Colossians 1:3-8, The Proem: Notes[1]

CHAP. I.
THis Chapter hath three parts: In the first whereof (after the Inscription, ver. 1, 2.) he exciteth, and encourageth them to constancy and progresse in faith and piety; partly, by shewing the good esteem which he had of them, manifested by his praying to God, and blessing him for them, ver. 3, 4. and that because of their constant good carriage •nce their first embracing of the Gospel, ver. 5. and ••cause of his perswasion of their perseverance, grounded on Gods saving work of grace begun in them, v••. 6. the evident signs of which grace he perceived in ••em, ver. 7. which made him sincerely love them, ver. 8. And partly by his seeking growth in grace from God to them, ver. 9, 10, 11:

001********
1:3 θεῷ πατρί (to God the Father) {C}
The reading in the text has rather narrow manuscript support, but it appears to account best for the origin of the other readings. In order to avoid the very unusual joining of these two nouns, some copyists inserted the definite article τῷ (the) before the noun πατρί and others inserted the conjunction καί (and) between these two nouns. (See also the comments on vv. 12 and 3:17). For reasons of style or grammar in the receptor language, it may be necessary to add the definite article with the noun "Father." For example, "we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (NRSV).

1:7 ὑμῶν (your) {B}
The reading of the second person plural pronoun ὑμῶν in the text, followed by NRSV and Seg, does not have the best manuscript support, but ὑμῶν is found in early versional and patristic witnesses. The sense of "on your behalf" is that Epaphras is a minister of Christ either "for the benefit of p 411 the Colossians or representing them before Paul" (Barth and Blanke, Colossians, p. 53).

Although the variant reading ἡμῶν (our) has superior support in the Greek manuscripts, it is probable that copyists introduced the first person plural pronoun under the influence of the preceding pronoun ἡμῶν (our) and the following pronoun ἡμῖν (to us) in v. 8. According to the variant reading, Epaphras is a minister of Christ on behalf of Paul and Timothy. NIV, following the variant, reads, "who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf" (similarly REB, NJB, TEV, FC, TOB). MacDonald (Colossians and Ephesians, p. 40), who prefers the variant reading, says that the purpose of these words is "to formalize Epaphras' authority over the Colossians by reinforcing his association with Paul (cf. 4:12–13)."

[1]The format of this document is fairly simple. The commentary source is numbered in the transition marker noting different commentaries. Underneath each numbered marker is the quotation from the source. These wil vary in length quite a bit. Below the source you will find [the bibliographic reference] formatted in Turabian 5th edition style. That is, most of the references are so formatted. Those being taken from sources beyond my Logos Software digital library are much briefer. This document is made available to you for your own personal study of the Proem of Colossians.

Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 410–411.

002********

1:3 θεῷ πατρί {C}

The reading adopted for the text, although it is rather narrowly supported (B C* 1739 Augustine), appears to account best for the origin of the other readings. In order to avoid the very unusual collocation of words, some copyists inserted τῷ (D* G 2005 Chrysostom) and others inserted καί (א A C2 Dc I K P Ψ 33 81 614 Byz Lect). (See also the comments on ver. 12 and 3.17.)

1:6 ἐστίν

In order to relieve a certain awkwardness of expression, the Textus Receptus reads καὶ ἐστίν, with Db, c F G K L Ψ most minuscules itd, g vg syrp, h al. The reading adopted for the text is decisively supported by early and diversified witnesses (𝔓46 א A B C D* P 33 88 104 326 330 436 464 489 1837 1944 copsa, bo arm eth al).

1:7 ὑμῶν {B}

Although on the basis of superior Greek evidence (𝔓46 and early Alexandrian and Western authorities) ἡμῶν might seem to be preferable, a majority of the Committee, impressed by the widespread currency of ὑμῶν in versional and patristic witnesses, considered it probable that copyists introduced the first person pronoun under the influence of the preceding ἡμῶν and the following ἡμῖν.

Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 552–553.

003********

Thanksgiving: Faith-love-hope and the Gospel (1:3–8)

Bibliography

Bornkamm, G. "Die Hoffnung im Kolosserbrief. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Frage der Echtheit des Briefes." Studien zum Neuen Testament und zur Patristik. Erich Klostermann zum 90. Geburtstag dargebracht. TU 77. Berlin: Akademie, 1961, 56–64. Reprinted in Geschichte und Glaube 2. Gesammelte Aufsätze. Vol. 4. BEvT 53. Munich: Kaiser, 1971, 206–213. Bujard, W. Untersuchungen. O'Brien, P. T. Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul. NovTSup 49. Leiden: Brill, 1977, 62–104. ———. "Thanksgiving and the Gospel in Paul." NTS 21 (1974–75) 144–55. Sanders, J. T. "The Transition from Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to Body in the Letters of the Pauline Corpus." JBL 81 (1962) 348–62. Schubert, P. Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings. BZNW 20. Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939. White, J. L. The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: A Study of the Letter-Body in the Non-Literary Papyri and in Paul the Apostle. SBLDS 2. Missoula, MT: Scholar's Press, 1972. Zeilinger, F. Der Erstgeborene der Schöpfung. Untersuchungen zur Formalstruktur und Theologie des Kolosserbriefes. Vienna: Herder, 1974.

Translation

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,a when we pray for you 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ

Jesus and of the love which you show to all God's people. 5 Both spring from the hope which lies prepared for you in heaven; you heard about this hope before when the word of truth, the gospel, 6 first came to you. As it is producing fruit and increasing all over the world so it is among you also (and has done) since the day you heard and understood the grace of God in all its truth; 7 you learned this from Epaphras our dear fellow-servant who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf 8 and who has told us of your love in the Spirit.

Note

aThere are several variants to the reading τῷ θεῷ πατρί κτλ. ("to God the Father …"). D* G and Chrysostom insert τῷ ("the") before πατρί ("Father"), while ℵ′ A 1 ˙ and many other authorities insert καί ("and") instead, thus reading τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρι κτλ ("to the God and Father …"). However, the more difficult reading, τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ("to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"), is to be preferred. The rarity of the phrase argues in its favor and it is the reading from which the variants can be explained. An expression, quite as unusual, is found in chapter 3:17, τῷ θεῷ πατρι, "to God the Father"—again in the context of thanksgiving—where the manuscript evidence is even more decisive, cf. Moule, 48, 49.

Form/Structure/Setting

The second main section of the Pauline letter form (cf. Doty, Letters, 27–33) is the introductory thanksgiving paragraph. On occasion the more intimate letters of the Hellenistic period began with a thanksgiving to the gods for personal benefits received. Evidence of this comes from the beginning of the third century B.C. while the earliest extant papyrus letter in which εὐχαριστέω is used of thanksgiving offered to the gods is that written by Isias (in 168 B.C.) to her husband Hephaistion, begging him to come home. Examples become more numerous in the following centuries (see Schubert, Form, 158–79) so that a clear but simple pattern emerges: (1) thanks are offered to the gods (using either χάρις or εὐχαριστέω); (2) often there is an assurance that the gods are being petitioned regularly for the welfare or health of the readers; and (3) the reasons for the thanksgiving to the gods are mentioned—frequently because they are thought to have saved the writer or the reader from some calamity.

This form of introductory thanksgiving is also found in Hellenistic Judaism, as may be noted from the important paragraph, 2 Maccabees 1:10–13, where a letter from the Jews in Jerusalem to those living in Egypt is cited. As Schubert rightly pointed out, this example is functionally and structurally very close to the Pauline thanksgiving paragraph (Form, 117).

The apostle Paul adopted this Hellenistic epistolary model, frequently using it at the beginning of his letters as he expressed his gratitude to God, the Father of Jesus Christ, for what he had effected in the lives of these predominantly Gentile readers. While Paul was indebted to this epistolary convention he was no "slavish imitator" (Schubert, Form, 119) of any such literary form since his structures in these thanksgiving paragraphs are highly developed and sophisticated.

Furthermore, while the structure of the Pauline thanksgiving periods was Hellenistic there are good reasons for believing that the contents (apart from their specifically Christian elements) showed the influence of OT and

Jewish thought. This point will be developed in the detailed exegetical notes below.
Two basic types of structure were noted in Paul's thanksgiving paragraphs: the first, which contained up to seven basic elements, began with the verb of thanksgiving and concluded with a ἵνα-clause (or its equivalent) which spelled out the content of the apostle's intercession for the readers. The second type was simpler in form. It also commenced with the giving of thanks to God (cf. 1 Cor 1:4) and concluded with a ὅτι-clause which noted the reason for this expression of gratitude (cf. Rom 1:8). (For a detailed discussion of these two main types as well as the mixed structures see Schubert, Form, 10–39, and O'Brien, Introductory Thanksgivings, 6–15.)

The introductory thanksgiving of Colossians is an example of the first type. It consists of the basic sevenfold structure commencing with (1) the verb of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστοῦμεν, "we give thanks," v 3), then (2) the personal object (τῷ θεῷ …, "to God," v 3) indicating the one who is thanked, (3) a temporal adverb (πάντοτε, "always" v 3) denoting the frequency with which thanksgiving was offered, (4) a pronominal phrase (περὶ ὑμῶν, "for you," v 3), and (5) a temporal participle (προσευχόμενοι, "praying" v 3) which, because of an apparent digression in verses 6–8, is taken up and repeated in verse 9 as Paul moves to the content of his intercessory prayer. The sixth element (6) is the causal participial clause (ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν …, "because we heard of your faith," v 4) which spells out the ground for Paul's offering thanks to God. The final feature (7) of this thanksgiving form is the ἵνα- clause of verse 10 which indicates the content of the intercession for the Colossians. (Note Schubert's comparative chart, Form, 54–55.)

Yet, within this basic structure, verses 3–8 are still rather difficult to follow, for this single sentence contains seven participial expressions, four relative clauses, three καθώς-clauses and unusual prepositional and genitival expressions. Bujard, in his stylistic analysis, considered that there was no logical progression of thought, but rather an association of ideas (Untersuchungen, 80). Zeilinger, on the other hand, believed that after the mention of thanksgiving (v 3) and its ground (v 4) the remainder of the sentence could be divided into two sections: the first (vv 4d–6a) was balanced by two relative clauses beginning with ἥν, while the second was structured around three καθώς-clauses and their related ἐν-phrases (Der Erstgeborene, 34–36).

It is doubtful, however, whether such an analysis carries conviction and Bujard's comment about the association of ideas needs to be kept in view when giving an exegesis of the passage. Lohse rightly remarks that after the reason for thanksgiving has been set forth (ἀκούσαντες … τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν … και τὴν ἀγάπην … διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα, vv 4–5a) several subordinate clauses are added: verse 5b (ἣν προηκούσατε) is related to the Colossians' hope, verse 6a refers to the world-wide scope of the proclamation (καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ …), while verses 6b–7 point back to the initial preaching to the Colossians by Epaphras (καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, v 6b; καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ, v 7). See Lohse, 13, 14.

