In the mid-third century of the Christian era Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, journeyed well over two hundred miles from his diocese in an attempt to restore peace to a region of Egypt where 'schisms and defections of whole churches had taken place' (Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica VII.24.6). The cause of the disruption was a local bishop's book which seemed to prove 'that the kingdom of Christ will be on earth' (H.E. VII.24.4). Three long days of discussion ensued with Dionysius and his non-chiliastic views eventually prevailing. It is not known whether in this dispute Dionysius's chiliastic brethren appealed for support to I Cor. 15:23-28, a text in which Paul speaks of a finite period of Christ's reign culminating in the handing over of that kingdom to God the Father—previous usage by patristic authors leaves only doubts.¹ Had the symposium been held sixteen or seventeen centuries later, however, there is no doubt that this text would have played a key role, and the outcome might well have been different. Since de Wette advocated it in 1841, a number of prominent, modern scholars have recognized an earthly Zwischenreich in this passage, including Grimm, Schmiedel, Beyschlag, Godet, Bousset, J. Weiß,

¹ In the 200 years that had elapsed since Paul's writing of the words no Christian on record seems to have cited these verses as if they spoke of an earthly kingdom, though many Christians believed there would be one. Irenaeus, it is true, adduces them at the end of his defence of the earthly millennium (Against Heresies V.36.2), but his use of them is anything but perspicuous; the destruction of death from 15:26 has apparently occurred before the millennium, and this would accord with his use of this passage elsewhere (A.H. III.23.7; IV.6.7; Proof of the Apostolic Preaching 52). Hippolytus in Against Noetus 6, 17 and Tertullian in Against Praxeas 4, 17, for example, derive from this passage proof of Christ's present regency over all things.
Holtzmann, Lietzmann, Schweitzer, Schlatter, and Wendland. This view has most recently been defended by L. Joseph Kreitzer in the published version of his University of London Ph. D. dissertation.

Was it or was it not Paul’s intention to deliver in this part of his great letter an outline of future events which would give expression to the belief in a transitional, earthly kingdom of Christ between the parousia and ‘the end’?

The following examination of Paul’s understanding of Christ’s kingdom in I Cor. 15:20-28 will first focus upon the literary structure of Paul’s argument, before proceeding to an exposition of his train of thought with an eye on this perennially debated topic.

I. Structure of the Argument

The boundaries of the paragraph vv.20-28 are clearly marked by the movements of Paul’s thought. He has fulminated in vv.12-19 against the position of some at Corinth who say ‘that there is no resurrection of the dead’. He complains of the absurdity of such a position held in full view of the fact that Christ has risen from the

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