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CHRIST VERSUS GNOSTICISM AT CORINTH; Goerss; S.T.M.; 1962

THE FOOLISHNESS OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED
VIEWED FROM THE POINT OF
INCIPIENT GNOSTICISM AT CORINTH

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This paper was written in an attempt to determine the influences which led the apostle Paul to use the particular framework and terminology found in the second chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians.

The problem of Pauline polemic and terminology has interested this writer for some time. The initial interest was prompted by the pronouncements of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod on the position of women in the church. This investigation continues in the Synod as a whole. While looking into the Biblical background of this matter, the writer was naturally attracted to the pertinent passages in the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:34-36). St. Paul's use of the order of creation in the eleventh chapter led to the consideration of the whole cosmological outlook and angelology which affect that passage. From there it was an easy step to proceed to the broader examination of the various religious and philosophic influences which were current in Paul's day such as the mystery religions, Gnosticism, Greek philosophy and mythology, and Jewish apocalyptic literature. Many similarities could be pointed out. Gradually, however, the study shifted from the practical consideration of the implications for woman suffrage to the broader study of Paul's preaching of the Gospel in the various situations he faced. How was Paul influenced, if at all? Why did he say things the way he did? Was his message uniquely Christian, or was it an outgrowth of Paul's environment, adapted to that same environment? This type of question has concerned Biblical scholars for centuries; but

interest in this type of question has accelerated since the major manuscript discoveries at Qumran and Nag-Hammadi.

In order to limit the specific area of investigation for a paper of this type, the second chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was chosen. Perhaps more than any other section of Paul's writings, this chapter is cited in attempts to prove that Paul was speaking as a heathen philosopher or as a Gnostic. Centering our attention on this chapter, then, we will try to define some of the influences which surrounded Paul and try to determine tentatively to what extent these did influence him, if at all.

The most orderly manner to proceed in a brief paper like this, perhaps, is to comment by verses. The chapter divides itself readily into three sections: 1-5; 6-9; 10-16. Each of these sections will be the subject of a chapter of this paper, with a general conclusion appended.

It is difficult to define with any finality what particular influences did affect Paul. Hatch is of the opinion that inside the original Christian communities were men who began to speculate upon the basis of one or the other elements of the Christian faith. He believes, too, that outside these communities men began to gather into other communities which had the same moral aims as the original communities, and which appealed in the main to the same authorities, but in which the simple forms of worship were elaborated into a thaumaturgic ritual. Under this elaboration, the solid facts of Scripture history evaporated into mist. They were linked on the one hand with the cults of the Greek mysteries, and on the other with philosophical idealism. The tendency to conceive

of abstract ideas as substance, with form and real existence, received in them its extreme development. Wisdom and vice, silence and desire, were real beings. They were not, as they had been to earlier thinkers, mere thin vapors which had floated upwards from the world of sensible existence, and hung like clouds in an uncertain twilight. As Hatch summarizes, the real world was indeed not the world of sensible existence, of thoughts and utterances about sensible things, but a world in which sensible existences were the shadows and not the real substance, the waves and not the sea.¹ Such was one great influential thought environment.

Then, too, one must continually reckon with the fact that under the Roman Empire a host of religions and systems of thought were intermingled, and often in the strangest mixtures. It was the age of syncretism.² According to Schlatter, among all the religions then prevalent, none came so near to Christianity as Gnosticism.³ Now Gnosticism is a typical product of syncretism which makes use of all sorts of elements. Sometimes the Christian factor was very firmly maintained, while at other times it was merely incidental or simply not there at all.⁴ In Jaeger's opinion, "Gnostic" is the fashionable word for the trend to transcend the sphere of nistis, which in Greek philosophical language

¹Edwin Hatch, The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1957), p. 130.

²Willem Cornelis von Unnik, Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings (Naperville, Illinois: Allenson Publishing Co., 1960), p. 29.

³Adolf Schlatter, The Church in the New Testament Period, translated from the German by Paul P. Levertoff (London: SPCK, 1955), p. 91.

⁴Unnik, op. cit., p. 29.

always had the connotation of the subjective.⁵ Some scholars, such as Adolf Harnack, formerly held that Gnosticism was the premature Hellenization of Christianity;⁶ but now scholars are of the opinion that Christianity acted upon it.⁷

Many scholars today hold the opinion that Gnosticism arose apart from any Christian influence. Indeed, they claim that it is older than Christianity, and is a phenomenon of pagan syncretism, which mingled Greek and oriental religion in the greatest variety of forms, filled them out with mystical traits, and at the same time combined them with philosophical ideas and modes of thought.⁸ Gnosticism itself was not a closed system of rigidly circumscribed dogmas, but rather a movement of the spirit without definite frontiers, in many lands, among all manner of men, through century after century. Unnik sees six main streams of influence which have to be taken into account: 1) Iran; 2) Babylonia; 3) Western Asia; 4) Greece; 5) Judaism; and 6) Egypt.⁹ Gnosticism, then, is a product of a world full of religious ideas and convictions, flowing and mingling together.

In general, the Gnostics thought that they were originally spiritual beings who had come to live in souls and bodies; they had once dwelt in

⁵Werner Jaeger, Early Christianity and Greek Paideia (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, c.1961), p. 53.

⁶Jean Doresse, The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics, translated by Philip Mairé (New York: The Viking Press, Inc., c.1960), p. 302.

⁷Ibid., p. 325.

⁸Hans Lietzmann, The Beginnings of the Christian Church, translated by Bertram Lee Woolf (Third edition; London: Lutterworth Press, 1958), p. 277.

⁹Unnik, op. cit., p. 35f.

the spiritual world above but had fallen into this world of sense and sin. Now, thanks to their self-knowledge, they were hastening back above, having been redeemed from this world below. "The Gnostic is a Gnostic because he knows, by revelation, who his true self is. Other religions are in varying measure God-centered. The Gnostic is self-centered."¹⁰ Gnostic self-knowledge, the result of revelation, is salvation; so it is described in the Gospel of Truth:

Consequently if one is a Gnostic, he is from above. If he is called, he is wont to heed, to respond, and to turn to Him who calls him, and go upward to Him. And he is wont to understand how he is called. Being a Gnostic, he is wont to do the will of Him who called him, is wont to wish to please Him, is wont to receive rest. Each one's name is wont to become his own. He who thus shall know is wont to understand whence he came and whither he goes. He is wont to understand as one who, having been drunk, has returned from his drunkenness, having returned to be himself alone: he has set on their feet the things that are his own.¹¹

Other works from the Nag-Hammadi discovery, such as the Gospel of Thomas, outline other emphases of the Gnostic teachings in a total group of forty-four books. Laeuchli demonstrates that some of these terms and thought patterns can be discovered throughout the New Testament.¹²

There remain, however, many essential problems to which the historian sees no solution. To outline Gnosticism in general is one thing; to estimate its impact and evolution is another, and more important. There is still some doubt as to the precise content of the Gnostic myths; none of the texts that Gnosticism has directly bequeathed deal with its

¹⁰Robert McQueen Grant, Gnosticism and Early Christianity (New York: Columbia University Press, c.1959), p. 8.

¹¹Gospel of Truth, 22:3-19.

¹²Samuel Laeuchli, The Language of Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1962), p. 39.

fundamental subjects. Concerning the sects, their prophets, the authors of their sacred books and their daily religious life, there is practically no information. As Unnik says, it is because the information in this field is so fragmentary, and the lines of interconnection so hypothetical, that it is so difficult to arrive at any firm conclusions.¹³

Some scholars feel that the so-called Gnostic pressures on Christianity have not come from the Greek thought-world at all. These men talk in terms of a pre-Christian Jewish Gnosticism. For example, LaSor says,

Something like this pre-Christian Jewish Gnosticism is found in the Qumran theology. It is not cosmologically dualistic. It does not quite have the doctrine of knowledge found among the later Gnostics--but it is tending in that direction. It does not have the speculative characteristics of Philonic Judaism. But it does put sufficient stress on esoteric knowledge that a system of ranks had developed within its membership.¹⁴

In liberal Hellenistic Judaism, to be sure, syncretism was a highly respectable movement. "Were not all religions fundamentally one? Did not all worship the same God, by whatever name they might call him, or whatever rites they used? If so, it was not necessary scrupulously to avoid all contact with foreign cults."¹⁵ Possibly the Qumran sects had to combat such thinking. Then, too, Persian, Hindu, and Mandaean similarities have been pointed out by various scholars; but while the similarities are marked, the arguments are not yet convincing for any

¹³Unnik, op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁴William Sanford LaSor, Amazing Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Faith (Chicago: Moody Press, c.1956), p. 149.

¹⁵Schlatter, op. cit., p. 185.

one of these sources.¹⁶ Perhaps Greek Gnosticism developed as a result of this same undercurrent coming in contact with Greek, particularly Platonic philosophy. Greek Gnosticism and Qumran "Gnosticism" would then have a common root (or roots) in the yet-to-be discovered source of the undercurrent. Thanks to its aggressive propaganda, at any rate, it seems that Judaism shared to a considerable extent in the development of Gnosticism.¹⁷

The Qumran writings show us still another facet. The Dead Sea Scrolls show us the possibility that various terms and concepts in Christianity once attributed to the influence of Greek culture and Hellenism can now be explained as the outcome of trends within Judaism itself.¹⁸ We now have fairly clear evidence that the vocabulary and thought found in the so-called Gnostic portions of the New Testament could well have developed within the Judaic background of the New Testament, and could even have been aimed at trends in Judaism that were moving in the direction of something similar to Gnosticism.¹⁹ Study of the scrolls led Stendahl to remark,

It has often been said the Dead Sea Scrolls add substantially to our knowledge of the Jewish background of Christianity. On this point there is universal agreement. This is significant enough. It means, among other things, that both the Pauline and Johannine literature can be understood in their Jewish background and that

¹⁶LaSor, op. cit., p. 149.

¹⁷Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 277.

¹⁸Johannes Petrus Maria van der Ploeg, The Excavations at Qumran, translated by Kevin Smyth (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), p. 223.

¹⁹LaSor, op. cit., p. 150.

many of the odysseys of scholars some decades ago on the deep waters of Hellenistic philosophy and religion were more fascinating than rewarding.²⁰

We must be cautious, however. Graystone warns that any influence of the Qumran scrolls on the origins of Christianity could only be slight and negligible.²¹ He is skeptical over the question of any direct contact between the Qumran literature and the New Testament.²² He gives four reasons why he fails to see much hope for any real connection:

- 1) Qumran was a closed sect that did not encourage contact with outsiders;
- 2) The Qumran sect was based on the Old Testament Mosaic Law;
- 3) The Qumran sect expected the advent of a Messiah yet to come; and
- 4) The Qumran sect was rigidly exclusive--for Jews alone and then only for those who were eternally called and elected.²³

He rules out any direct, causal influence of the Qumran writings on the origins of Christianity; but he admits the possibility of some indirect influence by way of a certain diffusion of ideas as part of the general body of apocalyptic writings and notions. In his opinion, however, this influence should not be exaggerated.²⁴ At most Graystone allows some influence in the vocabulary, the "periphery" of the New Testament as he calls it.²⁵

²⁰Krister Stendahl, editor, The Scrolls and the New Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p. 5.

²¹Geoffrey Graystone, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Originality of Christ (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), p. 28.

²²Ibid., p. 96.

²³Ibid., p. 26f.

²⁴Ibid., p. 79.

²⁵Ibid.

As far as any relationship between Gnosticism and the Qumran sect is concerned, Floeg doubts that any fruitful discussions have been held because of the lack of precision in determining the meanings of terms and the types of historical phenomena to include. He says,

It is becoming clearer every day that the Qumran community stood outside the particular trend in the practice of gnosis which is called Gnosticism, and which flourished chiefly in the second and third Christian centuries. The doctrine professed at Qumran was too well and truly Jewish to be called gnostic by us, that is, in the technical and historical sense in which the word is ordinarily used. If even so the Greek word gnosis has been applied to some passages from the Qumran writings, this is due to certain affinities.²⁶

This variety of opinions makes at least one thing clear: when Christianity spread through the known world, it did not do so in a religious vacuum or in the midst of religions that were dying away. Instead, Christianity found itself surrounded and opposed by a rich variety of religious patterns, theological and philosophical schools, most of which in some degree or other held out to the questing souls of men the promise of security in this world and the hereafter.²⁷

Now, the questions which this paper seeks to answer are, could and did the apostle Paul take over some of the thought patterns and vocabulary of his religious environment for polemic purposes? If he did, did these thought patterns affect what he said and presented at Corinth? Specifically, can "the wisdom of men" at Corinth be identified? How did the crucified Christ fit into this sort of accommodation, if accommodation it was?