Comment

3. εὐχαριστοῦμεν. Paul writes "we give thanks" rather than "I give thanks." The plural is used (as in the Thessalonian correspondence: 1 Thess 1:2; 2:13, 3:9; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13), not as an epistolary plural, nor because

Paul stood at a distance from the Colossians, but since he was writing on behalf of Timothy and perhaps others as well as himself. When later in the same chapter he wishes to emphasize his own ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles and its eschatological significance, he changes to the first person singular (vv. 23–27, οὗ ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος … νῦν χαίρω κτλ., "of which I, Paul, became a minister … now I rejoice …").
It is also possible that the plural "we give thanks whenever we pray" may draw attention to the regular gathering together for prayer by Paul and his colleagues to give thanks to God for the Colossian Christians.

Some writers consider that thanksgiving was an activity engaged in because of personal benefits received and was therefore a descent from the lofty heights of praise. But although our English word "thank" means to express gratitude to a person for something received, and is therefore to some extent a man regarding expression for praise, Paul's use of εὐχαριστέω ("I give thanks"), in the introductory paragraphs of his letters at least, is broader than this. For in each of these passages (though cf. v 12) Paul employs εὐχαριστέω consistently of thanksgiving for God's work in the lives of others, i.e. the readers, and εὐλογητός ("blessed," "be praised") for blessings in which he himself participated (2 Cor 1:3–5; Eph 1:3–12). Furthermore, when Paul employs εὐχαριστέω while the notion of gratitude is clearly present, the element of praise is not therefore absent. The corporate aspect of thanksgiving is often stressed by the apostle (2 Cor 1:11; Col 3:15–17).
We may suppose that Paul's report echoed his actual expression of gratitude and that, as he dictated his letter, thanksgiving to God once again welled up within him. (On the importance of thanksgiving in Colossians see 108, 205, 206.)

τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυριου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The apostle does not congratulate the Colossians. Instead he directs his prayer of thanksgiving to "God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This phrase is different from the usual short formulation "I give thanks to God" (1 Cor 1:4, cf. 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 1:3) and the more personal form "I give thanks to my God" (Phil 1:3; Phlm 4), and is somewhat reminiscent of Romans 1:8, "I give thanks to my God through Jesus Christ." At first sight the designation appears to be a stereotyped expression taken over from the worship of the early church, being employed in prayer with εὐλογητός (2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3; cf. 1 Pet 1:3), εὐχαριοστέω (Eph 1:17), as a summons to a doxology in Romans 15:6 and as the source of "grace and peace" in Philemon 3.

There is a textual problem as already noted and the more difficult reading (cited above) is to be followed and rendered as "God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Moule, 49). Paul expressed his gratitude to God in words that may have been used in early Christian worship but by omitting the article before πατρί he stressed that the God to whom thanksgiving was offered is the one whom Jesus reveals to us in his character as Father (1:2, 3, 12; 3:17).
πάντοτε … προσευχόμενοι. By means of the adverb "always" the apostle indicates the frequency with which he gave thanks. However, by using this term he was not referring to unceasing thanksgiving. To speak of prayer by this and similar terms (e.g. "continually," "at all times," "day and night") was part and parcel of the style of ancient letters, being a Jewish practice as well as a pagan one. A mea-

sure of hyperbole is also to be noted in these expressions. When Paul states he gave thanks "always" or "continually" he means that he regularly remembered them in his times of prayer: morning, noon and evening (the customary three hours each day), and whenever else he prayed. Here the adverb πάντοτε is further explained by προσευχόμενοι ("when we pray for you").

4. ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν κτλ. The basis for Paul's thanksgiving is expressed by means of this causal clause (cf. Phil 1:6; Phlm 5). He recalls the good reports that had been given to him about this congregation. ἀκούσαντες, by itself, does not indicate that Paul did not know the Colossians, but rather that he had received news about them via Epaphras who had referred to their "love in the Spirit," verse 8. We do know, however, from chapter 2:1–2 that the church was unknown to the apostle, even though individual members like Philemon had met him.

πίστιν … ἀγάπην … ἐλπίδα. The familiar Christian triad of faith-love-hope occurs within the causal clause. One or more elements of this formula were often a basis for the apostle's expression of gratitude to God (faith, love and hope: 1 Thess 1:3; faith and love: Eph 1:15 some manuscripts; 2 Thess 1:3; Phlm 5: faith: Rom 1:8). The triad appears elsewhere in the Pauline corpus (Rom 5:1–5; Gal 5:5–6; Eph 4:2–5), but may not have been the apostle's creation since it was also employed elsewhere in early Christian literature (Heb 6:10–12; 10:22–24; 1 Pet 1:3–8, 21–22; Barn 1:4; 11:8; Ign Pol. 3:2–3). It seems to have been a sort of compendium of the Christian life current in the early apostolic church, and according to A.M. Hunter's suggestion (Paul and his Predecessors 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1961, 33: American edition [Philadelphia: Westminster]) may have derived from Jesus himself. This passage could then represent Paul's own exegesis of the triad.

The "faith" of the Colossians is naturally mentioned first, for apart from it there would be no Christian existence (cf. Rom 10:9). This faith is "in Christ Jesus" (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), an expression which does not denote the object to which their faith is directed but rather indicates the sphere in which "faith" lives and acts. The Colossian Christians live under the lordship of Christ Jesus for they have been incorporated into him. That is why they have been addressed as "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae" (v 2). Some of the implications of living under this lordship will be spelled out in the later sections of the letter.

A faith which one may hear about (ἀκούσαντες; cf. ἀκούων, Phlm 5) and recount as Paul does here proves its reality by "working through love" (Gal 5:6). ἀγάπη is "the practical expression of care and concern" (Martin, NCB, 48) which is directed to all of God's holy people (the πάντας accentuates the breadth of the love; so Lohse, 17), i.e. Christians generally, particularly those at Colossae and in the other churches of the Lycus valley. It is through love that Christians serve one another (Gal 5:13) and the Colossians, according to Epaphras' reports, knew something of this service.

5. διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα. The three elements of this summary of the Christian life are "not completely co-ordinated" (Bruce, 180). "Faith" and "love," grounds for Paul's thanksgiving, are based on "hope." The last is here emphasized and it clearly formed part of the apostolic

message which the congregation had heard and accepted. Moule claims "it is remarkable that trust and love are described as dependent on ἐλπίς—the goal of Christian expectation" (49).

Both ἐλπίς ("hope") and its cognate verb ἐλπίζω ("hope") were used in the Pauline letters to denote the act of hoping as well as the objective content of the hope. Hope is oriented to that which is unseen in the future, the content of which is defined in various ways: salvation (1 Thess 5:8), righteousness (Gal 5:5), resurrection in an incorruptible body (1 Cor 15:52–55), eternal life (Titus 1:2; 3:7) and God's glory (Rom 5:2). On occasions in Paul the disposition of hoping is emphasized (Rom 4:18; 5:5; 12:12; 1 Cor 13:7), though Romans 8:24–25 shows that the term could be employed by the apostle in both ways within the one context (a point which Bornkamm, TU 77 [1961] 56–64, seems to have overlooked). In Colossians the concrete meaning is to the fore (so 1:23, 27, and the related ideas of 3:1–4), and in verse 5 ἐλπίς denotes "the content of hope," "that which is hoped for" (so Meyer, 256 and others). It already lies prepared (ἀποκειμένην) for them in the heavens, a phrase from common parlance denoting certainty (see Lohse, 17–18, for details). The Colossian Christians are assured that everything contained in their hope is kept for them in its right place—in heaven where no power, human or otherwise, can touch it. Though now hidden from men's view that hope, which is centered on Christ himself (he is ἡ ἐλπὶς τῆς δόξης, 1:27), will finally be revealed when he is revealed (3:4). That is why these believers in the Lycus valley are to direct their thoughts heavenward (3:1–4).

Their hope is clearly oriented toward the future, but because it is at this moment being kept safe for them (ἀποκειμένην is a present participle) it has present and immediate ramifications, not least as the basis for their ongoing faith and exercise of Christian love (ἔχετε is also a present tense). To suggest, with some of the older commentators that faith has to do with the past alone, love only with the present, and hope simply with reference to the future is to make a distinction that is not supported from this passage. (In Jewish apocalyptic literature God's future salvation was described as presently being reserved for the pious: 4 Ezra 7:14; 2 Bar 14:12. cf. H.-W. Kuhn, Enderwartung und gegenwärtiges Heil. Untersuchungen zu den Gemeindeliedern von Qumran (SUNT 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1966, 181–88.)

Paul has gone out of his way to stress this third element of the triad, hope (Bornkamm, TU 77 [1961] 58). It is described as the content of the gospel or at least one of its significant elements (cf. 1:23, 27).

Why this emphasis? It is quite likely that "the false teachers at Colossae were intending to rob them (sc. the believers) of this aspect of the Christian message, possibly by denying any future dimension of Christian salvation" (Martin, NCB, 48). If this is so, then it was necessary for the apostle to underscore again the nature of their Christian hope, as originally taught by Epaphras. That Paul is stressing what is true over against the false teaching is further suggested by the statements about the gospel which immediately follow: it is true, universal, powerfully effective and is concerned with God's grace—phrases which probably contrast the Colossian error.

προηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ

εὐαγγέλιου. The apostle was not telling the congregation anything new when he wrote about the heavenly hope. They had heard about it before (προ-ηκούσατε) when the gospel message was first proclaimed at Colossae by Epaphras (vv 7–8) and the congregation was founded (so Lohse, 18; Moule, 50, suggests it means "heard before the false teaching"). The phrase "the word of truth of the gospel" is best rendered with many commentators including Calvin: "the word of truth, which is the gospel." Schweizer (36, 37) and others rightly understand this against an Old Testament background where God's word, spoken and revealed to men, is "the word of truth." So the Psalmist prays "take not the word of truth … out of my mouth" (Ps 119:43; the term "hope" appears in the same context). God's word partakes of his character and is utterly reliable.

By describing the message as the "word of truth" (cf. Bultmann, TDNT 1, 244) a contrast with the false teaching of the Colossian heretics seems intended (against Hooker, Christ, 3150–31). Their message, elements of which may be gleaned from the following passages of the letter, especially chapter 2, was not only misleading, but also a delusion. It was empty, false and vain (cf. 2:8 where it is described as κενῆς ἀπάτης, "empty deceit"). Here the "word of truth" is in apposition to the "gospel" for it was in the proclamation of the gospel that God's true word was announced.

6. Several features of that gospel are now set forth. First, it had made its triumphal progress, coming to the Colossian congregation (παρόντος είς ὑμᾶς) and taking up a sure place in their lives (so Chrysostom and several recent commentators). Also, its progress at Colossae was at one (καθὼς καί) with its dynamic spread throughout the world (ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ). As the gospel produced a vigorous and increasing fruit of Christian life and testimony at Colossae, so (καθὼς καί) it was doing the same throughout the world. In contrast to the false teaching with its restricted appeal this message was truly catholic (Lightfoot, 132, 133).

Ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ. This phrase, along with similar universalistic passages (Rom 1:8; 10:18; 1 Thess 1:8) is not to be understood as a meaningless or "wild exaggeration" (as Scott, 16, claims). Certainly Paul did not mean that the whole world distributively, that is, every person under heaven, had been touched by the triumphal progress of the gospel. He has particularly in mind cities and towns, e.g. Damascus, Tarsus, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, etc, as centers from which the gospel moved further afield.

Bruce (181) claims that if Paul's language appears to have outstripped what had actually been accomplished at the time it was because he was indulging in prophetic prolepsis. It was with the eye of a true prophet that he described "the all-pervading course of the message of life rivalling that of the heavenly bodies of which the psalmist spoke: 'their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world' (Rom 10:18, quoting Ps. 19:4)."

καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον. These participles, "bearing fruit and increasing," which refer to the continuing progress of the gospel echo OT language (against Ernst, 158). "To bear fruit and to grow" is a frequent combination used first of human reproduction (Gen 1:22, 28; cf. 8:17; 9:1, 7) and subsequently of Israel's population increase

(Jer 3:16; 23:3). No metaphorical use of the phrase, however, occurs in the OT. It is always applied to people or animals. But in the parable of the sower (Mark 4) the seed, which is interpreted as the "word," bears fruit and increases in the lives of those who receive it rightly. Like the seed in the parable of the sower the word of the gospel bears fruit and grows. With Chrysostom and several modern commentators "fruit-bearing" is to be understood as a crop of good deeds (cf. Phil 1:11 where καρπός, "fruit," is found with this meaning), while the growth of the gospel points to the increasing number of converts.

καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν. With the addition of the words "so among yourselves" (a second καθώς-clause, cf. Zeilinger, Der Erstgeborene, 35, 36) the writer's train of thought moves back from the world-wide aspect of the gospel's dynamic progress to the beginnings of the congregation at Colossae. This additional phrase is not an afterthought, as some commentators suppose, but reminds the Colossians in an objective way (Schweizer, 38) that they too shared in this world-wide action of God's word. They continued to grow "in spiritual character and in actual numbers" (Bruce, 181) from the time when they first heard and believed the gospel. This apostolic proclamation focused on the grace of God (on the centrality of "grace" in the initial proclamation at Colossae see Lähnemann, Kolosserbrief, 105, 106; cf. Acts 20:24). The Colossians both heard (ἠκούσατε) this message of God's gracious action in Christ and came to know (ἐπέγνωτε is an inceptive aorist, so Beare, 154) the reality of that grace when they were converted (R. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament. Vol. 1. Tr K. Grobel [NY: Scribner, 1952] 67).

ἐν ἀληθείᾳ ("in truth") has been taken by some commentators in an adverbial sense (= "truly") to mean that the Colossian Christians understood the message of God's grace "as it truly is," "untravestied" (Moule, 51). They did not receive some garbled version from their evangelist Epaphras which then needed to be supplemented by later teachers with their philosophy (2:8, 20). Other exegetes understand the phrase ἐν ἀληθείᾳ as a reference to the previous description of the gospel (e.g. Lohse, 20), corresponding to ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας "in the word of truth") of verse 5. On this view the apostle is stating that the congregation understood the apostolic message (λόγος) presented by Epaphras as "the truth," that is, "God's truth." It was not man-made, and since it centered on God's grace "it sets men free from superstition and bad religion" (Martin, NCB, 49).

Since this congregation knows the "word of truth" (v 5) and understood the "grace of God in truth" from the beginning, its Christian direction has already been set. It needs to come to a greater knowledge and understanding of God's will (1:9–10) and to know Christ more fully (2:2), in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

Paul has gone out of his way here to stress the dynamic, indeed almost personal, activity of the gospel (see O'Brien, NTS 21 [1974–75] 144–55). In fact, the term εὐαγγέλιον ("gospel") and its synonyms μαρτύριον ("testimony"), λόγος ("word") and ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ("word of God") occur frequently within Paul's introductory paragraphs and the majority of the references to these terms are bound up with Paul's actual thanksgivings for the churches, as they stand either in an immediate or a more distant causal relationship to the verb of thanksgiving. In one way or anoth-

er the apostle's thanksgivings to God for his working in the lives of the readers are causally linked to the gospel or its right reception: so Paul is grateful for the Philippians' active participation (κοινωνία) in the gospel (1:5), that the testimony to Christ had been confirmed in the Corinthians' midst (1 Cor 1:6), and that the Thessalonians had been called through the gospel (2 Thess 2:14), and welcomed the word of God (1 Thess 2:13) when it came to them dynamically (1 Thess 1:5, 6).

It is a well-known fact that εὐαγγέλιον within the Pauline corpus is often used as a nomen actionis and this is the case in several instances where the noun appears within Paul's prayers of thanksgiving (Phil 1:5; Rom 1:9). The dynamic character of the gospel is accented in Paul's first introductory thanksgiving (1 Thess 1:5–6) where the manner of its coming was truly powerful, for it was not simply in word but also "in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."

A further point to be noted is that terms which are predicated of the gospel's activity—its coming (1 Thess 1:5), confirmation (1 Cor 1:6), or its bearing fruit and increasing (Col 1:6)—are employed with a slight change in meaning of the believers themselves. Fruit-bearing and increasing were marks of the gospel (Col 1:6). Paul then prays (see below) that fruit-bearing and increasing may be characteristics of the Colossians too—the fruit of good works and an increase in the knowledge of God (v 10)—that the dynamic of the gospel may characterize the lives of the Colossian believers themselves.

7. καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ. A third "just as" (καθὼς) clause indicates how the Colossian Christians heard and understood the grace of God: they learned (ἐμάθετε) the gospel from Epaphras. Usually Paul describes the acceptance of the gospel as "believing," "hearing" or "obeying" rather than "learning," and the verb μανθάνω itself is found rather infrequently (for details see Rengstorf, TDNT 4, 406–12).

Masson (92) suggests, on the basis of the relative infrequency of the verb μανθάνω in Paul, that the apostle chose this verb intentionally so as to endorse Epaphras' ministry over against the new and pernicious, heretical teaching. The term "learned" (ἐμάθετε) probably indicates that Epaphras had given them systematic instruction in the gospel rather than some flimsy outline and that these Colossians had committed themselves as disciples to that teaching (cf. 2:6, 7).

The name Epaphras (Ἐπαφρᾶς) is a short form of Epaphroditus (Ἐπαφρόδιτυς), a very common name found frequently in inscriptions and the papyri of the period (BAG, 283). He is mentioned again at chapter 4:12, 13 and in Philemon 23 where he is described as Paul's fellow-captive (συναιχμάλωτος), meaning no doubt that he shared one of Paul's many imprisonments, possibly in Ephesus. (There is insufficient evidence for identifying him with the Epaphroditus of Phil 2:25; 4:18.) As a native of Colossae (ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, 4:12) he had been the evangelist of the Lycus valley where now there were flourishing churches—in Hierapolis and Laodicea as well as in Colossae. Epaphras had discharged his responsbilities faithfully (τιστός) and the presence of these congregations testified to the enduring character of his work (Bruce, 182).

τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν … πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. The desig-

nations used of Epaphras, however, not only express the apostle's confidence in him. They also state significantly that he is Paul's representative in Colossae who has worked and who will continue to work in his place within the congregation. Epaphras is here described as "our beloved fellowservant" while at chapter 4:12 he is called by the predicate of honor, a "servant of Christ Jesus" (δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ). In the OT "servant of God" was a title of honor to refer to those chosen by God and predestined for his service. Abraham (Ps 105:42), Moses (Ps 105:26; 2 Kings 18:12), David (2 Sam 7:5; Ps 89:4, 21) and others, especially the prophets (Amos 3:7), were God's servants. The last named were servants of the Word of the Lord who were to proclaim the message entrusted to them. In the NT an apostle was also a "servant of Christ Jesus" (Gal 1:10; cf. Rom 1:1). By styling Epaphras a "beloved fellow-servant" Paul draws attention to his reliable associate who guarantees to the church at Colossae that they received the true apostolic gospel.

Epaphras is also designated a "minister (διάκονος) of Christ." This term (διάκονος) originally denoted one who rendered service of a lowly kind (Beyer, TDNT 2, 91, 92) and was used in a variety of ways (cf. BAG, 184, 185) in the NT (at Rom 15:8 Christ himself is a "servant to the circumcision," διάκονος περιτομῆς; while at 2 Cor 11:23 and Eph 3:7 the apostle is a "minister" of Christ). Significantly in many of Paul's references it is one of a series of designations (cf. συνεργός, ἀδελφός, κοινωνός and ἀπόστολος) used of his associates in his missionary activity. The διάκονοι, according to Ellis (NTS 17 [1970–71] 438, 440), were a special class of co-workers who were active in preaching and teaching (cf. 1 Cor 3:5). So Timothy is a minister of God (1 Thess 3:2; 1 Tim 4:6) and so is Tychicus a minister in the Lord (Col 4:7; Eph 6:21). Epaphras has ministered on Paul's behalf (reading ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, "on our behalf" with P46 א* A B etc, rather than ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, "on your behalf") and so the Colossians may be sure that the "truth" was faithfully taught to them (cf. H. Merklein, Das kirchliche Aret nach dent Epheserbrief [SANT 33; Munich: Kösel, 1973] 337–40, and E. Lohse, "Die Mitarbeiter des Apostels Paulus im Kolosserbrief," Verborum Ventas. Festschrift für Gustav Stöhlin, ed. O. Bocher and K. Haacker [Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1970] 189–94).

8. ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν. More recently Epaphras had visited Paul in Rome and told him how the churches were faring. As apostle to the Gentiles Paul has a responsibility to the congregation at Colossae and no doubt he would be grateful for the reports given to him. Much of Epaphras' news was encouraging and although some aspects of the Colossians' church life were disquieting Paul for the moment dwells on those worthy of praise.

τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι. This phrase indicates that the community's life was filled with a love generated by the Holy Spirit, enabling it to come to the help of all the saints (so Lohse, 23). No doubt these believers cherished a warm affection for Paul even though many had not met him personally (cf. 2:1). And the fact that they demonstrated this love in the Spirit toward Paul (as well as to others) would make it easier for him to exhort them about the dangers of the false teaching.

Explanation

In accordance with his usual custom Paul began his letter to the Colossians by reporting his thanksgiving to God for the faith and

love of his readers. This faith which they have as men and women in Christ Jesus and the love they continue to show toward Christians around them are both based on a sure and certain hope that is kept for them in heaven where no power, human or otherwise, can touch it. Such a hope is centered on Christ himself (1:27) and was an essential element of the gospel Epaphras preached (cf. v 23). That gospel produced a vigorous and increasing fruit of Christian life and testimony at Colossae and was working in the same dynamic way throughout the rest of the world. Epaphras, as Paul's faithful co-worker, representative and minister of Christ, had diligently taught the Colossians that gospel. They may, therefore, be assured that they had been instructed in the "truth."

