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A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php

THE ORIGINAL FORM OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

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JUST half a century ago Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, then *ordentlicher Professor der Theologie* in Heidelberg, in the most thorough-going treatment which the epistle to the Colossians has ever received, reduced its original text to the following proportions:¹

Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) καὶ (τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀγίους διὰ) τὴν ἐλπίδα (τὴν ἀποκαμένην ὑμῶν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, ἣν προηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας) τοῦ

¹ H. J. Holtzmann: *Kritik der Epheser- und Kolosserbriefe auf Grund einer Analyse ihres Verwandtschaftsverhältnisses*. Leipzig, 1872. The reconstructed text is given on pp. 325—330. It is reprinted by von Soden, in more convenient and corrected form (as above) in the *Jahrbücher für Protestantische Theologie* 1886, pp. 323—325. The four phrases in parenthesis in the first sentence Holtzmann, moved by criticisms of J. Koester, had in 1877 removed as not original, and the phrase in brackets he had restored as genuine. For these corrections, cf. Holtzmann in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 1877, col. 612, and von Soden *cf. supra*, p. 323, note 1. It may be added that the present article was written in 1922, as a slight recognition of Holtzmann's service, on the semi-centennial of his publication.

εὐαγγελίου τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς (καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ, καὶ ἔστιν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν) ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας [ἤκούσατε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ καθὼς] ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὃς ἔστιν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῶν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην.

Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς οὐ καυόμεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, περιπατῆσαι ὑμᾶς ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν καταλλάξαι καὶ ὑμᾶς ποτὲ ὄντας ἐχθροὺς ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τοῖς πονηροῖς, νυνὶ δὲ κατηλλάγητε ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου, εἶ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει ἐδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ὃ καὶ κοπιῶ ἀγωνιζόμενος κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἐμοί.

Char. 2. Θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ἠλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω περὶ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ ὅσοι οὐχ ἑώρακαν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου, ἵνα παρακληθῶσιν αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν. τοῦτο δὲ λέγω ἵνα μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς παραλογίζηται. εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῇ σαρκὶ ἄπειμι, ἀλλὰ τῷ πνεύματι σὺν ὑμῖν εἰμι, χαίρων καὶ βλέπων ὑμῶν τὴν τάξιν καὶ τὸ στερέωμα τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ὑμῶν.

Ὡς οὖν παρελάβετε τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον, ἐν αὐτῷ περιπατεῖτε, καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ. βλέπετε μὴ τις ἔσται ὑμᾶς ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστὸν, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ περιετμήθητε περιτομῇ ἀχειροποιήτῳ, συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτίσματι, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε διὰ τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν· καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς παραπτώμασι συνεζωοποίησεν σὺν αὐτῷ, χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα, ἐξαλείψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν καὶ αὐτὸ ἤρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου, προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ.

Μὴ οὖν τις ὑμᾶς κρινέτω ἐν βρώσει καὶ ἐν πόσει ἢ ἐν μέρει ἑορτῆς ἢ νομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων, εἰκῆ φυσιοῦμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ. Εἰ ἀπεθάνετε σὺν Χριστῷ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου, τί ὡς ζῶντες ἐν κόσμῳ δογματίζεσθε· μὴ

ἀψῆ μηδὲ γεύσῃ μηδὲ θίγῃ, ἃ ἔστιν εἰς φθορὰν τῇ ἀποχρήσει
πρὸς πλῆσμονὴν τῆς σαρκός;

Char. 3. Ἀπεθάνετε γάρ, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν κέρυπται σὺν τῷ
Χριστῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ. Ἐνδύσασθε οὖν ὡς ἐκλεκτοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁγιοὶ
καὶ ἠγαπημένοι σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρισμοῦ, χρηστότητα, ταπεινο-
φροσύνην, πραύτητα, μακροθυμίαν, ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων καὶ
χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς εἰάν τις πρὸς τινα ἔχη μομφήν, καθὼς καὶ
ὁ Χριστὸς ἐχαρίσατο ὑμῶν οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς. καὶ πάν ὁ τι εἶν
ποιῆτε ἐν λόγῳ, ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ, πάντα ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ,
εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ δι' αὐτοῦ.

Char. 4. Τῇ προσευχῇ προσκαρτερεῖτε γρηγοροῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ,
προσευχόμενοι ἅμα καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῶν θύραν
τοῦ λόγου λαλῆσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆ-
σαι. Ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω, τὸν καιρὸν ἐξα-
γοραζόμενοι. ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν πάντοτε ἐν χάριτι, ἀλατι ἡρτυ-
μένος, εἰδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἐκάστῃ ἀποκρίνεσθαι.

Τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ πάντα γνωρίσει ὑμῶν Τύχιμος ὁ ἀγαπητὸς
ἀδελφὸς καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος καὶ σύνδουλος ἐν Κυρίῳ, ὃν ἔπεμψα
πρὸς ὑμᾶς εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἵνα γνῶ τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν καὶ παρα-
κάλῃ τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν.

Ἀσπάζεταιται ὑμᾶς Ἀρίσταρχος ὁ συναικμαλωτὸς μου, καὶ
Μάρκος ὁ ἀνεψιὸς Βαρνάβα, περὶ οὗ ἐλάβετε ἐντολὰς, εἰάν
ἔλθῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, δεξασθε αὐτὸν, καὶ Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰούσ-
τος, οἱ ὄντες ἐκ περιτομῆς. οὗτοι μόνον συνεργοὶ εἰς τὴν βασι-
λείαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅτινες ἐγενήθησάν μοι παρηγορία. ἀσπάζεταιται
ὑμᾶς Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, δούλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, πάντοτε
ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν. μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτῷ ὅτι ἔχει πολὺν
πόνον ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἰεραπόλει.

ἀσπάζεταιται ὑμᾶς Λουκᾶς ὁ ἰατρός ὁ ἀγαπητὸς καὶ Δημᾶς.

ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ Παύλου.

μνημονεύετέ μου τῶν δεσμῶν.

ἡ χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν.

Which is, being translated:³

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God,
and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren

³ The *American Revised Version* is followed, so far as Holtzmann's text allows.

in Christ *that are* at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, having heard of your faith (in Christ Jesus) and of (the love which ye have toward all the saints, because of) the hope (which is laid up for you in the heavens, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth) of the gospel which is come unto you (even as it is also in all the world, and it is bearing fruit and increasing, as *it doth* in you also) since the day [ye heard the grace of God, even as] ye learned of Epaphras our beloved fellow-servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared unto us your love.

