



Here again a real letter from Paul, personal, full of attention and tenderness that Paul sent from prison to the community that had always been the most concerned for his well-being. More than once Paul counted on their material assistance, showing the confidence he had in them. Usually, in order to avoid any suspicion of personal interest, he preferred to earn his living while continuing his mission. In this letter we have the famous page: “Let the same project that was in Christ Jesus be found in you.”

We have just said it is a real letter from Paul. Actually, all in it does not follow, as if fragments of several letters from Paul had been combined. We shall draw attention to it as we proceed: 2:19, 21; 4:1. It may well be a question of two short letters, one where Paul wanted to give his news and to thank, the other a warning, in the same style as the letter to the Galatians.

When Paul’s letters were gathered together, the most important were arranged according to length: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians. Then came those we call “captivity letters.” It is there we have Philippians between Ephesians and Colossians as if the three had been sent from the same prison. Yet there is every reason to think that Philippians was not written when Paul was in Rome, about 60 A.D., but several years earlier, more like 56 A.D. Perhaps he was at that time imprisoned in Ephesus.

Acts
9:13
16:1
16:12

1 • ¹From Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to the saints in Philippi, with their bishops and deacons;

to you all in Christ Jesus:

²May grace and peace be yours from God, our Father, and Christ Jesus the Lord.

³I give thanks to my God each time I remember you, ⁴and when I pray for you, I pray with joy. ⁵I cannot forget all you shared with me in the service of the Gospel, from the first day until now.

¹Cor
1:8
¹Thes
5:24

⁶Since God began such a good work in you, I am certain that he will complete it in the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷This is my hope for you, for I carry you all in my heart: whether I am in prison or defending and confirming the Gospel, you are with me and share the same grace.

⁸God knows that I love you dearly with the love of Christ Jesus, ⁹and in my prayers I ask that your love may

lead you each day to a deeper knowledge and clearer discernment, ¹⁰ that you may have good criteria for everything. So you may be pure of heart and come blameless to the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of holiness that comes through Christ Jesus, for the glory and praise of God.

Heb
5:14

Jn
15:8
Heb
12:11
Jas
5:18

Christ is my life

• ¹²I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has served to advance the Gospel.

¹³Actually the whole praetorian guard, and even those outside the palace, know that I am in chains for Christ.

Eph
3:1

¹⁴And what is more, my condition as prisoner has encouraged most of our brothers who are now emboldened to proclaim the Word of God more openly and without fear.

¹⁵Some, it is true, are moved by envy and rivalry, but others preach Christ with a good intention. ¹⁶These

• **1.1** *With their bishops and deacons.* In Acts we saw how the apostles used to establish a community, a church, in every city where they proclaimed the Gospel. They did not leave without having established a council of leaders, called *presbyters*, or *elders*, according to Jewish custom. After a few years *bishops*, or *supervisors*, stood out: they may have been the leading members of the council of presbyters. They were not then like today's bishops.

As to the *deacons*, they were in charge of various services in the community. And may have done missionary work in areas that did not yet have a community.

God began such a good work in you, I am certain that he will complete it in the day of Christ Jesus (v. 6). The end for which they long is always the manifestation (2 Thes 1:7), or the visit, or *the Day* of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 1:8). No work is done without the expectation of the day when there will be all that one dreamed about. There is no Christian life where someone is content with looking forward to his retirement or feels fulfilled because he has a country house or because the family is growing up without a problem. Let us stop saying these first Christians still had the "illusion" of an early return of Christ. They wanted to meet him personally and be transfigured by him. That is an illusion only for those who enclose themselves in oases of peace within a world in crisis.

Knowledge and discernment... A good heart and generosity are not everything in Christian life. We are not saved, we do not reach our true

stature, we are not remade as God would like us to be, unless clarity has guided generosity. It is the same for world salvation. God calls us to discover new ways. We need to reflect, to be attentive, what we could call "revision of life," in order to discover what is positive and negative in our daily life, work relationships, social duties, leisure. This reflection, however, is not sufficient: among God's gifts, there is spiritual *knowledge* that gives us a fresh vision of the order of values and of the will of God.

• **12.** Paul is not only persecuted by the Jews: even in the Church "false brothers," delighted he is in prison, see in this situation the possibility of increasing their own importance. The problem is one for all times: the great names of the apostolate have spent half of their energy in limiting the harm caused by rivals or by powerful groups in the Church. Paul, however, is gifted with wisdom: he sees that even if many do for personal interest what they believe they are doing for God, he knows how to turn it to account.

I am hopeful, even certain, that I shall not be ashamed (v. 20). Paul's concern is that his trial and his appearances should serve to reveal Christ's message to the authorities.