²⁶Floeg, op. cit., p. 120.

²⁷Unnik, op. cit., p. 30.

The thesis of this paper is that at Corinth Paul did take over some of the thought patterns and vocabulary of an incipient Gnosticism with Judaic overtones. But instead of being influenced theologically by the borrowed terms, he used them for his consistent preaching of the crucified Savior, the true Wisdom of God. He was well aware of the uniqueness of the religion he preached; its real source lay not in the current thought forms of either Judaism or Hellenism, but in the Person, preaching and redemptive work of the crucified Son of God.

CHAPTER II

THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST AND THE HUMBLE PREACHER

This section, chapter 2:1-5, refers back to the *Κηρύσσειον* of chapter 1:23. Paul describes the method and wisdom of his preaching through which God called the Corinthians. He recalls the former situation: his missionary preaching at Corinth. Paul had left his companions behind in Athens and had gone on alone to Corinth. Speaking of his arrival at that time, he says he came "with fear and in much trembling," "in weakness," deliberately abandoning all rhetoric and philosophical subtlety.¹ He did not come to Corinth as an orator, or as the purveyor of a new philosophical system. He did not present himself as a privileged Gnostic who came to give them the benefit of his superior knowledge. To Paul the cross was something to be shown to men in all its stark simplicity. He would not preach with the wisdom of words lest the cross of Christ should lose its effect (1 Cor. 1:17).²

St. Paul says that his message found a hearing mostly among the lower strata of the population. There were "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble" (1 Cor. 1:26). God called His people without regard to the natural status of men--"a sacred sign for Paul of the universality of His grace."³ Yet it would be wrong to infer from this

¹Adolf Schlatter, The Church in the New Testament Period, translated from the German by Paul P. Levertoff (London: SPCK, 1955), p. 154.

²William Barclay, The Mind of St. Paul (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1958), p. 98.

³Schlatter, op. cit., p. 157.

that the Corinthian church consisted merely of slaves, dock laborers, and women. A ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, belonged to the church, and he was certainly not a poor man. Then there was the city treasurer, Erastus; and when Gaius not only gave hospitality to Paul on his second visit, but allowed the church to meet in his house, it shows that he probably lived in a well-to-do villa (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23).

When Paul arrived at Corinth, he did not embark upon a new method of work or depart from his former principles. Some commentators have suggested that it was the failure of his philosophical apologetic on the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31) that made Paul resolve that hence forward he would preach nothing but Christ crucified⁴ and never again would start from "the wisdom of this world" (1 Cor. 1:18-31). To the contrary, Richardson is correct when he states that such a suggestion is altogether unlikely.⁵ It is wrong to suggest that Paul attempted to give his preaching a philosophical turn at Athens, but, owing to its lack of success, concluded that that was the wrong approach; or, further, to infer that when he arrived at Corinth, he abandoned philosophy and rhetoric in a fit of despondency. It is true, however, that only a small community was established in Athens; the leading church in Achaia developed in Corinth.⁶

It is much more probable that Paul meant what he actually wrote to the Corinthians, namely, that his preaching of Christ was not a new

⁴David Smith, The Life and Letters of St. Paul (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 247.

⁵Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1958), p. 52.

⁶Schlatter, op. cit., p. 151.

religion, a man-made σοφία (1 Cor. 2:1,5f.,13). Instead, Paul proclaimed the κήρυγμα which was attested by the Holy Spirit of God no matter how foolish it sounded. He certainly did not confess that he had ever preached a man-made σοφία at Athens or anywhere else. He protested that this was the one thing he could never do. As Wendland says,

Auch wissen wir nicht das Mindeste davon, dasz Paulus jemals etwas Anderes verkuendigt haette als den gekreuzigten Christus; und der Bericht der Apg. ueber das Wirken des Paulus zeigt auch nichts von einer solchen Wendung in der Missionspredigt des Paulus.⁷

Furthermore, it was not the rabbinic apologetic which had scandalized the Athenians. They had mocked the idea of judgment and of a resurrection from the dead (Acts 17:32). The preaching of Christ crucified was the foolishness to the Greeks (1 Cor. 1:23). Paul knew well enough that there would have been no scandal in Christianity as a new σοφία. It was the kerygmatic element in the faith, not the philosophical, which was resented by the "disputers of this age." In his summary of Paul's preaching on the Areopagus St. Luke has given us a faithful account of the kind of approach which St. Paul was accustomed to make to an audience of educated Greeks, whenever he had an opportunity to preach to them.⁸ When Davies analyses these events, he remarks, "There may be no allusion to his experience at Athens in 1 Cor. 2:1ff."⁹ Then, too, Moffatt wrote,

⁷Heinz-Dietrich Wendland, Die Briefe an die Korinther in Das Neue Testament Deutsch (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, c.1954), VII, 22.

⁸Richardson, op. cit., p. 52.

⁹William David Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (Second edition; London: SPCK, 1955), p. 187.

There is no hint that he had felt disillusioned by the Athenian experience. It is not of any such contrast between one method of his own and another that he thinks in the present passage, but of the difference between himself and other evangelists who had tried to be more ambitious and philosophic in the mission (3:10) since he left.¹⁰

In chapter 1:26ff. Paul described the condition of the congregation; he decried the schisms in Corinth. These schisms claimed the authority of individual apostles. To offset this, Paul speaks of himself as the preacher in chapter 2:1ff. He states implicitly why he must not allow the "Paul" group to use his name or to think of itself as superior in any manner.¹¹ Paul does not speak as an enemy of culture or propose a way of life void of rational control. He does fight against the influence of a religious wisdom from Jewish and Hellenistic sources which claimed to give special knowledge of God and eternal life. This type of wisdom and knowledge has been overthrown by God through His merciful plan in the cross of Christ.¹²

In his complete statement Paul does not try to avoid such words as *γνώσις* (cf. 1:5), *ἐπίγνωσις*, *σοφία*, *πίστις*, *μυστήριον*, etc. This may be because he is a missionary and deliberately uses words already present in the religious vocabulary of his converts. They would know all about the mystery cults with their claims to impart saving *γνώσις*. In this situation it is not surprising that much textual

¹⁰James Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians in The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), VII, 22.

¹¹Ulrich Wilckens, Weisheit und Torheit (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, c.1959), p. 45.

¹²Wendland, op. cit., p. 22.

evidence supports the cultic word *μυστήριον* in chapter 2:1.¹³ In fact, Wilckens¹⁴ and Bornkamm,¹⁵ to cite just two commentators, adopt this reading. The weight of manuscript evidence, however, still seems to favor *μαρτύριον* in the Nestle text. Therefore, the Gospel is either *τὸ μαρτύριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ* (cf. 1:16), the testimony which the apostles bore to Christ (John 15:27; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8,22; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39,41); or *τὸ μαρτύριον τοῦ Θεοῦ* the testimony which God bore in Christ (1 John 5:9-11). Meyer favors the objective genitive for *τοῦ Θεοῦ*. "For the preacher of the gospel gives the testimony of God, as to what He has done, namely, in Christ for the salvation of man."¹⁶ Wendland gives gospel meaning to both possibilities. "Ob wir nun 'Geheimnis' oder 'Zeugnis' lesen, beides sind besonders gewählte Ausdrücke fuer das Evangelium."¹⁷

Paul apparently operated with the slogans of the new leaders of the congregation in Corinth; but by relating them all to the cross he gave them a radically different context. If they emptied the cross of its power (1 Cor. 1:17), he resolved to know nothing but the cross (1 Cor. 2:2); and he set the cross squarely in the center of the church again.

¹³Eberhardt Nestle, Novum Testamentum Graece (Editio vicesima quarta; Stuttgart: Privileg. Wuertt. Bibelanstalt, c.1960), p. 428.

¹⁴Wilckens, op. cit., p. 45.

¹⁵Guenther Bornkamm, "*Μυστήριον*," Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, n.d.), IV, 825.

¹⁶Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Corinthians, translated from the German by D. Douglas Bannerman and William P. Dickson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1884), p. 43.

¹⁷Wendland, op. cit., p. 21.

With its pure and all-inclusive grace, the cross lays a total claim upon man, body and soul, for a life lived wholly to God (1 Cor. 6:19,20). The cross annihilates all human greatness and all human pretences to wisdom. Franzmann remarks that the cross cuts off all boasting of men, and marks as monstrous and unnatural any clustering about great men in schools and factions that give their loyalty to men.¹⁸ Hence, Paul vowed to know nothing among the church at Corinth except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Paul does not want the Corinthians to think that he would give them a superior insight into some hidden mysteries of God, but he reminds them that the crucified Savior was the only content of his preaching. Paul knows no mystery but the open secret of Christ the Redeemer.

Paul made up his mind, *ἔκρινα* (1 Cor. 10:15; 11:13; 2 Cor. 2:1; 5:14), to know. *εἶδέναι* has the same meaning here as the *γινώσκειν* root.¹⁹ As Bultmann says, "In der Koine sind *γινώσκειν* und *εἶδέναι* kaum unterschieden."²⁰ Both words mean more than our simple meaning of gaining information; they express a personal involvement and relationship with that which is known. Paul expresses the giving up of everything else far more powerfully when he uses the word *εἶδέναι* than if he had used *ἔγνων* or *ἠγάθην*.²¹ *εἶδέναι*, like most of the Greek words for

¹⁸Martin H. Franzmann, The Word of the Lord Grows (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1961), p. 87.

¹⁹Wilckens, op. cit., p. 45.

²⁰Rudolf Bultmann, "*Γινώσκω*," Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, n.d.), I, 688f.

²¹Meyer, op. cit., p. 44.

knowing and knowledge, is related to the visual faculty--thus γνώσκω, γνώμη, γνώσις, ἐπιστήμη.²² This εἰδέναι in verse two meets the demand of Paul's argument in opposing the λόγου ἐξ ἁριστοῦ of the first verse. The exact difference in meaning, however, between λόγος, σοφία, and γνώσις is very difficult to determine exactly in each instance of use.²³

Without doubt there was a type of religious knowledge in Corinth to which Paul had to take exception in his polemic. Schmithals advances the possibility that Paul was opposing, perhaps, a type of preaching of Christ which omitted the crucifixion.²⁴ To counter this Paul underlined the fact that Christ was crucified, τοῦτον ἐσταυρωμένον. Paul was not conscious of anything else but Christ when among the Corinthians.²⁵ In fact, Paul emphasized the cross throughout his letters (2 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 3:1; 5:11; 6:12,14; Phil. 2:8; 3:18; Col. 1:20; 2:14).²⁶ This emphasis on the cross leads Franzmann to remark that Paul "preached the crucified Christ with an almost monomaniac insistence."²⁷ This preaching of the crucified Christ, however, was not the story of the execution in

²²Thorlief Boman, Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek, translated by Jules L. Moreau (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c.1960), p. 201.

²³Wilckens, op. cit., p. 46, n. 1.

²⁴Walter Schmithals, Die Gnosis in Korinth: Eine Untersuchung zu den Korintherbriefen (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1956), p. 57 where he emphasizes the of 2:1.

²⁵Meyer, op. cit., p. 44.

²⁶Clarence Tucker Craig, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," The Interpreter's Bible, edited by John Knox (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1953), X, 26.

²⁷Franzmann, op. cit., p. 80.

all its gruesome details. It was the glad news that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

This preaching of the cross opposes all the wisdom of the world. "Das Kreuz Christi ist ein wider alle Weisheit der Welt gerichtetes Gotteshandeln."²⁸ Therefore, the highest wisdom for men is not intellectual knowledge, but real life, which is to be experienced only in personal fellowship with Christ Jesus.²⁹ Paul loved to make his very phrases personal when he referred to this (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 3:1,2). Christian wisdom is not information about the Lord, but living in Him.³⁰

The fact that the Christ died on the cross was unbelievable for mankind in general; for the Jew, in particular, it was doubly absurd and quite impossible.³¹ The *λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ* was and is *μωρία* and *σκάνδαλον* (1:23). The Jews desired that He on whom they were to believe should manifest Himself by miraculous signs which would demonstrate His Messiahship (Matt. 16:4). They demanded signs as a ground of faith (John 4:48). What the Jews desired in place of the *σημεῖα* of the apostles were miraculous signs by which the crucified Jesus would show that He was the Messiah. Because of His crucifixion the miracles of Jesus' earthly life had lost all probative power for the Jews (Matt. 27:41f., 63f.).³² In relation to the demand for signs of proof, the

²⁸Wendland, op. cit., p. 17.

