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1 CORINTHIANS 2,6-16 IN LIGHT  
OF GIRARDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY  
PROBING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WISDOM  
AND THE WORD OF THE CROSS

A Girardian reading of the Corinthian correspondence has already been attempted<sup>1</sup>. Girardian themes of rivalry, mimesis, community and victimage have been identified and the explanatory power of the anthropological theory that connects them has been fruitfully employed in interpreting 1 and 2 Cor<sup>2</sup>. Encouraged by these explorations, we shall push them forward as we focus our attention on some of the exegetical problems encountered in 1 Cor 2,6-16.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance R.G. HAMERTON-KELLY. *A Girardian Interpretation of Paul: Rivalry, Mimesis and Victimage in the Corinthian Correspondence*. „Semeia” 33:1985 p. 65-81. See also, by the same author *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross*. Minneapolis 1992 especially pages 81-82.

<sup>2</sup> Hamerton-Kelly has identified and analyzed four Girardian themes in the letters: 1) A community split into factions by rivalry – 1 Cor 1,10 ff; 2 Cor 10-13.2) Calls by the apostle to his readers to imitate him as he imitates Christ – 1 Cor 4,16; 11,1; combined with a lively concern with the nature of sacrifice and the proper attitude towards it – 1 Cor 10,14-22.3) The self-understanding of the apostle as a victim and scapegoat – 1 Cor 2,1-5; 4,9-13; 2 Cor 12,7-10.4) Exposition of the nature of Christian community as the body of the crucified victim – 1 Cor 12; cf. 1,18-2,5. HAMERTON-KELLY. *A Girardian Interpretation of Paul*. p. 67.

1 Cor 2,6-16 has received much scholarly attention<sup>3</sup>. It is not unwarranted<sup>4</sup>. First of all, 2,6-16 stands out from its context. While what precedes it is based on „I – you (pl.)” relation, the subject of the discourse in 2,6-16 is „we”. The following expressions appear exclusively in 2,6-16: τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (2,6.8); πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων (2,7) τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου (2,12)<sup>5</sup>. The fundamental problem with this text, however, is that, in the words of Gregory Sterling, „it offers a wisdom theology immediately after Paul has *apparently* rejected wisdom by juxtaposing it with a theology of the cross (1,18-2,5)”<sup>6</sup>. The various proposals to explain 2,6-16 range from claiming it to be a pre-Pauline or non-Pauline interpolation to seeing in it a reflection of Corinthian wisdom theology only slightly qualified by Paul<sup>7</sup>.

In what follows, we shall limit ourselves to the application of the anthropological model advanced by René Girard to the problem of relation between the discourse of wisdom in 2,6-16 and the discourse of the cross in 1,18-2,5. In particular, we shall propose a Girardian reading of the relationship between, on the one hand, „the word of the cross” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ) – an expression central to the discourse of the cross in 1,18-2,5 – and, on the other hand, wisdom (σοφία) and two terms that qualify it in 2,6-16: mystery (μυστήριον) and spirit (πνεῦμα). We shall not search for the principal Girardian themes in order to see how Paul elaborates them. Rather, we shall search for the principal Pauline themes in order to see how the connection between them can be further illumined with the help of Girard. The structure of our study will reflect this approach. We shall proceed in three steps. After (1) initial articulation of the exegetical and theological content of 2,6-16, and (2) a brief presentation of Girard’s theory, we shall (3) explore its explanatory potential in relation to the studied text. As with any model, the value of Girardian anthropological assumptions will be measured by their ability to illuminate the problems posed by the Pauline text in question.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the bibliography on 2,6-16 in J.A. FITZMYER. *First Corinthians*. New Haven-London 2008 (*The Anchor Yale Bible*. 32) p. 188-191.

<sup>4</sup> E.J. Schnabel states briefly: „Der Abschnitt 2,6-16 gehört zu den schwierigsten Texten innerhalb der Paulusbriefe”. E.J. SCHNABELL. *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*. Wuppertal 2006 p. 160.

<sup>5</sup> See A. ROBERTSON, A. PLUMMER. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*. Edinburgh 1914<sup>2</sup> p. lii.

<sup>6</sup> G.E. STERLING. «Wisdom among the Perfect»: *Creation Traditions in Alexandrian Judaism and Corinthian Christianity*. „Novum Testamentum” 37:1995 nr 4 p. 367.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of scholarship on this text, see P. STUHLMACHER. *The Hermeneutical Significance of 1 Cor 2:6-16*. In: *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament*. Ed. G.F. Hawthorne, O. Betz. Grand Rapids MI: Tübingen 1987 p. 328-32.