Christ is my life. It is quite trendy to say that Christians should "understand the world" and be "fully human." This is true in a certain way, but it does not say everything. God's love increases in us through the gift of ourselves to persons and to tasks that he entrusts to us, but as the love of

latter are moved by love and realize that I am here to defend the Gospel. ¹⁷The others announce Christ to challenge me. They do not act with a pure intention but think they are making my prison more unbearable. ¹⁸But in any case, whether they are sincere or showing off, Christ is proclaimed and because of this I rejoice and have no regrets.

1:4

¹⁹I know that all this will be a grace for me because of your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Christ. ²⁰I am hopeful, even certain, that I shall not be ashamed. I feel as assured now, as before, that Christ will be exalted through my person, whether I live or die.

1Cor 6:20

²¹For to me, living is Christ, and dying is gain. ²²But if I am to go on living, I shall be able to enjoy fruitful labor. Which shall I choose? ²³So I feel torn between the two. I desire greatly to leave this life and to be with Christ, which will be better by far, ²⁴but it is necessary for you that I remain in this life. ²⁵And because I am convinced of this, I know that I will stay and remain with you for your progress and happi-

Gal 2:20

2Cor 5:6

ness in the faith. ²⁶I will surely come to you again, and give you more reason for being proud of belonging to Christ Jesus.

2Cor 1:14
1Thes 2:19

Stand firm in faith

• ²⁷Try, then, to adjust your lives according to the Gospel of Christ. May I see it when I come to you, and if I cannot come, may I at least hear that you stand firm in the same spirit, striving to uphold the faith of the Gospel with one heart. ²⁸Do not be afraid of your opponents. This will be a sign that they are defeated and you are saved, that is saved by God. ²⁹For through Christ you have been granted not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him. ³⁰And you now share the same struggle that you saw I had and that I continue to have, as you know.

Eph 4:3
Col 2:5

2Thes 1:4

Mt 5:11

Imitate the humility of Jesus

2 • ¹If I may advise you in the name of Christ and if you can hear it as the voice of love; if we share the same spirit and are capable of mercy and compassion, then I beg of you ²make me very happy: have one love, one

2Cor 10:1
13:13

God grows, the desire of Christ and eternity takes root with it: this desire makes us like strangers in the world.

Paul would like to see his friends but not for that will he linger over fraternal meals in which his friends would try to provide him with a warm atmosphere. His deep desire is for what he still lacks: to meet Christ in his glory (see 2 Cor 4:16 and Phil 3:10).

I desire greatly to leave this life and to be with Christ (v. 23). Thus, those who say that a person ceases to exist at the time of death and only recovers life in the resurrection at the end of times are wrong. See 2 Cor 5:8 also.

• 27. See how throughout this paragraph Paul invites the Philippians to fully share his own struggle: he is in prison, but they must remain in the front line of the battle. What does he expect? First that their community be a true one (v. 27). Unity is a decisive sign for those who see us from the outside. *Uphold the faith of the Gospel with one heart.* Whether there be a persecution or not, people from the outside will try to divide us.

• 2.1 Unity is often supported by a shared feeling of being the best, or the strongest, or

having to contend with another group: in that way many religious groups maintain their strength, their discipline and the efforts and sacrifices needed for this. All that is also found in Christian groups, but it should not be, for we have another spirit (Lk 9:55). With us, unity will follow from much humility and understanding of others. Here, Paul gives the secret of Christian co-existence: look for what is humble and do nothing through rivalry or for glory.

In a hymn which is a sort of creed, Paul proposes the example of Christ: his path from God to man, from rich to poor, from first to last, from master to servant.

The Lord Jesus desired to identify with the most humble, the most afflicted, the most despised. Such were Jesus' attitudes and they must be those of his followers, the Christians. A desire to identify with the most humble and to share with them is the motivation for a truly evangelical life.

In this we must differ from the majority of people who are mainly interested in their personal or family fulfillment. Their ambitions are legitimate, and who among us does not share them at least partly? Yet they have been devalued by Christ by the simple fact that he took the opposite way.

Jn 13:14 spirit, one feeling, ³ do nothing through rivalry or vain conceit. On the contrary
 Rom 12:3 let each of you gently consider the oth-
 1Cor 1:10 ers as more important than yourselves.
⁴ Do not seek your own interest, but rather that of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ had:

Jn 1:1 ⁶ Though he was in the form of God,
 Col 1:15 he did not regard equality with God
 Heb 1:3 as something to be grasped,
⁷ but emptied himself,
 Mt 20:28 taking on the nature of a servant,
 2Cor 8:9 made in human likeness,
 and in his appearance found as a man.

