

V. AUTHENTICITY¹

Although most scholars accept the genuineness of this epistle, there are some who do not, and the problems must consequently be briefly stated. Even before the Tübingen school of F. C. Baur and his associates disputed the epistle, T. Mayerhoff found in it un-Pauline thoughts, evidences of disputation with the second-century Cerinthus and a dependence on Ephesians. The main plank of Baur and his school was the alleged evidence that the heresy combated in the epistle was second-century Gnosticism, in which case Pauline authorship was sufficiently disproved. In attempting to salvage something from the results of this radical criticism, H. J. Holtzmann resorted to the theory of interpolations made by the author of Ephesians into an original shorter but genuine epistle to the Colossians. Others (e.g. van Soden) modified Holtzmann's theory by reducing the amount of interpolations, but all such partition theories are doomed to failure because of the manifest unity of our canonical epistle. Julicher rightly pointed out that the suspicion that there are interpolations in this epistle would never have arisen had it not been for the presence of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Another line of argument against authenticity has been the claim that the epistle reflects post-Pauline catholicism. This is usually based on three types of evidence: 1. The different idea of hope compared with the accepted Pauline epistles, 2. The alleged use of a baptismal confession, and 3. The claim that Epaphras lends support to the idea of apostolic succession. The first is to be questioned because it assumes that Paul could not have conceived of both a future and a present hope. That Colossians 1:15–20 may be a pre-Pauline hymn is possible and this does not exclude the possibility that Paul has used it to combat the Colossian heresy. There seems no reason to question authenticity on this ground. As for Epaphras, there is no reason to think he was other than a fellow labourer of the apostle.

The close relation of Colossians to Ephesians has continued to be a factor in the authenticity debate. F. C. Synge regarded Ephesians as genuine and Colossians as a pale reflection, which meant he had a poor opinion of the latter as a non-Pauline production. But this view has gained few supporters. Others have followed something of the same line as Holtzmann but have adopted different non-Pauline sections. This shows the weakness of testing authenticity by source criteria. The arguments invariably become too subjective.

The question of authenticity is decided on two issues, one literary, the other doctrinal. As C. F. D. Moule expresses it, 'a decision turns largely on whether or not one can imagine the type of error implied by Colossians having appeared already in St. Paul's lifetime, and can conceive of St. Paul dealing with it in this way and in these words'. Among the literary features which have sometimes been regarded as non-Pauline are:

¹Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Series taken from jacket., 4th rev. ed., The master reference collection Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996, c1990), 572.

1. A number of unusual genitival combinations as, for instance, ‘an inheritance ... as a reward’ (3:24), ‘putting off of the sinful nature’ (2:11), ‘grows as God causes it to grow’ (2:19) and ‘the hope of glory’ (1:27). glory’ (1:27).

2. The style is more laboured, with many more subsidiary clauses than in Paul’s earlier letters, and there are an unusual number of substantives with the preposition ἐν (see, for example, Col. 1:9–23 where thirteen instances occur, and Col. 2:9–15 where nine occur).

3. Many new words are used, while many well-known Pauline ideas are missing.

But these difficulties are not great. Stylistic differences are generally attributable to changing circumstances or subject-matter. The strongest peculiarities, as E. Percy observes, are found in those sections which deal with the false teaching, which is most natural in view of the fact that such teaching is not dealt with in any earlier letters. The same author suggests that the style shows a greater use of what may be called a liturgical hymn style, similar to that found in the prayers and thanksgivings of the other epistles. No doubt Paul’s circumstances of imprisonment also contributed towards changes of style. Certain differences are indisputable but there seem to be quite inadequate grounds for claiming that Paul could not have written in the style of this epistle.

The doctrinal problem turns on the presence of Gnostic ideas. It has already been shown that the false teaching is at most allied to an incipient Gnosticism, which is by no means improbable in Paul’s lifetime. Only a criticism which insists that fully developed Gnosticism is in mind will feel bound on the basis of doctrine to attribute the letter to a second-century origin (as the earlier critics did). Not all Pauline concepts find a place in the epistle, but it is quite unnatural to insist that a writer must express all his beliefs in every letter he writes. The new ideas are not out of harmony with Paul’s earlier thoughts, but are rather developments from them. The Christology of Colossians may be compared, for instance, with the germ ideas in 1 Corinthians 8:6 and 2 Corinthians 4:4. We may safely conclude that the apostle could have expressed all the doctrinal ideas of the Colossian epistle.

