Towards the year 62 A.D., Paul, a prisoner in Rome, writes to the Christians of Colossae, who, without being aware of it, belittle Christ. They do not feel assured with only faith in Christ and they want to add some practices from the Old Testament. Or they try to include Christ in a board of celestial persons, or “angels” who are supposed to have the key to our destiny in hand.

Something was lacking in them and in the majority of their contemporaries. They were caught in the Roman Empire which had imposed its peace on the known world at that time, but also prevented them from living a life of their own. They fell back on the “spiritual.” Secret doctrines offered to lead their “perfect ones” to a higher state and theories called “gnosis” (that is, knowledge) were drawn up on the origin of the human and the world. According to them, all comes from a cosmic soup that had been boiling for ages, with impressive celestial families of angels or “eons”, male and female, who devour each other, couple and finally imprison sparks of spirit in material bodies. So people are manufactured who, after “putting on” a series of successive existences, may return to the kingdom of light.

Caught in the wind of these fine discourses, the Colossians went the way of certain Christians today who trust in their devotion to souls or who allow their life to be led by spiritualism, astrology and horoscopes. They no longer consider Christ as the only savior since they give the priority to others or to practices that are not of the Church.

This crisis in the Church of the first century gave us this letter of Paul where he establishes the absolute supremacy of Christ. As in other letters of Paul, the letter to the Colossians mentions that Timothy is with him (1:1). Paul chose him as assistant and looked on him as “his true Son in Christ.” Perhaps it was Timothy who wrote a fair part of this letter; it would explain the difference in style from the more authentic of Paul’s letters while its content—exceptionally rich—is constantly faithful to the inspiration of the apostle. On this subject see the Letter to the Ephesians which has the same themes as the one to the Colossians, but in a more developed way. In several passages of Colossians, relevant commentaries in Ephesians will be indicated.
1 Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother,
to the saints in Colossae, our faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:
Receive grace and peace from God, our Father, and Christ Jesus, our Lord.
1Thanks be to God, the Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord!
We constantly pray for you, for we have known of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of your love for all the saints. Indeed, you await in hope the inheritance reserved for you in heaven, of which, you have heard through the word of truth. This gospel, already present among you, is bearing fruit, and growing throughout the world, as it did among you, from the day you accepted it, and understood the gift of God, in all its truth.
7He who taught you, Epaphras, our dear companion in the service of Christ, faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, has reminded me of the love you have for me, in the Spirit. Because of this, from the day we received news of you, we have not ceased praying to God for you, that you may attain the full knowledge of his will, through all the gifts of wisdom and spiritual understanding.
10May your lifestyle be worthy of the Lord and completely pleasing to him. May you bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God.
11May you become strong, in everything, by a sharing of the glory of God, so that you may have great endurance and persevere in joy.
12Constantly give thanks to the Father, who has empowered us to receive our share in the inheritance of the saints, in his kingdom of light.
13He rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. In him, we are redeemed and forgiven.

**Christ is the beginning of everything**

15 He is the image of the unseen God, and for all creation, he is the firstborn, for, in him, all things were created,
in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible: thrones, rulers, authorities, powers... All was made through him and for him. 17 He is before all and all things hold together, in him. 18 And he is the head of the body, that is the Church, for he is the first, the first raised from the dead, that he may be the first in everything, for God was pleased to let fullness dwell in him. 20 Through him, God willed to reconcile all things to himself, and through him, through his blood shed on the cross, God establishes peace, on earth as in heaven.

- 21 You, yourselves, were once estranged, and opposed to God, because of your evil deeds, but now, God has reconciled you, in the human body of his Son, through his death, so that you may be without fault, holy and blameless before him. 23 Only stand firm upon the foundation of your faith, and be steadfast in hope. Keep in mind the gospel you have heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

24 At present, I rejoice when I suffer for you; I complete, in my own flesh, what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 For I am serving the church since God entrusted to me the ministry to make the word of God fully known. 26 I mean that mysterious plan that, for centuries and generations, remained secret, and which God has now revealed to his holy ones.

