

I. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE *EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS*. A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

OLIMPIU NICOLAE BENEĂ*

ABSTRACT. The purpose of the present study is to offer an overall perspective of the historic of Epistle to the Colossians' interpretation. Ever since the 2nd century, we can remark an intense debate regarding the contents of the epistle, in the context of Gnosticism's development, reaching a peak in the 4th century, where the dispute revolved around the Christological accent. In the philokalic times, the focus of the interpretation will transit from the first two chapters of the Epistle, onto the third, chapter dedicated to understanding the Christian's mystical relationship with God in Christ. Starting with the Reform, especially in the last two centuries, the focus of the interpretation is determined by the new debates in the field of the epistle's isagogy.

Keywords: Colossians, Pauline Letters, Deutero-pauline Letters, Christological Hymn, Colossian "philosophy".

The first interpretations of the *Epistle to the Colossians* can be indirectly deduced from the contents of the Epistle. St. Apostle Paul asks his recipients, the believers from the Church of Colossae, to read this letter and then to make possible its reading in the Church of Laodicea (Col 4, 16). The reading of the Epistle in the Church must have been followed by lively debates regarding its contents, for, through its nature, a new-testamentary epistle¹ was a circumstantial

*Assist. prof., Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Email: olimpnb@gmail.com

¹ More details on the originals of the New Testament in Pr. Lect. Dr. Stelian Tofană, *Introducere în Studiul Noului Testament. Volumul I: Text și Canon. Epoca Noului Testament* (Bibliotheca Theologica 1), (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1997), 101-118.

document, written as a response to an existing problem in a specific Church, having the purpose of clarifying the theological aspects that generated it.² The timeliness of an epistle's message, owing to the work of the Holy Spirit,³ has caused throughout the history of the Church the necessity of its interpretation, due to the fact that the Holy Scriptures are used within the liturgical space.⁴

This is one of the reasons why this study is trying to outline an overall perspective on the focuses of the epistle's text interpretation throughout Church history. We are grateful to the papers of some contemporary biblical scholars: W. Schenk,⁵ Vicent A. Pizzuto and Ian Cristopher Levy,⁶ Harry O. Maier,⁷ mostly to J. B. Maclean⁸ and Larry Kreitzer⁹, on which we based the entire perspective of interpreting the *Epistle to the Colossians*. We have details on interpreting the *Epistle to the Colossians* ever since the beginnings of church's history, from Marcion of Sinope¹⁰

² In this regard, Pr. Prof. Dr. Stelian Tofană claims that St. Paul the Apostle's epistles "are *occasional letters*, written under the pressure of urgent missionary necessities, under special circumstances and for clarifying certain issues regarding faith, morals, church discipline or individual conduct. Without any literary stylistics concern, they are letters of the moment, some of an extreme emergency, but, nevertheless, they are timeless, with each generation of Christians. Their timeless is due, first of all, to the works of the Holy Spirit, Who assisted and coordinated both the kerygmatic and the missionary work of Paul the Apostle (Pr. Prof. Dr. Stelian Tofană, *Studiul Noului Testament. Curs pentru anul II de studiu*, [manuscris, 2006]). Also see the debates regarding the nature of the epistles in New Testament in "The Epistles – Learning to Think Contextually" and "The Epistles – The Hermeneutical Questions" from Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth. A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, (London: Scripture Union, 1989), 43-56, 57-72.

³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Stelian Tofană, *Studiul Noului Testament. Curs pentru anul II de studiu* (manuscris).

⁴ See more details on the Holy Scripture's hermeneutics in the Eucharistic community in Savvas Agouridis, "Premise pentru o ermineutică ortodoxă", in Pr. Dr. Constantin Coman, *Erminia Duhului*, (București: Ed. Bizatină, 2002), 303-338.

⁵ W. Schenk, "Der Kolosserbrief in der neueren Forschung (1945-1985)", *ANRW II Principat* 25 (1987): 3327-3354.

⁶ Vicent A. Pizzuto & Ian Cristopher Levy, "Epistle to the Colossians", in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* 5, (Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 502-509.

⁷ Harry O. Maier, *Picturing Paul in Empire: Imperial Image, Text and Persuasion in Colossians, Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles*, (London – New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013).

⁸ J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", in John H. Hayes, *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 206-210.

⁹ L. Kreitzer, "Colossians and Philemon", in R. J. Coggins & J. L. Houlden, *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, (London: SCM Press, 1990), 125-128.

¹⁰ Marcion (fl. 144, d.c. 154) was a heretic of the mid second century who rejected the Old Testament and much of the New Testament, claiming that the Father of Jesus Christ was other than the Old Testament God. See Thomas C. Oden (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Introduction and Biographical Information*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 498.

and the Valentinian Gnostics.¹¹

Characteristic to his theology, Marcion leaves out Col 1,15-16 from his Canon, assiduously focusing, in his commentaries, on Col 2,16-17.²¹ To argument rejecting the Mosaic Law.¹² The Valentinians have considered Col 1,15-17 and 2,13-15 proofs for the spiritual origins of Christ and His triumph on the rulers and the authorities, the spiritual hosts in the heavenly places.¹³ Irenaeus¹⁴ and Tertullian¹⁵, reinterpreting the texts, rejected the opposition between God and the material world, or between the Christian Gospel and the Mosaic law.¹⁶ Irenaeus's theological accents, both cosmological and ecclesiological, together with the atonement model, have their origins in the *Epistle to the Colossians*.¹⁷ Irenaeus is the first ecclesiastical writer explicitly mentioning the letter, identifying it as Pauline.¹⁸ Thus, we find many texts of Colossians mentioned in the second century and early third century. St. Justin Martyr¹⁹ cites: Col 1,15,²⁰

¹¹ J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 206. Valentinus (fl. c. 140) was an Alexandrian heretic of the mid-second century who taught that the material world was created by the transgression of God's Wisdom, or Sophia. His secret catechism, for those who were to be initiated into the Valentinian version of gnosis, provided an exposition of the origin of creation and was also concerned with the process of how our salvation is achieved in light of the myth of Sophia. See Thomas C. Oden (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Introduction and Biographical Information*, p. 506. Mature Gnosticism is constituted of a series of models promoted in the 2nd century by great teachers, such as Valentinus and Basilides. It refers to a great number of heavenly intermediates, or eons, emanations of the divinity that connect the good and high God with the material creation. There is usually a contrast between the spirit (which is good) and the matter (which is bad). The Gnosticism is an eclectic system, which combines teachings from many sources, and we must not doubt the fact that some of these teaching were present in the first century. However, the ones that defined it, as the ones mentioned beforehand, did not exist back then. At the base of the *Epistle to the Colossians* are surely some of the teachings that have shown up later on in diverse forms of Gnosticism, but this does not mean that the Gnosticism itself was the problem in the city of Colossae.

¹² J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 206.

¹³ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.3.4, *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG) 1447.001.

¹⁴ Irenaeus (c.135-c.202), was bishop of Lyons who published the most famous and influential refutation of Gnostic thought. See Thomas C. Oden (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Introduction and Biographical Information*, 495.