Rom 5:19 ⁸ He humbled himself by being obe-
 Heb 5:8 dient to death,
 death on the cross.

Mt 23:12 ⁹ That is why God exalted him
 Jn 10:17 and gave him the Name which out-
 Eph 1:20 shines all names,

Acts 5:41 ¹⁰ so that at the Name of Jesus all
 Eph 4:10 knees should bend
 Heb 2:17 in heaven, on earth and among the
 dead,

Is 45:23 ¹¹ and all tongues proclaim that
 Rom 10:9 Christ Jesus is the Lord
 Acts 2:36 to the glory of God the Father.

• ¹² Therefore, my dearest friends, as

you always obeyed me while I was with you, even more now that I am far from you, continue working out your salvation “with fear and trembling.” ¹³ It is God who makes you not only wish but also carry out what pleases him. ¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling, ¹⁵ so that without fault or blame, you will be children of God without reproach among a crooked and perverse generation. You are a light among them, like stars in the universe, ¹⁶ holding to the Word of life. I shall feel proud of you on the day of Christ on seeing that my effort and labor have not been in vain. ¹⁷ And if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I rejoice and continue to share your joy; ¹⁸ and you likewise should rejoice and share my joy.

Paul’s messengers

• ¹⁹ The Lord Jesus lets me hope that I may soon send you Timothy, and have news of you. With this I will feel encouraged. ²⁰ For I have no one so concerned for you as he is. ²¹ Most follow their own interest, not those of Christ Jesus. ²² But Timothy has proved himself, as you know. Like a son at the side of his father, he has been with me at the ser-

He did not claim equality with God: the mystery of God’s Son who became a mortal man and gave up God’s Glory, although he could have preserved it even in his human life. Since Christ was to be the New Man, glorified by God and placed above everything, his being subject to misery and limitations was a way of being reduced to nothingness.

God exalted him. The humiliation and obedience of Christ were the condition for receiving his glory. *He gave him the Name* (of God), that is, he made him fully enjoy in his human nature the divine Power (or Name).

• 12. *Continue working out your salvation with fear and trembling.* It is not a matter of being afraid of God. Paul has just urged his readers to rejoice, since they no longer have *the spirit of slaves to make them fearful, but the spirit of sons and daughters* (Rom 8:15).

Paul, in fact, has just recalled Christ’s sacrifice and he draws this conclusion: take your life very seriously (this is the meaning of fear and trembling: as does the one who carefully carries a

precious load). Be aware that God is at work in you through these good desires that come to you. Live in the presence of God.

• 19. Paul usually deals with personal matters at the end of his letters. Here he seems to interrupt the subject of his letter that he will take up again in 3:1. Paul announces two visits to the Christians of Philippi.

Timothy is Paul’s assistant; he is entrusted with several missions to the communities. It seems that Timothy did not have much authority and could be easily humiliated by those who disliked Paul’s direction.

As to Epaphroditus, he was a Christian from Philippi who had left his family, spent his money and faced risks in order to go and visit Paul. The community of believers must pay attention to its most committed members, who have little means, in order to assist them. The Church sometimes presents as examples, militants from the working class or peasants who were quite forgotten by their brothers and sisters in the faith during their lives.

vice of the Gospel. ²³ Because of that I hope to send him to you as soon as I see how things work out for me. ²⁴ Nevertheless the Lord lets me think that I myself shall be coming soon.

^{4:18} ²⁵ I judged it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, who worked and fought at my side and whom you sent to help me in my great need. ²⁶ In fact, he missed you very much and was still more worried because you had heard of his sickness. ²⁷ He was indeed sick and almost died, but God took pity on him and on me, sparing me greater sorrow. ²⁸ And so I am eager to send him to you, so that on seeing him you will be glad and I will be at peace. ²⁹ Receive him then with joy, as is fitting in the Lord. Consider highly persons like him, ³⁰ who almost died for the work of Christ; he risked his life to serve me on your behalf when you could not help me.

^{1Cor}
^{16:16}

• **3.1** *The discourse of Paul seems to be interrupted here. Paul begins a violent polemic against ill-converted Jews who keep repeating that one must first be faithful to the laws and customs of the Old Testament in order to be a good Christian.*

Beware of the dogs...! (v. 2) Paul applies to the Jews, proud of being the chosen people, the very insults that they reserved for non-Jews. Jews were sealed by the circumcision, but they mocked people of other religions who incised their skin (1K 18:28).