In this opening paragraph Paul begins to set the tone (which, incidentally, is not as warm as in the Philippian counterpart, 1:3–11) and introduce some of the themes that will be expanded in the rest of the letter. He does not attack the Colossian heresy as such. After all, he is reporting his thanksgiving to God. But Paul's positive descriptions of the gospel, the Colossians' response to it, and Epaphras' ministry all appear to be set over against something that is false. As the letter unfolds the nature of the error becomes more specific and clear.

At the same time by reporting that he gives thanks to God in connection with the faith, love and hope of the Colossians, and by mentioning the gospel and its world-wide fruitfulness together with the ministry of Epaphras, Paul instructs these Christian readers about those issues he considers vital. (On the didactic and exhortatory function of these introductory paragraphs, see below 29, 30.)

The mention of both the thanksgiving and the intercessory prayer which follows would no doubt help to strengthen the ties of fellowship between the apostle to the Gentiles and this congregation in the Lycus valley, most of whom he had come to know about through the reports of his colleague, Epaphras. In the offering of these prayers as well as in his telling them about it Paul clearly demonstrates his pastoral and apostolic concern for these Christians.

Peter T. O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon, vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 7–17.

004********

Thanksgiving (1:3–8)

3 We thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,1 always praying for2 you, 4 having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints 5 on account of the hope laid up for you in the heavens.3 Of this you heard earlier in the word of the truth of the gospel, 6 which has come to you, just as also in all the world it is bearing fruit and growing,4 so also it is among you from the day on which you heard and came to know the grace of God in truth, 7 as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow slave. He is a faithful servant of Christ5 on our6 behalf, 8 and he has made clear to us your love in the Spirit.

The beginning of the extended thanksgiving falls naturally into a chiastic pattern (Dibelius, Kolosser, Epheser, Philemon 5; cf. Lohse, Colossians and Philemon 14):

(3) We thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, always praying for you,

(4) having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints (5)….

Of this you heard earlier in the word of the truth of the gospel,

(6) which has come to you,

just as also in all the world it is bearing fruit and growing,

so also it is among you from the day on which you heard and came to know the grace of God in truth, (7) as you learned it from Epaphras …

(8) and he has made clear to us your love in the Spirit.

(9) That is why we also, ever since we heard, have not ceased to pray on your behalf and to ask that you …

As in the other Pauline letters, the themes and language of the thanksgiving are echoed in the rest of the letter (O'Brien, Thanksgivings, 69; Mullins 291), from which Mullins concludes that the structure and character of the thanksgiving are Pauline and provide no argument for post-Pauline authorship (against Lohse). "He might well be reproducing the kind of utterance he was accustomed to make in solemn liturgical gatherings of his churches…. the liturgical (or quasi-liturgical) utterances of a practical pastor and apostle" (Houlden 149).

1:3 εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι. A characteristic feature of the ancient art of letter writing was the congratulatory thanksgiving.7 In Paul, too, it follows a regular pattern: a thanksgiving (εὐχαριστεῖν) addressed to God; stressing his (unceasing) prayerful concern for the readers, with the subject of thanksgiving usually the faith they display (in 1 Corinthians their rich experience of grace rather than their faith). The closest parallel here is 1 Thes. 1:2–3 and, perhaps significantly, Phm. 4–5. The plural "we thank" may imply a consciously double authorship (Timothy and Paul), since elsewhere in Paul the singular is more usual (Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; Phm. 4; but note also 1 Thes. 1:2 and 2 Thes. 1:3).8

The most interesting variation here is the insertion of the phrase "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is a phrase that Paul uses a number of times—usually in the form "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; 11:31; also Eph. 1:3, 17; 1 Pet. 1:3). Contained in it is the implicit Christian claim that God, the one God made known to Israel, is now to be understood no longer simply as Father of Israel, but most clearly as the Father of Jesus Christ, and only as such "our Father," Father of Gentiles as well as Jews (see on 1:2).

More to the point, here again, as in 1:2, there may be a deliberate attempt to stress the sole sovereignty of God at the beginning of a letter that focuses so much on the divine status of Christ (see again on 1:2). The significance is all the greater, the greater weight we see in the attachment of κύριος ("Lord") to "Jesus Christ" (see also on 2:6). Given the degree of heavenly majesty and divine authority that that title carried (particularly Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 8:5–6; Phil. 2:9–11; see further, e.g., my Romans 607–9), it is important to recognize that Paul and Timothy begin by reminding their readers that God is the Father of Jesus Christ the Lord, or in the fuller formula Paul uses more often, that God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. From the outset, therefore, Paul and Timothy wish it to be understood that the high christology to be enun-

ciated shortly is kept within the constraints of Jewish monotheism. God the Father is the one to whom prayer should properly be offered (in 3:17, as in Rom. 1:8, the thanksgiving is directed to God "through him/Jesus Christ"; Conzelmann 134 thinks the mediatorship of Christ is implied also here), just as he is the ultimate source ("Father") of all creation and all being, including the dignity and authority of Jesus' Messiahship and Lordship.

The unceasing nature of this prayer (πάντοτε, "always, at all times") is one of the most characteristic features of Paul's opening assurance of his prayers for his readers, whether attached to the εὐχαριστεῖν ("thank"—1 Cor. 1:4; 1 Thes. 1:2; 2 Thes. 1:3) or to the προσεύχεσθαι ("pray," as in Rom. 1:10 and Phil. 1:4). Phm. 4, as here, could be taken either way. Paul could have meant that every time he prayed he remembered his various churches. Perhaps he maintained the Jewish practice of prayer three times a day (cf. Dan. 6:11; Acts 3:1; 10:3; Didache 8:3), or perhaps he used the long hours of travel and of work in stitching to hold his churches before God (see also on 1:9 and 4:2). But not too much should be made of the language since it is an epistolary flourish characteristic of the period (O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon 10). The use of περί ("concerning") rather than ὑπέρ ("on behalf of"; see n. 2) is sufficient to indicate that Paul saw his prayers not as a substitute for their own prayers but as a natural expression of Christian love and concern.

1:4 ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους. The congratulatory element focuses as usual on their faith (Rom. 1:8) and love (1 Thes. 1:3; 2 Thes. 1:3; and, perhaps significantly, Phm. 5; also Eph. 1:15). That this is a matter of report rather than of personal knowledge confirms that Paul did not know the Colossian church personally (though cf. Rom. 1:8); the parallel with Phm. 5 is again worth noting. It also reminds us that news of his churches would reach Paul regularly along the trade routes, even to far-off Rome, though in this case Epaphras seems to have made a special point of keeping Paul informed (1:8). To be noted also is the degree to which the vertical ("faith in Christ") was integrated with the horizontal ("love for the saints"). Paul would never have wanted these two to fall apart.

Perhaps more than any other word, "faith" sums up the distinctive feature of the Christian gospel and life for Paul (see, e.g., G. Barth, EDNT 3.95). Rather like "grace" (see 1:2), Paul's use of "faith" dominates New Testament usage (142 of 243 occurrences). Its distinctive Pauline force is most evident in Romans 4, where he makes unforgettably clear the character of faith as sheer trust in the power and grace of God, as against a more typical traditional Jewish emphasis on faithfulness (see on 1:2, "faithful"). And in Gal. 2:16–3:26 he indicates by emphatic argument that this faith has now been given its eschatological focus in Christ to become the single most determinative characteristic of the new phase of God's saving purpose introduced by Christ. What Paul and Timothy commend here, therefore, is the way in which the Colossians received the message about Christ (as Abraham received the promise of a son, Gen. 15:6; Romans 4; Galatians 3) and committed themselves in trust to the one so proclaimed, making Christ the focus and determinant of their lives from then on (see on 1:2, "in Christ").

One of the most interesting divergences from normal Pauline usage comes in the phrase πίστις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ("faith in Christ Jesus"). For Paul never so speaks. Normally he uses the noun phrase in the form πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ or an equivalent (Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil. 3:9; see also 2:12). Some take this in the sense "the faith (fulness) of Jesus Christ," but almost certainly it denotes "faith in Jesus Christ" (see my "Pistis Christou" and Galatians 138–39). He also uses the verbal form πιστεύειν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ("believe in Christ Jesus," Gal. 2:16; so also Rom. 10:14; Phil. 1:29; see also 2:5). But nowhere does he use ἐν with the dative, as here (Gal. 3:26 is not an exception since the two prepositional phrases there are independent of each other, as is generally agreed).9 In contrast the letters more frequently accepted as post-Pauline use phrases similar to what we have here in 1:4 a number of times (Eph. 1:15; 1 Tim. 3:13; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:15; also 1 Clement 22:1; 43:1). Here then is another suggestion that with Colossians we are already moving beyond Paul's own usage. There is, however, no significant difference in meaning (if anything, the ἐν formulation is more static), and the thought is otherwise wholly Pauline in character and emphasis.

The other element that draws the prayerful congratulation of Paul and Timothy is the Colossians' "love for all the saints." Here within the compass of three short verses we have a third word (after "grace" and "faith") to which Christianity, and again Paul in particular (75 out of 116 occurrences in the New Testament), gave distinctive weight as a carrier of one of the important and far-reaching emphases marking out Christianity among other religions of the time. For of the different Greek words for "love," ἀγάπη was little used at the time: it appears only rarely in nonbiblical Greek before the second or third century AD (C. Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994] 1.8–22) and is relatively rare in the LXX, usually used there in reference to conjugal love (though note Jer. 2:2; Wis. 3:9; 6:18). Most of Paul's references are to human love (e.g., Rom. 12:9; 13:10; 1 Cor. 13:1–14:1; 2 Cor. 2:4, 8; Gal. 5:6, 13, 22); so also in Colossians (1:8; 2:2; 3:14). But it is clear that for Paul the self-sacrifice of Christ is the definitive expression of this "love" (Rom. 5:6–8; 8:31–35; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; so also Col. 1:13–14; see further, e.g., G. Schneider, EDNT 1.10–11). Presumably, therefore, this is what was in mind here—an active concern for one another among the Colossian Christians which did not stop short at self-sacrifice of personal interests—and not just for one another, if the "all the saints" is to be taken seriously. Here may be indicated a network of mutual support and encouragement as Christians moved among the different towns in Asia Minor; a more specific reference to the collection for "the saints" in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 16:1—as suggested by Ernst, Philipper, Philemon, Kolosser, Epheser 156) is less likely. Epaphras must have spoken very encouragingly of his Christian townsfolk. For "the saints" see on 1:2.