¹⁵ Tertullian of Carthage (c.155/160-225/250) was a brilliant Carthaginian apologist and polemicist who laid the foundations of Christology and Trinitarian orthodoxy in the West, though he himself was later estranged from the orthodox tradition due to its laxity. See Thomas C. Oden (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Introduction and Biographical Information*, 504.

¹⁶ Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.19, *CCL* 1, p. 720. See J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 206.

¹⁷ Rolf Noormann, *Irenäus als Paulusinterpret* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1994), 377-378.

¹⁸ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.14.1.

¹⁹ St. Justin Martyr of Neapolis (c.100/110-165) was a Palestinian philosopher who was converted to Christianity, "the only sure and worthy philosophy". See Thomas C. Oden (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Introduction and Biographical Information*, 497.

²⁰ Iustinus Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 84.2, *PG* 6,673B = *PSB* 2, 192; 85.2, *PG* 6,676C = *PSB* 2, 193; 100.2, *PG* 6,709B = *PSB* 2, 210; 125.3, *PG* 6,768A = *PSB* 2, 240; 138.2, *PG* 6,793A = *PSB* 2, 253.

Col 2,11-12,²¹ Col 3,9,11;²² Irenaeus: Col 1,14,²³ Col 1,15, Col 1,18;²⁴ Tertullian: Col 1,5-6,²⁵ Col 1,15-17,19-22,24,²⁶ Col 1,15,²⁷ Col 1,16,²⁸ Col 1,18,²⁹ Col 1,21,³⁰ Col 2,8,³¹ Col 2,9,³² Col 2,11-13³³, Col 2,16-19,³⁴ Col 2,20,³⁵ Col 2,21-22,³⁶ Col 3,1-2,³⁷ Col 3,3,³⁸ Col 3,5,³⁹ Col 3,8,⁴⁰ Col 3,9-10,⁴¹ Col 3,13,⁴² Col 3,16,⁴³ Col 4,2;⁴⁴ Hippolytus,⁴⁵ disciple of Irenaeus:⁴⁶ Col 1,15,⁴⁷ Col 1,16,⁴⁸ Col 1,18,⁴⁹ Col 2,9,⁵⁰

²¹ Iustinus Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 43.2, PG 6, 568A = PSB 2, 138.

²² Iustinus Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 28.4, PG 6, 536B-C = PSB 2, 122.

²³ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Fragmenta varia* 2, TU 36.3, 123.

²⁴ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Demonstratio* 22.39-40, TU 36.3, 64.94; *Fragmenta varia* 2, TU 36.3, 60.

²⁵ Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.19, CCL 1, 720.

²⁶ Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem* 1.16.2-4; 5.19.3-4.6, CCL 1, 457-458,721-722,724.

²⁷ Tertullianus, *Adversus Hermogenem* 18.5, CCL 1, 412.

²⁸ Tertullianus, *Adversus Valentinianos* 16.1, CCL 2, 766.

²⁹ Tertullianus, *De virginibus velandis* 1.2, CCL 2, 1209.

³⁰ Tertullianus, *De resurrection mortuorum* 23.1, CCL 2, 949.

³¹ Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.19.7-8, CCL 1, 722; *De anima* 3.1, CCL 2, 785; *De praescriptionibus adversus haeresesomnes* 7.7, 33.9, CCL 1, 193,214.

³² Tertullianus, *Adversus Praxean* 14.2, CCL 2, 1176.

³³ Tertullianus, *De resurrection mortuorum* 7.6, 23.1-2, CCL 2, 930,949; *Adversus Marcionem* 5.19.9, CCL 1, 722.

³⁴ Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.19.9-10, CCL 1, 723.

³⁵ Tertullianus, *De resurrection mortuorum* 23.2, 46.15, CCL 2, 949,984.

³⁶ Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.19.10-11, CCL 1, 723.

³⁷ Tertullianus, *De resurrectione mortuorum* 23.4, CCL 2, 949.

³⁸ Tertullianus, *De resurrection mortuorum* 23.5, CCL 2, 950.

³⁹ Tertullianus, *De idololatria* 11.1, CCL 2, 1110; *De pudicitia* 17.18, CCL 2, 1317.

⁴⁰ Tertullianus, *De pudicitia* 17.18, CCL 2, 1317.

⁴¹ Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.19.11, CCL 1, 723; *De pudicitia* 20.7, CCL 2, 1324; *De resurrection mortuorum* 37.9, CCL 2, 970.

⁴² Tertullianus, *De pudicitia* 2.2, CCL 2, 1284.

⁴³ Tertullianus, *Ad uxorem* 2.8.8, CCL 1, 394.

⁴⁴ Tertullianus, *De ieiunio (adversus psychicos)* 10.3, CCL 2, 1267.

⁴⁵ Recent scholarship places Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235) in a Palestinian context, personally familiar with Origen. See Thomas C. Oden (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Introduction and Biographical Information*, 495.

⁴⁶ See the remark of patriarch Photios the I of Constantinople (810-893 / 858-877; 877-886) in Photius Constantinopolitanus, *Myriobiblon sive Bibliotheca* 121, PG 103, 401D-404A.

⁴⁷ Hippolytus Romanus, *In Daniele* 4.11.5, SC 14, 284; HIPPOLYTUS Romanus, *In Elcanam et Annam (In Reg. 1,1)*, GCS 1, 121.

⁴⁸ Hippolytus Romanus, *In Daniele* 2.30.6, SC 14, p. 176.

⁴⁹ Hippolytus Romanus, *De benedictionibus Isaaci et Iacobi et Moysis* (georg.et arm.), PO 27, 4.112.181; *De resurrection ad Mammaeam imperatricem* (fragm.1), GCS 1, 253; *Demonstratio de Christo et Antichristo (Peritouantichristou)* 46, GCS 1, 29; *In Daniele* 4.11.5, SC 14, 284.

⁵⁰ Hippolytus Romanus, *De benedictionibus Isaaci et Iacobi et Moysis* (georg.et arm.), PO 27, 38.

Col 2,10,⁵¹ Col 2,14,⁵² Col 2,15,⁵³ Col 2,20,⁵⁴ 3,2,⁵⁵ 3,9,⁵⁶ 4,1.⁵⁷ Although Origen's⁵⁸ and Clement of Alexandria's⁵⁹ works on the *Colossians* cannot be found anymore,⁶⁰ we can observe that the cosmic drama of creation in Origen's writings can be largely inspired by the words in the "Christological hymn": "ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται – the image of the invisible God through whom and for whom all things have been created" (1,15.16), Christ's omnipresence being a characteristic of Origen's works.⁶¹

Athanasius the Great recalls the *Epistle to the Colossians*, when referring to Paul's epistles, placing it between Philippians and 1 Thessalonians.⁶² The 60th Canon from the Council of Laodicea maintains the same order.⁶³

Starting with the middle of the fourth Christian century, we have copied and edited manuscripts, quite often, of Ambrosius⁶⁴, St. John Chrisostom⁶⁵, Severian of Gabala⁶⁶, Pelagius⁶⁷, Theodore of Mopsuestia⁶⁸ and Theodoret of

⁵¹ Hippolytus Romanus, *De benedictionibus Isaaci et Iacobi et Moysis* (georg.et arm.), PO 27, 112.

