureans. Although all too often men allow themselves to be “ruled by the present, following erratic sense-perception rather than unerring intelligence,” he points out, they would do better to see things differently, with the eyes of reason (*Legat.* 1–2). This would make them aware of the reality of providence, especially for the Jews:

And yet the present time and the many important questions decided in it are strong enough to carry conviction, even if some have come to disbelieve that the Deity takes thought for men (κἄν εἰ ἄπιστοι γεγόνασιν τινες τοῦ προνοεῖν τὸ θεῖον ἀνθρώπων), and particularly for the suppliants’ race which the Father and King of the Universe and the Source of all things has taken for his portion (καὶ μάλιστα τοῦ ἱκετικοῦ γένους, ὃ τῷ πατρὶ καὶ βασιλεῖ τῶν ὅλων καὶ πάντων αἰτίῳ προσκεκλήρωται). (Philo, *Legat.* 3)

The scepticism described, disbelieving “that the Deity takes thought for men,” is actually the denial of divine providence which is characteristic

of the Epicureans (cf., e.g., Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.50–56, 121–124; contrasted with the Stoics' view on divine providence in 2.57f., 73ff.). This scepticism, as Philo describes it, questions not only the general providence of God with regard to all humankind, but also, in particular, the providential care of “the Father and King of the Universe” for the Jewish people. It is moving that Philo presents Epicurean scepticism not just as a theory, but also as an existential doubt that afflicts Jews themselves in their dark hour of history. This shows that the debate extended beyond the exact interpretation of the epithet of God's fatherhood of all as discussed in the encounters between Platonists and Stoics; its very significance was questioned by the Epicureans, and then also by those crushed by the events of history.

Philo's writings are very useful, finally, for the analogies they offer for the contents and context of the notion of God's fatherhood as applied in Ephesians. (a) First of all, the phrase “the Father (πατήρ), from whom every lineage (πατριά) in heaven and on earth takes its name” is used as the appellation of God at the beginning of the letter's introductory prayer (3:14–21), just as Philo, too, uses the epithet “Father of all” to designate God as the recipient of prayers. According to Philo, during the yearly Day of Atonement, the Jews propitiate “the Father of All with fitting prayers” (ἱλασκόμενοι τὸν πατέρα τοῦ παντὸς αἰσίοις εὐχαῖς [*Mos.* 2.24]). In the *Vita Adam et Evae*, too, as we have seen above, Eve addresses her prayers to the “Father of all” (ὦ πάτερ τῶν ἀπάντων [*Vita Adam et Evae* (sub titulo *Apocalypsis Mosis*) 32]). Not only prayers, but also hymns are addressed to the Father of all. As maintained by Philo, not “buildings and oblations and sacrifices” can express humankind's gratitude to God, but hymns of praise. Alluding to the story in Hesiod's *Theogonia*, Philo relates how God, as “the Author of the universe,” prompts the birth of the Muses and of hymnody (*Plant.* 126–129; cf. Hesiod, *Theog.* 50f.). Indeed, according to Philo, “the hymn of praise to the Father of the universe” (ὁ εἰς τὸν πατέρα τοῦ παντὸς ὕμνος) is the best and most perfect of all truly virtuous actions (*Plant.* 136).

(b) Secondly, just as the author of Ephesians combines the appellation of the divine Father with a subsequent reference to all dimensions of the cosmos (4:18f.), in order to sketch the full scope of God's cosmic rule, Philo, too, emphasizes that the heavenly bodies...

... have not unconditional powers, but are lieutenants of the one Father of All, and it is by copying the example of His government exercised according to law and justice over all created beings that they acquit themselves aright. (Philo, *Spec.* 1.14)

(c) Further, just as this perception of God's cosmic fatherhood is celebrated in the Church, according to the ending of the prayer (Eph 3:21: "to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever, Amen"), so its Jewish counterpart, the Temple, is "dedicated to the Father and Ruler of all" (Philo, *Mos.* 2.88).

(d) Finally, the emphasis which the author of Ephesians places on the oneness of the divine Father, in proclaiming him the "one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν [Eph 4:6]), is paralleled in Philo's description of the conversion of those "who did not at the first acknowledge their duty to reverence the Founder and Father of all, yet afterwards embraced the creed of one instead of a multiplicity of sovereigns" (Philo, *Virt.* 179). This is very similar to the stress placed on the oneness of God by philosophers such as Maximus of Tyre (see §2.2.4 above).