## I. EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTENT OF 1 COR 2,6-16

Any analysis of the theological content of 1 Cor 2,6-16 must respect the literary configuration of the entire macro unit of 1 Cor 1-4 into which 2,6-16 is inserted. It is the literary composition of the whole that governs and determines the logical function of the singular units within that whole. This function, in turn, determines the theological conclusions to be drawn from the text.

### 1. LITERARY DESIGN OF 1 COR 1-4

Drawing on the results of the in-depth analysis conducted by M.T. Giordano<sup>8</sup>, we shall consider 1 Cor 1-4 to be a rhetorical discourse<sup>9</sup>. To be exact, 1-4 follows a model which, in accordance with the literary norms produced and promulgated by the ancient rhetoric, aims at finding and forming arguments (*inventio*), and setting them together into an organic whole (*dispositio*), with the help of the appropriate figures of speech and thought (*elocutio*). *Dispositio*, that is, the setting together, ordering and conjoining of the arguments into an organic structure must itself follow at least two necessary steps: the proposition (*propositio*), which announces that which is to be demonstrated, and the demonstration (*demonstratio*), that is, the fleshing out of the proposition. The first question we need to ask then is: what is the *propositio*, which Paul is to argue for?

The *propositio* which Paul sets out to expound appears in 1,18: 'Ο λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστίν, τοῖς δὲ σωζομένοις ἡμῖν δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστίν. („For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”). It is the development of the subsequent *demonstratio* that confirms our identification of *propositio* with 1,18. In the very next verse Paul presents a scriptural proof in direct connection – causal γάρ – with the idea expressed in *propositio*. He states: „For it is written...” (γέγραπται γάρ). We do not find such a connection when we try, with some scholars, to see Paul's admonition against the divisions in community expressed in 1,10 as *propositio* at the head of the entire discourse in 1,10-4,21. What follows the supposed *propositio* of 1,10 does not have a causal value in relation to 1,10. Instead, it simply offers a description of the circumstances („divisions”) in the

<sup>8</sup> M.T. GIORDANO. *La parola della croce: L'itinerario paradossale della sapienza divina in 1 Cor 1,18-3,4*. Roma 2010.

<sup>9</sup> For a presentation and evaluation of other diverse proposals regarding the identification of the literary model at work in 1-4 as thematic, midrashic, or epistolary, see GIORDANO. *La parola della croce*. p. 14-29. For a presentation and evaluation of the proposals of the oral rhetorical models, see p. 29-40.

community: ἐδηλώθη γάρ μοι περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί μου, ὑπὸ τῶν Χλόης ὅτι ἔριδες ἐν ὑμῖν εἰσιν. The γάρ here serves as a transition<sup>10</sup>.

Verses 1,10-17 should be identified as an *exordium* (introduction). They introduce the problems of divisions in the community. Paul will have to address these problems. But he is not going to address them right away. His first step consists of taking a critical distance from the concrete situation in Corinth. This distancing allows him to tackle the problems at their most fundamental level. Paul sets off a series of arguments by which he will bring about a correct understanding of Christ – or to be exact, of the cross of Christ – as the proper ground from which the solution to the problems of the community can be drawn. 1,18-4,21 is dedicated to that end, that is, to the forming of Christological foundations.

Verse 1,17b serves as *partitio*, that is, it draws up the plan according to which the discourse will develop: (εὐαγγελίζεσθαι) οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου, which announces the theo-christological and pneumatological discourse of 1,19-2,5 and 2,6-16 respectively, and ἵνα μὴ κενωθῆ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, which announces the theo-christological discourse of 1,18-2,5. Combined with the *propositio* of 1,18 it announces the word of the cross as the foundational criterion, which frustrates worldly wisdom and expresses the divine power.

As we have already mentioned, in 1,19 Paul begins to offer arguments in support of the thesis announced in 1,18. The following sequence of argumentation can be identified in 1,19-2,5:

- a) 1,19-25: as confirmed by the authority of the Scripture (1,19-20), human wisdom is destined to fail. What is asserted over against the wisdom of the world is the foolishness of the proclamation of Christ crucified.
- b) 1,26-31: an *exemplum* of believers in Corinth serves as a proof of how worldly standards are frustrated by God's designs.
- c) 2,1-5: an *exemplum* of Paul's conduct in Corinth proves that God's power is demonstrated, against the human standards of wisdom, through Paul's congruence with Christ crucified.