The strongest arguments in support of its authenticity are the indisputable nature of the external evidence and the inseparable connection of the epistle with Philemon. There is no shred of evidence that the Pauline authorship of the whole or any part of this epistle was ever disputed until the nineteenth century. It formed part of the Pauline corpus as far back as can be traced, and evidence of such a character cannot lightly be swept aside. This strong external attestation is further supported by the close link between the epistle and Philemon, whose authenticity has been challenged by only the most extreme negative critics. The reasons for maintaining this link may be stated as follows.

1. Both contain Timothy’s name with Paul’s in the opening greeting (Col. 1:1; Phm. 1).

2. Greetings are sent in both letters from Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke and Demas, who are all clearly with Paul at the time (Col. 4:10–14; Phm. 23–24).

3. In Philemon 2 Archippus is called a ‘fellow-soldier’, and in Colossians 4:17 he is directed to fulfil his ministry.

4. Onesimus, the slave concerning whom the letter to Philemon is written, is mentioned in Colossians 4:9 as being sent with Tychicus and is described as ‘one of you’.

In the light of these data it is impossible to imagine that the two epistles were sent at different times, and since the authenticity of Philemon is generally unquestioned it carries

with it the certainty that Colossians is a genuine work of Paul. The most that disputants of authenticity may reasonably claim is that the epistle is but partially genuine, but this raises more difficulties than it solves.

THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE LETTER²

Up to this point it has been assumed that the letter to the Colossians was a genuine composition of Paul, written by him, or at least at his dictation, and sent out in his name. This view does not rule out the possibility of Paul utilizing other material, such as chapter 1:15–20 or even chapter 2:13–15 (for a discussion see the relevant exegetical sections). Not all, however, are convinced that the letter came from Paul's hand, either directly or indirectly, and their reasons are examined below (on the history of the problem see Percy, *Probleme*, 5–15, and Lähnemann, *Kolossierbrief*, 12–28).

The tradition that Colossians is a genuine Pauline epistle stands on good ground. The later Church fathers accepted it (Irenaeus, *Adv Haer* 3.14.1; Tertullian, *De Praescr Haer* 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom* 1.1) and there was no dispute over its authorship in the first decades, even if the allusions to the letter in the earlier part of the second century are not entirely clear. (It appears to have been used as early as Justin, *Dialogue* 85.2; 138.2.) Marcion included it in his canonical list, and it is also found in the Muratorian canon. The letter itself is thought to confirm this, as Paul's name appears at both the beginning (1:1) and the end (4:18).

The first significant denial of Paul's authorship in recent times came in 1838 when E. T. Mayerhoff claimed to have found in Colossians un-Pauline thoughts, evidences of disputation with the second century Cerinthus and a dependence on Ephesians. The main plank of F. C. Baur and the Tübingen school's theories was the alleged evidence that the heresy combated in the epistle was second-century Gnosticism. Accordingly the case for Pauline authorship was thought to have been disproved.

Although few scholars have followed the lead of Mayerhoff in his assertions about the letter's alleged dependence on Ephesians, F. C. Synge (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: A Theological Commentary*. [London: S.P.C.K. 1941] 70–75) has (recently) championed the theory, regarding Colossians as a pale and inadequate imitation of Ephesians (which is considered a genuine Pauline letter). The style of Ephesians is said to be far superior to that of Colossians; in parallel passages (e.g. Eph 2:12, 13 and Col 1:20, 21) it is argued that the material of the former is more aptly suited to its context, while theological concepts such as "perfection" and "unity" are more primitive in Ephesians than in Colossians. But Synge's position fails to account for the many places where an advance in thought or a relationship of linguistic dependence can be more easily traced to Ephesians than to Colossians (cf. Polhill, *RevExp* 70 [1973] 441). Other hypotheses have been suggested to explain the relationship between the two letters: Ephesian dependence on Colossians (cf. Goodspeed, Mitton, Ochel, Beare), mutual interdependence

²Peter T. O'Brien, vol. 44, *Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon* (, Word Biblical Commentary Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), xli.

(Holtzmann, Coutts), or that neither epistle is directly dependent on the other (Klijn)! (For an overview of the various hypotheses see Polhill, *RevExp* 70 [1973] 439–50.) But the question of the authenticity of Colossians must be decided on other grounds and so we turn to the two major issues in the discussion, the one literary, the other theological.