⁵² Hippolytus Romanus, *In Daniele* 4.31.4, SC 14 p. 326; *In Genesim (frg. lat.)*, CSEL 54, 284.

⁵³ Hippolytus Romanus, *De benedictionibus Isaaci et Iacobi et Moysis* (georg.et arm.) 1, PO 27, 74.

⁵⁴ Hippolytus Romanus, *Demonstratio de Christo et Antichristo* (Peritouantichristou) 30, GCS 1, 20.

⁵⁵ Hippolytus Romanus, *In Canticum canticorum (fragm. 1)* 21.3, CSCO 264, 42.

⁵⁶ Hippolytus Romanus, *In Daniele* 1.17, SC 14, 107; see also M. RICHARD, "Les difficultés d'une édition du commentaire de S. Hippolyte sur Daniel", *Revue d'histoire des textes* 2 (1972):7.

⁵⁷ Hippolytus Romanus, *In Daniele* 3.4.4, SC 14, 200.

⁵⁸ Origen of Alexandria, (c.200-254) was an influential exegete and systematic theologian. His extensive works of exegesis focus on the spiritual meaning of the text. See Thomas C. Oden (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Introduction and Biographical Information*, 500.

⁵⁹ Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215) was a highly educated Christian convert from paganism, head of the catechetical school in Alexandria and pioneer of Christian scholarship. See Thomas C. Oden (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Introduction and Biographical Information*, 489.

⁶⁰ J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 206.

⁶¹ See Peter Gorday, "Paulus Origenianus: The Economic Interpretation of Paul in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa", in William S. Babcock (ed.), *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, (Dallas: SMU Press, 1990), 151.

⁶² See *Pidalion* (1844), 436.

⁶³ *Pidalion*, 329.

⁶⁴ Ambrosius, *In Epistolam Beati Pauli ad Colossenses*, PL 17, 443D-466C. Ambrosiaster, *In Epistolam ad Colossenses*, CSEL 81/3, 165-207.

⁶⁵ Johannes Chrysostomos, *In Epistolam ad Colossenses*, PG 62, 299-392.

⁶⁶ Severian von Gabala, in K. STAAB (ed.) *Paulus Kommentare aus der griechischen Kirche: Aus Katenhandschriften gesammelt und herausgegeben* (Pauline Commentary from the Greek Church: Collected and Edited CatenaWritings) (NT Abhandlungen 15), (Münster: Aschendorff, 1933), 314-328. More details in James Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible. Vol 5: Supplement – Articles*, (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), p. 524.

⁶⁷ A. Souter (ed.), *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul. Texts and Studies* 9.1-3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922-1931).

⁶⁸ Théodore de Mopsueste, *Theodori episcopi Mopsuesteni in epistolas B. Pauli commentarii: the Latin version with the Greek fragments*, (H. B. SWETE (ed.), Bd. 1, Cambridge: University Press, 1880), 253-312.

Cyrus⁶⁹. St. John Chrysostom's homilies reflect his concern as Archbishop of Constantinople to make the text of the *Epistle to the Colossians* to have a pastoral relevance for Christians.⁷⁰ In opposition to this, Ambrosius and Theodoret of Cyrus have interpreted each verse in the light of the whole argument of the Epistle.⁷¹ All of the Church Fathers mentioned beforehand have used the exegetical method of the Antiochian School;⁷² there are some exceptions, though, for example when Theodore of Mopsuestia allegorizes "σύνδεσμος" from Col. 1,19 as being "the apostles, the prophets and the teachers".⁷³ Details regarding the interpretation on the *Colossians* in the Alexandrine School have not been preserved, except the fact that Origen had identified in Col. 2,17 the justification for the typological reading of the Old Testament.⁷⁴

Augustine refers to Col. 2,8 when speaking of Platonist philosophy.⁷⁵ In his works, he mostly relates to Col 1,13;⁷⁶ Col 1.21;⁷⁷ Col 3,1;⁷⁸ Col 3,1-3;⁷⁹ Col 3,3⁸⁰ and Col 3,19.⁸¹

Important aspects regarding the isagogy of the epistle have been debated by Church Fathers: whether Arhippus or Epaphras were among the first to preach to the Colossians and if Paul knew them before writing the epistle – all

⁶⁹ Theodoret de Cyr, *Interpretatio epistolae ad Colossenses*, PG 82, 591-628.

⁷⁰ The twelve homilies from Johannes Chrysostomos, *In Epistolam ad Colossenses*, PG 62, 299-392, are also translated into Romanian in the book of Saint Ioan Chrisostom, *Comentariile sau explicarea epistolei către Coloseni, I și II Thesaloniceni*, (trad. de Arhim. Theodosie Athanasiu, București: Atelierele grafice I.V. Socescu, 1905). A history of the homilies can be looked up in John REUMANN, "Colossians 1:24 ('What is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ'): History of Exegesis and Ecumenical Advance", *Currents in Theology and Mission* 17 (1990): 454-461.

⁷¹ Ambrosius, *In Epistolam Beati Pauli ad Colossenses*, PL 17, 443D-466C. Ambrosius insisted on the idea that all men were created free and their slavery is the result of the committed sin. Theodoret of Cyrus always emphasizes the argument of "His love [the Son's]" from Col 1,13. Further details in J. B. MACLEAN, "Letter to the Colossians", 206.

⁷² More details in Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, (Leicester: IVP, 1996), 77-128.

⁷³ Théodore de Mopsueste, *Theodori episcopi Mopsuesteni in epistolas B. Pauli commentarii*, 253-312 (289).

⁷⁴ Origen, *De Principiis*, 4.1.13. In Romanian, look up Origen, *Scrieri alese, partea a III-a: Despre principii, Convorbiri cu Heraclide, Exortatie la martiriu*, (PSB 8, studii introductive, trad. și note de Pr. Teodor Bodogae, Pr. Constantin Galeriu, București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1982), 262-275.

⁷⁵ Augustini, *De Civitate Dei* 8.10.1, PL 41, 234.

⁷⁶ Augustini, *De Civitate Dei* 20.7.3, PL 41, 669.

⁷⁷ Augustini, *De Civitate Dei* 22.18, PL 41, 780.

⁷⁸ Augustini, *De Civitate Dei* 20.10, PL 41, 675.

⁷⁹ Augustini, *De Civitate Dei* 17.4.5, PL 41, 529-530.

⁸⁰ Augustini, *De Civitate Dei* 20.15, PL 41, 680.