We observe now how the *propositio* of 1,18 becomes fleshed out and concretized in light of argumentation conducted in 1,19-2,5. The point of departure, as demonstrated by the authority of the Scripture, is God's own design according to which human wisdom is doomed to fail. This failure is actualized in the proclamation of Christ crucified who is foolishness to the wise of this world but the power of God to those who believe in Him. Paradoxically, the foolishness of the cross, and the failure of the human wisdom<sup>11</sup> that it provokes, is itself an expression of the divine wisdom by which those who believe are saved.

<sup>10</sup> See GIORDANO. *La parola della croce*. p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> The Greek appreciation of the idea of wisdom is well known. For the discussion of the Jewish sapiential speculations as the background to 1 Cor 1-4, see M.D. GOULDER. *Sophia in 1 Corinthians*.

The next step in the chain of argumentation comes in the unit under our consideration: 2,6-16. The first thing to notice about the discourse developed in 2,6-16 is that it shifts from Christological to pneumatological argumentation and that it further elaborates the idea of divine wisdom with the help of categories of mystery (μυστήριον) and spirit (πνεῦμα). Before we focus our attention on 2,6-16 and analyze it in more detail let us briefly sketch the rest of rhetorical design behind 1 Cor 1-4.

The pneumatological argumentation of 2,6-16 continues in 3,1-4 with an *exemplum* of the Corinthian community: Paul was unable to teach divine wisdom to the Corinthians because of their persistence in a merely human way of thinking. He could not talk to them as to spiritual people (ὡς πνευματικοῖς) but only as to people of the flesh (ἀλλ' ὡς σαρκίνοις).

In 3,5-21 the argumentation takes on an ecclesiological character. 3,5 serves as a *propositio*, which aims at demonstrating the function of the apostles within the ecclesial community. This *propositio* is elaborated in 6-9 and 9-17 with the help of images connected with the activities of planting and building, respectively. Paul demonstrates here that the apostles are just servants used by God for the sake of the community.

The whole argumentation is summarized in 3,18-23. As *peroratio*, this unit recapitulates the main ideas of the preceding argumentation: 3,19 recalls the theocristological arguments of 1,19-30; and 3,22 recalls the ecclesiological discourse of 3,5-6. The use of imperatives stresses the need for personal application of the theological contents elaborated by Paul, in particular, the paradoxical need to become foolish in order to become wise. 3,21-23 serves as an emotionally charged conclusion.

The final word of the discourse comes in the fourth chapter (4,1-21). Here Paul again resorts to a personal example of himself and his collaborators. Like a good teacher, he demonstrates how the paradoxical demands of divine wisdom are practiced in a concrete human existence.

Before we move to analyze 2,6-16, let us summarize our findings. From the point of view of the rhetorical discourse that governs 1 Cor 1-4, two units headed by two *propositiones* can be distinguished: 1,18-3,4 and 3,5-17. The text under our investigation (2,6-16) makes part of the first unit. Furthermore, the rhetorical analysis allows us to see that within the first unit (1,18-3,4), the argumentation in support of the *propositio* of 1,18 is advanced in two interrelated steps: *refutatio* and *confirmatio*. The *refutatio* encompasses verses 1,19-2,5. It is a *refutatio* of worldly wisdom: arguments presented in this section constitute a critique of the pretenses of the worldly σοφία from the point of view of both μωρία and, at the same time, δύναμις οφ τηε λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ. The *confirmatio* (2,6-3,4) gives a positive con-

tent to the idea of divine σοφία through the use of pneumatological categories. Let us now turn our attention to the development of *confirmatio* in 2,6-16.

## 2. LITERARY DESIGN AND THEOLOGICAL CONTENT OF 2,6-16

The section opens (2,6a) with a stylistic figure of *expolitio*. Such a figure of thought consists of continually treating the same subject but from different points of view. In our case, the subject continues to be σοφία. The word σοφία, which has just appeared three times (v. 1, v. 4, v. 5) in the first five verses of the second chapter, is now taken up again in 2,6a. The adversative use of δὲ, however, announces the change of perspective: Σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις „Yet among the perfect we do speak of wisdom.” It is no longer the worldly wisdom but rather the divine wisdom, identified already in 1,23-24 with Christ crucified (Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον θεοῦ σοφίαν) and again in 1,30 with Christ Jesus. This notion of divine wisdom is now to be given an additional qualification, beyond the already affirmed identification with Christ crucified. It will be further qualified by mystery (μυστήριον)<sup>12</sup> and spirit (πνεῦμα).