²⁹Moffatt, op. cit., p. 21.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Schlatter, op. cit., p. 98.

³²Meyer, op. cit., p. 32.

simple preaching of the Gospel appeared as weakness indeed. The proclamation by the apostles of Jesus as risen and exalted was not the answer to this demand which the Jews would accept.

As far as any Gnostic wisdom was concerned, the preaching of the crucified Jesus exposed the Gnostic failure to grasp Jesus as a real human being.³³ As Laeuchli states, Gnostic wisdom could find no meaning in the life of the One who stood by the lakeside and called the fishermen to follow him.³⁴

The preaching of the cross cannot be proclaimed in such a manner as to attract a clique to the person of the preacher. Accordingly, Paul presented himself very humbly to the Corinthians (2:3). The three words, ἀσθένεια, φόβος, and ταῖμας depict the great timidity with which Paul came to Corinth.³⁵ Ἀσθένεια is not necessarily a reference to his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7) but is in contrast to "the power of God."³⁶ In commenting on all the attempts to show that Paul was "chronisch krank" in other commentaries, Schmithals is correct in his remark, "Mir scheint, als ueberschaetze man diese Parallelen."³⁷ Paul had a humble sense of the disproportion between his own power and the great enterprise to which his conscientiousness kept him bound.³⁸ In

³³Samuel Laeuchli, The Language of Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1962), p. 79.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Meyer, op. cit., p. 44.

³⁶Craig, op. cit., p. 36.

³⁷Schmithals, op. cit., p. 143.

³⁸Meyer, op. cit., p. 44.

facing it, he felt himself very weak, and was in fear and trembling. He did not deny his human frailty, but rather asserted it.³⁹ Elsewhere Paul suggests that his oratorical skill was not of the best (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6). The Book of Acts even reports a heavenly voice at Corinth to quiet his fears (Acts 18:9).

There were no signs of any lack of natural strength of will and determination in Paul even judging from his experience at Athens.⁴⁰ This timidity which Paul confessed was a deep theological humility and not just a humbleness in outward appearance. One sees something in Paul's bearing of the spiritual power which shows the marks of an apostle.⁴¹ Paul listened to God, fell on his knees and looked (Rom. 11:22,33; John 6:69; 9:35ff.). As Stauffer describes it, Paul "laid down his weapons before the all-subduing authority of the divine revelation and began his walk along the road to theological knowledge" (Gal. 4:8f.; Col. 1:10; Eph. 3:9f.; 2 Pet. 1:2).⁴² Yet the paradox remains: when one looked at Paul, one saw only a man, and then one of the weakest-appearing of human beings.

Paul used the same formula *ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ* when he described other Christians (Phil. 2:12; 2 Cor. 7:15; and possibly Eph. 6:5). Strange to say, according to Wilckens this formula in apocalyptic literature described the situation of the lost at the Last

³⁹Franzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁴⁰Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴¹Wilckens, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁴²Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, translated by John Marsh (New York: The Macmillan Co., c.1955), p. 173.

Judgment.⁴³ Certainly the Christians are the saved, not the damned. Then in what sense does such a formula with possible eschatological overtones such as these belong to Paul's statement? To answer this question, we have to consider the context.

Since chapter 1:18 Paul has kept as his general underlying theme the crisis of the world in holding to its own wisdom and not recognizing the wisdom of God. Christ is preached as the crucified and as such is the power and wisdom of God. God calls and chooses the saved from the world. He has not chosen His people on the basis of the world's standards. In fact, in the eyes of the world the believers are not wise but fools, not strong but weak, not well-born but low-born and full of trouble (1:26). In God's eyes the saved are not wise in themselves; but in so far as they are in Christ, Christ has become the Wisdom of God for them. Accordingly, no longer can anyone praise the wisdom of the world as real wisdom; Christians, too, appeal only to the cross and not to any wisdom of the world.

Both the preacher of the cross and the message of the cross are the objects of the intellectual scorn of the world. The preacher himself seems weak and lowly because his preaching does not have the content of the *λόγος* or *σοφία* of the world. He proclaims the crucified Christ instead. This is the situation which Paul described with his formula *ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ πολλῷ*. He described his own weakness in the phrase (2 Cor. 11:30).⁴⁴ He had no personal strength in the eyes of men

⁴³Wilckens, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 48.

because of his message, and under the eyes of God he could not and would not proclaim any other message just to please men.

In order to understand this context more fully, one must make very clear in this connection that Paul described the content of his preaching as the crucified Christ. He had already pointed out in this first letter to the Corinthians (1:25) that the cross of Christ was τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ and τὸ ἰσχυρὸν τοῦ θεοῦ. In other words, Paul underlined his own weakness in a Christological way. The understanding of the cross of Christ as weakness in the eyes of man formed the background of this section of Paul's discussion.

But Paul could not separate the cross from the Resurrection (15:3ff.). In the section we are discussing here, Paul affirms the center of his message, not the whole circumference.⁴⁵ For example, the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians has an important section which must be mentioned at this time (2 Cor. 13:3ff.). In this section Paul used a similar manner of speaking about the crucified Lord: Christ was crucified on the basis of His weakness. Yet Paul continued there by assuring the Corinthians that Christ rose from the dead on the basis of the power of God. If believers do share Christ's weakness, they will share His Resurrection by the power of God. In this connection εἰς ἰσχυρίαν is balanced by ἐκ συνήκειας. The life of Christ had been established by the power of God and only in this power (Rom. 1:4; 6:4). The point is that God has resurrected the Lord and will also resurrect the Christians not through weakness but through His

⁴⁵Craig, op. cit., p. 36.

power (1 Cor. 6:14). Christians share the weakness of Christ in His weakness--the crucifixion; but Christians also share in Christ's Resurrection--the demonstration of the power of God. Christians come to know the power of God in this weakness; and only as they share the weakness of Christ, does God grant them the knowledge of His power (2 Cor. 12:9ff.). In this same way, the Christian actually dies with Christ (Rom. 6:4).

Because of this paradox Paul often said with some vehemence that his gospel would not "persuade" men (2:4; Gal. 1:10; Col. 2:4). He used the idioms of his hearers; but he never spoke just to please them. His missionary preaching was not decked out with ideas congenial to Jews and Greeks, but rather led through offence, scandal and crisis to a new understanding of the real divine wisdom.⁴⁶ Ἐν πενθεῖς σοφίας λόγοις has undergone considerable textual doctoring.⁴⁷ Πενθεῖς occurs only here and is a verbal adjective.⁴⁸ Had Paul preached the cross of Christ by trying to persuade ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου (1:27; 2:4), Paul would have emptied his message of its divine and essential power to bless. Paul did not exalt man's wisdom by making common cause with it; instead, he renounced man's wisdom and exalted the true wisdom of God, the foolishness of Christ.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Stauffer, op. cit., p. 194.

⁴⁷Nestle, op. cit., p. 428.

⁴⁸Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, translated from the German and revised by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c.1961), p. 61.

⁴⁹Meyer, op. cit., p. 27.

The preacher of Christ authenticates himself as Christ's messenger "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (2:4).⁵⁰ The phrase *ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως* contrasts with the *ἐν πελώρις σοφίας λόγους*. *Ἀποδείξεις* was a technical term of rhetoric.⁵¹ What Paul depended upon was none of these arts but the power of the Spirit. The contrast here is really not between *ἀποδείξεις* and *πελώρις* but between the *σοφία* on the one side and *πνεῦμα καὶ δύναμις* on the other. The two words, *πνεῦμα καὶ δύναμις*, are practically a hendiadys. In many contexts they are virtually synonymous terms (Luke 1:17; 35; 4:14; 5:17; 6:19; cf. Mark 5:30). Christ Himself was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18,20; Luke 1:35) and He was anointed in the Holy Spirit at His baptism (Mark 1:10 and parallels); but it was not until after His Resurrection that the power of the Spirit was imparted to His disciples (John 7:39): "Tarry ye here in the city until ye be clothed with *δύναμις* from on high" (Luke 24:49); "Ye shall receive *δύναμις* when the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1:8).

Paul's *πνεῦμα* was a supernatural indwelling power, but never a means of deification, as in the cults.⁵² Neither does Paul, or any other New Testament writer for that matter, ever employ the concept of the Spirit in any cosmological context. Davies points out that one notable limitation of the sphere assigned to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is that it is nowhere described as the agent of creation or

⁵⁰Stauffer, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

⁵¹Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁵²Walter David Stacey, The Pauline View of Man in Relation to Its Judaic and Hellenistic Background (London: The Macmillan Co., c.1956), p. 35.

as a cosmic principle.⁵³ The Spirit in Paul's writings is confined to humanity as the sphere of its activity. Of course Paul means specifically the Holy Spirit and God's divine power communicating itself therein (Rom. 1:16; 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Thess. 1:5). Therefore for Paul the Spirit is the Spirit of power (2 Tim. 1:7; Acts 1:8; 10:38; Rom. 15:13; Eph. 3:16) who is enabling Christians to perform deeds beyond their own strength.⁵⁴

A word of caution is necessary: when Paul placed the Spirit above *πνεῦμα λόγος* (2:4), he did not advocate irresponsible irrationalism. He knew that understanding of our speech about God depends upon our faith and not upon reason.⁵⁵

One other issue should be noted briefly: Davies thinks that this preaching "in the Spirit" together with other evidence seems to confirm that Paul himself had ecstatic experiences.⁵⁶ Dodd appears to agree somewhat.⁵⁷ Paul does declare that his missionary work was accomplished "in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:19), and he regards "works of power, gifts of healing, divers kinds of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:28) as somewhat normal in the life of the church. These passages seem to indicate certain special gifts of the Spirit which Paul himself did experience.

⁵³Davies, op. cit., p. 188.

⁵⁴Richardson, op. cit., p. 111.

⁵⁵Laeuchli, op. cit., p. 247.

⁵⁶Davies, op. cit., p. 197.

⁵⁷Charles Harold Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1956), p. 58.

At any rate, πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως are not objective genitive but subjective genitive. Spirit and power call forth faith through the preaching of the cross.⁵⁸ Faith rests not upon persuasive arguments, but upon the work of God in the hearts of men. It is the Spirit which makes faith possible.⁵⁹ As Wendland says, "Der Glaube soll auf der Gotteskraft beruhen."⁶⁰ The phrase ἐν ἰσχυρίῳ κ. ε. λ. states how God has worked through Paul.⁶¹ It is clear, then, that the εἰς introduces not Paul's own but God's divine purpose.

Paul's description of Christ as "the wisdom of God" together with the contrast which Paul draws so decisively between the "wisdom of men" and the "hidden wisdom of God" (2:2-8) indicates the wide divergence in Paul's use of the term σοφία. As applied to the wisdom of God, Paul filled the term with that concept of the divine will and purpose which constituted the revealed knowledge of God made manifest in Christ.⁶² By using the term σοφία Paul tried to express the truth about Christ to those for whom religion could be expressed in the familiar terms of the mysteries. The use of this term does not mean that he accepted any of the tenets of a supposed religious philosophy. We know so little about the mystery religions and not much more about first century Gnosticism that any such theory is precarious as Richardson brings out.⁶³

⁵⁸Wilckens, op. cit., p. 51.

⁵⁹Craig, op. cit., p. 36.

⁶⁰Wendland, op. cit., p. 22.

⁶¹Meyer, op. cit., p. 46.

⁶²Elias Andrews, The Meaning of Christ for Paul (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1949), p. 196.

⁶³Richardson, op. cit., p. 47.

We are on surer ground if we recognize that in the Pauline letters there are two kinds of knowledge. There is first a "puffed up" knowledge, a worldly wisdom, which is vehemently repudiated (1:20; 2:5,13; 8:2; 13:2,8). Paul was speaking out in all probability against the pretended *γνώσις* and *σοφία* of the mystery cults and the preachers of philosophy (Col. 2:8). But there is also that knowledge of God through Christ, the true wisdom which Paul claims to be superior to all pagan substitutes. The test by which the false knowledge and wisdom can be distinguished from the true is the test of love, *ἀγάπη*. This test is strikingly similar to that proposed in 1 John 4:8. The false *γνώσις* puffs up in pride, instead of demonstrating *ἀγάπη*. Gnosis is valueless apart from love (1 Cor. 13).⁶⁴

The sphere of faith is not *σοφία ἀνθρώπων* but *δύναμις θεοῦ*. This antithesis was already set out by Paul in 1:18 and 1:23f. Here Paul could have substituted the term *σοφία θεοῦ* for *δύναμις θεοῦ*. The sense of his argument is really wisdom against wisdom. But Paul emphasized the weakness of the wisdom of the world by choosing *δύναμις* as his synonym for the wisdom of God.⁶⁵ The power which the missionary church experienced was in fact the power of the Spirit (Rom. 15:13,19; Eph. 3:16,20; Col. 1:11,29; 2 Tim. 1:7).