⁸¹ Augustini, *De Civitate Dei* 14.22, PL 41, 430.

conclusions being built on different versions of the text Col 1,7,⁸² then the location of St. Paul's detention during the writing varied between Ephesus and Rome.⁸³ Whereas the Marcionite Prologue supports the idea that the Church of Colossae had been attacked by false prophets, St. John Chrysostom describes the doctrinaire errors to have been influenced by Greek and Jewish teachings.⁸⁴ Theodore of Mopsuestia identifies the Judaizers among the opponents, while Ambrosius has concluded that Col 2,16-17 and 2,18-19 reflect their beliefs in the celestial elements and Jewish celebrations.⁸⁵

The interpreting of Col 1,15-17 has been extensively debated in the Arian and Christological controversies of the 4th century AD. Theodore of Mopsuestia has dedicated a third of his commentary on the *Epistle to the Colossians* to the text 1,13-20, motivating that in 1,15 "the image" must be seen as the human nature of Christ, so that the text would be referring to redemption, rather than to creation.⁸⁶ In the same way, we can observe the interpretation of St. Athanasius.⁸⁷ Other points of debate were the ones which intended to define "πρωτότοκος" (Col 1,15), either as involving a temporal priority, either pre-eminence; or those which claimed that the baptism wipes away sins or mortality.⁸⁸

The reference of another Pauline Epistle in Col 4,16 has led to a lively debate regarding the veracity of the canonical validation of the *Epistle to the Laodiceans*.⁸⁹ The philocalic literature has intensely cited the third chapter of *Colossians*, especially the texts regarding the mystical union with Christ (3,1-4), but also those which comprise the lists of virtues and vices (3,5-8), respectively the status of "the old self" and "the new self" (3,9-10). In the Middle Ages, we can observe a conservative orientation of the biblical researchers, who tried to

⁸² J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 206. Further details can be found in Olimpiu N. Benea, „Paternitatea paulină a Bisericii din Colose – repere și dileme în isagogia modernă”, in *Analele Științifice ale Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă. Tomul XIII (2009-2010)*, (Cluj-Napoca: Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, 2012), 181-200.

⁸³ See Olimpiu N. Benea, "Paternitatea paulină a Bisericii din Colose – repere și dileme în isagogia modernă", 181-200.

⁸⁴ J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 206.

⁸⁵ J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 206. Ambrosius, *In Epistolam Beati Pauli ad Colossenses*, PL 17, 455C-456C.

⁸⁶ Théodore de Mopsueste, *Theodori episcopi Mopsuesteni in epistolas B. Pauli commentarii*, 253-312 (260). J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 207.

⁸⁷ Olimpiu N. Benea, "Cruce și Jertfă în Epistola către Coloseni. O perspectivă a teologiei patristice și românești contemporane", in Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Alexandru Moraru și Drd. Paula Bud (coord.), *Crucea – Semn, simbol și putere*, (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2008), 105-122; Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Peter Gorday (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scripture. New Testament IX. Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2000), xxvi-xxviii.9-21.

⁸⁸ J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 207.

⁸⁹ J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 207.

renew some of the Church Fathers' commentaries in order to compile new commentaries with long paraphrasing of the Epistle's texts or with quotations from the Fathers.⁹⁰ The most important commentaries of the period 650-1000 AD are those of Theophylact⁹¹ and of Euthymius Zigabenus.⁹² Short commentaries on the *Epistle to the Colossians* were also written by Oecumenius, Sedulius Scotus, Rabanus Maurus, Photius the Great,⁹³ Atto de Vericelli, Lafranc and Haervaeus de Bourg-Dieu.⁹⁴

Scholasticism brings back a new interest for clarifying Paul's theology in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Peter the Lombard. The two, both in writing and in lectures, have noted the divergent interpretations of the patristic times. A special interest in the debates was Col 2,8, Peter the Lombard questioning the role of philosophy in the theological speculation of the scholastic debates. In his response, concerning the reduction of the Trinity to a philosophical issue, in the case of Abelard, Peter the Lombard warns, just as Paul the Apostle, against the *deceiving philosophy*.⁹⁵ Thomas Aquinas did not condemn philosophy as a whole, but considered it should be used to apply and subordinate it to Christ.⁹⁶

In the 16th century, the commentaries were focused on textual criticism: preoccupying of the Antiochian exegesis to the detriment of the Alexandrine exegesis and a critical approach of the Fathers. Erasmus's footnotes from the critical editions of the New Testament (1516 and 1535),⁹⁷ begin by underlining the location the city of Colossae, criticizing the general opinion about them – such as they were descendants of Rhodes, home of the famous Colossus. Citing classical authors in the commentary of Col 1,1, examining different versions of the text (1,7), the call to philology (1,1; 2,18), a special attention to idiomatic phrases (1,13) illustrate the scholar research influence on biblical interpreting.

⁹⁰ See J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 206; L. KREITZER, "Colossians and Philemon", in R. J. Coggins & J. L. Houlden, *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, (London: SCM Press, 1990), 125-128.

⁹¹ Theophylact von Ancyra, *Epistolae divi Pauli ad Colossenses expositio*, PG 124, 1205-1278.

⁹² J. B. MacClean, "Letter to the Colossians", 207.

⁹³ Photius of Constantinople - *Fragmenta in epistulam ad Colossenses* (in catenis).

⁹⁴ J. B. MacClean, "Letter to the Colossians", 207.

⁹⁵ Look up L. Kreitzer, "Colossians and Philemon", 125-128.

⁹⁶ J. B. MacClean, "Letter to the Colossians", 207. Also see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Colossians*, (trad. Fabian Larcher, Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2006); D' Aquino S. Tommaso, *Commento al Corpus Paulinum (expositio et lectura super epistolas Pauli apostoli). Lettera agli Efesini. Lettera ai Filippesi. Lettera ai Colossesi: expositio et lectura super epistolas Pauli apostoli*, (traduzione e introduzione a cura di Battista Mondin, Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 2007), 551-716 (635-637).

⁹⁷ Further details in Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrases on the Epistles to the Corinthian, the Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, (Collected works of Erasmus 43), (Robert D. Sider (ed.), traducere și anotare Mechtel de O'Mara și Edward A. Philips, Jr., [= *In epistolam Pauli Apostoli ad Colossenses paraphrasis*, Louvain, 1520] Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 393-431.

Among the protestant reformers, we mention the commentaries of Philip Melanchthon and Jean Calvin; Martin Luther's interpretation of the *Epistle to the Colossians* was purely occasional, in his sermons. In his *Scholia* on the *Colossians* (1527), Melanchthon used the classical rhetorical categories to analyse the structure and the meaning of the epistle. The commentary on Col 2,8 reflected the debate between Luther and Erasmus regarding the freedom of will.⁹⁸ For J. Calvin, his commentary on the *Colossians* (1548) has illustrated the torments of the separation between the Protestants and Rome, so that the Epistle has been read by the Reformers as a dispute against medieval Catholicism.⁹⁹ Based on Col 1,12, Calvin has accused the Catholics of ignorance towards the Christology from 1,12-14,¹⁰⁰ ignorance, which created a false support for using indulgences, misinterpreting the idea of insufficiency of Christ's sufferings (Col 1,24).¹⁰¹

Following M. Luther, J. Calvin motivates that "the worship of angels" (Col 2,18) is referring to the Catholic Church, especially, worshiping the saints¹⁰² and Col 2,23 is a critical description of monastic life in very clear terms.¹⁰³ Except the Eucharist, J. Calvin has blamed all religious ceremonies as being the "shadows" cancelled by Christ (Col 2,14.17).¹⁰⁴ In the 17th and 18th centuries, we must consider a benchmark commentary, J. Davenant's, bishop of Salisbury,¹⁰⁵ whose two volumes of research on the *Colossians* have been reprinted in many editions of the XIX century's research.¹⁰⁶ Davenant's lecture – initially structured on six university sessions¹⁰⁷ – comprises numerous debates against the catholic teachings of apostolic succession (1,1) and the righteousness through acts (1,12).¹⁰⁸

⁹⁸ J. B. MacClean, "Letter to the Colossians", 208.