The new perspective on wisdom announced by *expolitio* marks the passage from *refutatio* to *confirmatio*. The presentation proceeds by way of another figure of thought, namely, *correctio*. It is a figure of thought by which one word is replaced by another, more adequate word. Four *correctiones* are applied (2,6-7.8-9.12.13)<sup>13</sup>,

<sup>12</sup> For the Old Testament background of the connection between *musth,rion* and *sofi,a*, see J.-N. ALETTI. *Sagesse et mystère chez Paul. Réflexions sur le rapprochement de deux champs lexicographiques*. In: *La sagesse biblique. De l'Ancien au Nouveau Testament*. ACFEB. Paris 1995 p. 369-372. Aletti points out an interesting affinity between Pauline uses of mystery and wisdom and Dan 2. In both Dan 2 and Paul, wisdom and mystery are characterized in a similar way. Both wisdom and mystery have their source in God and appear in analogical situations: they manifest themselves through weakness, in unexpected ways, and to those who are poor and faithful, never to those who consider themselves the wise of this world. See, p. 372.

<sup>13</sup> See: First *correctio*:

2,6a σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν  
2,6b σοφίαν οὐ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου  
2,6a ἀλλὰ θεοῦ σοφίαν ἐν μυστηρίῳ

Second *correctio*:

2,8 ἢν οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἔγνωκεν  
2,9 ἀλλὰ καθὼς γέγραπται· ἃ ὀφθαλμὸς οὐκ εἶδεν...

Third *correctio*:

2,12 ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κόσμου ἐλάβομεν  
2,12 ἀλλὰ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ

Fourth *correctio*:

2,13 οὐκ ἐν διδακτοῖς ἀνθρωπίνης σοφίας λόγους  
2,13 ἀλλ' ἐν διδακτοῖς πνεύματος

structuring the whole unit and marking the semantic shifts from the definition of wisdom, through the role of the spirit, to its addressees. The following flow of argumentation emerges:

- a) 2,6-9 the limits of the concept of wisdom
- b) 2,10-12 the role of *pneuma*
- c) 2,13-16 the addressees

Let us briefly unpack the content of each of these steps.

#### a. *The concept of wisdom*

The tension between those who are being saved (*σωζόμενοι*) and those who are perishing (*ἀπολλύμενοι*), first stated in the *propositio*, then restated as the tension between *πιστεύοντες* (in 1,21b) and those who did not recognize God through wisdom (in 1,21a), continues to undergird the discourse. It is now conceived as the tension between the mature (*τέλειοι*) and the rulers of this age (*ἄρχοντες*). The wisdom of the mature Christians (*τέλειοι*), however, is not simply a counterpart of the worldly wisdom (*σοφία τοῦ κόσμου* in 1,20; *σοφία ἀνθρώπων* in 2,5). Rather, the wisdom proclaimed among the mature is of an altogether different, transcendent nature. This wisdom is qualified by a prepositional phrase „in mystery” (*ἐν μυστηρίῳ*)<sup>14</sup>. Mystery is a category that denotes unfathomable realities, never to be deduced by the powers of the human mind, and never to be reduced to human pre-conceptions; realities that can only be known when revealed. The scriptural quotation in 2,9 confirms the human inability to fabricate such mysterious wisdom.

This wisdom is what the rulers of this age have failed to know. As a consequence, they crucified the Lord of glory (2,8). The rulers were unable to recognize divine ways made manifest in the crucified Lord of glory. The reason for their failure is indicated in the scriptural quotation in 2,9. The *ἄρχοντες* are opposed to those who love God and who are thus capable of recognizing divine ways. The second *correctio* stresses love as the mode of enabling such knowledge.

#### b. *The role of spirit*

The *τέλειοι*, who love God, come to know God's wisdom (they recognize Christ crucified as a revelation of that wisdom) through connaturality – they receive God's Spirit. The transcendent reality (divine wisdom) is cognized by transcendent means (Spirit). The preaching of the Christ crucified is a gift which, to be re-

<sup>14</sup> For explanation of why *ἐν μυστηρίῳ* qualifies *θεοῦ σοφίαν* and not the verb *λαλοῦμεν*, see GIORDANO. *La parola della croce*. p. 161.

ceived, requires another gift, that of the Spirit. Christ crucified is then understood as the manifestation of the deepest truth (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ) about God.

c. *The addresses*

The spiritual (πνευματικοί) are the ones who have received the gift of the Spirit. They are the τέλειοι. The ψυχικοί are the ἄρχοντες incapable of recognizing divine ways. The gift of the Spirit enables the recognition of truth but also its communication among the perfect (2,12). The natural man will always fail to understand the ways of God (2,14). The spiritual man, on the other hand, is able to judge everything (2,15). The context, and in particular the scriptural quotation in 2,16, indicates that the ability to judge is limited to „the depths of God,” that is, to the divine salvific design in Christ crucified<sup>15</sup>.