A. THE LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF COLOSSIANS

Many of the formal features of Colossians show similarities with the other Pauline letters. The connections involve the structure of the epistle such as the introduction (1:1–2) and the conclusion (4:18), the thanksgiving prayer (1:3–8), connecting words and phrases which introduce instructional expositions and exhortatory conclusions (note the expression θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι [“For I want you to know”], 2:1; and the uses of οὖν [“therefore”] at 2:6, 16; 3:1, 5, and elsewhere), as well as the list of messages and greetings (cf. 4:8, 10, 12, 15).

Many expressions used in Colossians show decidedly Pauline peculiarities of style (note esp. Percy, *Probleme*, 36–66, Kümmel, *Introduction*, 341, 342, Lohse, 84–91), for example, the superfluous use of καί (“and”) after διὰ τοῦτο (“therefore,” 1:9; cf. 1 Thess 2:13; 3:5; Rom 13:6, etc); in phrases like οἱ ἅγιοι αὐτοῦ (“his saints,” 1:26; cf. 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10) and ἐν μέρει (“in regard to,” 2:16; cf. 2 Cor 3:10; 9:3); as well as in verbs such as χαρίζομαι meaning to “forgive” (2:13; 3:13; cf. 2 Cor 2:7, 10; 12:13). The similarities and points of contact extend into the theological terminology, such as the expressions “in Christ” (1:2, 4, 28), “in the Lord” (3:18, 20; 4:7, 17) or “with Christ” (2:12, 20; 3:1, 3); expositions about being united with Christ in baptism (2:11, 12); statements about being freed from the compulsive power of the regulations (2:14, 20, 21); concerning the contrast between the old and the new man (3:5–17); and also regarding the relation between the indicative and the imperative in the exhortations (3:5–17).

On the other hand, there are linguistic differences between Colossians and the other Pauline letters which are worthy of attention (see Lohse, 85–88, for details). In all there are thirty-four words appearing in Colossians but nowhere else in the NT, twenty-eight words which reappear in the NT but not in the other Pauline letters (not taking into account 2 Thess and the Pastorals), ten words which Colossians has in common only with Ephesians and a further fifteen appearing in Colossians and Ephesians as well as in the rest of the NT, but not in the other Pauline letters. Before coming to conclusions too quickly, several important factors need to be kept in mind. First, a good number of the words noted in these statistics appear either in the hymnic paragraph (though on the question of its authorship see 40–42) or in the interaction with the false teaching. It is not surprising, then, that unusual terms should appear either as catchwords of the Colossian “philosophy” or as part of the author’s polemic. Second, Lohse (86) has drawn attention to compound words in Colossians which are to be compared with similar compounds in the other Pauline letters (e.g. ἀναναπληρώω, 1:24; προσαναπληρώω, 2 Cor 9:12; 11:9). Further, it must be remembered that hapax legomena and other unusual expressions turn up in considerable numbers in the other Pauline letters (cf. Percy, *Probleme*, 17, 18; Galatians, for example, has thirty-one words appearing nowhere else in the New Testament). The nonappearance of certain Pauline theological terms such as “sin” (in the singular), “righteousness” and related words, “law,” “salvation,” “believe,” etc is not decisive. In other Pauline letters, occasionally one or more of these words does not appear or is strikingly infrequent: “righteousness” turns up in 1 Corinthians only at 1:30 and not at all in 1 Thessalonians. The verb “justify” does not occur in 1 Thessalonians,

Philippians or in 2 Corinthians while “law” also is absent from 2 Corinthians. Likewise “salvation” does not appear in Galatians or in 1 Corinthians.

The absence of one or other word or concept may be due to the different subject matter being discussed in the particular letter. Schweizer (22; cf. Lohse, 87) considers it is quite peculiar that the very terms which could be expected to occur in a confrontation with legalistic doctrine are actually those which are missing: “sin” (in the singular), “righteousness,” “justify,” “believe” (an appropriate response might be that if these terms are so obvious in such a context why does not Paul’s disciple [possibly Timothy, according to Schweizer] include them in his argument?).