For this cause we also do not cease to pray for you, that ye walk worthily of God, who delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the Kingdom of his Son. For it was the good pleasure *of the Father* to reconcile also you, being in time past enemies in your evil works, yet now ye have been reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, if so be that ye continue in the faith, stedfast and not moved away from the gospel whereof I Paul was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which was given me to you-ward, to fulfil the word of God, whereunto I labor also, striving according to his working which worketh in me.

Chap. 2. For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face, that their hearts may be comforted. And this I say, that no one may delude you. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in him, even as ye were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ; for in him ye were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands; having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through the working of God who raised him from the dead. And you,

being dead through your trespasses, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having blotted out the bond that was against us, which was contrary to us; and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross.

Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances: Handle not, nor taste, nor touch, which things are to perish with the using unto the indulgence of the flesh?

Chap. 3. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. Put on, therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as Christ also forgave you, so also *do* ye. And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Chap. 4. Continue stedfastly in prayer, watching therein, withal praying for us also, that God may open unto us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer each one.

All my affairs shall Tychicus make known unto you, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord; whom I have sent unto you for this very purpose; that he may know your state and that he may comfort your hearts.

Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (touching whom ye received commandments; if he come unto you, receive him), and Jesus that is called Justus, who are of the circumcision; these only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, men that have been a comfort unto me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, saluteth you, always striving for you. For I bear him witness that he hath much labor for you and for

them in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician and Demas salute you.

The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you.

Johannes Weiss wrote, more than twenty years ago,³ "Es ist sehr bedauerlich, dass keiner der neuesten Kommentare eine genaue *exegetische* Auseinandersetzung mit Holtzmann's Interpolationshypothese noch für nötig hält." What was true in 1900 continues to be true in 1922. The commentaries cite Holtzmann's hypothesis in their introductions as an erroneous and antiquated view, and go on to explain the text as if its integrity had not been seriously questioned. It is probable that few present-day students have really worked through Holtzmann's book, and that fewer still will do so in the future. The one thorough-going examination which it has received was from Hermann von Soden, who in a series of articles in the *Jahrbücher für Protestantische Theologie* for 1885,⁴ tested carefully Holtzmann's decisions in detail, verse by verse, almost word by word. Holtzmann, starting from the obvious literary parallels between Colossians and "Ephesians," had become convinced that, whereas in general the priority belonged to Colossians, yet in certain not inconsiderable passages the "Ephesians" text was the original. The conclusion of his investigation was, briefly, this: An original short (less than half our present text) letter of Paul to the Colossians had been used by a later Paulinist as model for writing "Ephesians;" then from "Ephesians" the same writer interpolated extensively the original Colossians text.

This somewhat complicated procedure seems not very probable outside the field of literary theory, and von Soden was able to show that even as a literary theory it would not hold water. The resultant "original" text, as given above, was a very unconvincing piece of Greek composition, as the English translation will indicate even to the layman. But von Soden himself, after the most conscientious examination of the text, was forced to

³ *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, Sept. 29, 1900, col. 555.

⁴ Pages 320—368, 497—542, 672—702.

agree with Holtzmann that Col. 1 15-20 was a later addition to what Paul had written. He further found certain interpolations in the second chapter: the whole of verses 10 and 15, and in verse 18 the words *θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρασκειᾷ τῶν ἀγγέλων ἃ ἰόρακεν ἐμβατεύων*, a famous *cruz interpretum*. But six years later, when he published his commentary on Colossians,⁶ he had grown more conservative in his analysis, and rejected as a probable gloss only the words *τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσται· καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν* in 1 16 b-17, and these on grounds of composition and style. After fourteen years, however, von Soden reverted to his original view that the whole passage 1 15-20 was an interpolation, again mainly on grounds of composition.⁸ This seems to have been his final view.

A view similar to Holtzmann's had been suggested by Weisse and developed in some detail by Hitzig.⁷ Adolf Hausrath briefly gave his adherence to the same conclusions.⁸ Otto Pfeiderer considered our present Colossians a later composition, probably on the basis of a genuine letter of Paul to this church, which it is impossible now, however, to reconstruct.⁹ In the same year in which Holtzmann's book appeared W. Hönig published an article strongly defending the priority of the text of Colossians over against that of "Ephesians," at the close of which he said,¹⁰ "Wir schliessen mit der einfachen Aufstellung der Ansicht, deren Begründung wir der Zukunft überlassen, dass auch der Kolosserbrief interpoliert ist, und dass alle diejenigen Stellen als Interpolationen zu betrachten sind, von denen nachzuweisen ist, dass

⁶ Holtzmann's *Hand-Commentar*, Vol. III, Part I: Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, Pastorals, by von Soden, 1891, 2nd Ed. 1893, *ad loc.*

⁷ *Urchristliche Literaturgeschichte*, 1905, pp. 51, 53. Eng. tr. p. 105.

⁸ As early as 1856. References to Weisse and Hitzig in Holtzmann, pp. 22 f., notes.

⁹ *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte: Die Zeit der Apostel*. 2nd Ed., 1875. Vol. II, p. 358. Eng. tr. 1895, Vol. IV, p. 118.

¹⁰ *Das Urchristentum*, 1887, pp. 683 f. More confidently in the 2nd Ed., 1902. Vol. I, pp. 190 f. Eng. tr. 1906, Vol. I, pp. 268 f.

¹¹ W. Hönig: Über das Verhältnis des Epheserbriefes zum Briefe an die Kolosser. In *Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie*, Vol. XV (1872); quot. from p. 87.

sie vom Verfasser des Epheserbriefes nicht gekannt sind." That Hönlig ever returned to the subject, however, does not appear.

Johannes Weiss, reviewing T. K. Abbott's commentary on Ephesians and Colossians, in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (September 29, 1900) insists that any serious exegesis of the text of Colossians leads to the conclusion, "dass eine Paulinische Grundlage in Überarbeitung vorliegt." The *Bearbeiter*, if he were not the *autor ad Ephesios*, was at least dependent on "Ephesians," and wrote to catholicize the Colossian letter at the time when it was taking its place in the growing Pauline canon and needed to be adapted for the use of the whole church. As samples of the interpolated passages, Weiss (in part following Holtzmann) cites *οὐδ' ἀκούσατε . . . τὸν οὐρανόν* in 1 23, *ἢ προηκούσατε . . . καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν* in 1 5 f., *καὶ θεοῦ . . . ἐν σαρκί* in 2 1; the pronoun following *καρδία* in 2 2 he thinks was originally *ὑμῶν* instead of *αὐτῶν*. In *Das Urchristentum* (1914) Weiss expresses himself more briefly to similar effect, but he treats the anti-heretical passages of chapter two and the Christological passages of chapter one without reserve as Paul's own.¹¹

Professor Ezra P. Gould of the Episcopal Divinity School in Philadelphia, in his *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*,¹² omitted any mention of Colossians and Ephesians in his presentation of Paul's thought, treating their Christology later as an expression of post-Pauline Alexandrianism in the church. For Colossians, however, he assumed composite authorship, the "practical parts" being Pauline, the Christological and anti-heretical passages being due to a subsequent editor. Gould argues that the Colossian church is too young to be invaded by a heresy of the indicated type, and that the high doctrine urged in rebuttal is not attributable to Paul.