Let us stress again that the divine wisdom is not a counterpart of the wisdom of the world. It is of a different, transcendent order. The change of perspective enacted by the *expolitio* spirals up the movement of argumentation to the level of signifying a transcendent reality. Both μυστήριον and πνεῦμα evoke the distinct aspects of that transcendence. Mystery refers to the external dimension of transcendence: from the point of view of the history of salvation, the cross of Christ represents a new, that is, transcendent to everything that came before, revelation of God's plan. Spirit, on the other hand, represents the inner dimension of transcendence: from the point of view of human inner capacities, something from the outside, transcendent to human being, must aid humans in appropriating the meaning of the cross of Christ.

One more general observation is of value here. The familiar „I – you (pl.)” tone of the discourse in 1,10-17 is followed by a reflection general in tone about the word of the cross in 1,18-31. Similarly, the personal tone of 2,1-5 is followed by a general discourse on wisdom in 2,6-16. The personal examples of the Corinthians, Paul and the apostles dominate the discourse in 3,1-4,21. It follows that the discourse of the cross (1,18-31), together with the discourse of the wisdom (2,6-16), appear as two high peaks, composed in the tone of general reflection, and surrounded by the valleys fashioned of personal tone discourse<sup>16</sup>. In this sinusoidal movement of the tone of argumentation, its two peaks (discourse of the cross and discourse about wisdom) parallel the two major components (*refutatio* and *confirmatio*) already discerned at the logical-rhetorical level of the development of argumentation. To discern other meaningful connections between „the word of the cross” (1,18-2,5) and the divine wisdom (2,6-16), we shall utilize the anthro-

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem.* p. 173.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem.* p. 185-186.

ological insights generated within Girard's theory. First, however, let us present a general outline of the Girardian anthropological model.

## II. GIRARDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY<sup>17</sup>

An anthropological insight at the basis of Girard's theory has to do with the mimetic nature of human desire. Inasmuch as we are humans, our desires do not have a fixed object. They can shift and be transferred from one object to another. The way our desire redirects itself is governed by imitation. We find objects desirable only because other people desire them. Our desire has a mimetic nature. There would be no human culture without mimesis. We learn how to act in society only because we are capable of copying the thoughts and desires modeled to us by others. The mimetic nature of desire is a basic anthropological fact.

The mimetic nature of desire, which stands at the basis of our human culture, stands also at the basis of human conflicts. Mimesis does not have to necessarily lead to conflicts but, as a matter of fact, it often does. Two individuals desiring the same object can end up perceiving each other as rivals. In the heat of conflict, the object of desire recedes and the rivals become completely preoccupied with each other. If left unchecked, the heightening of their mutual rivalry progresses to the point of violence. If enough people are involved in a mimetic conflict, tension and aggression can build to the extent of putting the stability of the whole society at risk.

According to Girard, in archaic societies the danger of destabilization caused by the heightening of mimetic rivalry was miraculously avoided by the scapegoat mechanism. The scapegoat mechanism transforms random violence into unanimous violence directed against one victim. The social conflict triggered by mimetic rivalry focuses itself on one person. The violence against that person unites rather than divides the group, bringing the immediate relief of peace. Community and culture again become possible at the cost of the sacrificed victim.

Because of its stabilizing effect, the killing of the scapegoat was seen as a good and life-giving activity. It became re-acted in sacrificial rituals meant to perpetuate the positive, stabilizing effect of violent contagion of all against one. It was the scapegoat mechanism itself that was responsible for the violence that stabilized society. The violent workings of this mechanism were never perceived. No one felt morally abhorred by killing an innocent victim. On the contrary, in the eyes of the

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<sup>17</sup> The structure of our brief presentation of the vast theory of Girard follows the argumentative steps taken by A. MARR in his *Violence and the Kingdom of God: Introducing the Anthropology of René Girard*. „Anglican Theological Review” 80:1998 nr 4 p. 590-603. Marr's article offers a basic English language bibliography of the major works of Girard and his main commentators on p. 602-603.

angry mob, the victim appeared responsible for all the chaos. A double transference took place. First of all, the guilt was always transferred onto the victim. And secondly, once the pacifying effects of the death of the victim were felt, the victim was given a sacred status. A religious narrative (myth) further concealed the truth about the scapegoat mechanism, sacralizing both the victim and the sacrificial rituals. The religious aura surrounding the ritual sent a clear theological message: the gods were on the side of the crowd, not of the victim. In archaic religions, violence was sacred. The lynching of the victim was never seen for what it was.