⁹⁹ J. B. MacClean, "Letter to the Colossians", 208.

¹⁰⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (translated and edited from the original Latin and collated with the French version, by rev. John Pringle, Edinburgh: Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 145-149.

¹⁰¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* 163-167.

¹⁰² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 194-196.

¹⁰³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 201-204.

¹⁰⁴ J. B. MacClean, "Letter to the Colossians", 208.

¹⁰⁵ J. Davenant, *Expositio epistolae D. Pauli ad Colossens*, (Genf, 1627).

¹⁰⁶ J. Davenant, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Colossians with Dissertatio de Morte Christi*, (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1831); J. Davenant, *Colossians*, (Geneva Series of Commentary), (Geneva: Banner of Truth, 2005). See J. B. Maclean, "Letter to the Colossians", 208.

¹⁰⁷ More details in Patrick Collinson, Richard Rex, Graham Stanton, *Lady Margaret Beaufort and her Professors of Divinity at Cambridge: 1502-1649*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 80-83.

¹⁰⁸ It is noteworthy that to prove that Reform was just a reform of the Church, not a transformation into something new, but into what it had always been, the author opposes cardinal Bellarmine and the Trent Council's documents, arguing in favour to the *Epistle to the Colossians*, with arguments from Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine and the scholastics Tomas Aquinas and Peter the Lombard. See J. Davenant, *Colossians*, 158, 167, 456.

As for the approach, he continued the rhetorical analysis started by Melanchthon.¹⁰⁹ We should also remember in this context the „Preadosloviia cãtrã colaseani” of the New Testament from Bãlgrad (modern Alba Iulia, Transylvania), 1648,¹¹⁰ which offers a general view of the Epistle, emphasizing aspects regarding the recipients, the purpose of its writing, its whole and its sections.

In the last 160 years, the *Epistle to the Colossians* has been and still remains a major source for the theological debates and disputes of the commentators who have focused on the writings of St. Paul the Apostle.¹¹¹ Not only the doctrinal message of the epistle, centred on the Christological hymn from Col 1,15-20, but also the questions regarding the literary connection with the other epistles from the *Pauline corpus*, particularly with the *Epistle to Philemon* and the *Epistle to the Ephesians*, have been the subject of many biblical conferences on this domain.¹¹²

Modern investigations of the 19th and 20th centuries have focused on aspects regarding the authenticity of the epistle, on identifying Paul’s opponents from Colossae, on how in which the author has used traditional material in the making of the *Epistle*, respectively the manner in which he put together the theology of the Epistle. Another largely debated issue is the one of authorship of the epistle, whether or not is a genuine work of St. Paul. Contemporary biblical scholars are trying to prove that the authorship of the epistle is an unimportant aspect. Most of them agree that it has some sort of connection with the writings of Paul; or, at least, the author was one of Paul’s devoted followers and that he has imprinted this epistle with a Pauline perspective.¹¹³ These commentators tend to give special attention to the manner in which the epistle adapts Paul’s position to the situation in which the author is.

In the past few years, the interest of the studies was the manner in which Paul the Apostle was perceived in the *Epistle to the Colossians*. Both the making

¹⁰⁹ L. Kreitzer, “Colossians and Philemon”, 125-128.

¹¹⁰ *Noul Testament – 1648*, (printed for the first time in Romanian in 1648 by St. Simion Ștefan, Metropolitan of Transylvania, republished 340 years later, at the initiative and the care of His Holiness Emilian, Bishop of Alba Iulia, Alba Iulia: Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române a Alba Iuliei, 1988), 499.

¹¹¹ Details regarding this period of time can be found at L. Kreitzer, “Colossians and Philemon”, 125-128.

¹¹² See P. Müller, (ed.), *Kolossier-Studien*, (BThS 103), (Göttingen: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2009).

¹¹³ A recent study came up with an even more challenging diving that of the two groups: the seven genuine epistles remain characterized by the eagerness, teaching and the specific pastoral caring of Paul the Apostle, the other six, however, suggest three authors: *Deutero-Paul*, who continues and extends the writing of the Apostle with the epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians; *Trito-Paul*, author of 2 Thessalonians; and *Tetrato-Paul* author of the Pastoral Epistles. All the three authors are seen in their intention as having the same purpose as *Proto-Paul*: to keep the churches on the right path. Further details can be found in Derek Edwin Noel King, “The four Pauls and their letters: a study in personality-critical analysis”, *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 15,9 (2012): 863-871. Derek Edwin Noel KING makes use in his study of the analysis of critical individuality, applying the theory of the psychological type to the author of the investigated epistle. However, the analysing the author is insufficient for the immense volume of research in the works in this domain.

of the epistle and the content of its motivation, emphasizes, as Udo Schnelle believes, that the author of the epistle was familiarized with Paul's theology, therefore belonging to the Pauline school. Paul is attributed a defining role in the process of writing (cf. Col. 1,25), because the person of Paul the Apostle belongs to the Pauline preached gospel. The epistle is making out of this emphasis a focus both on the person of the Apostle and on his theology. The contents of the Epistle do not involve a development of Paul's theology, but rather the traditions of Jewish-Greek Christianity being taken by the author of the *Colossians* and harmonized with the ones of the Apostle. This "paulinization" of the traditional material is intended to secularize the Gospel's identity. It opens innovative perspectives meaning, for example that in *Ephesians*, the cosmical Christology becomes a "concept of an ecclesiological Christology".¹¹⁴

Udo Schnelle believes that the issue of authorship unpauline of the *Epistle to the Colossians*, in the biblical scholar's interpretations, with few exceptions, is in an agreement that becomes more and more certain.¹¹⁵ *The hypothesis of a possible secretary* who would have written the epistle, supported by Eduard Schweizer, is still in the attention of researchers. If for the specialists there are no doubts that the real purpose of the epistle is the answer to the false teachings in the Church, the manner in which heresy is understood is still at unrest. Recent debates on this topic have outlined three significant interpretative patterns: the philosophy in Colossae appears because of the syncretistic orientation of Hellenistic Judaism,¹¹⁶ of the neo-Pythagorean influence¹¹⁷ or of the powerful influences of syncretistic Gnosticism.¹¹⁸

As Childs emphasizes, the epistle to the Colossians is strongly anchored in the Gospel preached by Paul the Apostle.¹¹⁹ He does not allege flatly Paul as the author of the epistle, but rather that, no matter if he wrote or not its text, there is a strong connection between the apostle and the epistle. We cannot assume Timothy or Epaphras wrote it, either, he continues, but the epistle identifies itself with Paul, both in the opening and ending, but also in its contents (1,23-2,5). He emphasizes the manner in which the Colossians are told to stick to the tradition that Paul represents, which was also transmitted to them. Childs claims that the conservative theologians have rushed to assign Paul as the author of the epistle.