A further notable contribution to this discussion was made by Wilhelm Soltau in 1905.¹³ This critic offers a radical reconstruction of the text of Colossians by the excision of two groups of passages. The first group consists of a considerable number

¹¹ Pp. 109 f., 296—298, 370 f.

¹² Published 1901, cf. especially pp. 134 f.

¹³ Die ursprüngliche Gestalt des Kolosserbriefes, in *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, Vol. 78 (1905), pp. 521—562.

of brief phrases which were originally only interpretative glosses and parallels written on the margin of a manuscript, later copied in as a part of the text. Not a few of these, notably those of greater length, were based on passages in "Ephesians." The other excisions are two extended passages (1 21-29 and 3 5-4 9) which come from the letter to the Laodiceans and which, surviving the loss of that letter as a whole, formed the basis for the pseudo-Pauline "Ephesians." The reconstructions offered by Soltan of the original Colossians and the original Laodiceans are extremely interesting—and extremely precarious. Most students seem to have felt that the complicated literary processes underlying these reconstructions tax our powers of belief quite as much as the acceptance of the letter as a substantial unity.

And yet any serious examination of the text must compel the conviction that it is *not* a perfect unity. Apparently all students agree that we no longer possess this letter just as Paul indited it. Westcott and Hort candidly remark, "This epistle, and more especially its second chapter, appears to have been ill-preserved in ancient times."¹⁴ Similarly J. O. F. Murray remarks that "in one or two places, notably in 2 18 and 23, it is difficult, if not impossible, to accept any of the attested readings,"¹⁵ and L. W. Grensted agrees that "in the second chapter the difficulty of translating is very great, and it is possible that in some cases the text has suffered from corruption lying further back than all our existing manuscripts."¹⁶ James Moffatt concedes that "the possibility of such changes being made during the second century is to be admitted, especially as scribes had always the temptation of conforming Colossians to Ephesians."¹⁷ Sanday also had suggested such primitive textual corruption as the plausible explanation of insurmountable difficulties in the present form of the letter.¹⁸ Granted, then, that the text has suffered, it is

¹⁴ Westcott-Hort: *The New Testament in the Original Greek*. Vol. II, p. 127.

¹⁵ Article "Colossians," in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*.

¹⁶ Article "Colossians," in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*.

¹⁷ *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, 1915, p. 156. On this page Moffatt gives some account of various suggested emendations.

¹⁸ Article "Colossians," in *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*, 2nd Ed., 1893.

open to us to inquire how seriously and in what way. The step from "primitive corruptions" in certain verses to such thorough reshaping as Holtzmann or Soltau suggests is only quantitatively important. If their reconstructions have not stood the test of time and of the renewed study of other investigators, they have at least made all future occupation with the problem easier, and it is only a pious tribute to their worth—in grateful memory especially of Holtzmann—when one who has entered into their labors modestly ventures another attempt at solution.

In the first place, the present writer is convinced of the hopelessness and essential fallaciousness of the processes of detailed literary criticism by which the interpolated passages are to be precisely distinguished from the original text. The *criteria* employed are inevitably far too subjective; in the hands of each new investigator they lead to results widely divergent from those of every predecessor. Other considerations, chiefly derived from the general content of the letter rather than from its specific phrasing, and bearing on the historical situation involved, must give the decision. "Ephesians" may be practically ignored, as it is (so the writer is convinced) in its entirety pseudo-Pauline, dependent on Colossians but not a source for it, valuable chiefly in this connection as its earliest commentary.

What, then, does the letter indicate as to the historical situation behind it? What of place and time of writing? Recent investigations have made it overwhelmingly probable that Colossians, with Philemon and Philippians, came not from Rome or Caesarea, but from a period of imprisonment in Ephesus during the third journey. The literature of this demonstration is increasing. The present writer tried to present its main contentions in the concluding volume of the *American Journal of Theology*.¹⁹ The bibliography there given can now be considerably augmented, notably by Paul Feine's detailed and highly persuasive argument as to Philippians.²⁰ The scholarship of the future is apt to reconstruct its picture of the apostolic age at

¹⁹ C. R. Bowen: Are Paul's Prison-Letters from Ephesus? *American Journal of Theology*, Vol. 24 (1920).

²⁰ Paul Feine: *Die Abfassung des Philipperbriefes in Ephesus*. Gütersloh. 1916.

this point, to take leave of Paul where Acts takes leave of him, and to regard the great letter to the Romans, with the contemporary note to Ephesus which in our Bibles forms its sixteenth chapter, as his latest extant communications. Without laboring this point further here, since it has been elaborated elsewhere, let us begin to read Colossians as the product of the Ephesian period. Immediately much of its phraseology becomes luminous and a perfectly clear historical situation confronts us. During Paul's three-year stay in the metropolis of Asia, not only was the city itself evangelized, but "all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19 10). Demetrius complains (Acts 19 26) "that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people." In writing First Corinthians from Ephesus, to his own greetings Paul adds (16 19) those of "the churches of Asia." In such passages as Rom. 16 5 and 2 Cor. 1 8 he refers to his work during this period as done in "Asia" rather than in "Ephesus." This evangelization of the province was probably, however, for the most part the work of his colleagues and assistants rather than of Paul himself. With him at this time were Aquila and Priscilla (1 Cor. 16 19; Acts 18 26), Timothy and Erastus (Acts 19 22), Gaius and Aristarchus (Acts 19 29), Sosthenes (1 Cor. 1 1), Titus (2 Cor. 8 *passim*), Apollos (1 Cor. 16 12), besides Ephesian friends like Tychicus and Trophimus (Acts 20 4), visitors like Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus from Corinth (1 Cor. 16 17), who at home (1 Cor. 16 15-18) are vigorous workers for the church, and doubtless are such abroad. Other such visitors, "brothers, fellow-workers, fellow-soldiers" are Epaphras of Colossae and Epaphroditus of Philippi. In Col. 4 10-14 we learn also that both Luke and Mark, the traditional evangelists, were with Paul at this period, besides Jesus Justus and Demas; of such as these he gratefully speaks as "fellow-workers unto the Kingdom of God, men that have been a comfort unto me." Others we shall meet in "the prison-letters." Thus "all the brethren that are with me" (Gal. 1 2) are an impressive number. To their company must be added that considerable company named in the note to Ephesus now disguised as an appendix to the Roman letter. Besides Priscilla and Aquila,