The Hebrew Bible, according to Girard, began to unmask the true nature of violence, even though the Bible was not completely free from the old projection of human violence on God. Historically, the hidden mechanism of sacrifice has been completely unmasked only in one instance: in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus was a result of mimetic contagion, that is, of the mob violence in need of a solution to the social unrest in Jerusalem. Collective effort to kill Jesus was so strong that even Peter was afraid to resist it and ended up denying Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus, however, made clear that God was not on the side of the violent perpetrators. It is the impact of resurrection that explains how the small group of the followers of Jesus would be bold enough to oppose the violent majority and proclaim the innocence of the victim. The entire gospel story is proclaimed from the point of view of an innocent victim. Or more exactly, the entire gospel story is a proclamation of the radical innocence of Jesus. Let us elaborate briefly this last statement.

In his *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*<sup>18</sup>, Girard makes an interesting observation regarding the last one of the Ten Commandments. While the prohibitions such as „you shall not kill,” „you shall not commit adultery,” „you shall not steal,” and „you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” have to do with violent acts, the last commandment does not prohibit an act but a desire: „You shall not covet the house of your neighbor. You shall not covet the wife of your neighbor, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything that belongs to him” (Ex 20,17). Thus the Hebrew Bible demonstrates awareness of the fact that the harmony and even survival of human communities demands prohibition, not just of different types of violent acts, but more importantly of the interior violent desires that engender them. From the point of view of this Biblical awareness of the nature of desire, Jesus appears as someone who offers a new way out of the dangerous world of mimetic rivalries. Instead of imposing additional prohibitions, he offers a positive model to imitate. It is a new pattern of desire, devoid of rivalry and competition. Paradoxically, Jesus’ own desire is not his very own. Unlike modern-day gurus, Girard observes, Jesus does not claim to obey only his own desire. Rather,

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<sup>18</sup> R. GIRARD. *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. Translated, with a Foreword by J.G. Williams. New York 2001 p. 7-18. Originally published as *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair*. Paris 1999.

his desire is to be like his Father. Jesus is the perfect imitator of God the Father in goodness, meekness, forgiveness and refusal to enter the violent game of human mimetic rivalry. Jesus embodies and initiates a new pattern of desire. He is innocent in the sense of being uncontaminated by mimetic rivalry.

The cross of Christ, for Girard, unmasks the mechanisms of violence. It reveals the true nature of the scapegoat mechanism, denounces the mimetic rivalry underneath it, and offers a way out of it through the new pattern of desire modeled by Jesus, the perfect imitator of the Father; the Father who is finally seen as untainted by our human violent projections.

### III. WISDOM AND WORD OF THE CROSS

Let us return now to the theological content of 1 Cor 2,6-16 and analyze the connections between wisdom and the word of the cross, this time with the help of Girardian insights. The following assertions now acquire new grounding:

1. *Wisdom as inseparable from the word of the cross.* Literary analysis revealed that the „word of the cross” from the *propositio* must be retained as the center of argumentation in both of its structural phases, namely, that of *refutatio* and of *confirmatio*. Wisdom (announced in *confirmatio*) cannot be separated from the word of the cross. Thanks to Girard we see the ground of the connection between the word of the cross and wisdom in the double function of the cross. The wisdom of the world, which operates according to the logic of mimetic rivalry, is revealed by the cross for what it truly is, collective violence against an innocent victim further concealed with an aura of sacredness. The cross, inasmuch as it reveals the truth about the scapegoat mechanism, makes it ineffectual. The worldly wisdom’s claim to sacredness is just a pretense. The event of the cross is the true *refutatio* of the worldly wisdom<sup>19</sup>. At the same time, the cross offers a positive message: it models a new pattern of desire<sup>20</sup>, which constitutes the way out of the mimetic rivalry. The cross of Christ is the true *confirmatio* of the di-

<sup>19</sup> Hamerton-Kelly, while analyzing the Pauline understanding of the cross, describes its function as that of deconstruction. He states: „The Cross is not a sacrificial mechanism but the deconstruction of sacrifice [...]. It is a deconstruction rather than a destruction, because it leaves the sacrificial structures in place while exposing them for what they are and thereby enabling us to withdraw credibility and allegiance from them”. HAMERTON-KELLY. *Sacred Violence*. p. 60.