Through what Paul says concerning his faithfulness to Judaism, we know something of his past. He was born in Tarsus to a Jewish family who had left their country and had settled there, in "Greek" territory, where they dedicated themselves to business. His parents were wealthy and well thought of since they had the dignity and the rights of Roman citizens (see Acts 22:28). Along with Greek culture, Paul received religious education from the Bible and the Jewish people. He saw firsthand the pagan feasts and sacrifices, but was proud of belonging to God's people, of being circumcised and instructed in God's promises to his race. His parents sent him to Jerusalem to study Scripture and the Law with the great masters of his time (see Acts 22:3).

He was a model of strict Pharisee. He did not meet Christ but did meet the early Christians. Because he was faithful to the religion of his ancestors, he believed it was necessary to persecute, imprison and even kill those preaching a new doctrine and deceiving (so he thought) the people, since they proclaimed a false, defeated and crucified Messiah.

Do not turn back to the Jewish law

3 ¹ Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. ^{1:4}
^{2Cor}
^{13:11}

• It is not a burden for me to write again the same things, and for you it is safer. ² Beware of the dogs, beware of the bad workers; beware of the circumcised. ³ We are the true circumcised people since we serve according to the Spirit of God, and our confidence is in Christ Jesus rather than in our merits. ^{Rom}
^{16:17}
^{Gal}
^{6:12}
^{Jer}
^{4:4}
^{Col}
^{2:11}
^{2Cor}
^{11:21}

⁴ I myself do not lack those human qualities in which people have confidence. If some of them seem to be accredited with such qualities, how much more am I! ⁵ I was circumcised when eight days old. I was born of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; I am a Hebrew, born of Hebrews. With regard to the Law, I am a Pharisee, ⁶ and such was my zeal for the Law that I persecuted the Church. As for being ^{Gen}
^{17:10}
^{Acts}
^{23:6}
^{Gal}
^{1:14}

At times, Paul must have had doubts (Acts 26:14), and increasingly so, when he felt duty bound to increase repression. The Pharisees were against the death penalty. To hesitate or go backwards was to recognize that God had taken another road than the one where he himself had been the defender of God's cause. Worse still: with Jesus, never more would he be the just man but rather the pardoned sinner. When Jesus forcefully entered into Paul's life, it was a matter of *losing all* and Paul from then on accepted to *regard as garbage* all that he had been proud of.

Forgetting what is behind me (v. 13). Paul only wanted to "forget." Forget his merits and his gains (in the judgment of others) so as to receive more fully the free grace of God; forget what he already knew of God and be available for new experiences.

I want to know him. The greatest thing for Christians is not to perform miracles, or to speak in tongues, but to know Christ and meet him as a living person. *I want to experience the power of his resurrection.* All of us would like to feel the presence of God and to see him in some way, but the way to experience his power that transfigures us is by sharing in Christ's sufferings (2 Cor 1:3-5).

All of us who claim to be perfect (v. 15). See what was said in 1 Cor 2:6. Paul speaks ironically again about those who believe they belong to a superior class of Christians, while he would not dare consider himself to be perfect (v. 12).

Finally, he insists on the resurrection. Because we know that our bodies (or persons) will be raised and that the universe will be renewed, we must put passing things in their place: food,

righteous according to the Law, I was blameless.

⁷But once I found Christ, all those things that I might have considered as profit, I reckoned as loss. ⁸Still more, everything seems to me as nothing compared with the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake I have let everything fall away and I now consider all as garbage, if instead I may gain Christ. ⁹May I be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but with the righteousness that God gives to those who believe.

¹⁰May I know him and experience the power of his resurrection and share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, ¹¹and attain through this, God willing, the resurrection from the dead!

¹²I do not believe I have already reached the goal, nor do I consider myself perfect, but I press on till I conquer Christ Jesus, as I have already been conquered by him. ¹³No, brothers and sisters, I do not claim to have claimed the prize yet. I say only this: forgetting what is behind me, I race forward and run towards the goal, ¹⁴my eyes on the prize to which God has called us from above in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let all of us who claim to be perfect have the same way of thinking, but if there is something on which you differ, God will make it clear to you. ¹⁶Meanwhile, let us go forward from the point we have each attained.

¹⁷Unite in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and look at those who walk in our way of life. ¹⁸For many live as ene-

mies of the cross of Christ. I have said it to you many times, and now I repeat it with tears: ¹⁹they are heading for ruin; their belly is their god and they feel proud of what should be their shame. They only think of earthly things.

²⁰For us, our citizenship is in heaven, from where we await the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord. ²¹He will transfigure our lowly body, making it like his own body, radiant in Glory, through the power which is his to submit everything to himself.