The astounding thing is that there is faith at all in the midst of all the so-called wisdom of the world. This *πίστις* is established not by the wisdom of the world but by the power of God. This *πίστις* has

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Wilckens, op. cit., p. 51.

the appearance of weakness; to be sure, it is weak in the eyes of the world. This *πίστις* does not let itself be convinced by the world, and certainly not by itself; but it rests solely upon God. In this type of "weakness" God's strength demonstrates itself as power. God Himself really lives in such weak people by faith as *πιστῶμα θεοῦ*.⁶⁶ The apostle Paul could preach the wisdom of God boldly by the Spirit of God Himself, even though he was weak in his own eyes and a fool in the eyes of men.

⁶⁶Wendland, op. cit., p. 22.

CHAPTER III

THE HIDDEN WISDOM

1 Cor. 2:6-16 is a finished piece of exposition which Paul interjects into the flow of his argument against schisms. The subject of this section is the source, content and conditions of the true religious wisdom for Christians. In one sense it is a digression; but it is a digression which carries forward the main argument for unity in Christ. By way of overview, we can summarize Paul's statement by saying that the gospel has a wisdom of its own; but 1) this wisdom does not belong to this present world and it must be revealed by God Himself, and 2) consequently can only be discussed with Christians fully initiated into the revelation.¹ This wisdom enables mature Christians to know the divine plan of salvation which is hidden from the *ἀφωρτες* of this age. It penetrates into the deep things of God because it depends on His gift of the Spirit. Paul admits that the spiritual man is superior to the natural, and is judged by no man. But such knowledge has for its content nothing but God's saving act (2:12). It is no vague speculation. This wisdom of God is a reality only in one whose way of life is in accordance with the Spirit.²

¹James Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians in The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 25.

²Rudolf Bultmann, et al., Bible Key Words, translated from the German by J. R. Coates and H. P. Kingdon (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1958), II, 42.

Now let us look more closely at what one writer has called "the most nearly 'Gnostic' passage in Paul"³ (2:6-9). Paul shows here that among mature Christians there is certainly a *σοφία*, but not a philosophy in the common worldly sense.⁴ In the eyes of the world, what preachers of the gospel set forth is no *σοφία* at all. Men boast of knowledge which makes them "wise in this age" (1 Cor. 3:18), a knowledge which puffs men up (1 Cor. 8:1), makes them boast of allegiance to men and creates cliques clustered about men. In contrast to this, Paul proclaims the offensive wisdom of the cross (1 Cor. 2:6-13). This brings men low, both Jew and Greek, and makes them glory in the Lord alone. Paul proclaims the whole grace of God without abridgement. This grace is the cross. God's grace gives that knowledge which is not primarily man's knowing at all, but man's being known by God. Man is thus enabled to love God (1 Cor. 8:1-3).⁵ Man has a knowledge that counts when God knows him at His own initiative. Yet the terminology which Paul uses in this section (2:6-9) does raise the question of Paul's relationship to his religious environment and the possibility of the influence of that environment upon him.⁶

³Samuel Laeuchli, The Language of Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1962), p. 47.

⁴Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Corinthians, translated from the German by D. Douglas Bannerman and William P. Dickson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1884), p. 46.

⁵Martin H. Franzmann, The Word of the Lord Grows (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1961), p. 88.

⁶Clarence Tucker Craig, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," The Interpreter's Bible, edited by John Knox (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1953), X, 36.

Let us examine some of the implications of Paul's phrase *ἐν τέλειος*. For Paul the *τέλειος* meant those already trained in Christian knowledge, grown up, as it were to manhood.⁷ Does Paul imply that he plans to shrink the congregation into some inner circle of knowledgeable Christians? Is there something he has to say only to those Christians who are mature which would be unintelligible to other hearers? Some light is shed by 2:13. There the content of this speaking is *πνευματικῆ*. Paul states specifically that such a spiritual speaking cannot be received nor understood by *ψυχικοί*, but only discerned by the *πνευματικοί*. Again, 3:1ff. turns the argument of Paul's polemic against any type of natural understanding on the part of the Corinthians. He could not speak to them as *πνευματικοί* because they were not ready for such spiritual discourses. Paul regrets that the Corinthians do not show themselves ready for it.⁸ They are still children. To be sure, they are children of God in Christ; but *πνευματικῆ* are to be preached to those mature enough in the faith to receive them. Children get milk, not meat. Paul recognizes clearly that there are different levels of Christian understanding within the congregation at Corinth. The *σοφία θεοῦ* has been reserved for those Christians who are already mature. The *τέλειος*, then, is Paul's term for mature Christians.⁹ They stand in contrast to the *νήπιος ἐν Χριστῷ* (Eph. 4:13).

⁷Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁸Charles Harold Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1956), p. 10.

⁹Marvin Richardson Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), III, 195.

They have penetrated beyond the position of beginners in Christian saving knowledge to the higher sphere of a more thorough and comprehensive insight. The presentation of these higher thoughts (11:8) is not yet appropriate for the beginners in the faith (16:1,2). The Holy Spirit influenced the framing of the form of this instruction without the teachings of philosophic rhetoric. Part of this instruction evidently was comprised of the *μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ οὐρανοῦ* (Matt. 13:11), the mysteries of the Messianic kingdom (2:9,12) in connection with the divine counsel of redemption and its fulfillment in Christ.¹⁰ Paul himself belongs to this mature group (Phil. 3:15) which can communicate these mysteries; but he continues to assure his readers that he is not already perfect (Phil. 3:12).¹¹

As Paul introduces the term *τέλειος* in the phrase under discussion, he presents us with an exegetical problem. At this point he suddenly begins to speak in terms which can be understood as thoroughly Gnostic. Taking just these words as they stand would allow them to fit neatly into a system of Gnostic teaching without any change whatsoever.¹² The Gnostics represented themselves as "spiritual" people who had come to the perfect knowledge of God and had acquired an insight into the origin of this earthly existence. Ordinary members of the Church were cast in an inferior mold and could only struggle, by simple faith and good works,

¹⁰Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹¹Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, translated from the German by Hendrich Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1951), I, 181.

¹²Ulrich Wilckens, *Weisheit und Torheit* (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, c.1959), p. 60.

to reach salvation.¹³ Paul, however, is not saying anything more here than he did in 1:18-2:5. Yet if he spoke against the Gnostic point of view in that section, why does he suddenly switch his whole approach and speak as he does by using words which could be understood in the Gnostic meaning? What sort of sense does that make? Paul himself, obviously, regards the Gnostic terminology as the appropriate form of expression for the understanding of Christian existence. He indicates this not merely by referring to the knowledge that is the foundation of his argument. Rather, being himself a *πνευματικός* as Bultmann points out, he considers himself also to have at his disposal that "wisdom" which penetrates into the mysteries of the divine wisdom, "the deep things of God."¹⁴

God's wisdom does not operate as human wisdom. It needs no verification from the wisdom of this aeon or from the rulers of this world since they are doomed anyway, *καταργουμένων*. Paul has already shown in his letter that the wisdom of God excludes every kind of worldly wisdom. Yet God did give a type of wisdom to the world. Paul is apparently thinking here in 2:6 about the wisdom of the divine control of history. When God gave the nations wisdom, His purpose was that the nations might attain a living and personal knowledge of Himself. Hence, as Stauffer puts it, God presented the nations with the possibility and the task of discovering the wisdom of His dealings with them in life and history.¹⁵

¹³Willem Cornelis von Unnik, Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings (Naperville, Illinois: Allenson Publishing Co., 1960), p. 42.

¹⁴Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, p. 181.

¹⁵Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology, translated from the German by John Marsh (New York: The Macmillan Co., c.1955), p. 88.

In English versions *αἰών* is often rendered by "world." In the sense of "this age," it is indistinguishable in meaning from the New Testament use of *κόσμος*. Because of sin and man's rebellion, the word takes on the meaning of the world standing in opposition to the purpose of God¹⁶ (Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 16:8; 20:34; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20; 3:18). In 1 Cor. 1:20 and Eph. 2:2 *κόσμος* and *αἰών* are clearly synonymous terms.

Paul focuses attention on the cosmic powers who rule this world and who consider it their own God-hating sphere of influence. Are any human beings meant by *ἀρχαὺς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου*? This possibility was formerly a popular one because of 2:8 which says that these rulers "crucified the Lord of glory." Meyer follows this point of view when he says the phrase means "rulers generally, the dominant powers of the pre-Messianic time among Jews and Gentiles."¹⁷ He opposes any thought of 1) philosophers and men of learning, 2) demons, or 3) Jewish archontes alone.¹⁸ We have to admit that the word *ἀρχαὺς* is used in Scripture for political representatives (Matt. 20:25; Luke 14:1; 23:13,35; 24:20; John 7:26,48; 12:42; Acts 4:5,8,26; Rom. 13:3). Taking just the word meaning, then, it could mean the men who took part in the crucifixion of Christ, that is, the officials--Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, Pilate and Herod.

¹⁶Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1958), p. 208.

¹⁷Meyer, op. cit., p. 48.

¹⁸Ibid.

The alternate meaning of "spiritual powers" for *ἰσχυεῖς* finds much support. Cullmann observes that the thought of the juxtaposition of invisible powers and their empirical organs is quite common in the New Testament.¹⁹ Wendland is right when he observes, "Die Welt ist beherrscht von Engelmächten--ein schon juedischer Glaube."²⁰ Craig says that the *ἰσχυεῖς* are the angelic rulers who stood behind the human agents and were "the real causes of historic events" according to ancient thought.²¹ They could be thought of as "elemental spirits of this world" (Gal. 4:3,9; Col. 2:8,20), "angels, principalities and powers" (Rom. 8:38), and "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). Andrews claims that all of these terms referring to angelic powers were familiar to Jewish thought.²² The expression *ἰσχυεῖς τοῦ αἵματος* can mean, then, the spiritual world-rulers in their corruption and blindness--not human *ἰσχυεῖς* like Pilate and Herod (despite Acts 3:17, where Peter says the rulers killed the Prince of life in ignorance). As Richardson says, "perhaps it was held that Pilate and the rest were mere cats-paws in the hands of the world-powers."²³ These spirit rulers are no longer to be served since the crucifixion of Christ brought the

¹⁹Oscar Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament, translated by Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c.1959), p. 228.

²⁰Heinz-Dietrich Wendland, Die Briefe an die Korinther in Das Neue Testament Deutsch, edited by Paul Althaus (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, c.1954), VII, 24.

²¹Craig, op. cit., p. 38.

²²Elias Andrews, The Meaning of Christ for Paul (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1949), p. 207.

²³Richardson, op. cit., p. 313.

defeat of the "rulers of the world" (John 12:31).²⁴ They are doomed, *καταργουμένων*.

These powers play an important role in Jewish apocalyptic and rabbinic literature. They are the rulers of this aeon and are brought to destruction with this aeon.²⁵ Gnostic literature, too, lays great stress upon these spiritual powers. The Gnostics pictured them as the angelic powers which surround the world like an impenetrable prison wall, holding men in like guards, and separating the world from the kingdom of light.²⁶ Jewish and Gnostic sources lead us to think of the *δρχουεργς* as demonic spiritual powers. But why does Paul bring them into his discussion at this point when he is speaking about the wisdom of God? Apparently he cannot discuss *θεοῦ σοφία* without fastening his attention upon its opposition to these powers.²⁷

Paul continues his discussion of the wisdom of God (2:7). The *θεοῦ σοφία* is God's wisdom, His "philosophy," which He alone controls. He alone makes it known to those who proclaim it. *Θεοῦ* is prefixed for great emphasis. The repetition of *ἀκλόουμεν* seems to give a certain solemn tone to the passage.²⁸ Paul uses the same sentence structure as he did in 2:6, but instead of *ἐν τελείῳ* he has *ἐν μυστηρίῳ*.

²⁴Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁵Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (Muenchen: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1956), IV/2, p. 1224.

²⁶Wilckens, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 64.