<sup>20</sup> Zumstein argues that the discourse of the cross establishes a new semantic field to discuss the death of Jesus, a field open to metaphorical dimensions and thus different from the one used by the synoptics, for whom the cross was exclusively an instrument of torture. In Girardian reading, this metaphorical dimension is understood as the new pattern of desire. See J. ZUMSTEIN. *La croix comme principe de constitution de la théologie paulinienne*. In: *Paul, une théologie en construction*. Ed. A. Dettwiler, J.D. Kaestli, D. Marguerat. Genève 2004 p. 302. Moreover, since generally in speaking about the cross Paul does not stress the fact of human co-involvement in crucifixion but rather

- vine way out of violence. It is precisely by virtue of establishing the new pattern of desire that the violent workings of the old pattern can be refuted. The two logical functions of refuting the old pattern and confirming the new one are inseparable. The positive content of the notion of wisdom announced in 2,6-16 is not something separate from or in addition to the word of the cross. Rather, the positive content of the notion of wisdom is at the same time the positive content of the word of the cross. Another way of articulating this is by saying that, from the point of view of the process of cognition by which the subject comes to know both the word of the cross and the wisdom, wisdom is not a new content of the word of the cross but a higher understanding of the word of the cross.
2. *Psyche and pneuma as distinct and opposed.* Refuting and confirming, as the two functions of the word of the cross, have their correlates in the architecture of the self. *Psyche* stands for the old and *pneuma* for the new pattern of desire. The former is to be refuted; the latter is to be confirmed. According to Theissen, opposition between them is something new. It is difficult to find sources for it in the Hebrew Bible or Hellenistic Judaism<sup>21</sup>. With Girard, we see that the opposition between *psyche* and *pneuma*, in the sense in which it is used by Paul, must be something new. In other words, this kind of opposition can appear only after the cross. The false pretenses of the old pattern of desire can be unmasked only by the revelation of the new pattern. *Psyche* can be seen for what it is only from the point of view of *pneuma*.
  3. *Mystery as a transcendent dimension of wisdom.* We have said before that μυστήριον characterizes wisdom as transcendent. From the point of view of the history of salvation, this transcendence means that the cross of Christ represents a new, that is, transcendent to everything that came before, revelation of God's plan; from the point of view of human capacities to know, μυστήριον refers to unfathomable realities that can be known only when revealed. Girardian understanding of crucifixion illuminates this double meaning of transcendence of wisdom evoked by the category of mystery. Functioning within the mechanism of mimetic rivalry one cannot step out of it on his own; one must be given a transcendent model, a model from outside the realm of mimetic rivalry. Jesus is such

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speaks of crucifixion in terms of divine initiative motivated by love, this aspect of the cross – the revelation of the new pattern of desire, that is, the revelation of love – is of primary importance.

<sup>21</sup> G. THEISSEN. *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*. Tr. J.P. Galvin. Edinburgh 1987 p. 361. Originally published as *Psychologische Aspekte paulinischer Theologie*. Göttingen 1983. Theissen admits that the opposition of psychic and pneumatic „has resisted derivation from the history of the tradition” p. 361. He nevertheless tries to identify the background of this opposition. He concludes that „the Pauline opposition of *pneumatikos* and *psychikos* was prepared by the devaluation of the psyche in the Roman-Hellenistic period, derives primarily from reflection on pneumatic-ecstatic experience in early Christianity, and was brought secondarily into contact with Gen. 2:7. It is to be noted that Paul goes beyond all three recognizable traditions” p. 364.

a model. His is not just a new (another) pattern of desire; his is rather a radically new, completely different pattern of desire. It cannot be fathomed by humans locked in the old pattern of mimetic rivalry. It has to be revealed, and only then can it be followed. Since we all are immersed in the mimetic rivalry (*psyche*), only intervention of something transcendent to us (*pneuma*) can cause an attraction in us to this new model. In this sense, the category of mystery inevitably evokes the category of *pneuma*.

