Toward Better Understanding of the "Christ's Party" in the First Epistle to the Corinthians

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In I Cor. 1, 12 appear four factional statements, whose meanings can be clarified without difficulty when the phrase, "I belong to Christ," is explained. Of old F. C. Baur believed to be able to detect, behind this statement, a Judaistic Christian circle which formed with Cephas' Party, also Judaistic, a unified line of fighting against the heathenish Christian circles, i.e. Apolos' and Paul's Parties.

The influences of F. C. Baur's thesis remain even at present. But his thesis has two basic difficulties; a) the willful reduction of the four statements into two, b) the proofless identification of the Christ's Party with the Judaistic and legalistic Jewish Christians. The merit of Baur's position consists in his understanding of Paul's conflict as a conflict with only one unified front.

A more plausible and, in consequence, a more predominant explanation is drawn from the identification of the Pauline opponents with the Gnostics. The former explanation, however, does not follow from the latter. There still remains a distance to bridge in the reasoning between the two. Many expositors are frustrated in the face of this task or simply shun it.

Assuming this task, W. Schmithals draws a fully developed Gnostic system of the Pauline opponents from the epistles on one hand, but on the other, he understands the *ego eimi*-phrase as the representation of the Gnostic dualistic anthropology. U. Wilkens, who supposes an existence of the Gnostic Savior-figure on the side of the opponents, finds a ground for the factional antagonism in the misunderstanding of each baptiser (scil. apostles) as a bearer of the eternal salvific authority. The identification of a salvific gift of Wisdom with exalted Christ led to the misunderstanding of the rite of the baptism as a participation of the Wisdom.

Their exegesises, regardless of their merits of profound religio-historical observations, presuppose the Gnostic System of the second century, and they read it into, rather than take out from, the biblical
texts.

Nowadays appear opinions which deny an existence of the Christ's Party at all. The most important exponents of this type of opinions are J. Munk, K. Stendahl and R. Baumann, but their explanations in themselves of the *ego eimi*-phrase are still ambiguous and unconvincing. They seem to be desperate measures in the face of various difficulties.

We notice that these explanations, regardless of their varieties, are based upon a common premise, i.e. a unitary and identical meaning of the Christou einai-concept throughout the texts. Besides, we give a priority of question to the Pauline understanding of the historical situations rather than to the historical situations themselves behind the textual expressions. From this viewpoint explanations of H. Conzelman and H. Koester are still insufficient, though they show a further step to the goal.

Such being the actual situation of the interpretation, we analyzed the context of 1 Cor. 1, 12. As a result we found that the principal problem of Paul in the first part of the epistle was that of the factional antagonism, and that the theme of "Wisdom" was closely connected with the theme of this antagonism. These two themes are connected in such a way that the latter forms a consequence of the former (*hôte* in 1 Cor. 3,21).

From this viewpoint, 1, 18ff. is considered to be a Pauline response to the problem of factional antagonism in 1, 10ff. Behind the formation of factions Paul discerned a misunderstanding of the gospel as "Wisdom". As a result of this misunderstanding the Corinthians regarded the apostles as teachers of salvific wisdom. In natural consequence, Christ was also regarded as a mere teacher of wisdom, which Paul could not approve regardless of its superficial plausibility. Against the background of this misunderstanding we can sufficiently appreciate the Pauline intentions of 3, 5ff; 3, 21f; 4,1. We can also comprehend why Paul contended with his opponents without discrimination.