

BEFORE THE TEACHERS OF ISRAEL AND THE SAGES OF GREECE:
LUKE-ACTS AS A PRECURSOR OF THE CONJUNCTION OF BIBLICAL
FAITH AND HELLENISTIC EDUCATION

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1. *The "Wiser Foolishness" of God. The Dialectic of Negating and
Surpassing Wisdom in Early Christianity*

From its origins, Christianity was something like an educational movement, but not in the elite sense of Greek *paideia*. Its founder, Jesus of Nazareth, who is constantly called "teacher," was a construction worker (Mk 6,3), his disciples also came from the same class (cf. Mk 1:16–20 par.) and were, according to the testimony of Acts, ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοι . . . καὶ ἰδιῶται (Acts 4,13). The content of Jesus' message was the dawn of the kingdom of God, attested in word and deed (Mk 1:15 par.), and this proclamation, with all its charismatic immediacy, was also levelled at established forms of religiosity. If the purification of the Temple (Mk 11:15–17 par.) shows Jesus' aloofness from cult, then his disputes with scribes exhibit his critical attitude towards the religious educational elite of his time. In his "Thanksgiving to the Father," handed down by the Q document, Jesus expressly praises the God he calls 'Father' precisely because

thou hast hidden this from the wise and intelligent and hast revealed it to the infants. Yea, Father, for thus has it pleased Thee (Mt 11:25 par. Lk 10:24).

The rejection of Jesus by the cultured and the acceptance he found among simple people is traced back directly to God's "discrete decision" (εὐδοκία); the antithesis to the "wise and intelligent" thus becomes a downright characteristic of Jesuan teaching. Paul can draw out this line even further regarding the end of Jesus' life in death, as he develops his theology of the Cross in explicit antithesis to the "wisdom of the world":

The word of the Cross is for those, who perish, foolishness; for us, however, who are saved, it is a power of God. For it is written: I shall destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of those who understand I shall render vain. Where is a wise man? . . . Has not God turned the wisdom of this world into foolishness? (I Cor. 1:18–21).

Regarding the community, the Apostle can once more explicitly claim:

Look upon your calling, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, . . . but God has chosen the foolish of the world so that he may shame those who are wise (I Cor. 1:26–27).

Yet precisely the concept of wisdom, which is also familiar from the Biblical tradition, precludes mere negation and presses for a closer explication, thus also preparing an opening for Hellenistic education and culture. This is already visible in the two passages quoted above, which apparently contain an outright rejection of wisdom of any kind. If they are placed in their context, it becomes conspicuous that the negation of wisdom is but one aspect of an endeavour to surpass it, which in turn employs the concept of wisdom, now in a perfectly positive way. Thus, the apostle stresses in one and the same breath that the crucified Christ whom he proclaims may well be foolishness for the Greeks and a scandal for the Jews, but for the elect, Jewish as well as Greek, the same Christ is God's Power and God's Wisdom (I Cor. 1:24), for, as the apostle declares,

the foolishness of God is wiser than men (I Cor. 1:25).

A very similar dialectic of negational surpassing is also shown in that marked Christological passage found in Matthew: the "Thanksgiving" that the Father has concealed those things from the wise and revealed them to the infants is framed by pointed identifications of Jesus with Wisdom. Thus, in verse 19, Jesus counters the criticism leveled at him by the people with the statement that

Wisdom shall be justified by her own works,

which in the context of the gospel can only refer to Jesus.¹ Furthermore, the *Jubelruf* is followed in verse 28ff by the "Comfort for the Heavy-Laden," which as far as tradition history is concerned, goes back to an invitation of Wisdom; Jesus calls out "an der Stelle der Weisheit."² The Jesus, who praises his Father for concealing His revelation in the Son³ from the wise and intelligent and revealing it to the infants, is simultaneously identified here with divine Wisdom and thus surpasses even Salomo, the Jewish sage

¹ Cf. Gnllka 1986, 425. The evangelist enhanced this Christological connection through the redactionally inserted reference to the deeds that refer back to the "deeds of the Christ" in Mt 11:2.

² Luz 2007, 218.

³ That is at least what the demonstrative pronoun in verse 25 refers to in its present context, whatever its original meaning might have been. Cf. Gnllka 1986, 435.