1:5 διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, ἣν προηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. Given the fact that faith and love have already been given prominent mention, it should occasion no surprise that the third member of the characteristic Christian trio, ἐλπίς ("hope"), should immediately appear in close connection. For the linking of the three is another distinctive feature of Pauline teaching (1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5–6; 1 Thes. 1:3; 5:8; cf. Rom. 5:1–5; see

further Hunter 33–35). "Hope" itself is almost as distinctively a Pauline feature in the New Testament (36 of 53 occurrences). In contrast to the more uncertain, fearful note typical of classical (and modern) usage, the sense here is characteristically Jewish: hope as expectation of good, confidence in God (R. Bultmann, TDNT 2.519–23). As such it is closely related to faith, confident trust in God.

The connection with v. 4, however, is slightly puzzling—"on account of the hope...."10 NEB/REB (and NIV similarly) resolve the puzzle by translating: "both [faith and love] spring from the/that hope...." And that is probably a fair rendering, since the preposition must be taken to indicate that the faith and love are in some sense a response to, derived from, or in some way dependent on the hope. In which case, unusually in Paul, the hope is being presented as the basis for the faith and love, somewhat in contrast to 1 Cor. 13:13 and Gal. 5:5–6 (hope in God as the basis for faith in Christ and love to all). At all events, the formulation here serves to underline the eschatological and forward-looking character of the gospel message that called forth the Colossians' faith and stimulated their love for their fellow saints (cf. Wolter 52–53).

This sense is reinforced by the description of the hope as "laid up (present tense) for you in the heavens." The verb has the basic sense of "be put away, stored up" (as in Luke 19:20). But it readily gathered to itself the richer sense of something held in reserve for someone or some occasion as a destiny (LSJ and BAGD s.v. ἀπόκειμαι; Lohse, Colossians and Philemon 18; so 4 Macc. 8:11; Heb. 9:27) and in Jewish and Christian thought of something retained by God for the appropriate time in God's foreordained plan (Gen. 49:10; Job 38:23; Joseph and Asenath 15:10: "your wedding robe … laid up in your chamber since eternity"), including eschatological reward (2 Macc. 12:45; 2 Tim. 4:8).11 The imagery thus gives "hope" a less typically Pauline sense of "that which is hoped for" (rather than as the subjective experience of hope), which some regard as another mark of post-Pauline authorship (e.g., Bornkamm, "Hoffnung" 207; B. Mayer, EDNT 1.439), though the effect is the thoroughly Pauline one of expressing full confidence that the sure purpose of God, not yet fully unveiled, will be revealed and realized in God's good time. This emphasis on the forwardlooking character of the gospel may well be a first counter to a too realized element in the teaching to be countered in the body of the letter (e.g., R. P. Martin, Colossians and Philemon 48; O'Brien, Colossians, Philemon 12), though the letter itself has a stronger realized emphasis than the earlier Paulines (see on 2:12 and the introduction to the comments on 3:1–4).

What precisely the hope is, or is directed to, is not mentioned here, but the picture becomes clearer with the other two references to hope in the letter, as to both its source ("the hope of the gospel," 1:23), its focus ("Christ in you"), and what is hoped for ("glory"; see on 1:27). The location of what is hoped for is, however, specified here: "in the heavens." What is hoped for, therefore, could be the exalted Christ ("their Lord in heaven," 4:1), making for an interesting tension with 1:27 ("Christ in you"), or the Colossian Christians' final salvation, consisting in their being taken up to heaven and transformed into heavenly/spiritual form ("glory"; cf. Rom. 8:17–25; 1 Cor. 15:44–49; 2 Cor. 5:1–5; 1 Thes. 4:14–17).

The plural form "heavens" should not be

ignored, since it is hardly found in nonbiblical Greek and therefore reflects the common Jewish view that the heavenly realm above had a number of regions, if not many (note the repeated Old Testament phrase "heaven and the heaven of the heavens," Deut. 10:14; 1 Kgs. 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6; 6:18; Neh. 9:6). If the usual topography is in mind here (anything from two to ten heavens; see H. Traub, TDNT 5.510–12), the implication would be that the lower reaches of heaven were populated by (normally hostile) "principalities and powers" (cf. particularly Eph. 6:12; see on 1:16), with God and his angels in the upper regions or beyond all the heavens (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2; Eph. 4:10; see on 2:18). The hope, then, would be for a destiny that outmaneuvers (cf. Rom. 8:38–39) and defeats these powers (see on 2:15) and reaches right into the presence of God. The sense that there are powers of evil abroad which are often strong enough to crush whole peoples as well as individuals is, of course, not dependent on the worldview presumed here. But however such realities are conceptualized, hope remains a constant feature of the Christian gospel.

In Greek the sentence runs on: "which [hope] you heard about earlier…." The reference presumably is to their first hearing of the gospel from Epaphras. How much earlier is not stated. JB/NJB assume that the force of the προ-implies a hearing "recently," "not long ago." But neither the Greek nor 1:7 and 4:12–13 are so specific. This gospel came to them in the word of preaching (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18; 2:1–4; Phil. 1:14; Col. 4:3; 1 Thes. 1:5–8; 2:13). The eschatological focus implied in the centrality of the theme of hope (as in 1:23, "the hope of the gospel") suggests a preaching not unlike that of 1 Thes. 1:9–10, which is often taken as a summary of the gospel as preached directly to Gentiles.

"Gospel" is another word baptized into Christian vocabulary by Paul (60 of the New Testament's 76 occurrences are Pauline). It was known in wider Greek usage, but almost always in the plural, in the sense of "good tidings" (LSJ s.v. εὐαγγέλιον), and the singular is unknown in biblical Greek outside the New Testament. The reason that Paul, I, and presumably others among the first Christian missionaries, lighted upon it, however, is fairly obvious. For the related verb, "preach/announce good news," was prominent in the second half of Isaiah (40:9; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1), that is, in passages that are remembered as having influenced Jesus' own self-understanding of mission (Matt. 11:5/Luke 7:22) and as summing up his mission (Acts 10:36), just as they also influenced others in that time (Psalms of Solomon 11:1; 1QH 18:14; 11QMelch 18). It was natural, then, that the noun chosen by the first Christian preachers to encapsulate their message about Jesus was derived from this verb. Implicit in this developed vocabulary is the sense of eschatological hope (so powerful in the Isaiah passages) already fulfilled in the coming of Messiah Jesus (cf. again the Psalms of Solomon and DSS references). That the gospel is summed up here in terms of "hope" (as again in the only other use of "gospel" in the letter, 1:23) is a reminder of how closely its original eschatological force still clung to the word. We should also note in passing how much distinctively Christian vocabulary appears in these first five verses (grace, faith, love, hope, gospel).

To be more precise, 1:5 speaks of "the truth of the gospel." RSV/NRSV, NIV, and NJB put the two words in apposition, "the word of the truth, the gospel," and JB breaks the sen-

tence after "truth" (cf. GNB in n. 3). These renderings probably reflect recognition that the Greek idea of "truth" is involved here, that is, of truth as the unveiling of the "full or real state of affairs" (R. Bultmann, TDNT 1.238). Here again the eschatological overtones of the word and the context are important: the claim being made is that the good news of Christ Jesus unveils the reality of human destiny in the sure hope that it holds forth (cf. again 1 Thes. 1:9–10; Acts 17:30–31). Equally, if "the word of truth" reflects a more Jewish assertion of the firm reliability (*'emeṯ*) of God's word (Ps. 119:43; Testament of Gad 3:1; Odes of Solomon 8:8), the effect is simply to reinforce the confidence in God's purpose for the future already evoked by the word "hope" (see further Lohse, Colossians and Philemon 18–19).

However, it is better to retain the fuller phrase, "the truth of the gospel," since it probably also contains an echo of the same phrase used in Gal. 2:5 and 14. That is to say, implicit in the language is the emphatic Pauline claim that the gospel is for Gentiles also, without requiring them to become proselytes; the echo is still more explicit in 1:25–27. It was this truth of the gospel (or the truth of this gospel) to which Paul dedicated his whole life as an apostle. At all events, there is probably a further implication (as in Galatians) that this is a truth that has to be stoutly maintained against teachings that (in this case) deny or diminish the eschatological thrust of the gospel's emphasis on hope (cf. pp. 33ff. above). This may lie behind NEB/REB's elision of the phrase into "the message of the true gospel" (cf. Bruce, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians 42: "the true message of the gospel"), with its implied warning against a false gospel.

1:6 τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς, καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ. The opening phrase could be translated "which is present among you," recognizing the force of the present tense (Lohse, Colossians and Philemon 19 nn. 53, 54). But in this case it can also mean "which has come to you" (and so is present among you). And that makes better sense of the preposition, which most naturally has the meaning "to or into" (Harris 19).

The congratulatory note continues: the gospel is (constantly) bearing fruit and growing among them; but since this is true all over the world, they should not feel particularly pleased with themselves. The implication may be that the Colossians should hesitate before making too much of the success of their own evangelism, and this prepares for the warning notes that become prominent from 2:8. Note should also be given to the dynamic, living character attributed to the gospel (cf. particularly Isa. 55:10–11): "just as a tree without fruit and growth would no longer be a tree, so a gospel that bore no fruit would cease to be a gospel" (Schweizer, Colossians 37).

The image of fruit-bearing is a natural one to indicate result, outcome (for good or evil), or success and was familiar in Greek and Jewish thought (F. Hauck, TDNT 3.614; Meeks, "One Body" 219 n. 26). In 1:10, as elsewhere, the fruit is thought of in terms of good moral character (the verb in Luke 8:15 and Rom. 7:4; the noun in Paul: Rom. 1:13; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 1:11). But here it could simply denote the success of the gospel in winning more and more to belief in Christ Jesus and in the hope offered. The unclarity is not helped by

the ambiguity of the second verb, which can mean either that the gospel "is causing (its converts) to grow" (1 Cor. 3:6–7)—that is, in knowledge (1:10), righteousness (2 Cor. 9:10), or faith (2 Cor. 10:15)—or that the gospel "is (itself) growing," that is, like a plant (Matt. 13:32; Mark 4:8) spreading throughout the world (cf. Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20), with the benefit of its fruit-bearing implied.12 Only here and in v. 10 are the two verbs thus associated in biblical Greek (though cf. Mark 4:8); the closeness of the two verses favors the idea of growth in character, but both ideas may be implied—the success of the gospel in producing so many mature and moral people. Either way, the note of triumphalism ("in all the world") is striking, as also the implied eschatological finality of Paul's apostolic mission (cf. particularly Munck 36–55, 275–79); and though hyperbolic (cf. Josephus, Contra Apionem 2.138–39, 284) it must reflect not only an amazing boldness of vision but also a considerable measure of success (already within three or four decades of Jesus' death), as in innumerable towns around the Mediterranean small groups met in the name of Christ Jesus, drawn together by the gospel (so also Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thes. 1:8).