twenty-two persons are there referred to by name, not including any mentioned above. Seventeen of these seem to be men. Of the five women named, four are especially stated to have "labored in the Lord;" two of them "labored much." Of the men, Andronicus and Junias have been Paul's fellow-prisoners and are "of note among the apostles." Urbanus is a "fellow-worker in Christ." Indeed, one gets the impression that all these people were active in one way or another in the spread of the gospel, and the same would seem to be true also of others, alluded to without name, like the mother of Rufus and the sister of Nereus. That makes all told a list of thirty-seven helpers in Asia known to us by mention, mostly appreciative, of their names. Even those scholars who still refuse to separate Romans sixteen from the rest of that epistle, and assume what Jülicher calls "a sort of general migration of Paul's eastern communities" to a city of which he himself had never come within five hundred miles, will have a list of fifteen valued co-laborers of the apostle in Asia, including such experienced and efficient helpers as Aquila and Priscilla, Timothy and Titus, Mark and Luke. Out of the work of these co-laborers grow "the churches of Asia," Troas, Miletus (probably), Colossae, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardes, Philadelphia and surely others. There is no indication that Paul himself visited any of these churches at this time, although later we find him at Troas (2 Cor. 2 12; Acts 20 6 ff.; in Acts 16 8—cf. v. 6—there is no preaching at Troas) as also at Miletus (Acts 20 15 ff.). Indeed the indication is rather that he did not. Writing to the believers at Colossae (2 1) he states definitely that they and their neighbors at Laodicea, with a number of other churches as well, have not seen his face in the flesh. This latter clause *καὶ ὅσοι οὐχ ἑώρακαν κ. τ. λ.* cannot naturally refer to individual churches or isolated Christians scattered about over the world who have not known his personal ministrations, but rather to a group of churches in his own territory, which would naturally look to him as leader, to which he would naturally address counsels, by letter or by messenger, even though he had not, in actual presence, been among them.

Among these Asian churches, then, whose actual establishing Paul had delegated to certain of his assistants, is the church at

Colossae, with its neighbors at Hierapolis and Laodicea. We learn the name of the man most concerned in planting the gospel in the Lycus valley. It is Epaphras who has thus acted as Paul's proxy (*πιστὸς διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν*, correct reading in 17) in his home city and region. Influential also in Colossae is Philemon, whose son (as it seems, Phm. 2) Archippus is especially noted also as actively at work (Col. 4 17). Philemon certainly (Phm. 19) and Epaphras probably, had been a convert of Paul's. Both men are thus personally known and personally dear to him. If we suppose that Epaphras and Philemon, well-to-do citizens of the provincial town, visiting Ephesus the metropolis, come under Paul's influence there and are converted, it is most natural that they should, on returning home, carry the propaganda thither also. Epaphras is Paul's dear fellow-slave and faithful server of Christ in his stead (Col. 17), himself one of the Colossians, who had much labor for them and the associated churches near by (4 12 f.). Philemon is a "beloved fellow-worker" with a son who is a "fellow-worker," with a church gathered under his roof, notable for his faith and his love, through which the hearts of the saints had been refreshed (Phm. 1 f., 5-7). The situation is clear and natural. According to the Colossian letter Epaphras has now returned to Paul, bringing news of the church's growth in faith and love, and of its warm concern for the apostle himself (1 3-8; cf. also the *καὶ ἡμεῖς* in 19 and 4 7-9). Finding Paul imprisoned, he is himself put under arrest and becomes the apostle's *συναιχμαλωτός* (Phm. 3); the detention from his important work at home is exceedingly painful to him. He is *ἀγωνιζόμενος* over his precious churches, that they may, deprived for a time of his support, "stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God" (Col. 4 12).

The clear implication of this situation and of all the language of the letter is that these churches are *new*, that Paul is for the first time learning of their founding, in short, that Epaphras' visit to Paul, here recounted, is truly, as we assumed, a visit to Ephesus, during the three-year mission there, no long time after he has planted the gospel in the region where he lives. The letter to the Colossians is, in its tone and content, clearly Paul's first reaction to the news of that planting. He introduces himself

to the Colossian Christians as one who, a personal stranger to them, is just cultivating their acquaintance. He explains who he is and why he addresses them (1 23 b—2 5). The phraseology of 1 6-8 clearly means that "the gospel has now at length come" to the Colossians; the day they "heard and knew the grace of God in truth" lies not far back; no long interval can possibly separate the *ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ* and the *δηλώσας ἡμῖν*. Epaphras has just reported his own recent work of evangelization. So all the moral counsels of the letter are adapted to an infant community, just learning the Christian way of life. The injunctions of 3 5 f. suggest a new group, still the object of much curious questioning from pagan neighbors. Any one who will read the letter with the purpose of learning, if possible, when the church was founded, cannot escape the impression that the founding is recent. Note especially the language of 1 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 21 f. (*πρὸς . . . νυνὶ δέ*), 23; 2 1 f., 5, 6, 7; 3 7 f. (*πρὸς . . . νυνὶ δέ*), 9 f. (*ἀπεκδυσάμενοι . . . ἐνδυσάμενοι*). There are in these eighteen verses some fourteen direct allusions to the Colossians' conversion. All this is the language of fresh and vivid reaction upon that happy event; it is absolutely incompatible with the supposition that the experiences in question lie five or six years back, whether known or unknown to Paul in the meantime. Every reader of the letter would have this impression, were it not for the influence of the tradition which assigns it to a Roman imprisonment at the end of Paul's life. No, at the time the letter is written the Colossian church has been in existence only a period of weeks or of months at most.²¹

The establishment of this fact is important here, not primarily for the chronology of the letter, but for the determination of its original content. In its present form a large part of chapter two, and indirectly of chapter one, is directed against the inroads of an elaborate and dangerous heresy. It may be submitted as in the highest degree unlikely that a church which has been only a brief time in being is already so seriously invaded by heresy.

²¹ The writer is here making use of his article in the *American Journal of Theology*, 1920, cited above. Holtzmann also (p. 15) reads out of 1 2-5, 8; 2 f. that Paul is addressing an "erst kürzlich gegründete Gemeinde."