¹¹⁴ Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998), 299.

¹¹⁵ Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology*, 298-299.

¹¹⁶ E. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Hermeneia), (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 41-61; Joachim Gnilka, *Der Kolosserbrief* (HTKNT), (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 15.

¹¹⁷ E. Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 13.

¹¹⁸ P. Pokorný, *Colossians: A Commentary*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991), 8.

¹¹⁹ Brevard S. Childs, *Colossians, The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 344.

More important, he believes, is the fact that “in the Colossians, a false teaching has generated a certain reaction from the apostle, reaction which used this heresy as a way to display a new testimony regarding the truth of the Gospel”.¹²⁰

The false teaching in Colossae was studied with high interest. The problem is how to enclose everything Paul says in regard to these heresies in coherent model. In the past decades, the general opinion was that the *Epistle to the Colossians* is trying to fight some sort of Gnosticism – the more so as Gnosticism was a syncretic current, based on more sources. Actually, W. G. Kümmel make the following statement “nowadays, there are not many differences regarding the basic idea. Paul, being right, with no questioning, sees in the heretical teaching Gnosticism, a secret wisdom of a syncretic nature (2,8.18), which combines the ascetic and ritualistic worship towards nature with Jewish ritualism and the Jews’ speculations regarding angels”.¹²¹ The author is rash in affirmations, thou. In our times, Gnosticism is mainly known as a religion developed in the 2nd century; moreover, syncretism was not imperative to wait for its apparition.¹²²

Childs is right when he states, “although we reached some sort of agreement regarding that it’s a form of Hebrew syncretism, there is still the debate on what is the exact nature of this adversity”.¹²³ Moreover, the Judaic elements in the teaching of which Paul is against, cannot be disregarded. As if trying to define a new standpoint, N. T. Wright claims that “all the elements of Paul’s [the Apostle] dispute in *Colossians* are best understood as a warning against Judaism”.¹²⁴

The problem here is that we are unaware of any teacher who would have combined all the elements that Paul disputes here. If one commentator picks up a few elements and claims that these are the basic teaching, the others disagree with his selection. The believers of Colossae had been Christians for a short while at the time. They hadn’t given up paganism long before (or Judaism, especially if some of them were people with fear of the Lord) and it was extremely easy for them to go back to the practices and thinking they were used to before becoming Christians and they were still struck by them, and the attraction to those could not be denied.

¹²⁰ Brevard S. Childs, *Colossians*, 346.

¹²¹ W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 239.

¹²² Brevard S. Childs, *Colossians*, p. 346.

¹²³ Brevard S. Childs, *Colossians*, p. 343.

¹²⁴ N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon* (TNTC), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 27. Wright believes Paul’s writing is addressed to former pagans in order to warn them against the dangers of Judaism. Although his reasoning explains the Hebrew elements, approaching the Greek ones and even the magical ones it seems to go a bit too far. Focusing also on the Jewish side, Thomas J. SAPPINGTON, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae* (JSNT Sup 53), (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) claims that Paul is against an ascetic-mystical piety, which has strong roots in the Judaic ideology regarding the apocalypse.

Regarding the description and the identification of Colossian “philosophy”, according to Lightfoot’s commentary in 1875,¹²⁵ this has become a central topic of studies on the Colossians.¹²⁶ In contemporary studies, there is not a convergence of opinions on this topic, the academic background offering a diversity of approaches that is richer and richer with every new published commentary. In 1973, J. J. Gunther enumerates over forty-four suggestions made by different biblical scholars about the possible heresy of Colossae.¹²⁷ These suggestions can be classified in five

¹²⁵ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistles to Colossians and Philemon*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, [1875] 1995).

¹²⁶ Consult the collection of studies from the book of F. O. Francis and W. A. Meeks (eds.), *Conflict at Colossae* (SBL Sources for Biblical Study 4), (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975); H. Hübner, “Der Diskussion um die deuteropaulinischen (Briefeseit 1970): Der Kolosserbrief I”, *Theologische Rundschau* 68 (2003): 263-285(263).

¹²⁷ J. J. Gunther makes an analysis of the biblical commentaries from the 19th and 20th centuries, until the year his commentary was published: J. J. Gunther, *St. Paul’s Opponents and their Background: A Study of Apocalyptic and Jewish Sectarian Teachings*, (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 35), (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 3-4: „[1] Essentially pagans (E. F. Scott); [2] Chaldeans or Magians (Hug); [3] Platonic & Stoic philosophers (Heumann); [4] Pythagorean philosophers influenced by Judaism (Grotius); [5] Speculative, ascetic Judaeo-pagan syncretists (Leclercq); [6] Pharisees (Eichhorn, Schoettgen); [7] Syncretistic, universalist Jews (Schneckenburger); [8] Non-gnostic, esoteric, apocalyptic, cultic-ritual, militant Jews (N. Kehl); [9] Heterodox Jews (Nock); [10] Cabbalists (Herder, Kleuker); [11] Alexandrians (Juncker, Schenkel, Koster, von Soden, Erbes); [12] Ascetic, non-legalistic, syncretistic Jews influenced by Alexandrian speculation (Huby); [13] Semi-Gnostic, syncretistic, esoteric Jews (J. B. Lightfoot, Moffatt, Kümmel, Meinertz); [14] Hellenistic Judaic incipient Gnostics (T. H. Olbricht); [15] Incipient Gnostics (von Dobschütz, J. Knox, Bruce); [16] Heretical pre-gnostic Jews (H. Hegermann); [17] Gnostics (Renan, Pfeleiderer); [18] Gnostic Ebionites (Baur, Lipsius, Hoekstra, Sabatier, Davidson, Blom, Schmiedel); [19] Ascetic Judaizers (Foerster); [20] Judaizing syncretists (Lyonnet); [21] Judaizing syncretistic gnostics (Goppelt); [22] Judaizing gnostics (S. L. Johnson, Marxsen); [23] Jewish Christian Gnostics (H.-M. Schenke); [24] Jewish gnostics (Bornkamm, Goppelt, E. W. Sauders); [25] Cerinthian Gnostics (Neander, Mayerhoff, Nitzsch, R. Scott); [26] Non-Jewish oriental gnostics (Reitzenstein, Bultmann); [27] Non-Jewish oriental-Hellenistic mystery cult, pre-gnostic syncretists (Dibelius-Greeven); [28] Pagan and Jewish mystery cult syncretists (Radford, G. H. P. Thompson, G. Johnston, Beare); [29] Syncretistic, pre-gnostic, dualistic, mystery cult ascetics (E. Lohse); [30] Syncretistic ascetics influenced by philosophy, myths and the mysteries (J. Lähnemann); [31] Pharisaic-legalistic, theosophic ascetics (Bleek, Reuss, Oltramare); [32] Jewish Christian mystic ascetics (Francis); [33] Jewish Christians appealing to Moses and natural philosophy (Hofmann); [34] A link between heterodox Jews and the Gnostics of Chenoboskion (E. Yamauchi); [35] Syncretistic Jewish Christians influenced by non-Gnostic Hellenistic philosophy and asceticism (Percy); [36] Judaeo-Hellenistic ascetic gnostics influenced by the mysteries (N. Hugedé); [37] Hellenistic Jewish Christians influenced by non-speculative, esoteric asceticism (Hort); [38] Esoteric Jewish Christians (Danielou); [39] Syncretistic Jewish-Greek gnostics worshipping Christ (Meyer, Goguel, Humphries, Guthrie, J. Stewart); [40] Jewish Christians combining Greek philosophical speculations and oriental mystical theosophy (McNeile-Williams); [41] Syncretists combining pre-Gnostic paganism and Jewish Christianity (Cerfaux); [42] Disciples of Apollos (J. Michaelis); [43] Judaizing disciples of Apollos and John (Heinrichs); [44] Pure Gnostics and pure Judaizers (Hilgenfeld).” J. J. Gunther composes the list, based on the works cited on page 3, footnote 6: Heinrich A. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1875), 238-241; H. J. Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der Historisch-kritischen Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (J.C.B. Mohr-Paul Siebeck: Freiburg, 1872), 250; J. B. LIGHTFOOT, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, p. 74; James Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New*