The congratulatory thanksgiving continues with a fulsomeness that results in a rather cumbersome repetition of "just as" (καθὼς καί) and a second relative clause (1:5: "which you heard earlier"; 1:6: "from the day on which you heard"). The clause simply indicates that the process of growth and fruit-bearing has been continual since the day of the Colossians' conversion. This rhetorical courtesy would, of course, make it easier for the recipients to hear the subsequent exhortations more favorably.
The rhetorical flourish may also explain the use of the more elaborate form of the verb "to know" (ἐπιγινώσκειν) rather than the more common γινώσκειν, though some prefer to give the prefix more weight in intensifying the meaning ("understood," JB, RSV, NIV; "comprehended," NRSV). Either way the verb denotes the experience (Ernst, Philipper, Philemon, Kolosser, Epheser 159) as well as the intellectual apprehension of God's outreaching generosity ("grace") as transforming power (cf. Rom. 3:24; 5:15, 17; 1 Cor. 1:4–5; 15:10; 2 Cor. 6:1; Gal. 1:6, 15; see on 1:2, "grace"). The addition of "in truth" reinforces the overtones of 1:5 ("the truth of the gospel") that their encounter with the gospel was an opening of their eyes and lives to reality, what actually is God's purpose for humankind (see on 1:5), a purpose of grace, with the further implication that this truth first learned thus should continue to be the touchstone of their ongoing discipleship. NJB and REB catch the sense well when they translate: "recognised it for/learned what it [God's grace] truly is" (so also Moule, Colossians and Philemon 51). Lohse, Colossians and Philemon 21, notes that "knowledge of the truth" assumes much greater importance in the later New Testament writings (1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Tit. 1:1; Heb. 10:26; 1 John 2:21; 2 John 1).

1:7 καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὅς ἐστιν πιστὸς ὑπέρ ἡμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Paul and Timothy extend their note of congratulation to include the one who first brought them the gospel—Epaphras.13 As a native of Colossae (4:12) he presumably first encountered Paul and was converted through his preaching during Paul's long stay in Ephesus (Acts 19:8–10), some 120 miles distant on the coast and directly accessible by road down the Lycus and

Meander valleys (see further pp. 20f. above). Whether he became a regular member of Paul's mission team, as did so many others whose names are preserved for us in Paul's letters (see Ollrog ch. 2), we cannot say. But it may have been Paul's missionary strategy to concentrate his own energies in major cities, while sending out mission teams to towns in the region (Conzelmann 134–35; cf. Acts 19:10). It is not too fanciful to imagine Epaphras, anxious to share the good news with his own townsfolk, volunteering to evangelize Colossae and devoting himself to laboring for the gospel there and in the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13). In Paul's terms, therefore, Epaphras may be called "apostle of Colossae" (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1–2), though the fact that the letter to Colossae was then written by Paul and Timothy, without including Epaphras as fellow author, despite his recent (?) presence (1:8: cf. Phm. 23), presumably implies that Epaphras saw himself simply as Paul's emissary (see on 1:1), or that the letter writer (Timothy?) did not wish to diffuse Paul's apostolic authority too far. This is reinforced by the reading "on our behalf" (see n. 6), which again clearly implies that Epaphras's evangelization in Colossae was at Paul's behest: "the apostle gives his seal to the teaching of Epaphras" (Abbott 199). In view of the double commendation of Epaphras in 1:7–8 and 4:12–13, Paul and Timothy may have concluded that Epaphras himself as well as his gospel needed some defense and support (Wall 42–43). At all events, 1:7–8 and Phm. 23 certainly seem to indicate someone who was eager to share the news of his success with Paul and who spent enough time with Paul to be imprisoned with him, but who remained deeply concerned for his townsfolk and fellow believers in Colossae.

The verb used ("as you learned") may imply that Epaphras had seen his task in Colossae not simply as winning them to faith but as instructing them in the traditions and parenesis without which they would have no guidelines in translating their faith into daily living (cf. Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 4:6; Phil. 4:9; see also on 2:6).

Ἀγαπητός ("beloved") is one of Paul's favorite words for fellow Christians (Rom. 1:7; 12:19; 16:8), converts (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 4:14; 10:14; 15:58, etc.), and fellow workers (Rom. 16:9, 12; 1 Cor. 4:17; Col. 4:7, 9, 14; Phm. 1). It reinforces the sense of family belonging that seems to have been characteristic of the young Christian mission (see on 1:1, "brother"). Behind it probably lies Jewish election theology, the claim that the patriarchs, Jerusalem, and the whole people of God are loved and have been chosen by God (e.g., Deut. 33:12; Isa. 41:8; 44:1; Jer. 31:20; Dan. 3:35; Sir. 24:11) and therefore the sense that the first Christian churches shared in that election. If so, the term embodies an implicit claim first advanced by Paul and characteristic of a central thrust of his gospel (see particularly Wischmeyer).

"Fellow slave" (σύνδουλος) is a term that we might have expected to occur more often in Paul's letters, since he so delighted in the use of συν-compounds (W. Grundmann, TDNT 7.786–87, plus "fellow prisoner," "fellow worker," "yoke fellow," "fellow participant," "fellow imitator," "fellow soldier"), and he was quite prepared to use the term "slave" (of Christ) both for himself (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1) and for other Christians (1 Cor. 7:22; Col. 4:12; cf. Rom. 6:18, 22). In fact, however, "fellow slave" occurs only in Colossians (here and 4:7); Ephesians also has συν-compounds unique to it (2:19; 3:6; 5:7). On the basis of this evidence

it is impossible to say whether this is the mark of a close disciple copying Paul's style or Paul himself simply extending his usage in coining ever more συν-compounds.

The slave metaphor was a potent one since the basic image was essentially negative in Greek thought—slavery as the antithesis of the freedom that the Greek mind cherished so dearly, since, by definition, the slave was completely at another's beck and call (K. H. Rengstorf, TDNT 2.261–65; H. Schlier, TDNT 2.493–96). Even so, "slave" could still be something of a honorific title, at least if one was slave of an important and powerful individual (D. B. Martin, Slavery), and this was reinforced by the more oriental tradition in which the devotee of the cult saw himself as slave of the god—not least in Jewish religious thought (e.g., Deut. 32:36; Josh. 24:29; Pss. 89:3; 105:26, 42; Mal. 4:4; see further my Romans 7). Implicit in the designation, therefore, is the readiness to hand over one's life completely to a master (to sell oneself into slavery was a policy of desperation, but not uncommon), but to a master (Christ Jesus) whose power and authority were greater than that in any other master-slave relation. Presumably also implicit is the Christian conviction that only such unconditional handing over of oneself can prevent one becoming enslaved by a more destructive power (Rom. 6:12–23). Epaphras is further described as a "faithful [see on 1:2] servant of Christ on our [see n. 6] behalf." "Servant" (διάκονος) often retains overtones of its original sense, "waiter at table" (John 2:5, 9; cf. Mark 1:31; 15:41; Luke 10:40; 12:37; 17:8; Acts 6:2); and thus its range of meaning merges into "slave" as denoting obligation to offer humble service to a superior (note particularly Mark 9:35; 10:43–45). That the memory of Jesus' actions and teaching influenced Paul's idea and practice of service may be suggested by such passages as Gal. 2:17 and Rom. 15:8. At this stage the word seems to be still descriptive of an individual's sustained commitment (like "fellow worker") and not yet the title of a clearly defined office (cf. Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:23, 25; 4:7; 1 Thes. 3:2). If there are conscious overtones of the use of the term for cultic and guild officials (LSJ s.v. διάκονος; H. W. Beyer, TDNT 2.91–92; cf. A. Weiser, EDNT 1.304) we must assume that, as with Paul's use of priestly language elsewhere (Rom. 12:1; 15:16; Phil. 2:25), the cult has been secularized and the terms appropriated for all ministry on behalf of the gospel and Christ (see also on 1:25).

1:8 ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι. The congratulatory thanksgiving is concluded with a final note of appreciation to Epaphras, which also serves to make clear to the readership that Paul is well informed about their situation. Presumably it was to Epaphras (cf. again Phm. 23) that Paul owed knowledge of the threatening circumstances at Colossae, to which the main thrust of the letter is directed (from 2:6 on). But here, as is appropriate in the letter opening, the note is all of praise, even though it involves repetition of what has already been said well enough in 1:4.

As hope is the main thrust of the gospel (1:5), so love (see on 1:4) is its main fruit (here cf. particularly 3:14). It is described more fully as "love in (or by) the Spirit" (NEB: "God-given love"; REB: "the love the Spirit has awakened in you"). This is another characteristic Pauline note (cf. particularly Rom. 5:5 and Gal. 5:22). The love that mirrors the love of God in Christ

can only be aroused and sustained by the Spirit of God. The phrase carries overtones of an inspiration that wells up from within, charismatically enabled (Rom. 2:29; 1 Cor. 12:3, 9, 13; 14:16; 1 Thes. 1:5), and that depends on continued openness to the Spirit if its quality of unselfish service of others is to be maintained.
This is the only direct reference to the Spirit in Colossians—a surprising fact and further indication for many that the letter may not have been written/dictated by Paul himself. Schweizer, Colossians 38 and n. 19 notes several themes and phrases that attract reference to the Spirit (as a kind of reflex) in the undisputed Paulines but that do not do so in Colossians; he suggests therefore that ἐν πνεύματι here should be taken to mean "spiritual." But see Gnilka, Kolosserbrief 38; Fee 638–40; and below on 1:9.

James D. G. Dunn, The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 54–66.

005********
2. Thanksgiving for the Colossians (1:3–8)
3. We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you 4. because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints, 5. on account of the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and of which you have previously heard in the word of the truth of the gospel 6. that has come to you. Just as in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, so also it has been doing so among you since the day you heard it and came to know the grace of God, in truth. 7. You learned this from Epaphras our beloved fellow slave who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8. and who indeed informed us of your love in the Spirit.

NOTES
3. We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you: The thanksgiving section of the letter begins with the use of the verb eucharistoumen (we give thanks). Prayer and thanksgiving go together in Colossians (cf. 1:12–14; 2:7; 3:15–17; 4:2–3). Philemon 4–7 offers the closest parallel in Pauline literature to Col 1:3–8 (cf. Phil 1:3–11). Commentators have pointed to the inclusion of thanksgivings to God (the gods) in the letters of Jews and pagans in antiquity (see, e.g., 2 Macc 1:10–2:18, discussed by Lohse 12–13). Thanksgivings are found in all Pauline epistles with the exception of Galatians, 1 Timothy, and Titus. The plural subject "we" here is probably an example of "epistolary plural" (replaced by the singular in 1:23) where there is no difference in meaning between it and the singular; here Paul himself is the subject, or perhaps Paul and Timothy as co-authors (see the notes on 1:1). As is the case elsewhere in Pauline works, God is identified as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:2 has "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"). The more usual expression in Colossians, however, is Christ Jesus (e.g., 1:1; 2:6).