Christian heresies, especially heresies of the general type revealed in this letter, do not arise until the church has been long enough in existence to have developed a sufficiently self-conscious faith to be perverted, a definite orthodoxy from which heresy may be clearly felt to deviate. In short, a fundamental discrepancy runs through the present text of the letter. The anti-heretical passages posit a developed situation and a late date; most of the rest of the letter posits a primitive situation and an early date. Indeed, the letter seems at times almost to go out of its way to declare that the Colossians' faith is eminently satisfactory. The language of 1 3-8, for example, is hardly compatible with the idea that heresy is threatening the life of the church. "Thank God for your faith! You heard the word of the gospel's *truth*; it has come to you and is growing and bearing fruit among you, and has been doing so since the day you heard and recognized the grace of God *in truth*, from its authorized spokesman Epaphras, my proxy among you." The next verse (1 9) offers a prayer for the development of the readers in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, but this is not that they may understand doctrine correctly, but that they may recognize God's will so as to walk worthily and bear fruit in good work. The whole interest is in life and conduct. So "continue in the faith" (1 23) clearly means, in its context: continue in Christian living, not: continue in correct belief. The same note dominates 1 28, where the burden of all the apostle's admonitions and teachings "in all wisdom" is to furnish every man perfect in Christ. *τέλειος* here is almost certainly not a mystery-term, but has the force of "morally complete," the exact parallel and exegesis being the words of 1 22 *παραστήσαι ὑμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους καὶ ἀνεγκλίτους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ*. Even 2 1, where begins the deviation to doctrinal concern, is preoccupied at first with the moral interest. Especially is 2 5 notable in this connection, where the absent apostle, on the basis of all he can learn of the situation, joys in the *τάξις* (*well-drilled order*) and *στερέωμα* (*solidity*) of the Colossians' faith in Christ. So the natural understanding of 2 6 f. finds in its language no warning against false doctrine, but only an injunction to go on to fuller development in the same path in which they have already begun so promisingly to walk. Very

different is the apostle's tone when he is really combating false teaching, as in Galatians!

It is frequently noted with some surprise by commentators that chapters three and four of the letter have no hint of heresy in the church. Haupt, for example, points out that this portion of the document "gibt, ohne jede erkennbare Beziehung auf diese Irrlehrer, ethische Mahnungen."²² These simple ethical counsels are precisely suited to an infant church, but they do not remotely suggest a church overwhelmed with a dangerous heresy, nor have these two chapters any back-references to the matter of the first two. Indeed, chapter one has no positive reference to the heresy, except indirectly, on the assumption that the lofty Christology is deliberately set over against derogatory views of Christ among the heretics.²³ It is to be observed also that the note to Philemon, sent to the same community at the same time, lacks any hint of heresy in the church of which Philemon is an honored leader, in whose house the congregation (or a congregation) assembles, to whom Paul gives grateful acknowledgement "of the faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints," praying "that the fellowship of thy faith may become effectual, in the knowledge of every good thing which is in you, unto Christ" (Phm. 5 f.). The special message (Col. 4 17) to Archippus (probably Philemon's son) to fulfil the ministry which he has received in the Lord, also lacks the slightest hint that the most pressing task of his ministry must be to protect the church against heresy.

The suggestion of these and similar observations is simply this: All the allusions to heresy in the letter (chiefly, if not exclusively, in chapter two), all the anti-heretical polemic, all the lofty Christology which is set forth as a counter-claim to erroneous views—all this belongs, not to Paul's original letter to the nascent Colossian church, but to a later enlarged edition

²² E. Haupt: *Der Brief an die Kolosser*. (Meyer's Commentary) 1897, p. 167. Cf. also S. R. Macphail: *The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, 1911, p. 14.

²³ Von Soden, in *Jahrbücher für Protestantische Theologie*, 1885, p. 840, urges strongly that even 1 15-20 is not intended as a refutation of false teaching.

of it, circulated as a tract for the times, in the days when false teaching actually had become a danger. If this be true, we need no longer try to make plausible the rise of so elaborate a heresy in Paul's own life-time, when the church is new. Now all the phenomena of the letter fall into line. We understand now (what on any other hypothesis is incomprehensible), why we have here an altogether different method of opposing false views from that used elsewhere by Paul, in Galatians, Corinthians, Romans, for example. Never once, in the refutation in Colossians, is the Old Testament quoted, or any "rabbinical" argument brought into play. Indeed, the whole letter contains no single Old Testament citation, but at most five formal reflections of Scriptural language (2 3, cf. Is. 45 3; 2 22, cf. Is. 29 13; 3 1, cf. Psalm 110 1; 3 10, cf. Gen. 1 26 f.; 3 25, cf. Deut. 10 17). Nor does the word *νόμος* ever occur. And all this despite the fact that the heresy combated is of a marked Jewish cast; in so much that Hort, Peake, Eadie and others regard it simply as orthodox Judaism, and Soltau as the Alexandrianism of Philo. There are allusions to circumcision (which is spiritualized rather than attacked), to "traditions of men," to "the bond written in ordinances," to "new moon and sabbath days" and the like. How could the Paul who wrote Galatians or Romans try to refute such Judaism without one appeal to the Scriptures which were final authority for himself and his opponents alike?

Nor is it in the least probable that the real Paul would denounce so vigorously a false teaching of which he was apparently able to give no more clear and definite account than we find in the second chapter of Colossians. We are irresistibly reminded of the *Irrlehrer* of the Pastorals, who will doubtless remain an inexhaustible theme for the speculation of students as long as the New Testament is studied. The Pastoral discussions of heresy, we understand, are not Paul's, but the product of a mind much less clear and penetrating in the field of religious thought. It is similarly no compliment to Paul to suppose that his was the intellect that set out to warn the Colossians against a dangerous *φαιλοσοφία*. He would have known what he was fighting, and by the same token so would we his readers. We see very clearly what was being taught in Galatia; but what was

wrong in Colossae? Who can say with any confidence? In identifying the heretics, as Moffatt says, the compass has been pretty well boxed. Orthodox Jews, Alexandrian Jews, theosophic Jews, gnostic Jews, Essenes, Baptists, Ebionites, Gnostics, pagans with Oriental or Pythagorean affinities, devotees of Mithra—all these and many more are suggested. Jülicher takes refuge in calling them "mysteriosophists," and Moffatt "plays safe" with his inclusive statement of a "syncretistic theosophy, a blend of disparate elements rife within the popular religion of Phrygia, together with notions and practices current among Jewish circles which were sensitive to semi-Alexandrian influences!"³⁴ We may submit that if Paul were the writer of the polemic in question we should know more precisely than this at whom he was aiming, and guesses so antipodal as orthodox Judaism and Mithraism would not be possible. And such a conglomeration of disparate "notions and practices," Jewish and pagan, making headway in a young Christian church in the fifties (or at latest, the very early sixties) of the first century it is surely difficult to make plausible. Nothing so developed and dangerous, so elaborate and complicated, can have attacked the Colossian church in its very cradle, so that Paul hears of the founding of the church and of the heresy that threatens its young life at the same time. Epaphras "declared unto us your love in the spirit" (1 8). Did he also declare that "ye subject yourselves to ordinances: handle not, taste not, touch not" (2 20 f.)? When Paul "heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which ye have toward all the saints" (1 4), did he hear also of "one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit" (2 8)? It does not seem probable. Every allusion in the letter (1 4; 1 8; 1 9; 2 5 may serve as examples) to Paul's having *heard something* about the Colossians, to his having had news, refers to news about their founding or about their steadfastness, growth and faith, never once to a report of their defection to heresy. If he had actually had news of such defection, would he not be likely to express as much, in some such phrase as, "It hath been

³⁴ *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, 1915, p. 162. For a list of other views and their sponsors, cf. p. 162.

signified unto me, brethren, by them" etc. (1 Cor. 1 11)? Galatians, without naming authorities, yet makes clear at every point that it rests on exact information; there Paul fights as not beating the air.