4. *Pneuma as an interior transcendence.* Jesus is not just another model of desire; he is a completely different model of desire, a radically new pattern. By virtue of the new pattern of desire, Jesus reveals the violent workings of the old pattern. From the point of view of the cognitional processes, as the self grasps the old pattern, it distances itself from it. One cannot grasp the old pattern from within the old pattern. The self must acquire a new standpoint from within which to perceive and refute the old self. This new center of the self represents, from the point of view of the old self, a transcendent dimension within the self. This new center is a realm of the spirit<sup>22</sup>. What is more, the cross of Christ does not represent a new object of desire but a new way of desiring. In this sense, it is not something that can be grasped like an object, but rather something one comes to know by conforming oneself to it. This reversal of the natural direction of cognition from grasping to being grasped, indicates that the true agent of change is not the self, but the spirit who transforms the self.
5. *Progressive growth in wisdom.* Our analysis of the literary design of 1 Cor 1-4 has revealed that the pneumatological argumentation of 2,6-16 continues in 3,1-4 with an *exemplum* of the Corinthian community: Paul was unable to teach the divine wisdom to the Corinthians because of their persistence in the merely human way of thinking. He could not talk to them as to spiritual people (ὡς πνευματικοῖς), but only as to people of the flesh (ἀλλ' ὡς σαρκίνοις). In 3,3 Paul names jealousy and strife – two types of behavior typical of mimetic rivalry – as reasons for which the Corinthians are still of the flesh and not spiritual. It appears that even though the Corinthians have been exposed to the symbol of the cross, they have not yet grasped its meaning. The Girardian model explains the progressive character of the growth in wisdom. While the unmasking of the true nature of the scapegoat mechanism and the refutation of the sacred status of violence are enacted in the proclamation of the cross (the initial kerygma), the acquisition of true wisdom is a matter of imitating Jesus. The imitation,

<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Theissen identifies and discusses two kinds of dynamic in Pauline anthropology: transformative- and depth-dynamic. Transformation of the old self involves the forming of the new, deeper self. See G. THEISSEN. *Erleben und Verhalten der ersten Christen. Eine Psychologie des Urchristentums*. München 2007 p. 76-102.

by its nature, is a process of conforming one's entire existence to the model of Christ. Wisdom is not a matter of a single visual experience („eye has not seen” 2,9), but of an attitude of love („what God has prepared for those who love him” 2,9), which is a conformation of our way of desiring to the way modeled to us by Christ.

### *Conclusion*

To sum up our analysis, Girard's theory has proved helpful in illuminating the logic of Pauline argumentation. Despite the obvious limitations of our study – we have not considered the whole of Pauline theology of the cross, nor have we utilized all the anthropological facts implied by Girard's model – we feel justified in saying that the Girardian discourse of desire gives a new grounding to the Pauline use of such theologically complex terms as the word of the cross, wisdom, mystery and spirit. The meaningfulness of this grounding is a reflection of the shift toward the inner self that characterizes our modern construction of personal identity: we find explanations meaningful that speak the language of „the inwardness of radical reflexivity”<sup>23</sup>. Being able to transpose Pauline theological language into our modern interior language of desire seems to be a fruitful exercise. What is more, the meaningfulness of Girardian grounding reinforces the conclusion reached at the level of rhetorical analysis of the text, namely, that 2,6-16 fits well into the context of 1 Cor 1-4, that it constitutes an organic part of the argumentation, and that it helps to give fuller content to the *propositio* of 1,18.

## 1 KOR 2,6-16 W ŚWIETLE ANTROPOLOGII GIRARDA PROBLEM RELACJI MIĘDZY MĄDROŚCIĄ A NAUKĄ KRZYŻA

### Streszczenie

Antropologia René Girarda rzuca nowe światło na stare egzegetyczne problemy. Jednym z takich problemów jest relacja pomiędzy Pawłowym dyskursem na temat mądrości w 1 Kor 2,6-16 a poprzedzającym go dyskursem na temat krzyża w 1 Kor 1,18-2,5. W zaprezentowanej analizie tych, pozornie sprzecznych ze sobą, dyskursów nie chodzi o poszukiwanie tematów charakterystycznych dla Girarda w celu pokazania, jak posługuje się nimi św. Paweł. Chodzi raczej o wyłuskanie zasadniczych koncepcji Pawłowych po to, by móc lepiej zrozumieć ich spójność za pomocą modelu antropologicznego René Girarda.

<sup>23</sup> C. TAYLOR. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge 1989 p. 131.

**Słowa kluczowe:** René Girard, 1 List do Koryntian, teologia św. Pawła, teologia biblijna, teologia Krzyża.

**Key words:** René Girard, 2 Corinthians, theology of St. Paul, biblical theology, theology of the Cross.