4. because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints, 5. on account of the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and of which you have previously heard: While in English the phrase immediately calls to mind faithfulness and loyalty, it is probably closer to the meaning of tēn pistin hymōn en Christ̄ Iēsou to

think in terms of the sphere in which the faith of the Colossians operated (see the notes and interpretation on 1:1–2). The parameters of the community of those who have been incorporated into Christ are being announced. Note the greater focus on Christ as the object of faith implied by the language in 2:5, which refers to the firmness of the faith of the Colossians in Christ: to stereōma tēs eis Christon pisteōs hymōn (Harris 16). Verses 4–5 introduce the classic Pauline triad of faith, love, and hope (cf. 1 Corinthians 13; 1 Thess 1:3; Col 3:14). Hope here has a special significance. It is less an attitude to foster than an object to be seized. In essence the term functions as a synonym for eternal life. Where to locate salvation is a central concern of Colossians. The notion of a heavenly store of eternal life fits with the cosmological interests of the letter and probably also reflects the nature of the conflict at Colossae; the "false teaching" seems to have included heavenly visions, and community members evidently debated how the present fruits of salvation should be lived out on a daily basis in the earthly realm (see the notes and interpretation on 2:8–23). The use of the verb apokeimai here refers to what is put away or stored up (BAGD 92; cf. 2 Tim 4:8). The transition from v. 4 to v. 5 is awkward because of the Greek term at the beginning of v. 5 (dia + accusative), translated literally here as "on account of." It is not certain if the hope that is laid up in heaven provides the grounds for the thanksgiving (i.e., one more reason for giving thanks), though grammatical considerations suggest otherwise (see Harris 17). It is more likely that in v. 5 hope (eternal life) acts as the basis for faith and love. The rather fluid translation offered in the REB and NEB probably best captures the true meaning: "both [faith and love] spring from that hope stored up for you in heaven." Love (agapē) is mentioned again in v. 8.

in the word of the truth of the gospel 6. that has come to you: The translation of this phrase is the same as that adopted by the NRSV and the NIV, but it has been rendered otherwise by some translators: "when the message of the true gospel" (REB; NEB). The difficulties of translation involve several issues including: (1) en could be spatial (in), instrumental (through), or temporal (when); (2) the word logos is translated variously in English as "word," "message," or "preaching"; (3) it is not entirely clear whether "of the truth" refers specifically to the gospel or to the word that constitutes the gospel (see Harris 18). None of these variations, however, alters the sense dramatically. The important point is that the Colossians have previously heard of the true word/message, that is, the gospel (cf. Eph 1:13). The insistence on truth is no doubt related to the false gospel preached by certain teachers (cf. Col 2:8, 16–23). The importance of truth is stressed a second time in v. 6.

Just as in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, so also it has been doing so among you: The Greek words kathōs kai are repeated twice in this verse and are used to convey comparison ("in the same way too"). There is an awkwardness in the language used to compare the arrival and growth of the gospel in Colossae to its expansion throughout the world. Some copyists sought to alleviate the awkwardness by inserting an extra kai before the words estin karpophoroumenon (it is bearing fruit), but the reading adopted here is both early and well attested (Metzger 619). The central idea is clear: the presence and growth of the gospel among the Colossians reflects a cosmological reality. The verbal construction "it is bearing fruit and growing"

points to more than a single occurrence in the present; it refers to ongoing action (Harris 19). Both in the community and in the whole world the gospel is engaged in a process of expansion and production. Growth is a very important theme in Colossians, with respect both to the theological ideas articulated in this epistle and to the social reality experienced by community members. (For more detailed discussion of this expression see the notes on 1:10 below.)

since the day you heard it and came to know the grace of God, in truth: The Colossians have come to know the grace of God. The verb meaning "to come to know" here is epignōskō in contrast to the more common term ginōskō. Thus some assign weight to the prefix and translate it as "comprehend" (NRSV) or "understood" (NIV). But a comparison of this passage to 2 Cor 8:9 reveals that there is no necessary difference in meaning between the compound verb and the simpler form (see Harris 20; on the importance of knowledge in Colossians see the notes on 1:9). This is the second reference to grace in the epistle (cf. 1:2). "The grace of God" in this instance is a reference to the true message of salvation, the gospel. The NRSV captures the heart of the meaning of this phrase by rendering the reference to truth as an adverb that modifies the verb "came to know or comprehended": "from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God." However, the more literal translation here allows the repetition of the concept of truth in vv. 5–6 to stand out more clearly (see also the notes on 1:5).

7. You learned this from Epaphras our beloved fellow slave: Clearly an important member of Paul's circle of fellow workers, Epaphras is depicted in Colossians as being with Paul in prison (cf. 4:12; Phlm 23). The reference to the Colossians learning of the gospel from Epaphras (v. 7) means that he founded the community. While it is possible to translate the term doulos in a more neutral way as "servant," it is increasingly being recognized that the metaphorical use of the term "slave" in Pauline Christianity is related in complex ways to the actual shape of the institution of slavery in the Greco-Roman world. Because Epaphras is described as both a fellow slave and a faithful minister of Christ, it is possible that what is meant is that both he and Paul are fellow slaves of Christ. Epaphras is in fact described as a slave of Christ in 4:12. Since being enslaved to members of the upper class was a form of possible upward mobility in the ancient world, to be a slave of Christ (1:15: the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation) would mean that one participated in Christ's supremacy. Thus the term "slave" could function to enhance Epaphras' authority in Colossae. It is also clear, however, that Paul can speak of himself as a slave in a manner that calls to mind self-abasement and the language used by popular leaders of the time to reinforce their solidarity with the masses, their enslavement to their followers. In 1 Cor 9:19–23 Paul speaks of having become a slave to all in order to benefit some. He has even become weak in order that he might win the weak (see Dale B. Martin [1990]). Such considerations may also underlie v. 6 since it is evident that Epaphras is bound to the Colossian community and goes to extraordinary lengths to foster its growth (Col 4:12–13). At any rate there are indications in the text that the institution of slavery required careful attention in Colossae (see the notes and interpretation on 3:18–4:1).

who is a faithful minister of Christ: The word

"minister" here is the same Greek term as was later used to refer to the established church office of deacon (diakonos). The term does not imply that Epaphras occupies an institutionalized office, but it is nevertheless a title reserved for leaders. Local community leaders in Philippi (Phil 1:1) are given the same title along with another designation, overseer, which would later refer to the office of bishop (episkopos). Paul can also describe himself as a minister of Christ (e.g., Rom 15:15–16 [the Greek term for minister here is leitourgos]). In 1:23 he is called a minister of the gospel. Another member of the Pauline entourage, Tychicus, is called a faithful minister in 4:7, and in 4:17 Archippus is instructed to fulfill the ministry that he has received in the Lord (see also the notes and interpretation on 4:7–18). Recent work on the concept of diakonos in the ancient world has highlighted the use of the word to refer to the role of messenger, spokesperson, go-between, or authorized representative (see Collins 71–191, 195–210). It is likely that both descriptions of Paul and Epaphras are intended to convey the notion that they are messengers on assignment from God or Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:5–6; 6:4; 11:23), but there is also a sense in which Epaphras is on assignment from Paul. Epaphras is in fact the founder of the community (1:7–9; 2:1; 4:12–13).

on our behalf: The strong evidence for both "on our behalf" (hyper hēmōn) and "on your behalf" (hyper hymōn) among the textual witnesses has made it difficult for translators to arrive at a conclusion about this verse. The NIV favors the former while the NRSV prefers the latter. However, the goal here seems to be to do more than establish Epaphras' connection with the Colossians; it is, apparently, to formalize Epaphras' authority over the Colossians by reinforcing his association with Paul (cf. 4:12–13). Thus "our behalf" is the preferred translation. Epaphras acts on Paul's behalf; in essence he acts in his place. The translation adopted here best captures this sense (see Harris 22). The words carry an especially strong weight if Colossians is deutero-Pauline; in Paul's absence his authority is mediated through the apostle's fellow worker who is well known to the Colossians.

8. and who indeed informed us of your love in the Spirit: While the term spirit (pneuma) can sometimes refer to the human spirit in Pauline literature, in this case the meaning is probably God's Spirit: love (cf. 1:4) has been awakened or engendered in the Colossians by God's Spirit. That the verse refers more generally to the Colossians having a spiritual love appears less likely. There is, however, very little in Colossians about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit figures much more prominently in Ephesians.

INTERPRETATION

In Greek, Col 1:3–8 is one long sentence that offers reasons for thanking God. These reasons extend from the origins of the community to its ultimate goal. As is also the case with other Pauline thanksgivings, these verses introduce themes and concerns that are taken up again later in the letter. To praise the community for a faith that is publicly known is also a typical feature of the opening of Pauline works. In other letters such praise makes explicit the universal scope of the gospel message (e.g., 1 Thess 1:7–10; Rom 1:8) and this consideration probably also shapes Colossians.

Read social-scientifically, Paul's praise takes on new significance as an assertion of the legitimacy of the church mission. In an hon-

or-shame society like the first-century Mediterranean world the public demonstration of reputation is vital to the establishment of identity. In recent years NT scholars have turned to anthropological studies of Mediterranean societies in order to shed light on the values embraced by ancient Mediterranean people (e.g., Malina [1983]; Malina and Neyrey [1991]; M. Y. MacDonald [1996]). An understanding of the core Mediterranean values of honor and shame has proved to be especially fruitful. A leading anthropologist of Mediterranean societies defines honor and shame as "reciprocal moral values representing primordial integration of individual to 'group.' They reflect, respectively, the conferral of public esteem upon the person and the sensitivity to public opinion upon which the former depends" (Gilmore 2). In essence the apostle's praise recognizes that the Colossian community has been endowed with honor: its worth has been publicly acknowledged. In order for the community to have a credible identity such acknowledgment is vital.

It is easy for a modern person to miss the weight of such a brief testimony to the public success of early Christianity as is disclosed by the reference to the apostle having heard of the faith of the Colossians. Its importance is far greater than simply a passing reference to church growth and exemplary church life. The faith that binds the community members together in Pauline Christianity and forms them into one body must be externally manifested (see Malina [1993] "Faith-Faithfulness," 68). Such considerations help explain why community members are instructed to conduct themselves wisely toward outsiders (4:5). All exchanges with the outside world involve the precarious commodity of community honor (see the notes and interpretation on 4:2–6).

In these dense few verses a good deal is communicated about the priorities of the letter. The basis of salvation is at stake. The fact that this basis is described in terms of hope which is stored in heaven may reflect the interest of the false teachers, examined below, in heavenly bodies and cosmic speculation (see the notes and interpretation on 2:18–23). The author may be correcting interpretations by making use of the language that has become controversial in Colossae.