The present writer, therefore, to whom the main portion of Colossians is indubitably and profoundly Pauline, would attempt to discriminate the non-Pauline accretions, not by exact literary analysis of style and vocabulary, not by meticulous comparison of passage with passage, or of the Colossians text with the "Ephesians" text, not even by researches into the Christology of the letter, but primarily on the basis of the historical situation out of which the letter must assuredly come. Each of the other avenues of inquiry is important and valuable and if intelligently and scientifically followed will lead to some useful result. But in all, the danger of subjectivism and arbitrariness is very great. The line of investigation here chosen is at least somewhat more open to control.

A word, however, may be said as to the style and vocabulary of chapters one and two; (it should be remembered that *all* the difficulties belong to these two chapters, the last two being as innocently Pauline as anything in Galatians or First Corinthians). That there are very great difficulties here no exegete would dream of denying. It is illuminating to note the proportion of space given to the two halves of the letter by the commentators. The length of chapters one and two is to the length of chapters three and four about as thirteen to ten. Yet Abbott gives 86 pages to the first part, only 30 to the second; Haupt gives respectively 118 and 68, Klöpper 328 and 91, and others in similar proportions. The last two chapters are smooth sailing. As to vocabulary, the counting of *hapax legomena* is relatively unimportant. It is, however, of some interest to note that of the 33 listed by Holtzmann (p. 105) as found in Colossians, 24 are found in the first two chapters. More impressive is Holtzmann's list (p. 107) of forty words and phrases common in Paul elsewhere but totally absent here. It includes words like *δικαιοσύνη*, *σωτηρία*, *ἀποκάλυψις*, *πιστεύειν*, *νόμος*, *καυχᾶσθαι*, *δύνασθαι*, as well as particles like *οὐδέ*, *οὔτε*, *ἔτι*, *διό*, *οὐκἔτι*, *διότι*, *ἄρα*. The failure of the particles is of course more serious than that of

the nouns and verbs, but, on the whole, no conclusive argument can be based on these statistics.

The matter of style is more important. Chapters one and two are not written as Paul usually writes, whatever explanation be offered. The movement of expression is slow, even sluggish, heavy, involved, piling up never-ending sentences by attaching clause to clause with relatives of one sort or another, the successive clauses constantly branching off on a tangent to some new line of thought. The sentences do not aim at the expression of one specific idea, as Paul's do elsewhere (though he may be halted before he gets the specific idea out). They simply drag on from one idea to another, as the words suggest a new thought, with no notion where the sentence is coming out and no reason for ever stopping. The end of such a sentence has no remotest relation to its beginning. Examples are 1 3-8; 1 9-23; 1 24-29; 2 8-12; 2 13-15. Let the student try reading aloud chapter one in three sentences! There is no real parallel to this except in "Ephesians," certainly not in Rom. 1 1-7 or 2 4-11, sometimes cited as such. Phrases pile up cumbrously, with much repetition, as in 1 5; 1 12 f.; 1 24; 1 27; 2 2; 2 14 f.; 2 19; 2 23. Whether these sentences are Paul's or not, they are not expressed in his usual style. Then come the fearful obscurities of phrasing in certain parts of chapter two, such as verses 18-19 and 22 f. Is this a primitive corruption of text, as so many commentators allege in despair, or is it the unskilful work of an editor? If the former, why did just these passages suffer just this peculiar corruption? Here at least we must agree that some reconstruction of text is necessary before we can approximate what Paul wrote. The difficulties are of such a nature that they cannot be resolved by merely tinkering with the text and substituting one word for another. They are involved in the whole context, in what the sentences are used to say, however obscurely. Only a drastic excision will be of use in these passages.

And what shall we say of the Christology of this letter? In particular, what of the Christology of 1 15-20, a section unrelated to its context before or after, which Holtzmann, von Soden and Soltau agreed in calling an interpolation, which in many ways marks the highest point attained by Christology in the New

Testament? It is difficult to say, categorically: this thought concerning Jesus *cannot* be Paul's. It is, however, not at all difficult to say: it *is not* Paul's, in the other letters which are most certainly from his pen. In the last analysis, our judgment of the genuineness and integrity of the letter may depend on our ability to attribute its Christology to the writer of the letters to Galatia and Corinth and Rome, to Thessalonica and Philippi. Let Peake speak for all the commentators: "The Christology, it is true, presents an advance on what we find in the earlier epistles."²⁵ Let Kennedy describe it: "Here, unquestionably, [Paul] has in view what must be called a 'metaphysical' relationship. It represents something more than perfect mutual understanding, completely reciprocated love."²⁶ The best evidence that we have here other conceptions of Jesus than those expressed elsewhere by Paul is the monumental and laborious attempt of the exegetes to find points of contact between Colossians one and two and the other letters. That such points of contact may be found only brings into clearer relief the conclusion that we have here the utterance of a Paulinist, not of Paul. To believe that the Colossian letter lies before us in a second, enlarged edition, rather than in its original form, relieves us from this toilsome task of harmonizing the cosmic figure in whom all the *pleroma* of the Deity dwells bodily with the one man Christ Jesus who, though he is exalted for a space to be *κύριος*, is yet the first-born among many brethren. It relieves us also from the necessity, when reconstructing the Christology of the apostle, no simple thing at best, of embodying as a consistent part of it such *data* as are offered in Colossians 1 15-20 and 2 9f. This is no small gain. But the Christology of the epistle is a theme for itself, too large to be approached in these pages; it is adduced here only as one more aspect of the letter which, if on other grounds it can be shown to be partially un-Pauline, will gain enormously in intelligibility.

The present writer cannot escape the conclusion that what happened is this: After Epaphras' own conversion by Paul at

²⁵ A. S. Peake: *The Epistle to the Colossians* (Expositor's Greek Testament) 1908, p. 489.

²⁶ H. A. A. Kennedy: *The Theology of the Epistles*, 1920, pp. 81 f.