²⁸Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

Actually the syntax would allow *ἐν μυστηρίῳ* to be connected directly to *σοφίαν* as Craig prefers.²⁹ Vincent,³⁰ Meyer,³¹ and Wilckens,³² however, all connect *ἐν μυστηρίῳ* to *λαλοῦμεν*. Thereby they take the phrase to mean, "we speak by means of a secret," *i. e.*, by our proclaiming what has been secret, a doctrine hidden from human understanding and revealed specially to us by God.³³

The word *μυστήριον* signified a sacred rite of the mystery religions of ancient Greece. These mysteries were the one form of ancient Greek religion which had survived the wave of skepticism and unbelief. Indeed, the spirit of Paul's times was congenial to their revival. Among the Greek mystery religions which flourished at the time of Paul were the Eleusian, the Dionysian, and the Orphic.³⁴ Individuals participated in the mysteries by their own free choice. By means of a *μυστήριον*, initiates, called *mystai*, were brought into close relation to the deity honored. They were given a new nature, delivered from the cycle of reincarnation, and assured happiness after death. The experiences of the *mystai* resulted either from an act done to them or by them, or from watching a sacred drama. The votary was expected to keep his knowledge secret after he had passed through the ritual which made

²⁹Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³⁰Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

³¹Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

³²Wilckens, *op. cit.*, p. 64, n.1.

³³Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

³⁴James Ligon Price, *Interpreting the New Testament* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, c.1961), p. 310.

him a member of the cult. There are those who maintain that it was with such a connotation bordering on the pagan meaning that Paul used the word.³⁵ But the meaning of *μυστήριον* for Paul is always a revealed mystery, and therefore the opposite of that of the cults as Stacey clearly points out.³⁶ Paul used the term to denote not a hidden truth, but a truth once hidden and now revealed.³⁷ The gospel stands, an open secret, for all who will believe the good news³⁸ (Rom. 11:25; 16:25f.; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-6; Col. 2:2; 4:3). Paul fills *μυστήριον* with the whole content of the Christian revelation. If the term in the Pauline epistles has any affinity at all with an outside source, it is with the Septuagint usage rather than with its pagan associations.³⁹ This "mystery" is nothing else than the gospel (Eph. 6:19), the saving plan of God (Eph. 3:9). *Μυστήριον* means Christ (Col. 1:27), hidden from the world and opened to faith.⁴⁰ This *μυστήριον* is described as "hidden" wisdom, *ἀποκρυμμένον*. It had been hidden from all preceding generations, and apart from divine revelation remained and continues to remain hidden and unknown.⁴¹ In Christ God's secret plan

³⁵Andrews, op. cit., p. 195.

³⁶Walter David Stacey, The Pauline View of Man in Relation to Its Judaic and Hellenistic Background (London: The Macmillan Co., c.1956), p. 35.

³⁷David Smith, The Life and Letters of St. Paul (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), p. 320.

³⁸Richardson, op. cit., p. 59.

³⁹Andrews, op. cit., p. 195.

⁴⁰Laeuchli, op. cit., p. 49.

⁴¹Meyer, op. cit., p. 49.

or purpose is no longer a secret; it is made known; and ministers of Christ are "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1). That is to say, they are evangelists who are commissioned to declare openly and everywhere God's purpose for mankind. One of the supreme mysteries in the apostle's thought was God's long neglect of the Gentile world; and this mystery has now been revealed by the discovery of a limitless grace in Christ.⁴²

God had ordained, *Προώρισεν*, his plan before the aeons. God had formed His plan for the world before all ages. His plan endures for all ages to come (2:7; Eph. 2:7; 3:21), and is divided up into measured times and periods (1 Thess. 5:1; cf. Acts 17:26).⁴³ By using this word here, Paul showed his concern to bring out the absolute indebtedness of Christians to God's sovereign and gracious will which plans and realizes their life.⁴⁴

The two terms, *τέλειος* and *μυστήριον*, were both important in Gnostic usage. In fact, the Gnostic *τέλειος* was bound up together with the *μυστήριον*: *τέλειος* was that Gnostic man to whom *μυστήριον* had been revealed. Paul could have been using the Gnostic framework for his presentation of the *ἄρθε σοφία*. Paul presented the teaching of *ἄρθε σοφία* as *μυστήριον* whose addressees could only be *τέλειοι* because they are those to whom the Spirit has revealed the spiritual content of this revelation, the *ἄρθε σοφία*. The same *ἄρθε σοφία*

⁴²Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

⁴³Stauffer, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

⁴⁴Moffatt, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

is hidden from all those human beings as well as spiritual powers who do not have the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵

On the other hand, Wilckens claims that an equally good case can be made for Jewish apocalyptic literature as the framework and terminology of this section.⁴⁶ Apocalyptic literature speaks of secrets, סֵּתֵּר . They really exist already in heaven, but will be revealed only at the end of the world. Before the end of the world these secrets will be received only by the "wise" in wonderful visions and sounds. These secret gifts separate the really wise people from the rest who remain "unwise" men. Those who receive these apocalyptic secrets guard them very closely in order to keep the revelations secret.

The hiddenness of the $\mu\upsilon\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omicron\upsilon$ in Jewish apocalyptic literature is part of the plan of God who prepares the secrets for His elect. God keeps the secrets hidden from the world until the time of the eschatological revelation. Ἀποκρυμμένα , then, does not have to be understood in a Greek religious sense or from a Gnostic point of view, but it can also have an essentially eschatological meaning from Judaistic sources.

Inherently the secrets in the apocalyptic literature have the meaning of salvation which has been prepared for the elect as an eschatological gift. Wilckens speculates that since the quotation which Paul used in 2:9 has the style of a typical apocalyptic statement concerning such secrets, it could possibly have come from an Apocalypse which has been lost.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Wilckens, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 66.

God prepared the blessings of salvation for those who love Him, namely, for the elect righteous. God has already prepared these gifts in heaven εἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν. God intends to glorify us through the blessing of salvation by taking us into His glory. This apocalyptic sense gives good meaning to 2:7. Paul considered the *ἰσθὺ σοφία* to be a blessing of salvation, one of the eschatological gifts which God gives to the elect.

We see, accordingly, that Paul could have been developing the framework for the presentation of his *σοφία* partly from possible Gnostic and partly from possible Jewish terms. Apparently for Paul both of these traditions were not such sharply separate influences which we take so much trouble to divide from each other today. For him they were mixed and interwoven with each other to a great extent. Wilckens advances such a suggestion.⁴⁸ So Paul has described wisdom as a hidden blessing of salvation with apocalyptic and Gnostic nuances at the same time. He made his point in this way so that it would be very clear that the *ἡμεῖς* in which he included himself meant the very elect of God.

In the possession of this knowledge of revelation the elect have a distinct advantage over the blind world and its powers. But what is the essential meaning of *σοφία* which Paul developed here? It is noteworthy that he began 2:6 without any word of introduction or explanation. For this reason one can conclude that the meaning of *σοφία* in this connection was obvious and self understood.

From the Christological context we can infer a Christological

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 67.

meaning for *σοφία*. Wilckens concludes that Paul used *σοφία* as a Christological title for the resurrected Christ.⁴⁹ It stands to reason that Paul would return to this Christ-centered meaning from 1:18 in the development of his presentation.

Jewish apocalyptic literature does portray God working out salvation. Proofs for this possible understanding of the meaning of *σοφία* here occur throughout late-Judaic apocalyptic literature; although, to be honest, we must admit that such references are infrequent. The Qumran texts, however, do use this concept for a far-reaching plan of salvation in which everything that happens occurs according to an eternal plan of predestination as Wilckens points out.⁵⁰ To illustrate we could cite the following sections. Men exist from eternity in two spirits which God has placed in them (I QS 3:13f.). This placing by God rests upon His eternal decision of predestination. This eternal decision of God is hidden on principle. The understanding of this will of God is revealed only to the children of light on the basis of a special enlightening revelation. This plan is the plan of salvation in the understanding of the elect and they call it His divine wisdom (I QS 4:18f.). Whoever knows this wisdom has the right insight into knowledge of the Highest and into the wisdom of the children of heaven (I QS 4:22). The possession of this wisdom divides the sons of light from the sons of darkness. As long as the two spirits still remain and God has not yet created the new spirit, people continue to live in wisdom and foolishness (I QS 4:10).

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 68.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 69.

The Qumran meaning of wisdom, however, does not seem to be used here (2:6). Much more probable is the use of the meaning found in the apocalyptic literature, namely, the presentation of one of the real blessings of salvation which have been already prepared for the elect in view of the future revelation in heaven. This presentation is revealed even before the judgment to a few men wise in apocalyptic truths. That is a clear possibility in the text according to Wilckens.⁵¹

To sum up, Paul the preacher preached wisdom (2:7) in the context of a secret mystery which God has predestined for the glorifying of the mature Christians. Paul proceeded to describe the content of this mystery of wisdom in the quotation (2:9), which he possibly took over from an apocalyptic writing. The possibility exists, then, that Paul was talking entirely in the framework of Jewish apocalyptic terminology.

If it is true that Paul was speaking to his hearers out of a Jewish apocalyptic setting, then 2:8 came as quite a shock in his presentation of wisdom. He has already said in 2:7 that the heavenly gift of wisdom which he has described in 2:6 was not recognized by the ἀρχουτες. Up to this point a Jew could have followed easily. But then 2:8b shifts the emphasis: "If they would have known it (σοφία), they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." From the context it is evident that the same σοφία was meant which the ἀρχουτες did not recognize.

Paul spoke of the crucified Christ as the Lord of glory. Wendland exposes this inherent paradox neatly by saying,

Im Gegensatz zu den Herrschern dieser Welt traegt Christus den Wuerdenamen 'Herr der Herrlichkeit,' der im Judentum von Gott

⁵¹Ibid., p. 70.

gebraucht wurde. . . . In diesem Namen ist die Paradoxie des paulinischen Christus=Glaubens groszartig formuliert; denn gerade der Gekreuzigte ist her Herr der Herrlichkeit, d. h. Der, dem die goettliche Herrlichkeit eignet.⁵²

The title *Kúrios* occurs as the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew YAHWEH. Frequently Paul gave this title to Christ and applied to Him Old Testament passages which obviously referred to Israel's God (1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 3:16; 10:11; Eph. 4:8; 2 Thess. 1:9). From the time when Paul wrote his letters onwards the title *Kúrios* was used for Christ much more frequently than any other, and at that time attained a much deeper meaning. This deeper meaning came about in four ways in Stauffer's opinion:⁵³ first, Paul used the name *Kúrios* in a personal sense. After his Damascus experience the apostle became the slave of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the Lord who claimed Paul's life and work. Paul turned to Christ in everything that concerned his labors (2 Cor. 12:8). Second, though the name *Kúrios* was particularly applicable to the exalted Lord, Paul also applied the title to the Christ who entered upon His passion at the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11:23b). Paul's use of *Kúrios* took on some color from the theology of the passion. Third, Paul stressed that the exalted *Kúrios* (Col. 2:15) had authority over all the powers that affect human beings. Fourth, Paul confessed his exalted Lord; and the church to whom Paul proclaimed Him confessed Christ who was Lord of the world to come (1 Cor. 8:5).

Christ is the Lord. His qualitatively characteristic condition is that of the divine glory in heaven. He came from the glory of heaven

⁵²Wendland, op. cit., p. 24.

⁵³Stauffer, op. cit., pp. 115-116.

and He has returned to the glory of heaven (John 17:5; Luke 24:26; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1-4, et al.). Hence, He can claim the title, "the Lord of glory."⁵⁴ Christ possesses the divine splendor, *δόξα*, and bestows this glory on men.⁵⁵ But only the gift of faith enables Christians to discern the divine presence and glory in the future of the Crucified; unbelievers do not see the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:4,6). They have been blinded by the ruler of this world.⁵⁶

What, then, is the relation between *θεὸς σοφία* and *κύριος τῆς δόξης*? If we have to distinguish wisdom in the sense of the apocalyptic expectation on the one hand, from the crucified Christ on the other, then Paul's argument in 2:8 makes no sense. Only one possibility gives a good meaning: *θεὸς σοφία* and *κύριος τῆς δόξης* mean the same thing; namely, we must understand *σοφία* in the entire section (2:6ff.) to be Christ. *θεὸς σοφία* is a Christological term here and means nothing different from the person of the Lord of glory Himself.⁵⁷

If this is true, then the point Paul made is: Mature Christians preach wisdom (Christ) because it has been revealed to them through the Spirit (2:10ff.). But wisdom (Christ) remains hidden and inaccessible to the *ἀνοήτους*. God has decided in eternity to reveal wisdom to us (*ἡμῶν*, 2:7) for our glory. Christ, the Lord of glory, is the wisdom

⁵⁴Meyer, op. cit., p. 50.