distinct categories: Jewish Gnosticism, Gnostic Judaism, mystical Judaism, Hellenistic syncretism and Hellenistic philosophy.¹²⁸ With few exceptions,¹²⁹ contemporary commentators have abandoned the first two categories and focused on the connection between the philosophy in Colossae and Gnosticism. Recent findings tend to identify Colossian philosophy as a form of Judaism,¹³⁰ especially mystical Judaism.¹³¹ Other biblical scholars understand Colossian “philosophy” as a form of Judaic syncretism,¹³² of the visionary Christian ascetics¹³³, or a Christian syncretism made up of Phrygian public religion, which included magic, aspects of the Hebrew cult and initiations in the Phrygian mystical religions.¹³⁴ Some researchers identify the Colossian “philosophy” as belonging to the popular philosophical schools, such as Pythagoreanism¹³⁵, middle Platonism¹³⁶ or Cynism¹³⁷. Some specialists argue that the Scythians’ mentioning from Col 3,11 is an important textual clue for clarifying the identity of Colossian philosophy.¹³⁸

Testament (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1918), 153; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction: The Pauline Epistles* (London: Tyndale, 1961), 162-166. For further details with regard of these perspectives, see Elke Toenges, “«See, I am making all things new»: New Creation in the Book of Revelation”, in Henning Graf Reventlow, Yair Hoffman (eds.), *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (JSOT Supplement Series 319), (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 138-152; Henning Graf Reventlow: „Creation as a Topic in Biblical Theology”, in Henning Graf Reventlow, Yair Hoffman (eds.), *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, 153-171.

¹²⁸ See R. E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy: Wisdom in Dispute at Colossae* (JSNTSS 96), (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1994), 38-39.

¹²⁹ H. W. Attridge, “On Becoming an Angel: Rival Baptismal Theologies at Colossae”, in Lukas Bornmann (ed.), *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World: Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 81-98; D. M. Hay, *Colossians* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries), (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 112; R. McL. Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon* (ICC, London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 57.

¹³⁰ N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 27.

¹³¹ C. A. Evans, “The Colossian Mystics”, in *Biblica* 63 (1982): 188-205(204); P. T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, xxxviii; T. J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae*, 19-22; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 154; Ian K. Smith, *Heavenly Perspective: A Study of the Apostle Paul’s Response to a Jewish Mystical Movement at Colossae* (Library of New Testament Studies 326), (London and New York; T. & T. Clark, 2006), 39-73.

¹³² A. T. LINCOLN, *Colossians* (New Interpreter’s Bible 11), (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 567.

¹³³ J. L. Sumney, “Those Who ‘Pass Judgment’: The Identity of the Opponents in Colossians”, *Biblica* 74 (1993): 366-388(386).

¹³⁴ C. E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism* (WUNT 2.77) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 228-244.

¹³⁵ E. Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 132-133.

¹³⁶ R. E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy*, 17.

¹³⁷ T. W. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as Response to a Cynic Critique* (JSNT Supplementary Series 118), (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 205-206.

¹³⁸ T. W. Martin, “The Scythian Perspective in Col. 3:11”, *Novum Testamentum* 37 (1995): 249-261; T. W. Martin, “Scythian Perspective or Elusive Chiasm: A Reply to Douglas A. Campbell”, *Novum Testamentum* 41 (1999): 256-264.

However, the growing variety of approaches regarding the heresy has generated a form of scepticism among some researchers, who have wondered whether there really had been teachers with false teaching in Colossae,¹³⁹ or if identifying the Colossian philosophy would ever be possible.¹⁴⁰

Although one can notice this diversity regarding the teaching to which Paul the Apostle responds through the *Epistle to the Colossians*, biblical scholars believe, that in the identification of this teaching, the approach should be, first of all from the text of the epistle, and only after that from the parallel, secondary literature.¹⁴¹ The benchmark is Col 2,16-23. Interpreting the text from Col 2,16-17 is crucial for understanding the practices with regard to “eating”, “drinking”, “a religious festival”, “New Moon celebration” and “Sabbath”.¹⁴² Col. 2,18 is defining for identifying whether the opponents of the Pauline Gospel were members of the church,¹⁴³ or not,¹⁴⁴ or if they were both members of the church and outsiders.¹⁴⁵ Despite the obstacles of translation, many commentators see this verse as being the key of identifying the Colossian “philosophy”.¹⁴⁶ For example, C. E. Arnold¹⁴⁷ translates the Greek text as follows: “Let no one condemn you by insisting on ascetic practices and invoking angels because he *entered the things he had seen*”. His translation uses the genitive ἀγγέλων more as objective, rather than subjective,¹⁴⁸ or as a source of the genitive.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, C. E. Arnold understands the participle θέλων (“insisting on”) as a Semitic construction,¹⁵⁰ the perfect verb ἑώρακεν as a past (“entered”) and the present participle ἐμβατεύων as past perfect (“had seen”). In T. W. Martin’s¹⁵¹ opinion Arnold’s translation is

¹³⁹ M. D. Hooker, “Were There False Teachers in Colossae?”, in B. Lindars and S. Smalley, *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 315-331.

¹⁴⁰ J. M. G. Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon*, 53-54; H. Hübner, “Der Diskussion um die deutero paulinischen (Briefe seit 1970): Der Kolosserbrief I”, 263-285 (263).

¹⁴¹ Troy W. Martin and Todd D. Still, “Colossians”, in David E. Aune (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to The New Testament* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 490-491.

¹⁴² T. W. Martin, “But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Colossians 2:17)”, *JBL* 114 (1995): 249-255; T. W. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as Response to a Cynic Critique*, 116-134.

¹⁴³ J. M. G. Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon*, 39.

¹⁴⁴ M. Barth, H. Blanke, *Colossians*, 21-22; T. W. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit*, 140-141.