27 God willed to make known to them the riches, and even the glory, that his mysterious plan reserved for the pagan nations: Christ is in you, the hope for glory.

He also affirms that since the resurrection of Jesus, it is he who has in hand all the movement of history (Rev 5:3-5). Something that may astonish those among us who think all history is the responsibility of humankind. In one sense, they are right but on condition that they do not forget the Firstborn, the one who has already come to the end of history and of whom we say he is Lord (Phil 2:11) of history.

He is the image of the unseen God. We should not imagine that God has a human form beyond the clouds, and that Jesus is his image; human creature is the image of God, but God is not in the image of human creature.

In all that he is and in all that he does, Christ among us is the perfect image of the Father and of his mercy: his actions reveal God’s way of thinking and acting. Already before he became man, the Son of God existed in God, as the eternal and invisible image of God eternal and invisible, the radiance of the glory of the Father (Heb 1:3), the Expression or Word of God (Jn 1:1).

For all creation he is the firstborn. We take this word in its biblical sense. He is not the first of many creatures, but the one who has a place apart. In his human nature, Christ is a Galilean Jew, a descendant of David. His person, however, is rooted in God and is presented to us as the model and the firstborn not of people but of all creation.

All was made through him (v. 16): John 1:1 and Hebrews 1:2.

And was the first raised... (v. 18). Paul says more precisely “and as the first fruits offered to God, was raised” (as in 1 Cor 15:23). He has not come only for the forgiveness of sins, but for a “passover,” a passage from death to life, and his Resurrection after his total surrendering to his Father was a first necessary step so that we too would have a resurrection.

God was pleased to let fullness dwell in him (v. 19) who is the only bridge between God and the universe. The fullness of God is in him to be communicated to the universe, and the fullness of the universe will be found in him when all human beings are reconciled and reunited in him.

God willed to reconcile (v. 20). Once again the work of Christ is presented as reconciliation: reconciliation between people (2 Cor 5:17-21) and reconciliation of the whole of creation.

- 21. Paul now requires the Colossians to keep their feet on the ground. Do not waste your time imagining struggles between celestial beings and evil ones. The struggle is here below and costs blood and life. This is why Paul reminds his readers what he himself is suffering because of the Gospel.

The body of Christ is the place where the peace of all humanity with God, and peace
28 This Christ, we preach. We warn, and teach everyone true wisdom, aiming to make everyone perfect, in Christ. 29 For this cause I labor and struggle, with the energy of Christ working powerfully in me.

Let Christ Jesus, the Lord, be your doctrine

2 • 1 I want you to know how I strive for you, for those of Laodicea, and for so many who have not met me personally. 2 I pray, that all may be encouraged. May you be established in love, that you may obtain all the riches of a full understanding, and know the mystery of God, Christ himself. 3 For, in him, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

4 So, let no one deceive you with persuasive arguments. 5 Although I am far from you, my spirit is with you, and I rejoice in recalling how well-disciplined you are, and how firm in the faith of Christ.

6 If you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, let him be your doctrine. 7 Be rooted and built up in him; let faith be your principle, as you were taught, and your thanksgiving, overflowing.

8 See that no one deceives you with philosophy or any hollow discourse; these are merely human doctrines, not inspired by Christ, but by the wisdom of this world. 9 For in him, dwells the fullness of God, in bodily form.

10 He is the head of all cosmic power and authority, and, in him, you have everything.

Baptized and risen

• 11 In Christ Jesus, you were given a circumcision, but not by human hands, which removed completely from you the carnal body: 12 I refer to baptism. On receiving it, you were...
buried with Christ; and you also rose with him, for having believed in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

13 You were dead. You were in sin and uncircumcised at the same time. But God gave you life with Christ. He forgave all our sins. 14 He canceled the record of our debts, those regulations which accused us. He did away with all that, and nailed it to the cross.