⁵⁵Craig, op. cit., p. 38.

⁵⁶Richardson, op. cit., p. 66.

⁵⁷Wilckens, op. cit., p. 71.

of God; but the ἀρχαίτες have crucified Him because they did not recognize Him. God has revealed Him to us through the Spirit. The entire context makes the point that mature Christians, the τελειοί, already have the blessing of salvation from God in eternity in the person of Christ. The Christ, who came down from heaven and whom the demonic powers crucified, has been revealed to mature Christians but remains hidden from and unknown by the ἀρχαίτες.

If one agrees to this identification of σοφία with Christ, then in addition the possibility opens up for the Gnostic myth of the savior-redeemer as further background to Paul's presentation. Bultmann claims,

The Gnostic idea that Christ's earthly garment of flesh was the disguise in consequence of which the world rulers failed to recognize him--for if they had recognized him--they would not have brought about their own defeat by causing his crucifixion--lurks behind 1 Cor. 2:8.⁵⁸

This myth is difficult to state exactly because of all the variants.

One could summarize the most important parts as follows:

A divine being fell from its home in heaven into strange depths. The powers of the world captured it and smashed it into many small pieces. These smashed pieces comprise mankind who must live in the world as strangers separated from heaven. A second divine being was sent down from above to rescue mankind. He is related and similar in appearance. This rescuer descended from heaven and took on a disguise of flesh before the world powers. Therefore the world powers did not recognize him for what he was, but really considered him one of their own kind. In this manner he finally arrived in the depths and showed

⁵⁸Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, p. 175.

himself to his scattered brothers. His brothers recognized him as a divine being. They collected themselves together and rose again with him in order to return home to their origin. Once again in heaven all the members together constitute a unity.

The doctrine of salvation in this myth introduces and then describes the reception of knowledge through the savior as recognition of his divine being. Whoever has this recognition in the sense of the myth is "saved," which means in this sense of *γνώσις*, to be brought back to and reunited again with one's origin.

This tradition of Gnosticism influenced early Christendom. Without going into detail, suffice it to say that Christian Gnostics found it easy to read Christ into the savior-redeemer of the myth. We can find a Christian *γνώσις* of this sort not only in the various Gnostic heresies of the second and third centuries; but already in early Christian texts we can discern various Gnostic influences and meanings. This Gnostic infiltration into early Christendom stands in the same historical context with the entry of Gnosticism into late Judaism with which Christianity was bound up at the time of its own beginning. From this one can conclude that it hardly makes any real difference whether Christianity received its Gnostic influences from a gnostic Judaism or from a heathen-hellenistic Gnosis.⁵⁹

Without doubt Paul could have spoken about the wisdom of God (2:6ff.) in the context of Jewish apocalyptic literature. In the same connection (2:8), however, we find the possibility of the Gnostic savior

⁵⁹Wilckens, op. cit., p. 73.

myth blended with Jewish apocalyptic elements. It is difficult to separate the various influences completely and accurately. One has to keep in mind a broad stream of Gnostic nuances in which σοφία had the function of savior as a personified mythical being. In the same mixed sense one must understand Paul's use of τέλειος . As Wilckens demonstrates, Jewish and Gnostic meanings flowed together for Paul so that it was not strange for him to bring Gnostic and mythological statements into a Jewish-apocalyptic context.⁶⁰

Some further comment is necessary concerning the apparently deliberate relationship between εἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν (2:7) and κύριος τῆς δόξης (2:8). Just as the term θεοῦ σοφία meant Christ (2:7), so the apocalyptic presentation of the future glorification of the righteous has been possibly blended here with the corresponding Gnostic teaching of the Gnostic sharing in the glory of the savior-redeemer himself. If this specific Gnostic sense was intended, then the following Christological conclusion was also intended: Just as Christ is the wisdom of God, through whom the mature become wise, so also is Christ the Lord of glory insofar as He transforms the mature believers into the glory of the heavenly sphere above.⁶¹

Now one can finally come to grips with the sense of the so-called antithesis in 2:6b: This phrase has been added not in order to make extreme statements concerning the hiddenness of the wisdom of God by indicating that it was hidden even from the ἀρχαίους ; but to the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 74.

contrary, this concealment of the wisdom of God and its non-recognition by the world powers has made possible the action of salvation. Just because of this hiddenness God could reveal Himself to the elect *ἡμεῖς* and to the *ἡμεῖς* alone. Because of this revelation in concealment the *ἡμεῖς* could return into the *δόξα* through the disguised *κύριος τῆς δόξης*. The spiritual revelation of the wisdom of God as the saving mystery has been allotted to the *ἡμεῖς*, while the *ἀρχαίτες* have been deceived. The *σοφία τῶν ἀρχόντων* has been smashed at the cross of Christ, the point of the apparent victory of the *ἀρχαίτες*. But because they did not recognize *ἰσοῦ σοφία*, they have been defeated themselves as Paul adds triumphantly (2:6). Where this mystery of the wisdom of God is preached, there the *ἀρχαίτες* are always defeated. True wisdom remains hidden from them.

Paul concluded this section with a fitting quotation (2:9). The language that he used to describe the blessedness of the Age to Come was evidently traditional in Judaism as Davies says.⁶² But the verse still poses some serious difficulties. The introductory words *καθὼς γέγραπται* are ordinarily used by Paul for direct quotations from Scripture.⁶³ But what does Paul quote? Where are these words written? This verse certainly is not a direct quotation from any source which scholars have discovered. In fact, this particular quotation is one of the most vexing problems in textual background which remain to be

⁶²William David Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (Second edition; London: SPCK, 1955), p. 307.

⁶³Edward Earle Ellis, Paul's Use of the Old Testament (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), passim.

clarified.⁶⁴ Commentators suggest a few places in the Septuagint, all in Isaiah (52:15; esp. 64:3(4); 65:16?) which say similar things. But Paul differs markedly from the LXX and the Hebrew. The first suggestion has a completely different meaning in its context which prompted Stauffer to remark,

The most difficult quotations from Scripture that we find in the NT are those which, though they cite specific passages from the OT, often with an express introductory formula, and which we can locate in our canon, yet neither say nor contain what the NT writers suppose (1 Cor. 2:9. . .).⁶⁵

The second and third possibilities have many textual dissimilarities. For example,

1 Cor. 2:9
 καθὼς γέγραπται
 εἰ ὀφθαλμοὶ οὐκ εἶδον
 καὶ οὖς οὐκ ἤκουσαν

LXX Isaiah 64:4
 ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος οὐκ ἠκούσαμεν
 οὐδὲ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἡμῶν εἶδον
 θεοῦ πληρῶς σου καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου

It is difficult to assume any direct connection to this Isaiah passage. Only the underlined words give any possibility of quotation and then only as indirect quotation at that. Yet the fact remains that Paul used his introductory formula; he must have been quoting from some source. Ellis lists the various solutions which have been proposed: an apocryphal writing since lost; an apocryphal phraseology of OT texts; a Jewish anthology of OT passages (and an apocryphal passage); and a free paraphrase of the OT by Paul.⁶⁶ Origen and Ambrose say that the words come from the Secrets of Elias. But would Paul have used his formula for

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁵Stauffer, op. cit., p. 19.

⁶⁶Ellis, op. cit., p. 35.

scripture citation to refer to a non-canonical writing? I Clement 34:8 uses the same unknown quotation almost identically; yet by a slight change Clement puts an emphasis on future reward into the text. Then, too, the author of Clement may have drawn the quotation from this Corinthian letter which he apparently knew well. Later the passage came into the text of the Ascension of Isaiah (11:34) but that could not be Paul's source as Craig points out.⁶⁷ At any rate, the meaning of the passage is fairly simple: God has already prepared his final blessings for the elect, and has shown them only to the initiated in secret revelations⁶⁸ (cf. Gal. 3:19; 4:26). "Those who love Him" must mean the true Christians who are responding to the love and wisdom God has shown them in Christ.

⁶⁷Craig, op. cit., p. 38.

⁶⁸Stauffer, op. cit., p. 53.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRULY SPIRITUAL MAN

Having set forth the hidden character of the divine *σοφία*, Paul turned to its unveiling in 2:10-16.¹ God has made known to His saints the riches of the glory of Christ (Col. 1:27). God has already revealed His hidden *σοφία* in the person of Christ the Crucified.

To be sure, the word *σοφία* does not occur in the section (2:10-16) except in the negative sense (2:13). Paul considered the concept of knowledge very simply by including everything under the term *πάντα* and then explaining it through the additional amplification *τὰ βάρη τοῦ ἁγίου*. In fact, there is an interesting shift of emphasis: only the Holy Spirit really knows *τὰ τοῦ ἁγίου* because he is the One who "searches," *ἔρευνᾷ*. Only insofar as the receiver of special revelation has actually received the Holy Spirit Himself and has been instructed by Him, can he also be called really "spiritual."

In the back of his mind Paul may have had some Gnostic heresy which he had to oppose. In the Gnostic texts the revealer himself is spirit in his being. The receiving of the spirit in Gnosticism brings the receiver of the spirit into the very being of the spirit. He becomes identical with the *πνεῦμα*-revealer, and so is *πνευματικός*. His knowledge in truth is that of the spirit into which he has been taken up.

¹Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Corinthians, translated from the German by D. Douglas Bannerman and William P. Dickson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1884), p. 51.

From this point of view one can realize why Paul does not use the term *σοφία* any longer in this section of his presentation: *σοφία* and *πνεῦμα* were identical in the Corinthian Gnosticism.² Paul has simply exchanged one synonym for another. That is indicated a little farther on (2:13). There he says that the teacher dare not be human wisdom but the Spirit. The preaching of this doctrine must not be oriented to men's wisdom but to the Spirit. Here the Spirit of God stands opposed to the wisdom of men, just as before the wisdom of God stood opposed to the wisdom of the world. Therefore the Spirit of God must be sharply distinguished from the spirit of men. Paul made use of the Corinthian terminology to note this distinction.

Let us assume that the Corinthian Gnostics held their ground against Paul and continued to claim that they themselves were *πνευματικοί* and *σοφοί*. They would assert that since they had received a revelation of spiritual insight through the spirit, they had become spiritual themselves; they had received the spirit that recognized the divine in them. As spiritual beings, they would have continued, they were identical with the spirit. Exactly parallel to this possible Gnostic point of view is the formula which Paul proposed: in the measure they have perceived Christ to be the Wisdom of God, they were really wise. As wise they were identical with wisdom. The Corinthians were both spiritual and wise to the extent that they received the content of revelation. Paul specified this content as *τὰ βάρη τοῦ αἵμου* (2:10b).

²Ulrich Wilckens, Weisheit und Torheit (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, c.1959), p. 81.

The Spirit is familiar with the mysteries of God, because He alone stands in that unique relation in respect to the true knowledge of God, which corresponds to the relation of the human spirit to man.³ We must not make the mistake of confusing Paul's idea of the Spirit, the supernatural gift to believers and to them only, with the Stoic idea of a reality permeating the entire natural universe.⁴ That *πνεῦμα* meant the Holy Spirit and not the human spirit is certain from the context.⁵ As Wendland says, "Wenn Paulus Sagt: 'der Geist,' so meint er immer den Gottesgeist."⁶ The Holy Spirit "searches," *ἐρευνᾷ*. This searching is not done in order to discover; but this word describes the ever active, accurate, careful sounding of the depths of God by the Spirit.⁷ Wendland comments,

'Der Geist erforscht alles', das gilt von dem ewigen Gottesgeist; Gott kann nur durch Gott erkannt werden. Nur Gott selbst kann die goettlichen Heilstaten auslegen und verstaendlich machen.⁸

The phrase, *τὰ κρυπτά τοῦ Θεοῦ*, denotes the whole rich exhaustless fullness which is hidden in God.⁹ It is the opposite of the phrase, *τὰ βυβλία τοῦ Στρατῆ* (Rev. 2:24). Wilckens sees in this phrase,

³Meyer, op. cit., p. 52.

⁴Clarence Tucker Craig, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," The Interpreter's Bible, edited by John Knox (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1953), X, 39.

⁵Meyer, op. cit., p. 52.

⁶Heinz-Dietrich Wendland, Die Briefe an die Korinther in Das Neue Testament Deutsch, edited by Paul Althaus (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, c.1954), VII, 25.