Agree with one another and be happy

4 ¹Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, you my glory and crown, be steadfast in the Lord. ²I beg Evodia and Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³And you, Sycygnus, my true companion, I beg you to help them. Do not forget that they have labored with me in the service of the Gospel, together with Clement and my other fellow-workers whose names are written in the Book of Life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: rejoice ⁵and may everyone experience your gentle and understanding heart. The Lord is near: ⁶do not be anxious about anything. In everything resort to prayer and supplication together with thanksgiving and bring your requests before God. ⁷Then the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with whatever is truthful,

wine, sex – all must stop being the idols that enslave us.

• **4.1** *Once again the theme is interrupted; this passage seems to be the continuation of 2:19–3:1.*

The Book of Life (v. 3) is a common Jewish term meaning those who will be saved (Rev 20:12).

Fill your minds with whatever is truthful,

holy, just, pure, lovely and noble (v. 8). Paul continuously repeats that it is not enough to avoid what is forbidden. Let us discover this free and open attitude of a believer who knows that God speaks to him in a thousand ways through others. How many examples before our eyes each day! What great, noble and true things there are in this world about which we speak negatively! Let us accept what is good, wherever we find it, even among unbelievers.

2Thes
3:7

Mt
6:19
Col
3:2

Eph
2:6
Heb
12:22

Rom
8:19
1Cor
15:51
Tit
2:13

1Thes
2:19

Dn
12:1
Rev
20:12

3:1
1Cor
16:22

Lk
18:1

Rom
3:11

Eph
6:18

Jn
14:27
Col
3:15

Mt
5:20
Rom
10:3
Gal
2:16

2Cor
4:11
2Tim
2:11

1Jn
4:10

Lk
9:62
1Cor
9:5

1Cor
4:16

holy, just, pure, lovely and noble. Be mindful of whatever deserves praise and admiration. ⁹Put into practice what you have learned from me, what I passed on to you, what you heard from me or saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.

Rom
12:2

Paul's thankfulness

• ¹⁰I rejoice in the Lord because of your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me before, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹I do not say this because of being in want; I have learned to manage with what I have. ¹²I know what it is to be in want and what it is to have plenty. I am trained for both: to be hungry or satisfied, to have much or little. ¹³I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

Heb
13:5

2Cor
12:9
Col
1:29

¹⁴However you did right in sharing my trials. ¹⁵You Philippians, remember that in the beginning, when we first

Acts
16:12

preached the Gospel, after I left Macedonia you alone opened for me a debit and credit account, ¹⁶and when I was in Thessalonica, twice you sent me what I needed.

Acts
17:1

¹⁷It is not your gift that I value but rather the interest increasing in your own account. ¹⁸Now I have enough and more than enough with everything Epaphroditus brought me on your behalf and which I received as "fragrant offerings pleasing to God." ¹⁹God himself will provide you with everything you need, according to his riches, and show you his generosity in Christ Jesus. ²⁰Glory to God, our Father, for ever and ever: Amen.

1Cor
9:11

2:17
Gen
8:21

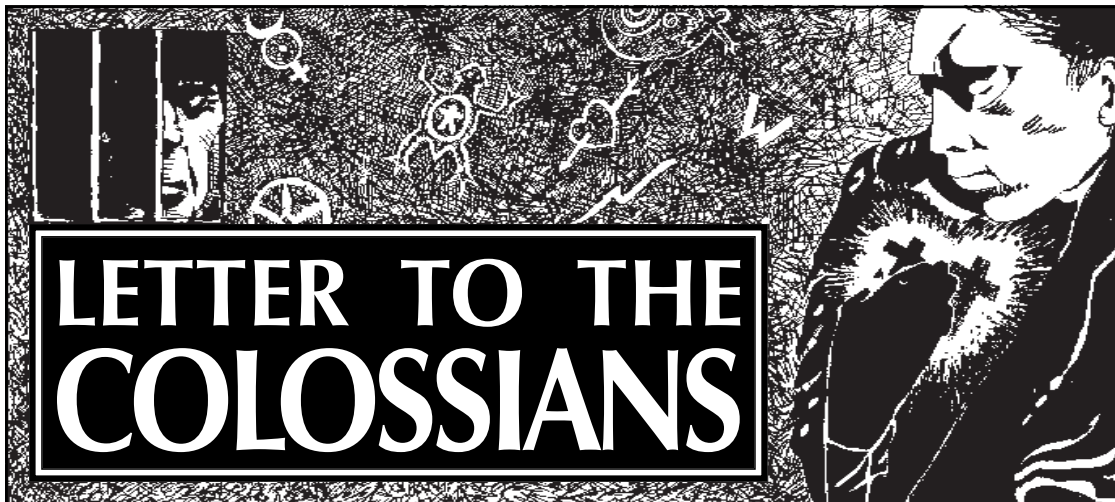
Heb
13:16

²¹Greet all who believe in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters with me greet you. ²²All the believers here greet you, especially those from Caesar's household. ²³The grace of Christ Jesus, the Lord, be with your spirit.