Ephesus, he had gone back to his home in Colossae, to sow the seeds of the gospel there and in the cities near by. When, as a result, three promising churches had developed in the Lycus valley, he returned to Ephesus to report the success of his labors to Paul. Whereupon Paul, being at the time held in a confinement which Epaphras himself was forced to share, sent off letters to the groups in Laodicea and Colossae, together with a note to Philemon of the latter city, who was, like Epaphras, a convert of his own, and whose family and circumstances he knew. The letter to Laodicea is wholly lost; the most improbable of hypotheses is that which identifies it with the document now known as "Ephesians." The letter to Colossae was brief; there were no personal problems or community difficulties in these new congregations to be settled, and their own leaders, Epaphras, Philemon, Archippus and others, were abundantly able to care for their needs. Paul only desires to express his joy at the tidings of these new groups of believers, to reciprocate their greetings and good wishes, and to add some earnest moral counsels for their guidance in the new life. This letter, brought to Colossae by Tychicus and Onesimus, was assuredly received with grateful appreciation there, was read also at Laodicea and perhaps at Hierapolis, then was laid carefully away as a precious memorial. The church was comparatively small and unimportant; it did not figure as one of the seven churches of Asia, as its neighbor Laodicea did, so that its letter had for a long time no general circulation. Then came the days, perhaps early in the second century (so Holtzmann, von Soden, *et al.*) when that part of the world began to be overrun with syncretistic types of gnosticism, in which angel-veneration and many Jewish elements were blended with contributions from local pagan cults. Then the old letter is brought out and re-edited by some zealous church-leader, who, to meet the great need of the time, desiderates supremely a message from the apostle to whose memory he is altogether devoted. This Paulinist editor is not very original or very clear in his intellectual grasp, but he is tremendously in earnest and he is a faithful reflector of the orthodoxy of his day and place, shaped as that is by the pressure of heresies around. He feels certain that he is expressing Paul's mind when he

expands the actual words of the apostle to the Colossians into fuller explication of what he believes is implicit in them. And this all the more as he reenforces the words to this church by quotation or reflection of many sayings (not always in the original sense!) in other messages of Paul now at his disposal, like Romans, Galatians, First Corinthians. He is quite unconscious that he is saying anything that Paul had not said, in substance, or had not meant, or would not be saying now if he were present. Thus the nameless editor sends out this revised and enlarged edition of Paul's letter to the Colossians, as a sorely-needed letter to the Colossians of his own time and to their neighbors. Such a procedure is quite common in that age, quite intelligible, quite praiseworthy. Up to this time the old Colossian letter has not been read generally among the churches; the new Colossian letter, with its vital message for the time, is widely circulated, widely valued, widely influential. It is in this enlarged form only that the letter lives on in the church and finds a place in the developing canon. We must agree with von Soden, "daß es nicht auffallen kann, wenn der alte Paulinische, wenig verbreitete, vom Verfasser der Apokalypse und des Hebräerbriefes nicht gekannte Kolosserbrief durch den zeitgemäß interpolierten Brief rasch verdrängt wurde, so daß sich keine Erinnerung an dessen ursprüngliche Gestalt mehr erhielt."²⁷ As Holtzmann points out at length (pp. 193—199), such procedure has many analogies, in the Old Testament, in the apocrypha, in the gospels and elsewhere in the New Testament, in the patristic literature. That a canonical document has come down to us, not in the simple text of its autograph, but in a form enlarged and adapted to the needs of the growing church, is not in any sense a reason for undervaluing that document; it is rather a tribute to its worth, the evidence of its vitality and its usefulness. It is coming

²⁷ *Jahrbücher für Protestantische Theologie*, 1885, p. 702. Cf. also Soltau, in *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, Vol. 78 (1906) p. 543: "Der Kolosserbrief muß lange Zeit nur in intimen Kreisen, innerhalb der Gemeinde, kursiert haben, und hat dabei dann, aus interpretatorischen und erbaulichen, zum Teil auch aus dogmatischen Rücksichten, Ergänzungen erfahren." Similarly Holtzmann (p. 284) says that the letter is "erst in Folge seiner Überarbeitung in weiteren Kreisen bekannt geworden."

increasingly to be seen that what the church canonized was not primarily what the apostles had said to their own generation, but what they were saying to the churches which were finding their messages to be holy Scripture.²⁸

To restore the autograph text of Paul to the Colossians is of course not possible. To regard "Ephesians" as prior to our present text and the source of some of its readings, as do Holtzmann, von Soden, Soltau, Johannes Weiss and others, seems to the present writer very precarious. The first two chapters have been pretty thoroughly re-written, and the separation in detail of what is new from what is old is a task which the present study would not attempt. The *style* of these chapters is undoubtedly in part that of the later editor; we may feel greater confidence in dealing with the *matter*, and suggesting what passages seem actually to have been added. The original letter, then, is most probably to be found within the material of 1 1-14, 21-25 (omitting in 24 f. the words *ὁ ἔστιν ἡ ἐκκλησία ἧς ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ διάκονος*), 28 f.; 2 1 f. (as far as *συνβιβασθέντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ*), 5-7, probably some of the phraseology of verses 11-13 and 20 (but this section now contains only fragments of the original text, much mutilated and set in new connections); then chapters three and four, in substantially their present form, close the letter.

It must be repeated that this suggestion covers only the *material* of the text, not its actual wording and structure, which even in the surviving "original" passages owe something to the redactor, particularly in the way of looseness and redundancy. Thus the words of 1 e a (*καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντί . . . καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῶν*), which at best are parenthetical (they are so punctuated by Dibelius and others) may well be part of the redaction in a generation succeeding Paul's. Much can be said against their originality. The construction is difficult, especially the redundant *καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῶν*, which curiously doubles the comparison back upon itself. Scribes tried to alleviate this (the T. R. has inserted a *καὶ* after *κόσμῳ*), showing that the difficulty was early felt. The reference to the growth and fruitfulness of Christianity *ἐν παντί τῷ κόσμῳ* is more natural for a later writer (despite Rom. 1 8; 1 Thess. 1 8; 2 Cor. 2 14). The repetition of "fruitbearing

²⁸ Cf. Johannes Weiss: *Das Urchristentum*, 1914. p. 102.

and growing" a few sentences below (v. 10) seems odd, and of the two, the phrase seems more original the second time. The periphrastic construction in v. 6 (*ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενος καὶ αὐξανόμενος*) is very rare in Paul, and the middle voice of *καρποφορέω* is *hapax legomenon* not only in Paul but in all known Greek writing. It is probable, therefore, even if not certain, that these words did not stand in the original, but are an editorial parenthetical comment.

Other questions rise, so soon as we thus begin to look at the text. There is no antecedent for *αὐτοῦ* in 1 9. Because the reference to *God's* will is so clear, is it probable that Paul himself originally made the grammatical slip? Who is "thanking the Father" in 1 12? *Εὐχαριστοῦντες* may refer to *ἡμεῖς* or to the Colossians. Probably the latter are meant, but this is simply one example out of a considerable number in chapter one where phrases may be connected in more than one way. So *πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν* (v. 3) may go with *εὐχαριστοῦμεν* or with *προσενχόμενοι*; in v. 5 *διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα* may go with *εὐχαριστοῦμεν* or with *τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην*; in v. 10 *ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ* may go with *περιπατήσαι* or with *καρποφοροῦντες*; in v. 11 *μετὰ χαρᾶς* may go with *ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν* or with *εὐχαριστοῦντες*, etc., etc. The absolute use of *ὁ πατήρ* for God in 1 12 is without parallel in Paul (Eph. 2 18 is pseudo-Paul), whence some scribes have prefixed *θεῷ* and some exegetes have explained the meaning as "*Christ's* Father," harking forward, as it were, to "the son of his love" in v. 13. To what term in the context does *ἐν τῷ φωτί* (v. 12) attach? The phrase "kingdom of his son" (v. 13) is without parallel in Paul, who everywhere else makes the kingdom the possession of God. Is *ἐν ᾧ* (v. 14) "in the Father" (coordinate with *ὅς ἐρύσατο*) or "in the son of his love?" Is the very close parallel in 1 12-14 to a speech of Paul in Acts 26 18 due to Paul or to a redactor who knew Acts? There would clearly seem to be some literary relationship, and it is certain that the author of Acts does not know the Pauline letters. How shall we punctuate and construe the complicated structure of 1 21 f.? It ignores verses 15-20 and (to quote T. K. Abbott *ad loc.*) "obviously begins a new paragraph, resuming the thought from which the apostle had digressed in 15." Then what governs