Recent writers have drawn attention to the characteristic features of the letter’s *style*, as distinct from its vocabulary (Lohse, 88–90; Bujard, *Untersuchungen*; cf. Percy, *Probleme*, 18: “the real problems concerning the form of the letter lie completely within the area of style”). Thus we note combined expressions belonging to the same stem (“strengthened with all power,” 1:11; cf. 1:29; 2:11, 19), synonymous expressions (“praying and asking,” 1:9; cf. 1:11, 22, 23, 26; 2:7; 3:8, 16; 4:12), series of dependent genitives (“the word of truth, of the gospel,” 1:5; cf. 1:12, 13, 20, 24, 27; 2:2, 11, 12), examples of nouns attached to phrases by the preposition “in” (ἐν: “the grace of God in truth,” 1:6; cf. 1:8, 12, 29 etc) and a loosely joined infinitive construction (“to walk worthily of the Lord,” 1:10; cf. 1:22, 25; 4:3, 6). Although similar usages can be cited from the chief Pauline letters they do not appear as frequently (cf. Schweizer, 22). Furthermore, it has been argued by Lohse (89) and others that Colossians is characterized by a liturgical hymnic style with its long sentences, made up of relative clauses, inserted causal phrases, participial phrases and further notes, some of which may be compared with material from the Qumran texts.

These stylistic peculiarities, however, have been interpreted differently. Percy (*Probleme*, 43) considers that these features when compared with the rest of the Pauline letters have their “basis entirely in the peculiarity of the letter’s content. This content, for its part, is clearly connected with the peculiarity of the situation which necessitated the letter” (cited by Lohse, 90; cf. Kümmel’s conclusion, *Introduction*, 342: “On the basis of language and style ... there is no reason to doubt the Pauline authorship of the letter”). Lohse (91) for his part, while concluding (on the grounds of theology) that “the author was a theologian decisively influenced by Paul” nevertheless admits that “on the basis of the observations made about the language and style of the letter, no final decision can yet be reached on the question of Pauline or non-Pauline authorship of the letter.” Several recent continental scholars have been more negative in their judgment. So Schweizer (23, with special reference to Bujard’s researches, *Untersuchungen*) concludes that a large number of carefully evaluated observations gives a uniform picture and depicts an author who, for all his dependence on Paul in vocabulary and thought, nevertheless argues differently from him. “The letter cannot have been written or dictated by Paul.” Such a judgment in our view appears to be unduly negative and presupposes an almost infallible understanding of what Paul could or could not have done. It also does not really explain the close similarities between Colossians and the generally accepted Pauline letters, a point which Ollrog (*Paulus*, 220, 237) is painfully aware of but does not satisfactorily answer with his own thesis of authorship by one close to Paul, i.e. Timothy.

B. THE TEACHING OF THE EPISTLE

For some scholars such as Lohse the supposed theological differences between Colossians and the generally accepted Pauline letters are decisive against the apostolic authorship of Colossians, even if the grounds of language and style were not. Earlier Mayerhoff believed that Colossians was full of non-Pauline ideas. F. C. Baur and the Tübingen school agreed with this judgment and cast further doubt on the apostolic authorship because this letter did not reflect the conflict between Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity which was the hallmark of the apostolic age. Further, it was argued that the letter's Christology belonged to a later period of church history when classical Gnostic influences had begun to exert themselves (on Baur's position see W. G. Kümmel, *The New Testament. The History of the Investigation of its Problems*. Tr S. McLean Gilmour and H. C. Kee (London: SCM, 1972) 135–37 American edition [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1972], cited by Martin, NCB, 33). It has already been shown that one need not resort to supposed full-blown Gnostic influences of the second century as a reconstructed background to the heresy and its letter. If the Jewish background of an ascetic mystical kind is the most likely of the competing possibilities (see above xxxvi–xxxviii) then there is no need to look beyond the apostolic age and certainly Pauline authorship is not ruled out on this account.