15 Victorious through the cross, he stripped the rulers and authorities of their power, humbled them before the eyes of the whole world, and dragged them behind him, as prisoners.

Useless doctrines

- 16 So, then, let no one criticize you in matters of food or drink, or about observance of animal festivals, new moons or the Sabbath. 17 These things were only shadows of what was to come, whereas the reality is the person of Christ. 18 Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on humbling practices and worship of angels. In fact, they are only good to satisfy self-indulgence, instead of holding firmly to the head, Christ. It is he who nourishes and gives unity to the whole body by a complex system of nerves and ligaments, making it grow according to the plan of God.

20 If you have really died with Christ, and are rid of the principles of the world, why do you now let yourselves be taught as if you belonged to the world? 21 “Do not eat this, do not taste that, do not touch that…” 22 These are human rules and teachings, referring to things that are perishable, that wear out and disappear. 23 These doctrines may seem to be profound because they speak of religious observance and humility and of disregarding the body. In fact, they are useless as soon as the flesh rebels.

its commandments. Religion for him was not, as it is for some who like principles, a defensive shield as necessary as a policeman: religion was for him a reminder of a debt toward God, something that made love and real trust impossible. Jesus in dying had nailed to the cross all kinds of fears of God; at the same time he did away with all the moral principles and pressures (“powers and authorities” of v. 15) that smother our free response to God.

In some countries, many people are baptized but baptism scarcely changes their life and generally speaking they do not belong to communities seeking to renew their faith. It is not enough for us to admit that we are poor Christians, that we have not really buried the sinner within us. Our resurrection depends, first of all on faith in God who resurrected Jesus, who has pardoned us, and prepared everything so that we may live our life.

- 16. Paul has just reminded us that baptism is the beginning of a new life. It is not a matter of replacing old commandments with better commandments: the coming of Christ has put an end to all religions with commandments. That will perhaps shock many Christians: should we not obey the commandments of God and of the Church? What will become of us if there are no longer religious duties?

Indeed there is no religious group—no Christian community—without rites, habits, commandments: what would become of a community where the members would no longer gather to hear the word of God or celebrate the Eucharist? Paul nevertheless shows it is finished with religions where the most important consideration is to do or not to do, where it is believed that God likes us to rest on such a day, not to eat such and such a food, to dress in a certain way, abstain from this or that. Religions give great importance to these laws for they help the faithful to maintain their cohesion and to retain their own identity. All that deforms the idea we have of God. All that is human regulation, very useful perhaps, old fashioned perhaps, but still always human. Paul says: God does not share our interest in what is transient, in our cooking, feast days and the like; he does not treat us like little children, saying, “Don’t do that!”

All that may seem very religious (2:3). Religious prohibitions always impress those who are not free of their fear of God. Instead of freeing us and leading us to child-like trust in God, these restrictions favor a narrow-mindedness, and later violence exerted against those who think differently from us.

Do not be mistaken in thinking that contempt for the body is a sign of holiness (v. 23). Fewer kilos do not mean more Spirit! The penances and sacrifices that we impose on ourselves could cause us to feel superior to others. If you belong
Seek the things that are above

3 1So then, if you are risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your mind on the things that are above, not on earthly things. 3For you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4When Christ, who is your life, reveals himself, you also will be revealed with him in glory.

5Therefore, put to death what is earthly in your life, that is immorality, impurity, inordinate passions, wicked desires and greed, which is a way of worshiping idols. 6These are the things that arouse the wrath of God.

7For a time, you followed this way and lived in such disorders. 8Well then, reject all that: anger, evil intentions, malice; and let no abusive words be heard from your lips.

Put on the new self

9Do not lie to one another. You have been stripped of the old self and its way of thinking; 10to put on the new, which is being renewed, and is to reach perfect knowledge, and the likeness of its creator. 11There is no room for distinction between Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised,

to a group that has its fasts, would you not like it to be known?

Let no one criticize you (v. 16). Who is going to criticize us for celebrating Sunday with the Resurrection of the Lord instead of the Jewish Sabbath?