¹⁴⁵ A. Standhartinger, *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte und Intention des Kolosserbriefs* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 94), (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 193.

¹⁴⁶ M. Dibelius, “The Isis Initiation in Apuleius and Related Initiatory Rites”, in F. O. Francis and W. A. MEEKS (eds.), *Conflict at Colossae*, 61-121 (83-84); F. O. Francis, “Humility and Angelic Worship in Colossae”, in F. O. Francis and W. A. MEEKS (eds.), *Conflict at Colossae*, 163-195 (163).

¹⁴⁷ C. E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 123.

¹⁴⁸ F. O. Francis, “Humility and Angelic Worship in Colossae”, 163-195 (164).

¹⁴⁹ T. W. Martin, “Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-Keeping Schemes in Gal 4.10 and Col. 2.16”, *NTS* 42 (1996): 105-119 (118).

¹⁵⁰ T. W. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit*, 137.

¹⁵¹ T. W. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit*, 14.

determined by parallel text from secondary literature and not by rules of translating, these sort of imprecise interpretations leading to a variety of approaches regarding the Colossian “philosophy”.

Besides these two aspects, concerning the paternity of the epistle and the Colossian “philosophy”, the commentaries on the *Epistle to the Colossians* also focus on theological aspects. For example, the cosmology of the epistle is linked to the meaning of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου from Col 2,8 and 2,20. Although some authors bring lexical evidence that this phrase refers to “land, water, air and fire”,¹⁵² others support the meaning as being elementary teaching,¹⁵³ primordial principles¹⁵⁴ or “law and flesh” as fundamental earthly aspects.¹⁵⁵ Even if C. E. Arnold interprets the word στοιχεῖα as spirits,¹⁵⁶ E. Schweizer believes that we have no evidence that this limited word τοῦ κόσμου to have a personal dimension.¹⁵⁷

Another recent debate is focused on the traditional and liturgical material that the author took and used to support his reasoning. The commentators have relied especially on the text from 1,15-20, which is generally considered as an adapted hymn by the author, having the purpose to pass on critical teachings concerning Christ and His attributes.¹⁵⁸ As for the Christological hymn in Col 1,15-20, there is a disagreement regarding the words that belonged to the original hymn. Although, most biblical scholars find the expressions τῆς ἐκκλησίας (1,18) and διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ (1,20) as editorial additions to the original hymn, there is no consensus concerning to why some editorial alterations are included in the present form of the hymn.¹⁵⁹

A special interest is expressed in the commentaries, apart from cosmology, in the Christology, eschatology and soteriology of the epistle.¹⁶⁰ Colossians is also a source for reflecting upon Christian ethics.¹⁶¹ The Christological hymn in Col 1,15-

¹⁵² E. Schweizer, “Slaves of the Elements and Worshippers of Angels: Gal. 4,3.9 and Col. 2,8.18.20”, *JBL* 107 (1988): 455-468 (456-464); J. L. Martyn, *Galatians* (AB 33A), (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 393-406.

¹⁵³ T. J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae*, 169.

¹⁵⁴ R. E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy*, 73-87.

¹⁵⁵ A. J. Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements of the World: An Exegetical Study in Aspects of Paul's Teaching*, (Kampen: Kok, 1964), 68-72.

¹⁵⁶ C. E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism*, 176-183.

¹⁵⁷ E. Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 128.

¹⁵⁸ See the arguments against of J. C. O'Neill, “The Source of the Christology in Colossians”, *NTS* 26 (1979-1980): 87-100, who claims that it is not about a hymn, but a loan of traditional prosaic material.

¹⁵⁹ Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology*, 298.

¹⁶⁰ J. M. G. Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon*, 25-28.

¹⁶¹ W. A. Meeks, “To Walk Worthily of the Lord: Moral Formation in the Pauline School Exemplified by the Letter to Colossians”, in E. Stump and T. P. Flint (eds.), *Hermes and Athena*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 37-58; W. A. Meeks, “The ‘Haustafeln’ and American Slavery: A Hermeneutical Challenge”, in E. H. Lovering, Jr. and J. L. Sumney, *Theology and Ethics in Paul and his Interpreters*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 232-253; see also J. P. Héring, *The Colossian and Ephesian Haustafeln in Theological Context: An Analysis of their Origins, Relationship, and Message*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

20 remains a benchmark not only for outlining the theological accents,¹⁶² but also for the ecological Christian standpoint.¹⁶³ Some biblical scholars have responded to the ethical problem of subordination, illustrated by the “Haustafeln” from Col 3,18-4,1, by emphasizing the immediate context of “equitability”¹⁶⁴ or the larger scriptural context of equality.¹⁶⁵

This brief historical overview on interpreting the *Epistle to the Colossians* was intended to understanding this Epistle’s importance throughout the Church’s history. The commentaries, the homilies, the scholiums have determined methods of perceiving the contemporary aspects for researchers, who, using the authority of the Holy Scriptures, have motivated the listeners in a pastoral way, especially in the patristic times, or missionary during the Reform. The fact that the text’s meaning was several times imposed with a contemporary significance has motivated the researchers of the past two centuries to approach the original meaning of the text.¹⁶⁶ The way in which this step was taken has been contoured in the light of biblical criticism diversification. The scientific approach started from the prerequisite that the Holy Scriptures can be interpreted just like any other book, with the help of historical and literary methods, which lead to releasing new judgements regarding the origin and the meaning of the text. In most critical commentaries, there is a potential loss of a specific theological interpretation of the text, as God’s Word.

¹⁶² V. A. Pizzuto, *A Cosmic Leap of Faith: An Authorial, Structural, and Theological Investigation of the Cosmic Christology in Col. 1:15-20* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 41), (Leuven: Peeters, 2006).

¹⁶³ R. J. Clifford, “The Bible and the Environment”, in K. W. Irwin and E. D. Pellegrino (eds.), *Preserving the Creation*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 1-26; J. J. Davis, “Ecological ‘Blind Spots’ in the Structure and Content of Recent Evangelical Systematic Theologies”, *JETS* 43 (2000): 273-286(275).

¹⁶⁴ A. Standhartinger, “The Origin and Intention of the Household Code in the Letter to the Colossians”, *JSNT* 79 (2000): 117-130(129).

¹⁶⁵ A. McGuire, “Equality and Subordination in Christ: Displacing the Powers of the Household Code in Colossians”, in J. F. GOWER, *Religion and Economic Ethics*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 65-85(72-85).

¹⁶⁶ As for deeper understanding of the concept “original text”, look up the study of Eldon Jay Epp, “The Multivalence of the Term ‘Original Text’ in New Testament Textual Criticism”, in Paul Foster, *New Testament Studies*, (vol. 1-4, SAGE Benchmarks in Religious Studies, SAGE Publications, 2010), 1-34 (the study was also published in *Harvard Theological Review* 92,3 (1999): 245-281). See also Andreas DETTWILER, “Mémoire et émergence d’une rhétorique renouvelée: l’exemple de Colossiens et Ephésiens”, *NTS* 59,1 (2013): 109-128, lectured at “The 65th General Meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas”, 27-31 July 2010, Berlin.

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