More significant are the objections to Paul's authorship on the grounds that major differences exist between Colossians and the theology of the main Pauline epistles. These differences, it is asserted, are not limited to the passages that argue against the "philosophy," but also turn up in sections that are free of polemic. They may be examined under the following headings:

1. CHRISTOLOGY

Lohse claims (178, 179) that Colossians develops its Christology on the basis of the Christ-hymn of chapter 1:15–20, and goes beyond the recognized Pauline statements of 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Romans 8:31–39 in its teaching that in Christ the entire fullness of deity dwells "bodily" (σωματικῶς, 2:9) and that he is the "head of every principality and power" (2:10). Certainly the hymnic passage (1:15–20) is central to the letter: the long prayer report of chapter 1:9–14 leads up to this paragraph in praise of Christ, while subsequent references in the epistle either echo some of its statements or are a spelling out of their implications. We judge that chapter 2:10 may be explained along these latter lines (there is no implication that "every principality and power" is a member of Christ's body; see the exegesis) while chapter 2:9 applies the words of the hymn (1:19) to the context of the Colossian heresy, making plain by the addition of the words "bodily" (σωματικῶς) the manner the entire fullness of deity dwells in Christ, i.e. in bodily form, by becoming incarnate (see on 2:9). The emphatic cosmic dimension of Christ's rule is a fuller and more systematic exposition of the theme of Christ's universal lordship, already made plain in earlier Pauline letters (cf. 1 Cor 8:6; 1:24; 2:6–10) and now spelled out in relation to and as a correction of the false teaching at Colossae. There is no need to postulate an author other than Paul as the source of such ideas.

2. ECCLESIOLOGY

The ecclesiology of Colossians is intimately connected with its Christology. This is nowhere more apparent than in the statement that Christ is the "head of the body" (κεφαλή τοῦ σώματος), that is, "the church" (τῆς ἐκκλησίας, 1:18). In the relevant exegetical section we have contended that σῶμα ("body") here did not originally refer to the cosmos and thus there is no need to look for Stoic antecedents as the source of the

writer's ideas (see 48–50). In 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 and Romans 12:4, 5 Paul employs the body terminology and its constituent parts to refer to the mutual relations and obligations of Christians. In these earlier references the “head” (κεφαλή) of the body had no special position or honor; it was counted as an ordinary member (cf. 1 Cor 12:21). In Colossians (and Ephesians) there is an advance in the line of thought, from the language of simile (as in 1 Cor and Rom) to that of a real and interpersonal involvement. This advance may well have been stimulated by Paul's reflection on the issues involved, in the Colossian heresy (for details see on 1:18).

The term ἐκκλησία (“church”) at chapter 1:18 is usually taken to refer to the people of God all over the world, the universal or world-wide church, where Christ here and now exercises his cosmic lordship (see for example E. Lohse, “Christusherrschaft und Kirche im Kolosserbrief,” *NTS* 11 [1964–65] 203–216, especially 204–207). However, we have suggested below (57–61) against the majority opinion, that it is best to understand this as a reference to a heavenly assembly around the risen and exalted Christ (cf. Col 3:1–4; Eph 2:6). That heavenly gathering with Christ at its center is manifested here and now on earth. Hence the same word ἐκκλησία (“church”) can be used of the local congregation at Colossae or even of a small house community (4:15, 16). The congregation in heaven finds its manifestation and becomes visible as the domain of Christ's rule where the saints and faithful brothers in Christ gather (1:2).

3. ESCHATOLOGY

In the current discussion about the eschatology of Colossians several different arguments are used against an acceptance of the apostolic authorship of the letter. Since these have been treated at length in the relevant exegetical sections we shall simply summarize the salient points here.

Bornkamm (see on 1:5 and 3:4) alleged that ἐλπίς meaning the “object of hope” in chapter 1:5 was unusual in Paul (“hope” was normally regarded as signifying the subjective experience of the Christian like “faith” and “love”). Further, he detected in Colossians 1:26, 27 not hope in the sense of historical eschatology but a “gnostic spherical thought.” However in neither chapters 1:26, 27 nor 3:4 are there spherical conceptions. Rather, there is evidence of a genuine eschatological tension. (It is perhaps not without significance that Bornkamm made no reference to Rom 8:24, 25—a passage in one of the main letters—where the connotation “object of hope” is certainly present [cf. Gal 5:5]; see the criticisms of Kümmel, *Introduction*, 344, and Martin, *NCB*, 34, 35.)