1:13

• 10. Paul thanks the Church of Philippi for their help. He, who is so jealous of his independence and anxious not to seem to take advantage

of others under the pretext of religion, accepts what his real friends give him.



Towards the year 62, 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.

^{1Cor 1:1} **1** • ¹Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy our brother,

²to the saints in Colossae, our faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:

Receive grace and peace from God our Father, and Christ Jesus our Lord.

^{Eph 1:15} ³Thanks be to God, the Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord!

We constantly pray for you, ⁴for 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, ⁵of which you have heard through the word of truth. This Gospel, ⁶already 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.

^{4:12} ^{Phlm 23} ⁷He who taught you, Epaphras, our dear companion in the service of Christ, faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸has reminded me of the love you have for me in the spirit. ⁹Because 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. ¹⁴In him we are redeemed and forgiven.

Christ is the beginning of everything

• ¹⁵He is the image of the unseen God,

and for all creation he is the first-born,

¹⁶for 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.

¹⁷He is before all

and all things hold together in him.

¹⁸And he is the head of the body, that is the Church,

^{1Thes 2:12}

^{1P 2:9}
^{Dt 33:3}
^{Acts 26:18}
^{Wis 5:5}

^{Rom 3:24}
^{Eph 1:7}

^{Jn 1:1}
^{Wis 7:26}
^{Gen 1:26}

^{Pro 8:22}
^{Jn 1:3}
^{Heb 1:2}

^{1Cor 8:6}
^{2Cor 4:4}

^{Eph 1:10}
^{Phil 2:6}
^{Heb 1:3}
^{1:6}

^{Eph 1:22}
^{4:15}
^{5:23}

• **1.1** Paul, as usual, praises his readers. Actually, he is writing because of the information Epaphras gave him about the Colossians' concerns.

Epaphras, about whom Paul speaks (1:7), is a man from Colossae. When Paul was organizing the evangelization of the province of Ephesus (see Acts 19:26 and 20:4), he did not go to every city, but would send his assistants. Epaphras of Colossae announced the Good News and had started to form communities in Colossae and then in the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis (see Col 4:13). He was the man who came to Rome to inform Paul of the difficulties.

Your faith... your love... in hope... (vv. 4-5). Paul constantly regroups these three Christian powers: believe, love and hope. In the Christian world, they are called theological virtues (i.e., powers that go straight to God). The three go together, otherwise they do not exist. In a sense hope is the first: if it is no longer alive, faith and love remain powerless.

Straight away, Paul presents faith as being

matchless: the Gospel has already been preached and believed throughout the world (v. 6) (which is rather too quickly said); faith opens for us the way to true knowledge: precisely what the Colossians are looking for (see Introduction); through this faith God has already placed us in the kingdom of Light (v. 12).

He has transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. While the Colossians are interested in an invisible world of supernatural forces, where luminous powers battle with those of darkness (see the Introduction, and also Eph 1:21), Paul immediately clarified the situation: there is nothing other than the power of Darkness and the kingdom of the Son.

• 15. Paul shows that the angels or *invisible powers* (v. 16) whether from the Bible or the story tellers of "gnosis" with their Thrones, Authorities, Principles... are nothing compared with Christ. He is neither agent nor intermediary of a creative adventure without a true creator. He is not one of the saviors of a history rather

for he is the first, the first raised from the dead

that he may be the first in everything,

2:9 Jn 1:16 Eph 1:23
 19 for God was pleased to let fullness dwell in him.

Rom 5:10 2Cor 5:18 Eph 1:10 2:14
 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.

2:13 Eph 4:18
 • 21 You yourselves were once estranged and opposed to God because of your evil deeds, 22 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

Eph 5:27

Mk 16:15
1Cor 15:58
1Tim 3:16Acts 9:16
2Cor 4:10

2Cor 3:6

impersonal: there is only God-Creator and in him is Christ. See the same idea in Hebrews 1.

In Galatians 4:1-5 Paul recognizes that the history of humanity has been deeply marked by natural and social forces that he does not name. 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.

God was pleased to let fullness dwell in him 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.

All was made through him: Jn 1:1 and Heb 1:2.