The importance attached in Judaism to the epithet "Father of all" is also reflected in the fact that the second-century C.E. pagan Platonist philosopher Numenius of Apamea seems to be aware of the accordance in this respect between Judaism and ancient philosophy. He even goes so far as to suggest that "the Father of all the gods" is worshipped in the Jerusalem temple. According to an ancient testimony,

Numenius says that the power of this god is not to be shared by any other, and that he is the father of all the gods (ὁ δὲ Νουμήνιος ἀκοινώνητον αὐτὸν καὶ πατέρα πάντων τῶν θεῶν εἶναι λέγει), and that he deems any other god unworthy of having a share in his cult. (Numenius, *Fragmenta* 56, ed. DES PLACES [1973]; Lydus, *De mensibus* 4.53, trans. STERN [1974–1984, no. 367])

This passage is evidence of pagan interest in the Jewish God of Jerusalem, and of pagans identifying him with the Father of all the gods.³⁰ This is not to claim that the appellation is exclusive: Numenius also regarded Mithras as "the Creator and Father of all" (Numenius, frg. 60). Nevertheless, it is coherent with Numenius' view that Plato's teaching was related to the ancient wisdom of the Brahmins, Magi, Egyptians, and Jews. Within this historiographical perspective, Numenius could develop a great appreciation for the Jewish God as the Father of all gods.³¹

³⁰ Cf. DÖRRIE (2008, 54–55 [text no. 187.4] and 315–316 [commentary]).

³¹ Cf. also, among Christian authors, Clement of Alexandria, who shares the same historiography, stating that the philosophers, including Plato, are dependent upon Moses (*Strom.* 5.14.92.3, also with reference to the notion of "the Maker and Father of this universe" in Plato's *Tim.* 28C). On Numenius' view on Judaism, Moses, and the Jewish God,

4. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: THE POLEMICS BETWEEN CELSUS AND THE CHRISTIANS ABOUT THE “FATHER OF ALL”

As we have seen, the epithet “Father of all” is firmly rooted in Graeco-Roman traditions, was applied in ancient philosophy, and had also come to be used by Jewish authors as an appellation for God. In Christian writings, it is first attested (in the extant literature) in the Letter to the Ephesians. Within the full outline of the notion of the divine cosmic Father from the Presocratics up to philosophers of the first/second century C.E., such as Plutarch, Aelius Aristides, Maximus of Tyre, and Alcinous, I wish, finally, to focus on the middle-Platonist Celsus. In his *Ἀληθὴς λόγος*, his attack on early Christians which is thought to date to 176 C.E., he also criticizes their use of the epithet “Father of all.” I shall briefly comment on Celsus’ critical remarks and on their rebuttal by Origen in his *Contra Celsum*, written ca. 249 C.E. This polemic confirms that Christians were involved in a common theological discourse with their ancient philosophical contemporaries. Whereas Numenius had no difficulty in ascribing the divine epithet to the Jewish God, Celsus took great objection to its application by Christians. It seems that this controversy between Celsus and Origen centred on two issues: (1) the question of whether God can easily be known as the Father of all or is inherently nameless and indescribable; and (2) the question of how this supreme God relates to the other gods.

The question of whether God is nameless, first of all, arises from the context in which Plato uses the epithet “Father of this universe” in his *Timaeus*. As we have seen above (see §2.2.2), Plato states the following:

Now to discover the Maker and Father of this universe were a task indeed; and having discovered Him, to declare Him unto all men were a thing impossible (τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντός εὐρεῖν τε ἔργον καὶ εὐρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν). (Plato, *Tim.* 28C)

In Celsus’ reading of this passage, Plato is emphasizing that it is virtually impossible for the non-educated masses to find God and to call God “the Maker of the Father of this universe,” since the First Being is actually nameless (*ἄκατονόμαστος*) and hence indescribable (*ἄρρητος*). As we have it on the authority of Origen, Celsus argues as follows:

see BURNYEAT (2006, 139–168). Cf. also BOYS-STONES (2001, 99–122) on Platonism’s relation to primitive wisdom,” esp. 113f.116 on Numenius. For a collection of ancient philosophical, Jewish, and Christian texts on the relation between Plato and Moses, see DÖRRIE (1990, 190–219 [text nos. 69.1–4, 70.1–7, and 71] and 480–505 [commentary]).