ὕμῳ in v. 21? From what is παραστήσαι (v. 22) dependent? Westcott-Hort produce an island of lucidity by an arbitrary parenthesis in v. 22 (ὡν δὲ τοῦ θανάτου), but at the cost of leaving the context more chaotic than ever. Scribes, in efforts at alleviation, fluctuate between ἀποκατηλλάξεν, ἀποκατηλλάγητε, and ἀποκαταλλαγέστε (v. 22). Is the phrase ἐν τῷ σώματι τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ (v. 22) which slips out of its context leaving no trace of excision, which has no parallel in Paul and is often understood as a tacit correction of docetic heresy, perhaps a redactional touch? And is the likewise easily detachable phrase (v. 23) τοῦ κηρυχθέντος ἐν πάσῃ κτίσει τῇ ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν the language of a later day than Paul's, as ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ (v. 6) may be? 1 28, with its curious but effective three-fold repetition of πάντα ἄνθρωπον, arouses a question, especially since it uses the language of 3 18, νοουθετοῦντες καὶ διδάσκοντες ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ. The connection of ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ is perhaps different in the two passages, but we may have here the language of chapter three used by an editor in chapter one, *exactly as the language of the whole letter is used by the author of "Ephesians,"* the words being taken over, with new contexts and new significances, to serve new purposes. In 2 6 the phrase τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον is unparalleled; is it Paul's own? These are questions, not answers; they arise, in much greater number than these examples indicate, upon any careful reading of the text, even of those passages whose general content we have kept as part of the original letter. They may serve to justify the position that the *text* of Paul's friendly note to Colossae is not now to be reconstructed, especially its first part, although those portions of our document which contain the *substance* of that original note may with some degree of certainty be indicated. Especially is it negatively clear which passages of the document Paul is least likely to have written.

We refrain, then, from offering even a tentative reconstruction of the original Greek text. But the substance of what we conceive Paul to have written to the Colossians was something like the following. The contrast to Holtzmann's reconstruction, given at the beginning of this article, may serve to indicate the divergent avenue of approach.

Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus through God's will, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

We thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, always praying for you, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love unto all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in the heavens, of which you have already heard in the word of the truth of the Gospel that is present with you since the day you heard and recognized the grace of God in truth, even as you learned from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, who also declared unto us your love in the spirit.

Therefore we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease praying for you and supplicating that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so as to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power according to the might of his glory unto all endurance and long suffering; giving thanks with joy unto the Father, who qualified us for the sharing of the lot of the saints in light, who rescued us from the power of darkness and set us over into the kingdom of the son of his love, in whom we have Deliverance, the forgiveness of sins. And you, being once estranged and enemies in mind in your evil works, yet now you have been reconciled through his death, to present you holy and unblemished and irreproachable before him, if you continue grounded and stedfast in the faith and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which you heard, of which I Paul was made a minister.

Now for your sakes I rejoice in my sufferings and fill up for my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ, in my flesh, for the sake of his body, according to the dispensation of God which was given to me with respect to you, to fulfil the word of God, which we proclaim, admonishing and teaching in all wisdom, that we may present every man

complete in Christ, to which end also I labor, striving according to his working that works within me mightily.

For I would have you know how great a striving I have for you and for those in Laodicea and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, as they are knit together in love. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, rejoicing and beholding your order and the solidity of your faith in Christ. As therefore you received Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted and builded up in him and established in faith according as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

[. . . . you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the stripping off of the body of flesh, in the circumcision of Christ having been buried with him in baptism, wherein you were also raised with him through faith in the working of the God who raised him from the dead. You, then, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all those trespasses If you died with Christ].²⁹

If then you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at God's right hand. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ our life shall be manifested, then shall you also be manifested with him in glory. Put to death, then, your members that are on earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and the greediness that is idolatry, on account of which things comes the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience, in which you also once walked, when you were living in these things. But now put off, you also, all these things: wrath, fury, malignity, slander, foul speech from your mouth. Lie not one to another, since you have stripped off the old man with his actions and have put on the new man that is renewed unto knowledge according to

²⁹ The section in brackets is fragmentary and uncertain. Here the redactor treated the text most drastically.

the image of his creator, where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, slave, free-man, but all in all is Christ.

Put on, then, as chosen of God, consecrated and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearing one another and forgiving each other, if any one have a complaint against any one; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do you. And over all these put on love, which is the bond of completeness. And let the peace of Christ be dominant in your hearts, unto which also you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, as you teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and songs that are spiritual, in the grace singing in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, let it all be in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Wives, be in subjection to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not harsh toward them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is well-pleasing in the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children, that they be not discouraged. Slaves, obey in everything those who are in the flesh your masters, not with eye-services as man-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing the Master. Whatever you do, work heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance. To the Lord Christ be slaves! For he that does wrong shall get back the wrong that he did, and there is no respect of persons. Masters, render to your slaves what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a master in heaven.

In prayer be constant, watching in it in thanksgiving, praying at the same time also for us, that God may open unto us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for the sake of which also I am in bonds, that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak. Wisely walk with respect to the outsiders, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always in graciousness, seasoned with salt, so as to know how you should answer each one.

All my affairs shall Tychicus make known to you, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord, whom I am sending to you for this very purpose, that you may know our situation and that he may encourage your hearts, along with Onesimus the faithful and beloved brother, who is of your company. All matters here they shall make known to you.

Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner greets you, and Mark, Barnabas' cousin (about whom you received orders; if he come to you, receive him), and Jesus called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, who have been a comfort to me. Epaphras of your own company greets you, a servant of Christ Jesus, always wrestling for you in his prayers, that you may stand fast, complete and perfect in all God's will. For I bear him witness that he has much toil for you and for those in Laodicea and for those in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician greets you, and Demas.

Salute the brethren in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the congregation at their house. And when the letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and the one from Laodicea do you also read. And say to Archippus: Take heed to the ministry which you received in the Lord, that you fulfil it.

The greeting of me Paul with my own hand. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you.