And was the first raised... 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 abandonment to his Father was a first necessary step so that we too would have a resurrection.

God willed to reconcile. 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 between individuals and nations can be achieved (Eph 2:11).

That you may be, without fault, holy and blameless before him (v. 22): see commentary on Eph 5:26.

I complete in my own flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. After Christ's death something would be lacking in the salvation of the world, if Jesus' followers and apostles did not, in their turn, meet with trials and sufferings. Working for the Church means suffering for the Church; to work for the rule of justice is to suffer for the sake of justice.

His mysterious plan: see Eph 3:5. We must not forget that in those days, no one even thought of the common destiny of humanity: they did not even speak of humanity. Moreover, neither the Greeks nor the Romans looked beyond their actual existence. Paul is amazed by the generosity of God whose promises are for all people, without distinction (v. 27). We, too, are offered nothing less than a share in the *Glory of God*, that is to say, all the riches found in him.

Mk 13:10
Acts 20:24
Rom 16:25
Eph 3:3
ministry to make the word of God fully known. ²⁶I mean that mysterious plan that for centuries and generations remained secret, and which God has now revealed to his holy ones.

Rom 5:2
8:19
Eph 1:18
²⁷God 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 and you may hope God's Glory.

²⁸This Christ we preach. We warn and teach everyone true wisdom, aiming to make everyone perfect in Christ.

Eph 3:7
Phil 4:13
²⁹For this cause I labor and struggle with the energy of Christ working powerfully in me.

Let Christ Jesus, the Lord, be your doctrine

Rev 1:11
Is 45:3
2 ¹I want you to know how I strive for you, for those of Laodicea and for so many who have not met me personally. ²I 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. ³For in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

1Cor 5:3
⁴So let no one deceive you with persuasive arguments. ⁵Although 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.

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

⁸See 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. ⁹For in Him dwells the fullness of God in bodily form. ¹⁰He is the head of all cosmic power and authority, and in him you have everything.

Mt 15:2
Gal 4:3
Eph 5:6
2Tim 4:3
1:19
Jn 1:16
Eph 1:21

Baptized and risen

¹¹In Christ Jesus you were given a circumcision but not by human hands, which removed completely from you the carnal body: ¹²I 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.

Jer 4:4
Rom 2:25
Phil 3:3
Rom 6:4
10:9
Eph 2:6

¹³You were dead. You were in sin and uncircumcised at the same time. But God gave you life with Christ. He forgave all our sins. ¹⁴He canceled the

Eph 2:15

• **2.1** *I want you to know how I strive for you.* This *struggle* of Paul signifies labor (1:28-29) and prayer (4:2 and Rom 15:30). It would be very tempting (and it is the temptation of the Colossians) to make Christianity an attractive religion, with beautiful explanations, leaving people hanging on to their dreams and passions, a religion that does not attack the sin rooted in our way of life and in our society. To join the attack we must first be convinced that it is in Christ that we find the whole mystery of God.

Let no one deceive you. Philosophy and the search for wisdom are highly respectable. Philosophies always contain some truth; their danger is in seeming to give a total response to our problems. They are *deceptive* insofar as they come from philosophers who have in fact had either a limited or questionable experience of human reality. In faith, on the contrary, rather than a discourse on human concerns, we have a person: Christ. While all the currents of thought are the product of their day and grow old with time, Paul assures us that all the fullness of God is in Christ in a human form.

• **11.** Paul has just said that a Christian has wisdom and is on a way of knowledge. He now reminds us that our entry into the Church has been much more than an exterior rite. Through baptism, we have become part of this renewal of the world brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Paul had been circumcised, and knew from experience that it did not save him. We can be fairly sure baptism did not also miraculously free him of his aggressiveness and weaknesses, but he began to live his human existence differently. He had been liberated, among other things, of what weighed heavily on him: religion with all 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* towards 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.

2Cor 2:14
1P 3:22
record of our debts, those regulations which accused us. He did away with all that and nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵Victorious 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

Rom 14
1Cor 8:8
Gal 4:10
Mt 11:13
Heb 8:5
10:5
1Cor 8:1
Eph 4:15
• ¹⁶So, then, let no one criticize you in matters of food or drink or for not observing festivals, new moons or the Sabbath. ¹⁷These things were only shadows of what was to come, whereas the reality is the person of Christ. ¹⁸Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on humbling practices and worship of angels. In fact, they are only good to satisfy self-indulgence, ¹⁹instead 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.

²⁰If 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...” ²²These are human rules and teachings, referring to things that are perishable, that wear out and disappear. ²³These 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.

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.