Then after this he [i.e., Celsus] refers us to Plato as a more effective teacher of the problems of theology (ἐπὶ ἐνεργέστερον διδάσκαλον τῶν θεολογίας πραγμάτων ἀναπέμπει ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα), quoting his words from the *Timaeus* as follows: “Now to find the Maker and Father of this universe is difficult, and after finding him it is impossible to declare him to all men” [Plato, *Tim.* 28C]. Then he [i.e., Celsus] adds to this: *You see how the way of truth is sought by seers and philosophers, and how Plato knew that it is impossible for all men to travel it* (ὁρᾶτε, ὅπως ζητεῖται θεοπρόποις καὶ <φιλοσόφοις> ἀληθείας ὁδὸς καὶ ὡς ᾗδει Πλάτων, ὅτι ταύτη βῆναι πᾶσιν ἀδύνατον). *Since this is the reason why wise men have discovered it, that we might attain some conception of the nameless First Being that manifests himself either by synthesis with other things, or by analytical distinction from them, or by analogy, I would like to teach about that which is otherwise indescribable* (ἐπειδὴ δὲ τοῦτου χάριν ἐξηγῆται σοφοῖς ἀνδράσιν, ὡς ἂν τοῦ ἀκατονομάστου καὶ πρώτου λάβοιμὲν τινα ἐπίνοιαν διαδηλοῦσαν αὐτὸν ἢ τῇ συνθέσει τῇ ἐπὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἢ ἀναλύσει ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ἢ ἀναλογία, τὸ ἄλλως ἄρρητον θέλω <μέ>ν διδάξαι). *But I would be amazed if you were able to follow, as you are completely bound to the flesh and see nothing pure* (θαυμάσαιμι δ’ ἂν, εἰ ἀκολουθήσαι δυνήσεσθε παντελῶς τῇ σαρκὶ ἐνδεδεμένοι καὶ μηδὲν καθαρὸν βλέποντες). (Celsus, *Ἀληθῆς λόγος* 7.42 [trans. Chadwick])

In this passage Celsus raises the familiar question of whether God “the Father of all” is indeed a common father of all humankind, or of one class of man in particular: “the noblest and best of them” (as Plutarch put it, albeit in a very different context, with regard to Alexander the Great; see §2.2.4 above). What Celsus implies is that “the Maker and Father of this universe” cannot be found by all men, but only by an exclusive, elitist class of “seers and philosophers,” who apply the methods of synthesis, analysis, and analogy.³² It is only thanks to this class that the rest of humankind is able to acquire at least “some conception” of God who is “nameless” and “otherwise indescribable.” The Christians, however, according to Celsus, deny themselves access to this knowledge about “the Maker and Father of this universe,” which is mediated through the philosophers, because they “are completely bound to the flesh.”

Origen responds to Celsus’ criticism by challenging his interpretation of the passage from Plato’s *Tim.* 28C: He counters that “when Plato says that it is impossible for the man who has found the maker and father of the universe to declare him to all, he does not say that he is indescrib-

³² On God as approachable only through the methods of abstraction, analogy, and intuition, cf. Alcinous, *Epit.* 10.5f. (the three ways of conceiving God), and the commentary by John Dillon; see DILLON (1993, 109f.). Cf. CHADWICK (1953, 429–430n4). See also DÖRRIE (2008, 76–79 [text no. 190.1: Celsus] and 363–366 [commentary]; 88f. [text no. 190.3: Alcinous] and 377–381 [commentary]). For the difficulty of finding God, see DÖRRIE (2008, 70–77 [text nos. 189.1–4] and 353–362 [commentary]).

able and nameless, but that although he can be described it is only possible to declare him to a few" (Cels. 7.43). Celsus' interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* is also expressed by Velleius, the Epicurean speaker in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, according to whom Plato, in the *Timaeus*, "says that it is impossible to name the Father of this universe" (*patrem huius mundi nominari neget posse* [Nat. d. 1.30]). The notion of the ineffability of God also occurs in the writings of Alcinous (*Epit.* 10.3f.), Dio Chrysostom (*Dei cogn.* 78 [Or. 12]), Maximus of Tyre (*Dissertationes* 2.10; 11.9), and Apuleius (*De Platone et eius dogmate* 1.5).³³ Earlier in his *Contra Celsum*, Origen had already responded to Celsus' assertion that God "cannot be named":

The assertion that He cannot be named also needs precise definition (Καὶ τὸ οὐκ ὀνομαστὸς δὲ διαστολῆς δεῖται). If he [i.e., Celsus] means that none of the descriptions by words or expressions can show the attributes of God, the affirmation is true. . . . But if you take the word to mean that it is possible by names to show something about His attributes in order to guide the hearer and make him understand God's character, in so far as some of His attributes are attainable by human nature, then it is not wrong at all to say that He can be named. (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.65)

Hence, Origen claims, God can be named, insofar as some of the divine attributes that are attainable by human nature tell us something about God's character. We may assume that God's fatherhood is also such an attribute.