⁷Marvin Richardson Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), III, 196.

⁸Wendland, op. cit., p. 25.

⁹Meyer, op. cit., p. 52.

τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ, an expression which could be considered typically Gnostic and would then refer to the spiritual world above, the heavenly sphere.¹⁰ The fulfillment of this knowledge of the depths of God through the spirit separates the Gnostics from the world. Soteriologically, the Gnostic religion would understand this as ascent out of the world into the glory of the spiritual realm. Even though Paul used such a term which the Gnostics could have misunderstood, Paul tried to prevent any such wrong interpretation by setting out in the following verses (2:10ff.) the unreachable dimensions of this knowledge of revelation by God in contrast to all worldly knowledge.

In order to point out this difference as sharply as possible, Paul made use of an anthropological meaning to the term πνεῦμα by which he meant just the ability of man to know anything. Sometimes Paul employed this term to denote a normal element in human nature. It is clear that for Paul there was in all men, even the unregenerate, what he calls πνεῦμα. Without seeking to define this πνεῦμα which every man possesses, we may think of it as "the controlling directive in man."¹¹ Paul made use of a conclusion by analogy--as only a man's "spirit" (πνεῦμα) knows what is within him, so also the depths of God are available only to the divine "Spirit" (πνεῦμα).¹² Paul considered both types of knowledge as fact and set them side by side here in this

¹⁰Wilckens, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

¹¹William David Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (Second edition; London: SPCK, 1955), p. 185.

¹²Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, translated from the German by Hendrich Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1951), I, 205.

analogy. In fact, he did not intend to make any sort of case for any contrast or difference between the two here.¹³ Indeed, Bultmann realizes this when he quotes this reference among others to point out that there is no difference in meaning between *εἰδέναι* and *γινώσκειν*.¹⁴ These two sections of the formula stand completely parallel to each other as far as the internal meaning of knowledge is concerned. Gnostics would agree, too, with the meaning of the formula; for they held that there was no more radical difference than that between God and the world. This whole verse made good sense in both parts to Gnostics and Paul alike: spiritual understanding is not a human possibility, but can occur only through the understanding of the spiritual revelation given to men.¹⁵

Paul hastened on to point out the real contrast. In the next verse (2:12) he set the spirit of the world over against the Spirit of God. True wisdom is not attainable through merely human means. The spirit of man, the normal element in human nature, cannot achieve it. It is revealed by the Spirit of God.¹⁶ *τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου* is the spirit which unbelieving mankind has.¹⁷ This spirit is opposed to God in all

¹³Wilckens, op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁴Rudolf Bultmann, "Gnosis," Bible Key Words, translated and edited from the German by J. R. Coates and H. P. Kingdon (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1958), II, 30, n.1.

¹⁵Wilckens, op. cit., p. 84.

¹⁶Davies, op. cit., p. 186.

¹⁷Meyer, op. cit., p. 53.

His purposes¹⁸ (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:11,12). In pointing out this radical difference, Paul neatly sidestepped an inherent danger in the manner of his speaking. Paul said, "We do not have the spirit of the world, but we have received the Spirit from God," and any Gnostics would have hastened to add, "in order that we might become spiritual," *ἵνα γένωμεν πνευματικοί*. Paul, however, structured his argument in such a way--and probably with just such an intention--that the Gnostics who were agreeing with him were left high and dry. Paul broke the whole chain of Gnostic thought when he concluded the verse with the phrase, *ἵνα εἰδῶμεν τὰ σπὸ τοῦ αἰθοῦ χαρισθέντα ἡμῖν*.

In this turn of phrase, Paul introduced the free spontaneous gifts of God. By doing so he underlined the great difference between the gifts and the Giver. He turned attention from knowledge itself and from the Spirit itself to God the Giver of all good gifts.¹⁹

These gifts are the content of Christian knowledge. Meyer believes that these gifts are the blessings of the Messianic kingdom, the possession of which is bestowed by divine grace on the Christians.²⁰ To be sure, these gifts are only hinted at in this entire context. Furthermore, we do not know clearly what Paul meant exactly by *τὰ χαρισθέντα ἡμῖν* in any anti-Gnostic sense. In fact, Wilckens maintains that it is possible to point out instances in Gnostic writings where the word,

¹⁸Hermann Sasse, "Κόσμος," Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer), III, 883ff.

¹⁹Wilckens, op. cit., p. 86.

²⁰Meyer, op. cit., p. 54.

Χαρίσματα, is used in the same sense.²¹ The whole verse lends itself to the possible meaning of Christian conversion, especially since the phrase λαμβάνειν τὸ πνεῦμα became one of the technical terms of early Christian missionary preaching and meant conversion in that use.²² It could also be possible that Paul did have in mind here some special charismatic gifts which he discussed later in the letter.²³

But Paul has given us a problem. Whom did he really mean by "we," ἡμεῖς ? In connection with the τοῖς τελείοις (2:6), he apparently meant the special circle of mature spiritual people. Those make up the ἡμεῖς . But the Corinthians used the term ἡμεῖς in such an exclusive sense that it became the basis for the divisions against which Paul was striving. In spite of this technical use just a few verses prior, Paul meant all Christians here without doubt. Yet it can have this meaning only if we eliminate the possibility of χαρίσματα meaning charismatic gifts.

Where Paul emphasized the ἡμεῖς (2:6ff.), he may have accommodated his presentation to the possible Gnostic way of speaking which he may have taken over. The theological viewpoint of Paul has been clouded over by a strange Gnostic conception and the resulting lack of clarity leaves us with some unanswered questions at this point. Have all Christians received the Spirit (2:12), or only the "spiritual" among the Christians (2:10,14f.)? Does the gift of the Spirit mean chiefly the

²¹Wilckens, op. cit., p. 86, n. 2.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p. 87.

gift of faith (2:12) or does it mean some special charismatic gift? Is the expression of the wisdom of God all types of preaching (1:24ff.) or only a special charismatic gift of tongues? Is the addressee of such passages the world--Jew and heathen--or only a special group of people with charismatic gifts? These questions arise because there is no clear answer in the text itself.

Let us go on to the next verse (2:13). Just as the understanding of God's knowledge is a gift from God's Spirit Himself, so also is the preaching of this knowledge. Having given proof of Spirit-given wisdom, the Apostle went on into the manner in which the things revealed are proclaimed, passing from the *εἰδέναι τὰ Χριστοκεντρικά* to the *κηρύξαι* of them.²⁴ The preachers of God do not speak *ἐν διδακτικῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ σοφίᾳ λόγους*. Just what did Paul mean by *ἀνθρωπίνῃ σοφίᾳ*? The preceding verse was an apparent polemic against Gnosticism. Did Paul continue this polemic view? Or did he speak out here in general against natural knowledge in contrast to spiritual knowledge (2:11)? Or did he again oppose the weak Corinthian-type wisdom against which he spoke up for the crucified Christ as the power of God (2:5)? If we can refer back that far in the context, we can tie all these points together. Any so-called wisdom on the part of man is nothing but human speculation, *ἀνθρωπίνῃ σοφίᾳ* if it denies the crucified Savior. The Spirit of God will really have nothing to do with this denial. The powerful Spirit of God proclaims God's wisdom in the crucified Christ even when it appears to be weak and foolish.

²⁴Meyer, op. cit., p. 54.

The Christian preacher, therefore, speaks *ἐν δίδακτοῖς πνεύματος*. The Spirit is the power and source of the proclamation, not logic not empirical evidence. *πνεύματος* is subjective genitive. The Spirit speaks by His power through the *διδάκτοῖς* which He gives. This word implies that the Spirit appropriates His speakers. He gives different individualities capabilities of proclaiming Christ in very different forms resulting in a corresponding variety.²⁵

This brings us to a group of words which are very difficult to interpret with finality: *πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντας*. The two words with the *πνεῦμα*-root could refer to spiritual men, things, or words. The possible meanings for *συγκρίνοντας* include adapting, interpreting, proving, or comparing. This word occurs only here and in 2 Cor. 10:12 where it obviously means "compare." Four main interpretations have been proposed for this cryptic phrase: 1) adapting spiritual words to spiritual things; 2) adapting spiritual things to spiritual men; 3) interpreting spiritual things to spiritual men; and 4) interpreting spiritual things by spiritual words. Vincent says that the most satisfactory interpretation is combining spiritual things with spiritual words.²⁶

We can conclude at this point that there is great difficulty in any attempt to interpret this phrase in Paul. Paul did not use clean terminology with exact meanings here; and he used the words he did in circumstances which are not easy to determine. Added to this is the

²⁵Ibid., p. 55.

²⁶Vincent, op. cit., p. 197.

fact that Paul's purpose in this section was so similar theologically to the central thesis of Gnosticism; namely, that salvation consists in the identification of the saved as the spiritually grown up in the *TIWENOM* of the savior. The danger exists here that Christ and Christians appear the same way in a mystical sense. This line of argument of Paul is remarkable and hard to understand. For was it not just this possibility of the identity of spiritual wisdom with Christ as the wisdom of God which Paul attacked so vehemently before? Didn't he, so to say, downgrade this type of wisdom in which the Corinthians gloried as wisdom of the world and wisdom of men? Didn't he put this type of wisdom in radical contrast to the real wisdom and power of God in the crucified Christ?

One could wish that Paul would have been somewhat clearer at this point. Even after he brought in the simple surprise phrase for the Gnostics in 2:12b, the mainstream of his line of thinking has to strain to come through all the apparent Gnostic terminology he seems to have taken over.²⁷ For that reason, a person could understand the entire section (2:10-13) in a Gnostic sense contrary to the Apostle's intention. Such an erroneous interpretation could lead to the further conclusion that Paul's theology was also influenced by Gnostic thought.

Added to this is the evidence that the next verse (2:14) is typically Gnostic in form. There is hardly a single extant Gnostic text which does not say the same thing as Paul does here.²⁸ "The

²⁷Wilckens, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 89.

natural man does not receive the things of the spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, nor is he able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

The term *ψυχικός* provides an interesting study. First of all, neither *ψυχικός* nor *πνευματικός* occur in old rabbinic literature. As Strack-Billerbeck points out, the terms $\text{רְחִימָה} = \text{πνευματικός}$ and $\text{רְחִימָה} = \text{ψυχικός}$ belong to a later time.²⁹ In addition, *ψυχικός* is not equivalent to *σαρκικός*, "fleshly," in the evil sense. Paul was speaking of natural as contrasted with spiritual knowledge applied to spiritual truth. Paul was contrasting the *ψυχή*, "soul," as the organ of human cognition with the *πνεῦμα* as the organ of spiritual cognition. The man, therefore, whose understanding of truth depended solely upon his natural insight was *ψυχικός*, "natural," as compared with the spiritual man, *πνευματικός*, to whom divine insight was imparted.³⁰ The fact that Paul used *ψυχικός* and *σαρκικός* synonymously a few verses farther on would surprise those versed in the Hellenistic doctrine of the soul. But Paul's view was that the *ψυχή* in a man enlightened by the Spirit of God was of the same nature as his flesh and blood.³¹ *ψυχή*, then, was for Paul the principle of life for the *σάρξ*.³² Paul's view of *ψυχή* here was in complete accord

²⁹Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (Muenchen: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1956), III, 329.

³⁰Vincent, op. cit., p. 198.

³¹Walter David Stacey, The Pauline View of Man in Relation to Its Judaic and Hellenistic Background (London: The Macmillan Co., c.1956), p. 148.

³²Meyer, op. cit., p. 56.

with his doctrine of the Spirit.³³ In each of the four cases where *ψυχικός* was used, it was contrasted with *πνευματικός* which at once gives a hint to its meaning. Here in the passage under discussion (2:14) the contrast meant that the *ψυχικός* was unable to receive or appreciate the things of the Spirit. The "natural" man had only the natural spirit, not the regenerated spirit which marked believers. If the Spirit of God could not have fellowship with such a man, the question arises as to how regeneration could have been carried out; but Paul, knowing that the Spirit was being given, did not stop to consider that question at this point nor puzzle over the logic of it.³⁴ As the natural soul was confined to the lower aspects of consciousness, the *ψυχικός* was man considered apart from God. He was not a person who had only biological needs, but the person whose life was directed toward, and limited to, the earthly.³⁵ As Bultmann remarks, the derived adjective can be translated "second-rate," "limited," or "transitory."³⁶

This *ψυχικός* did not *δέχεται* the things from God's Spirit. This *δέχεται* did not have the meaning of intellectual understanding when used in the New Testament in connection with teaching (Luke 8:13; Acts 8:14; 11:1; 17:1; 1 Thess. 1:6; James 1:21). Instead, as Vincent shows, it meant to admit the teaching into the heart and live by it.³⁷

³³Stacey, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 147.