It is also alleged that eschatology in Colossians has receded into the background. Chapter 3:4 is said to contain the only explicit futuristic reference, and even here the “hidden-revealed” motif is without parallel in the earlier Pauline letters. Spatial concepts are thought to dominate at chapters 1:26, 27; 3:1–4; while none of the typically Pauline eschatological ideas—parousia, resurrection of the dead, judgment of the world—is encountered in Colossians. Further, it is pointed out that in this letter not only have believers died with Christ and been buried with him in baptism (2:11, 12), but also (unlike the genuine Pauline epistles), they are said to have been raised with him (2:12); God has made them alive together with Christ (2:13), raising them with him from the dead (3:1). The resurrection to new life has already occurred, so that the future event is no longer called the resurrection of the dead but the revelation of life in which the Christians already participate and which is still hidden with Christ in God (3:3, 4). The ethical “imperative” in Colossians as elsewhere in Paul is based on the “indicative”;

however it is argued that in Colossians, but nowhere in the genuine epistles of Paul, the resurrection of Christians in the past or present is regarded as the basis of that imperative.

A more detailed examination of these contentions has been made at 168, 169). Suffice it to say at this point that there is an emphasis on realized eschatology in Colossians, called forth by the particular circumstances of the letter. In terms of the “already-not yet” tension the accent falls upon the former. But this is not to suggest that the “not yet” side of Paul’s tension is absent. There is future eschatology at chapters 3:4, 6, 24 and, in our estimation, at 1:22, 28; cf. 4:11 (note the relevant exegetical sections). The “hidden-revealed” theme is a significant apocalyptic feature, while spatial concepts are used in the service of eschatology. The antithesis between eschatological and transcendent perspectives is a false one as both are found together in the undisputed Paulines and at Colossians 3:1–4. The apocalyptic notion of the resurrection from the dead is found at chapter 1:18 (see on this passage and 3:4) and in the undisputed Paulines the ideas of the resurrection from the dead and eschatological life are interchangeable (cf. Rom 4:17; 5:17, 18, 21; 8:11 etc; see further on chapter 2:12). There is an eschatological motivation in Colossians; it may not be dominant but it is present nevertheless (the exhortation, “put to death, therefore, ...” 3:5, is based on verses 1–4, the last of which has an eschatological emphasis). At the same time there are other grounds for exhortation in the generally accepted Pauline letters. In sum, the arguments against the Pauline authorship of Colossians based on a change in eschatology are inadequate. The differences of emphasis can be satisfactorily explained by the particular circumstances of the letter. There is no need to resort to a non-Pauline or post-Pauline authorship.

4. TRADITION

The alleged differences between the theology of Colossians and that of the major Pauline letters in the above-mentioned areas of Christology, ecclesiology and eschatology—differences which are thought to pervade the nonpolemical as well as the polemical parts of the letter—are ascribed to the emergence of a “Pauline school tradition” which was based probably in Ephesus. E. Käsemann (“A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy,” *Essays on New Testament Themes*. Tr by W. J. Montague [London: SCM, 1964] 166, 167 American edition [SBT 41; Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1964]) focuses his attention on two further features of this tradition. First, the baptismal *homologia* or confession of faith. He maintains that the post-Pauline author of the epistle has taken over a pre-Christian hymn (1:15–20) and used it for his purposes by setting it within the framework of a Christian confession of faith, by surrounding it with baptismal motifs (1:13, 14, which he had, in fact, found already connected with the hymnic piece), and a pastoral admonition to remain true to the faith (1:21–23). The intention of the author’s Christian use of the hymn was to combat heresy by a confession of faith shared by this community of the subapostolic age. Whatever else one may say about the overall approach, Käsemann’s contentions that the hymn was originally a pre-Christian Gnostic text taken over in Christian usage in a baptismal liturgical reinterpretation have been rejected by contemporary New Testament scholarship, and with good reason (for details see below 37, 38, cf. 25 and note the critique of the view integral to Käsemann’s argument that vv 12–14 were known in a prebaptismal context and served as an “introit” to the hymn).

The second feature of this post-Pauline tradition, according to Käsemann, is the adherence of the community “to the apostolic office as guardian of the truth. The

apostolate expounds the truth of the Gospel, as the confession of faith fixes it” (*Essays*, 166, 167). It is not Paul who relates the confession and apostolate in this way; rather, it “is the voice of the subapostolic age.”

Closely related to this presentation is the view of Marxsen (*Introduction*, 177–86) who argues that within the list of greetings in Colossians Epaphras’ name is especially emphasized. One of the chief reasons for this document, which is “a kind of pastoral letter” (180), was to give an apostolic authorization to Epaphras whose teaching represents the mind of Paul. Now that the apostle is no longer alive Epaphras stands in an apostolic succession. The letter bears the marks of the “early catholicism” of the subapostolic age, according to Marxsen (note the remarks on 4:13). For Lohse (68) “Colossians certifies the gospel as the correct teaching by connecting it with the apostolic office.”