It may well be that a similar approach to Origen's is also reflected in the Letter to the Ephesians, if in a far less technical, intuitive way. On the one hand, in his prayer to the cosmic Father, the author of Ephesians shows himself conversant with the view that God's power goes beyond anything which the mind can perceive (Eph 3:20); at the same time, however, he regards "all patriarchal lineages" which constitute the full cosmic reality as being named after the Father: God is "the Father (πατήρ), after whom every lineage (πατριά) in heaven and on earth is called (ὀνομάζεται)" (3:14f.). Even though he has said, at the beginning of his letter, that God has installed Christ "above every name that is named" (ὑπεράνω . . . παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου [1:20f.; cf. Phil 2:9]), from this later passage in 3:14f. it transpires that the author postulates a continuity, or correspondence

³³ For these references, see CHADWICK (1953, 380n7); TRAPP (1997, 23n31). Cf. also Philo, *Somn.* 1.67; Porphyry, *In Platonis Parmenidem commentaria (fragmenta)* section 1; Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* vol. 1, p. 312. On the ineffability of God, see also DÖRRIE (2008, 60f. [text no. 188.1: Alcinous], 330 and 335 [commentary]; 66f. [text no. 188.2: Apuleius] and 346f. [commentary]). Cf. also DILLON (1993, 103).

between God and cosmos, which is expressed through the attribute of fatherhood. And in line with this, both Origen and the author of Ephesians maintain that access to the divine Father is not restricted to a particular class of man, but is open to all (Eph 2:18; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.42, cf. 6.1f.; cf. Justin Martyr, 2 *Apol.* 10.6).

Secondly, in his criticism of the Christians' use of the epithet of God's fatherhood, Celsus also targets the question of how this supreme God relates to the other gods. In Celsus' view, the Christians undermine the supremacy of "the Father of all" by talking so much about Jesus:

Then again Celsus says: *If you taught them [i.e., the Christians] that Jesus is not his Son, but that God is father of all, and that we really ought to worship him alone (οὐκ ἔστιν οὗτος ἐκεῖνου παῖς, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνός γε πάντων πατήρ, ὃν μόνον ὡς ἀληθῶς δεῖ σέβειν), they would no longer be willing to listen to you unless you included Jesus as well, who is the author of their sedition. Indeed, when they call him Son of God, it is not because they are paying very great reverence to God, but because they are exalting Jesus greatly.* (Celsus, *Ἀληθῆς λόγος* 8.14)

In his criticism, Celsus rebukes the Christians for including Jesus in the worship which should be only addressed to God, as "Father of all." Yet Celsus himself seems to be inconsistent: besides God, he also worships other gods, such as Helios and Athena, claiming that "the worship of God becomes more perfect by going through them all" (Celsus, *Ἀληθῆς λόγος* 8.66). In his response, Origen criticizes the mythological gods such as Athena, but does make an attempt to connect Helios with God as the Father of all:

We praise Helios [i.e., the sun] as a noble creation of God, which keeps God's laws and hears the saying, "Praise the Lord, sun and moon" [Ps 147:3], and with all its power praises the Father and Creator of the universe (καὶ ὅση δύναμις ὑμνοῦν τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν δημιουργὸν τοῦ παντός). (Origen, *Cels.* 8.66)

This resembles the polemic we noted above between the author of Ephesians and authors such as Maximus of Tyre: Ephesians insisting on the unity of the "one God and Father of all" (4:6) and the continuity between this cosmic Father and the rest of reality (3:14f.), whereas Maximus and his like, though they too emphasize the oneness of God, continue to talk of the "many gods" (*Dissertationes* 11.5; see §2.2.4 above). Within a century of the Letter to the Ephesians, Celsus felt the need to attack the Christians' appropriation of the epithet "Father of all," of which Eph 4:6 is the earliest surviving example. It shows that Christians, even if they emerged from a Jewish background, became attracted to this pagan epithet of God,

like many other Jews of this period. Alternatively, if they converted from paganism to Christianity, they perhaps remained captivated by this divine appellation. Either way, Christians are revealed to be fully immersed in a discourse about the true nature of God and his relation to humankind and the universe that extended throughout ancient philosophy and religion.

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