³⁵Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 205.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 204.

³⁷Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

The *ψυχικός* chose to live his own life under his own direction. The Corinthians apparently decided that their way of life as *πνευματικοί* and *σοφοί* with the Savior was the *πνεύμα θεοῦ* and *σοφία θεοῦ*. In other words, they made their Gnosis into the criterion. Their seizure of the *σοφία θεοῦ* as their own *σοφία* was the final, real theological reason for the Corinthian factions. Paul opposed this Gnostic type of reasoning; but he accommodated his presentation to the framework of the thinking of the Corinthians. Even so, he did not condone the divisions within the congregation in any way. Paul found such an accommodation and assimilation of terminology necessary for his polemic. For a profitable and fruitful discussion he needed the groundwork of the common language of mutually known terms. Paul also had a pastoral outlook toward the Corinthians and in kindness started where they were in their understanding of things. But one of the biggest reasons for Paul's accommodation here was the fact that he found it difficult himself to give up some of the essential points of the teaching concerning the Spirit at Corinth. He himself understood the resurrected Lord as Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17f.). He himself looked forward to an eschatological change into a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44ff.). Above all, he valued special spiritual charismatic gifts very highly for the building up of the Church (1 Cor. 14). Perhaps the *λόγος σοφίας* and *λόγος γνώσεως* (1 Cor. 12:8) fit here, too. Paul stated his conviction that such charismatic gifts have not been given to each Christian in the same way (1 Cor. 12:4ff.; Rom. 12:3ff.). Yet all Christians had the same Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; Rom. 8:9ff., 15f.). His outlook, therefore, was to take into his own teaching and preaching as much as possible of the framework of the Corinthian teaching, while at the same time he had to combat and abrogate

the false, specifically Gnostic elements in that teaching. Paul had a double purpose, then, of taking up certain points in a positive way and of taking up other points in order to abrogate them. This double purpose has caused a dangerous and ambiguous lack of clarity for the minds of many interpreters as they have considered these sections.

This double character of Paul's argument becomes very evident again in the concluding two verses (2:15,16). He spoke first about the competence of a spiritual man to form a judgment. The spiritual man understood the wisdom of God's way; he recognized the hidden plan of salvation which came to the climax in the cross, and he laid hold of the gifts of God (John 4:10). For where the Spirit is, there faith is quickened.³⁸ This passage (2:15) suggests that anyone who had received the Spirit was a *πνευματικός*. Later on (1 Cor. 14:37), Paul excluded ordinary believers and gave the title only to the man who possessed a particular *πνεῦμα* as well. The obvious conclusion is that Paul used the term for any man possessed by the Spirit. If he was thinking of the spirit of prophecy, then prophets were *πνευματικοί*; but if he was thinking of the spirit of faith, then all believers were *πνευματικοί*. As Stacey concludes, the important point is that the word did not only, or even usually, apply to ecstasies.³⁹

Ἀνακρίνειν means to examine or investigate. Paul did not really mean to lift the spiritual man above the possibility of all judgment at the hands of his fellows. Every page of his letter called for

³⁸Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology, translated by John Marsh (New York: The Macmillan Co., c.1955), p. 173.

³⁹Stacey, op. cit., p. 147.

evaluation by the members of the church of one another and for mutual helpfulness. What Paul wanted to exclude was a judgment from wrong premises, as he stated again later (4:1-4). "When the standard is false, the judgment will be untrue."⁴⁰ The word *οὐδενός* refers to those who did not possess the endowment for understanding the gifts of the Spirit. The *πνευματικός* who lived out of the real spiritual dialogue with God, lived a new life of which the world knew nothing (Rom. 8:2; 14:17; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:22ff.).

The Apostle set out his proof in an imperfect syllogism (2:16). The last proposition of this syllogism was not expressed because Paul considered it self-evident. Fully expressed, it would go like this: No one can know the mind of Christ so as to instruct Him. We *πνευματικοί* have the mind of Christ. Therefore, we are those people whom no one can know so as to instruct them.⁴¹

This verse (2:16) quotes Isaiah 40:13 but the quotation is at variance with the LXX and the Hebrew text:⁴²

1 Cor. 2:16
 τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου;
 ἢ συμβιβάσκει αὐτούς;

LXX Isaiah 40:13
 τίς ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου;
 καὶ τίς αὐτοῦ σύμβουλος
 ἐγένετο ἢ συμβιβᾷ αὐτούς;

Romans 11:34
 τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου
 ἢ τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο;

⁴⁰Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁴¹Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴²Edward Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), p. 151.

In the passage from Romans Paul used the quotation to confess that even he did not understand the mysteries of God. Here Paul used Isaiah to lead his readers to the assurance that the secret wisdom has been made known to those who possess Christ, the Spirit.

Paul substituted the word *νοῦς* for *πνεῦμα* which he has used in the whole preceding discussion.⁴³ He apparently equated the two terms here.⁴⁴ Ordinarily Paul used the word *νοῦς* for man when the reasoning faculty was determinative,⁴⁵ when man exercised his judgment and regulated pneumatic experience with a view to practical utility.⁴⁶ If there was any Greek influence or background for this word in the mind of Paul, it is safer to assume a Platonic emphasis rather than a Stoic one as Davies remarks.⁴⁷

The expression *νοῦς Κυρίου* means the understanding of the Lord which includes His thoughts, judgments, measures, plans, etc. The *νοῦς Κυρίου* is the faculty where these originate and are elaborated.⁴⁸ Bultmann holds the opinion that Paul substituted *νοῦς Κυρίου* for *πνεῦμα* because he wanted to confirm his statement about the Spirit of God with the quotation from Isaiah.⁴⁹

⁴³Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, p. 211.

⁴⁴Davies, op. cit., p. 182, n. 6.

⁴⁵Stacey, op. cit., p. 198.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 203.

⁴⁷Davies, op. cit., p. 183.

⁴⁸Meyer, op. cit., p. 59.

⁴⁹Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, p. 207.

This quotation is in the form of a question. The obvious answer is, "No one knows the mind of God." This negative answer which Paul expected fitted right into his plan. He intended that such a negative answer to his question would silence those Corinthians who claimed special spiritual insight outside of Christ. He wanted to humble those in the congregation who were attracted to the incipient Gnosticism.⁵⁰

Paul closed this section with the phrase *ἡμεῖς δὲ νοῦν Χριστοῦ ἔχομεν*. When Paul used the phrase *νοῦν Χριστοῦ*, he was not only thinking of the mental faculties with which Jesus was endowed as a man. He meant that Spirit which dwelt in Christ, who was Himself the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17) and the giver of the Spirit.⁵¹ This was a confession on the part of Paul that Christ was God; for this passage from Isaiah obviously meant YAHWEH.⁵² But why didn't Paul merely quote the *νοῦν Κυρίου* since *Κύριος* meant Christ for him, too? Why did he substitute *Χριστοῦ* for *Κυρίου*?

The answer to this question underlines Paul's specific point of view. *Χριστός* had a central position in Paul's entire presentation. Above everything else, Paul thought of *Χριστός* in a very special way: Paul thought of Christ in the express image of the crucified (1:17,23f., 30; 2:2). Only as the crucified could Christ be preached as the power and wisdom of God.⁵³ In the mind of Paul everything was based upon the

⁵⁰Wilckens, op. cit., p. 95.

⁵¹Craig, op. cit., p. 41.

⁵²Elias Andrews, The Meaning of Christ for Paul (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1949), p. 127.

⁵³Wilckens, op. cit., p. 95.

crucified Christ. Everything he has said concerning the Spirit and the spiritual knowledge of revelation came down to this: The ΠΝΕΥΜΑ was the Spirit of Christ, the Ἐσταυρωμένου (1:23). The Gnostic point of view had to be taken to task and any terminology of value had to be put into the service of the preaching and knowledge of the crucified Christ.⁵⁴

The true ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΟΙ, then, were the possessors of the mind of Christ. For their νοῦς, too, was no different in kind from the νοῦς Χριστοῦ. They had the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9,16). Christ was in them (Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5). The true ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΟΙ were ideally one with Him, as it was true that Christ Himself lived in them (Gal. 2:20); the heart of Christ beat in them (Phil. 1:8); and He spoke in them (2 Cor. 13:3).⁵⁵

Paul could take up all sorts of apparent Gnostic assertions into the far-reaching accommodation of his argument. He never aimed to "quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19). But Paul had to confront the Corinthians who were attracted to incipient Gnosticism with the Spirit of Christ in all His fullness. He had to impress them that the only Spirit which could give real spiritual knowledge was the Spirit of God in Christ. When the Corinthians misused the evidences of the Spirit to establish their own concepts of what was spiritual and wise, Paul had to establish the real specific historical working of the Spirit of Christ. The specific work of Christ was the crucifixion in which He demonstrated the wisdom of men to the point of crisis because he showed the foolishness

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 96.

⁵⁵Meyer, op. cit., p. 60.

of all so-called wisdom of men. True Christian wisdom stood the test only when men's wisdom was shown to be foolish by the work of Christ in His crucifixion.⁵⁶

The converts from paganism came to the knowledge of the true God by the preaching of the work of Christ. This preaching took place only because God in His outgoing love had first known them. There was a real knowledge of God for those who responded to the word of God in Christ. This knowledge of God, even though sufficient, was not yet final or perfect knowledge. In this life knowledge of God was partial knowledge at best (1 Cor. 13:9). It was knowledge by faith, not yet by sight. Knowledge of the mind of Christ was sufficient for daily guidance through faith in Him. Christians had light enough, "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know. . . ." (Eph. 1:17f.). Those who were really guided by God were the truly spiritual.

⁵⁶Wilckens, op. cit., p. 96.

CONCLUSION

Pauline Christianity was an entirely new entity in its essentials. It could not be a reconditioned Judaism; for the Messiah had come to the Jews and they were unable to accept him. Paul often mused over the fact that the inability of Pharisaic Judaism to recognize and receive Christ as the Messiah had prevented the Jewish nation from fulfilling its destiny, but the fact had to be faced. Judaism did not perceive the hour of its visitation, and the hierarchy underlined the failure by taking upon itself full responsibility for the Messiah's death.

On the other hand, Paul's message was not taken over from the Greek culture. The central belief that redemption was obtained through Jesus Christ, who took flesh, suffered, and died, was sheer nonsense to the Hellenistic mind. Greek religion with its anthropomorphic deities and its lack of a sense of sin could make nothing of a crucified Messiah. Greek philosophers would hardly expect to learn anything from an unlettered Jew, executed as a common criminal.

Pauline Christianity was therefore a new creation; not Judaism overhauled, nor a Hellenistic cult purified, and certainly not an uneasy amalgamation of the two. Paul preached Christ crucified, a new fact in the religious world based on his personal encounter with the Lord Himself.

Paul does not disparage human knowledge as such. But he is very certain that it does not bring men to God. That depends upon God's own act of redemption in the cross of Christ. Access to God is not through human philosophy or wisdom but only through the historical revelation of God in Christ.

In presenting this message to his hearers, he framed his words and argument in the thought patterns and words which his listeners would immediately recognize as a religious vocabulary with which they were familiar. Paul did not borrow terms to add some new and unthought of quality or dignity to the Glory of Christ. He sought to reveal to his audience, in the people's own language, that which is essential for true Christian wisdom and spirituality. Paul was complete master over his vocabulary. Under the influence of his own Christian experience of Christ, the true Wisdom and Power of God, he molded and subdued terms even from the apparent religious vocabulary of incipient Gnosticism. He took over the Gnostic framework and terminology while at the same time he fought against what the Gnostics were teaching and doing. This was in keeping with his all-consuming purpose of proclaiming to his hearers the inexhaustible content of the Christian message.

We may conclude, therefore, that Paul did appropriate much of the language current in his pagan environment, and used it as a vehicle of expression to convey to his readers the incomparable greatness of Jesus Christ, the crucified Lord of Glory. There is no reason to believe that this appropriation in any way influenced his Christology.

We rejoice that new manuscript discoveries from time to time may shed new light upon the thought patterns and religious terminology current in Paul's day. In fact, this study must be tentative because so much of what has been discovered already still remains unedited and unpublished. But whatever does come to light can only serve to focus attention upon the uniqueness of God's expressed wisdom in the crucified Christ no matter what terms or framework the chosen apostles used to convey their inspired message.

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