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

Let no one criticize you. 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,

1Cor 6:13

Is 29:13
Mt 15:9Mt 6:20
Phil 3:20
Jn 3:1Gal 2:20
1Thes 4:17
1P 1:7
1Jn 3:2

Rom 6:6
Gal 5:24
Mk 9:43
5 Therefore, 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. 6 These are the things that arouse the wrath of God.

Eph 2:2
Jas 1:21
1P 2:1
7 For a time you followed this way and lived in such disorders. 8 Well then, reject all that: anger, evil intentions, malice; and let no abusive words be heard from your lips.

Put on the new self

Gen 1:26
2Cor 4:6
1Cor 12:13
Gal 3:28
9 Do not lie to one another. You have been stripped of the old self and its way of thinking 10 to put on the new, which is being renewed and is to reach perfect knowledge and the likeness of its creator. 11 There is no room for distinction between Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, foreigner, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all.

Eph 4:1
Phil 2:1
Jn 15:12
Rom 5:7
1Cor 13
12 Clothe yourselves, then, as is fitting for God's chosen people, holy and beloved of him. Put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience 13 to bear with one another and forgive whenever there is any occasion to do so. As the Lord has forgiven you, forgive one another. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love which binds ev-

erything together in perfect harmony. 15 May the peace of Christ overflow in your hearts; for this end you were called to be one body. And be thankful.

16 Let the word of God dwell in you in all its richness. Teach and admonish one another with words of wisdom. With thankful hearts sing to God psalms, hymns and spontaneous praise. 17 And whatever you do or say, do it in the Name of Jesus, the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

On obedience

Eph 5:21-6:9
18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as you should do in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not get angry with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, 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

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. It is not that we have to kill ourselves, but to destroy egoism, 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

(vv. 18-19) will be largely developed in Eph 5:21-33. Paul would not accept the attitude of many Christians who say: "Religion has nothing to do with what I do in my home, my work, my leisure, or in politics." On the contrary, Paul insists that Christians live all of this before the Lord, for the Lord and in the Lord.

This is why Paul preaches the same ethics to everyone: men, women, slaves (we would say bosses and workers); all must be just, loyal and respectful of others, even when they have faults. We should struggle to bring about change and defend our rights; but we must lead these struggles and live our commitments according to the spirit of Christ. Very often what we ask for in order to change the world is less important than the way in which we ask it, and it is often there that a Christian will give a witness that only she can give. Let others be successful whatever the means that are taken and whatever the disastrous consequences for society: see on this subject the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7).

Rom 2:11
1P
1:17
Christ. ²⁵Every evildoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, for God does not make exceptions in favor of anyone.

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

Further instructions

Eph 6:18
²Be steadfast in prayer and even spend the night praying and giving thanks. ³Pray 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; ⁴pray then that I may be able to reveal this mystery as I should.

1Cor 5:12
1Thes 4:12
1P
3:15
⁵Deal wisely with those who do not belong to the Church; take advantage of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be pleasing with a touch of wit. Know how to speak to everyone in the best way.

Phlm 10
⁷Tychicus will give news of me. He is our dear brother and for me a faithful assistant and fellow worker for the Lord. ⁸I am purposely sending him to give you news of me and to encourage you. ⁹With 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.

Acts 12:12
2Tim 4:11
1P
5:13
¹⁰My companion in prison, Aris-tarchus, greets you, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, about whom you have already received instructions. If he calls on you, receive him warmly. ¹¹Jesus, called Justus, also greets you. They are the only Jewish people working with me for the kingdom of God, and because of that they have been a comfort to me.

Rom 15:30
¹²Greetings 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. ¹³I assure you that he has worked hard for you, as well as for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

2Tim 4:11
¹⁴Greetings from Luke, our dear doctor and from Demas. ¹⁵Greet the brothers and sisters of Laodicea, and don't forget Nympha and the church that gathers in her house.

1Thes 5:27
Rev 1:3
Phlm 2
¹⁶After reading this letter, see that it is read in the Church of the Laodiceans, and have the letter they received read in yours. ¹⁷And say to Archipus, "Do not forget the ministry given to you in the Lord."

1Cor 16:21
Gal 6:11
¹⁸Greetings in my own hand, Paul. Remember that I am in chains. Grace be with you.

• **4.2** All this is commented on in *Ephesians 6:18-21*.

Onesimus is a runaway slave who returns to Colossae with Tychicus after Paul converted him to the faith (see Letter to Philemon).

The evangelist *Mark*, now reconciled with Paul (see Acts 15:38), is with him. *Luke* (v. 14) mentioned here is the author of the Gospel and Acts.

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 con-

scious 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.