However, serious questions have been raised about the grounds for such far-reaching reconstructions, and scholars such as Schweizer and Ollrog, who do not accept the direct Pauline authorship of Colossians, have made several pertinent criticisms. Both argue that of all the so-called deutero-Pauline letters Colossians stands most closely to Pauline theology. It is clearly an occasional letter written to a concrete church situation (cf. especially Lähnemann, *Kolossierbrief*). Colossians stands in a close relationship to the letter to Philemon. In both Paul is in prison (Col 4:3, 10, 18; Philem 1, 9, 10, 13, 23). The names of Paul and Timothy stand at the head of each letter (Col 1:1; Philem 1). Eight of the nine names mentioned in Philemon appear in Colossians. Clearly they are Paul’s co-workers, and it just will not do with Lohse (177) to assert that the messages and greetings as well as particular details about fellow-workers of the apostle are used by the author of Colossians “to prove that his writing is an apostolic message” (Lohse adds: “In using Philemon’s list of greetings and making it more vivid, he ensures that his letter will gain a hearing as a message from Paul”; Ollrog, *Paulus*, 238, 239, is critical of Lohse’s methodology, claiming that the latter has not properly analyzed the epistolary situation of Colossians; rather, he has first decided that the theology reflected in the letter is post-Pauline, and then turned to the historical details such as the list of greetings to “confirm” his prior judgment that the Pauline school made literary use of Philemon). Both Schweizer (23–27) and Ollrog (*Paulus*, 241; cf. Lähnemann’s arguments, *Kolossierbrief*, 181, 182) claim, with reference to the above-mentioned issue of tradition, that Colossians is not post-Pauline.

Finally the matter must be settled on the exegesis of chapters 1:7; 4:7–13 (see the relevant exegetical sections) and the important statement about Paul’s commission to preach the gospel in chapters 1:23–2:5. The function of the latter passage is to spell out the content and purpose of Paul’s ministry, a commission given to him in accordance with the gospel-plan of God to make known God’s mystery among the Gentiles, and especially among the Colossians. He is a minister (διάκονος) of the gospel (1:23), just as are Epaphras (1:7; cf. 4:12, 13) and Tychicus (4:7). Against Lohse (68) it must be maintained that the gospel is not certified as correct teaching by its connection with the apostolic office. Quite the reverse. It is the gospel that gives the validity to Paul’s commission: he is to serve that gospel and to proclaim it fully and effectively throughout the world (1:25, 26). His service of the gospel finds expression in suffering (1:24) and imprisonment, and while this is generally on behalf of Gentiles, to whom the mystery is now made known, it has particular reference to the Colossians (note the parallelism of

1:24–29 with 2:1–5). This paragraph is not written to legitimize the gospel through the apostolic office of Paul, and then to assert (1:7; 4:7–13) the legitimation of Epaphras because of his relationship to Paul. Paul serves the gospel; so does Epaphras, and the apostle goes out of his way to show the equality of himself and his co-workers (συνεργοί) as ministers (διάκονοι) of that word. There is no attempt in these three passages (either singly or jointly) to give an apostolic authorization to Epaphras because he stands in an apostolic succession and his teaching represents the mind of Paul. There is no suggestion of ongoing authority or apostolic succession bound up with any single person.

In our estimation the so-called differences between Colossians and the generally accepted Pauline letters do not constitute sufficient grounds for rejecting the apostolic authorship of this epistle. Differences of emphasis there are, but these are best interpreted as being called forth by the circumstances at Colossae. It is not without significance that some of the most recent continental New Testament scholarship has recognized that the historical situation of Colossians, together with the theological answers provided for these difficult pastoral circumstances, stands very close to that of Paul (so Lähnemann, *Kolossenerbrief*, 23–28, 177–83, Schweizer, 23–27, and Ollrog, *Paulus*, 219–31, 236–42). Rejecting a post-Pauline situation, the latter two scholars have suggested the differences between Colossians and the other epistles of Paul may be due to Timothy's authorship, or at least his active hand in the composition of the letter under Paul's authority. While it may not be necessary to resort to this suggestion, at this stage of NT research further understanding is needed as to what part Paul may have allowed his colleagues to play in the production of his letters.