The spatial language that appears at the beginning of the epistle has been judged by scholars who understand Colossians to be deutero-Pauline because it represents a shift in meaning in relation to the "authentic" Paul: hope changes from something with a temporal-eschatological orientation into a concept with spatial characteristics. The change in priorities is made even more apparent in v. 6 where the process of entering the church is described as knowing the grace of God in truth. The association between knowledge and truth has been judged as characteristic of later NT writings (e.g., 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 3:7; see Lohse 18, 21). Petr Pokorný (1991) describes the shift as follows: "The 'spatial' interpretation of Christian hope [cf. the "above" in Col 3:1] relativizes the dimension of the future fulfillment, which is rarely the case in the main letters of Paul [cf. Titus 2:13]. In place of a future fulfillment we read in 3:4 of a future unveiling of the content of hope (of eschatological praise and of being with Christ)" (41). Pokorný notes, however, that the notion of a heavenly deposit can be found in Jewish apocalyptic literature (4 Ezra 7:14) and in Jesus' sayings (Matt 6:20–21, par.; Mark 10:21, par.), and he points out that it is not completely foreign to Paul (1 Cor 2:7).

There are clearly strong elements of continui-

ty between the undisputed letters of Paul and Colossians, but there are also some changes of emphasis. A social-scientific perspective allows us to make greater sense of these changes of emphasis that emerge in Colossians. In their famous treatise on the sociology of knowledge Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann described a dialectical relationship existing between the symbolic universe (a canopy of ideas offering meaning to the individual and the group) and the actors in a given social context. The symbolic universe is continually shaped by social experience and continually shapes what is experienced. According to their analysis contact with "deviants" or "heretics" leads to legitimations of the symbolic universe (attempts to justify a particular perspective, perhaps by making use of the language of the perceived deviants). These legitimations are incorporated into the symbolic universe and the symbolic universe is ultimately transformed (Berger and Luckmann 125; see the full discussion in M. Y. MacDonald [1988] 10–18).

When Colossians is understood as the result of a dialectical relationship between social actors and the symbolic universe its cosmological perspective emerges as fundamentally tied to the realities of community life. Everything is pushed upward and outward in Colossians: Hope is laid up in heaven; Christ is above, seated at the right hand of God; the gospel is bearing fruit and filling the world; Christ is the head of the church (cf. Col 1:5–6; 1:18; 3:1). Such beliefs are articulated first and foremost in relation to the problem of false teaching (2:8–23), but other social factors should be considered such as the growth of the Pauline churches, the disappearance of the apostle, and especially rising tension between the church community and the outside world (see the notes and interpretation on 4:2–6). In these opening verses of Colossians the assertion of Paul's authority as an apostle and over the Colossians is intended to ensure that they continue to be established securely in the faith (cf. 1:23). Just as in Galatians (cf. Gal 1:6–9), there is value in stating what has been known to be true from the beginning: the gospel is the same gospel of which they have previously heard and that is now bearing fruit among them. It is the same gospel that has a universal scope and that promises heavenly treasure. The strategy to ensure adherence to the gospel in v. 7 turns to the concrete matter of the leadership of Epaphras.

Epaphras is presented in vv. 7–8 as an intermediary between Paul and the Colossian community. The church at Colossae is clearly part of the Pauline sphere of influence, but the Colossians did not receive the gospel from Paul himself. Epaphras founded the community and the letter presents him as now with Paul and as having brought news about the life of the community to the apostle. Epaphras is perhaps the most important of Paul's fellow workers mentioned in Col 1:7 and in the list of greetings in Col 4:7–17, but Onesimus and Tychicus also play a significant role in community affairs. These verses reveal an attempt to bolster the reliability of Paul's fellow workers and emphasize the centrality of their role in maintaining communication between the apostle and the community. The reliability of the associates of the apostles is stressed in other NT works as well. In a manner that calls to mind the exhortation in Col 4:7–8 a promise is made in Eph 6:21 that Tychicus will communicate all things to the addressees. The Pastoral Epistles are not addressed to communities in the first instance, but exhort church groups through Paul's delegates, Timothy

and Titus. A particularly interesting exhortation is found in 1 Pet 5:12, which suggests a link between the bolstering of the apostles' associates and the writing of pseudonymous epistles. Silvanus is not only a faithful brother to the community, he is also the one through whom Peter is said to write. All these texts come from the latter decades of the first century and the early second century when particular problems arose due to a vacuum in leadership created by the death of the earliest witnesses and authorities in early Christianity (see Brown [1984]).

As discussed in the comments on Col 1:1–2, Paul's authority is charismatic; it has been bestowed upon him by a divine encounter with Christ and revealed through his miracles and wonders, and above all by means of his ability to convince others to accept the gospel and attain salvation. By establishing a strong link between Paul and Epaphras, who brought the gospel to the Colossians, the author of Colossians leaves no doubt that community members participate in the divine benefits—the hope that is laid up in heaven—delivered through the Pauline mission. Because Epaphras is clearly the one who preached the gospel originally in Colossae and perhaps also in Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13) it may be accurate to consider Epaphras also as a type of charismatic leader, but his leadership is clearly dependent on Paul's. In Weberian terminology, Epaphras is part of the staff of the charismatic leader. The disappearance of the original charismatic leader creates the problem of succession: to whom will we now listen? Those who are closely associated with the charismatic leader, the fellow workers, will naturally need to secure their own leadership positions and reinforce their authority among the body of followers (mediated through a connection to the central leader; see the notes and interpretation on 1:1–2; and see M. Y. MacDonald [1988] 11–16). Whether Paul is imprisoned or dead, fellow workers like Epaphras would need to secure the continued existence of the Pauline movement by defending their own leadership. The problems created by the proponents of the "false teaching" (see the notes and interpretation on 2:8–23) make even more critical the reinforcement of the authority of the one who originally preached the gospel in Colossae. If Colossians is deutero-Pauline, then it would most likely be individuals like Epaphras who would seek to make Paul speak to the community by writing in his name. They would make his presence felt and bring comfort in his absence.

There is no doubt that the disappearance of Paul would have been traumatic for those who worked closely with him. However, the continued existence of Pauline Christianity beyond the disappearance of the apostle was related to the practices and social structures of Greco-Roman society. The very act of composing a document in Paul's world inevitably involved a group effort in a way that is no longer the case in the modern world (see the notes and interpretation on 1:1–2). It may well have seemed natural for Paul's fellow workers to continue to spread the truth of Pauline Christianity by taking on his persona. Certainly the practice of composing pseudonymous works is one that early Christians shared with Jews and pagans in the ancient world and it should not be understood as simply an effort to deceive (see Introduction). If we think of the authorship of Pauline works as a communal enterprise undertaken by Paul and his entourage, the sharp distinction between authentic and inauthentic epistles is significantly reduced.

The potential for Paul's assistants to continue

to exercise their authority in Paul's absence was also strengthened by the system of patronage that permeated relationships in Greco-Roman society. Whether in the context of political, economic, or religious arenas, the system of patronage imbued non-kinship relationships with the flavor of relations in the hierarchical household (see Malina [1993] "Patronage," 133–37). The patron acted very much like the head of a household. Patrons bestowed material benefits on their "clients" and in return expected to receive honor and loyalty. These material benefits were not simply financial but included all kinds of economic resources (such as access to a house for church meetings). Patrons allowed clients to have access to social advantages as well: the client shared in the prestige of the patron. In the context of Paul's churches we can easily see how the prestige associated with particular patrons becomes the subject of conflict when Paul censures the Corinthian community for dividing into parties: "each of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ' " (1 Cor 1:12 NRSV). Sometimes a third party facilitated the relationship between patron and client. "Brokers" or "mediators" provided access to the patron. In many respects Paul's fellow workers acted as brokers, mediating between Paul and the "client" communities.

Scholars are increasingly coming to recognize that an understanding of the system of patronage in the ancient world sheds light not only on the general nature of the relationship between Paul and his communities but also on the interaction between the apostle and the individuals mentioned in his correspondence. Although most often it is Paul who is cast in the role of patron, it is increasingly acknowledged that the balance of power varied considerably from relationship to relationship. That in Rom 16:1–2 Phoebe is recommended by Paul to the community indicates that she will benefit from Paul's prestige. Like Epaphras she is called diakonos, minister or deacon. But Paul in this text also describes Phoebe as his patron, indicating his dependency on her in certain circumstances (see Whelan). The relationship between Epaphras, Paul, and the Colossians turns out to be complex when it is evaluated in terms of the ancient structures of patronage, for in the few verses where Epaphras is mentioned he is shown as functioning in all three roles: patron, broker, and client.

As is made clear by the description of Epaphras as a minister to the Colossians "on our behalf," Epaphras is a mediator figure, providing the Colossians with access to Paul's benefaction and communicating their loyalty to the apostle (Col 1:7–8). Epaphras is also a patron to the Colossians: having founded the community, he continues his prayers and hard work to sustain it (Col 1:7; 4:12–13). Implicit in such commendations of Epaphras is probably an encouragement to respect his authority—to honor him with loyalty and obedience. But Epaphras can also stand with the Colossians in their relationship with Paul as "clients before the patron Paul," for Epaphras is described as "one of them" (Col 4:12). The flexibility of the role of Epaphras (and other fellow workers) probably contributed to the survival of Pauline Christianity beyond the disappearance of the main charismatic leader. Paul may have been absent, but his assistants were in place to provide access to the Pauline legacy. Their solidarity with local communities was reinforced because they, along with other community members, had been Paul's clients. Participation in Paul's mission and the privilege of sharing in Paul's prestige as "fellow slaves of

Christ" prepared them to become patrons of local communities.

When they are understood as deutero-Pauline, Colossians and Ephesians are usually associated with a transitional period between the height of the leadership of the Apostle to the Gentiles and the establishment of the church offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, at the beginning of the second century when the apostle's fellow workers would themselves have died. One senses a void of leadership in the social setting of Colossians and Ephesians. To become aware of the influence of the system of patronage on social relations in Greco-Roman society enables us to see more clearly the structures that would have been in place to allow Pauline Christianity to continue beyond the disappearance of Paul.

FOR REFERENCE AND FURTHER STUDY

Brown, Raymond E. The Churches the Apostles Left Behind. New York: Paulist; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984.

Collins, John N. Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Crafton, Jeffrey A. The Agency of the Apostle: A Dramatistic Analysis of Paul's Response to Conflict in 2 Corinthians. JSNT.S 51. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990.

Malina, Bruce J. The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology. Atlanta: John Knox, 1981; London: S.C.M., 1983.

———. "Faith-Faithfulness" in John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, eds., Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993, 67–70.

———. "Patronage," in ibid. 113–17.

Marshall, Peter. Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987.

Martin, Dale B. Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990.

O'Brien, Peter T. Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul. NT.S 49. Leiden: Brill, 1977.

Saller, Richard P. Personal Patronage under the Early Empire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Schubert, Paul. Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings. BZNW 20. Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1939.

Whelan, Caroline F. "Amica Pauli: The Role of Phoebe in the Early Church," JSNT 49 (1993) 67–85.

[Witherington, Ben III. Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.]

006********

Thanksgiving

Colossians 1:3–8*

1

3 We thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, always when we pray for you, 4/ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints, 5/ for the sake of the hope which lies prepared for you in heaven; about this [hope] you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel 6/ which is present among you-just as it is in the whole world, bearing fruit and growing, just as it is among you-from the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth; 7/ as you learned from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf 8/ and who has made known to us your love in the Spirit.