• 3.1 Here we have what was said about baptism (2:12) which joins us to Christ and makes us share in all his wealth. Since Christ left this earth, we leave it too: what is best in our lives, what motivates us to do things is neither visible, nor is it of the earth. God alone knows the riches of the believer’s heart, even when her life seems tarnished by various faults and weaknesses: one day God will manifest the goodness, the “glory” which we do not yet see (see Mt 25:31-46).

Put to death what is earthly in your life (v. 5). It is not that we have to kill ourselves, but to destroy egotism, wickedness, envy, excessive confidence in self, for sin is there. Being free of a religion of commandments should not make us less aware of what is required in a new life: it means being still more perfect (Mt 5:20 and 48).

• 9. See Ephesians 4:20-24 where Paul develops the same idea of the new self created in Christ and of the old self which must be abandoned.

While the old self is self-centered, enslaved by passions, the new self is characterized by a communal attitude, a constant concern for others. He lives with a thankful heart.

• 18. The brief counsel given to spouses (v. 18-19) will be largely developed in Ephesians 5:21-33. Paul would not accept the attitude of many Christians who say: “Religion has nothing
because that pleases the Lord. 21 Parents, do not be too demanding of your children, lest they become discouraged.

22 Servants, obey your masters in everything; not only while they are present, to gain favor with them, but sincerely, because you fear the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do it wholeheartedly, working for the Lord, and not for humans. 24 You well know, that the Lord will reward you with the inheritance. You are servants, but your Lord is Christ. 25 Every evildoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, for God does not make exceptions in favor of anyone.

4 1 As for you, masters, give your servants what is fair and reasonable, knowing that you yourselves have a Master in heaven.

Further instructions

• 2 Be steadfast in prayer, and even spend the night praying and giving thanks. 3 Pray, especially, for us and our preaching: may the Lord open a door for us, that we may announce the mystery of Christ. Because of this, I am in chains; 4 pray, then, that I may be able to reveal this mystery as I should.

5 Deal wisely with those who do not belong to the Church; take advantage of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be pleasing, with a touch of wit. Know how to speak to everyone in the best way.

7 Tychicus will give news of me. He is our dear brother and, for me, a faithful assistant and fellow worker for the Lord. 8 I am purposely sending him, to give you news of me, and to encourage you. 9 With him, I am sending Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of yours. They will tell you about everything that is happening here.

10 My companion in prison, Aristarchus, greets you, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, about whom you have already received instructions. If he calls on you, receive him warmly. 11 Jesus, called Justus, also greets you. They are the only Jewish people working with me for the kingdom of


We can see there was much communication between churches of different places. Each one was not locked within its own community; had this been the case, within a short time, there would have been as many religions as there were churches. Quite to the contrary, they were conscious of being the Church of Christ, established in various places, but with one testimony concerning Christ, which explains the interest the believers had in keeping in close contact with one another. At a time in which it seemed difficult to preserve unity due to the distance and differences among the people, the power that preserved unity—more than a rigid organization—was the profound sense all the people had that the church was a “communion” or a community enlivened by the Spirit of Christ.

Nowadays when we attempt to form “basic Christian communities,” we must also be careful to remain in contact and in harmony with other communities.
God, and because of that, they have been a comfort to me.

12 Greetings from your countryman Epaphras, a good servant of Christ Jesus. He constantly battles for you, through his prayer that you be perfect, and firm in whatever God asks of you.

13 I assure you, that he has worked hard for you, as well as for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

14 Greetings from Luke, our dear doctor and from Demas. 15 Greet the brothers and sisters of Laodicea, and don’t forget Nympha and the church that gathers in her house.

16 After reading this letter, see that it is read in the Church of the Laodiceans, and have the letter they received, read in yours. 17 And say to Archipus, “Do not forget the ministry given to you in the Lord.”

18 Greetings in my own hand, Paul. Remember, that I am in chains. Grace be with you.