

XII. - The wisdom of the world.

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 1 COR. 1:20.

The whole now stands before us in close connection. It is the spirit that controls the material. Of all the creatures on earth, man was the strongest spirit. As such, God had intended him in His creation to be king of the earth and to rule all of nature. Satan has disturbed this. As an even more powerful spirit, he influenced man's spirit, led him to the fall and, with his action, penetrated into all of man's life and into the affairs of this earth. Thus, man lost his kingship and Satan took his place. He pushed man away from the throne of honor and sat on it himself. As such he was called the ruler of the world by Jesus himself. Against the "ruler of the world" came first the prophecy that one day the "seed of the woman" would crush his head; then the foundation of the people of Israel, who were placed in safety against his demonic power; and finally, the Christ Himself. This Christ was the Son of God and the Son of Man, and it is as a man that He wrestled with Satan to depose and dethrone him as "Ruler of the world" and Himself as Head of mankind to regain the kingship over this earth that had been lost in paradise. That struggle between the God-anointed King and the ruler of the world began in the desert at the temptation, continued until Gethsemane and Golgotha, and was resolved in the resurrection of the Prince of Life.

The turmoil of the demonic world during Jesus' appearance was great. The land was full of possessed people. The most hellish thoughts took possession of a Judas, Israel's high priest, Rome's governor. But against the power of Satan and his demons Jesus acts with royal supremacy of spirit. He casts out the demons and gives His disciples power to cast them out, not indirectly, but immediately, by the direct power of His spirit. And it does not stop there. Even in the curse, and in the misery that the curse brought upon Nature and upon mankind, the demonic power of the ruler of the world is at work. He not only casts out demons, but also heals the sick, and demonstrates the power of his spirit over material nature. And this too directly, immediately. He even subdues the storm of the elements by nothing more than his word of power on Gennesareth's lake. Finally, Jesus even touches death; most powerfully in the recall of Lazarus from the grave. He called the little daughter of Jairus to life from her deathbed, the boy of Naïn from the bier. Lazarus from the grave. And this power of the immediate working of the spirit he also lays upon his young people, and throughout the apostolic century these miracles continue. And all this is only the beginning, and in that beginning the prophecy of what awaits in the end of the ages. One day the Christ will return, and then the

power of Satan will be completely destroyed, paradise and more than paradise will return, and the great miracle of the world will come, when this earth will be transformed into a new earth, which under a new heaven will flourish forever before God.

But between that beginning and that end lies a long interim period of centuries. In that interim period, Satan has been conquered in principle, but his power is still raging and working, especially among the peoples of the Gentiles. And that is why Jesus is now ascending, assuming His royal rule at God's right hand, and forming a new humanity in this world, which is His body, living out of Him as the Head. This congregation of the living God receives the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and this in the sense that it itself lives from the spirit, and at the same time spreads an atmosphere of higher, holier human life around it. It is the city on the mountain, which not only enjoys the light itself but also radiates it to the outside world. This atmosphere of the Holy Spirit pushes back the atmosphere of Satan's spirit. Especially in Europe, a Christian human life is developing in the political, social, scientific and artistic fields. Worship and guile are withdrawn from this Christian circle. The spirit of mankind is set free. And this liberated spirit of mankind also begins to eat the bread of knowledge in the sweat of its brow, and thus regains the power over Nature by scientific means to which we have now arrived.

But, lo and behold, instead of giving the Christ the credit for this regained power, it is this very science that now more and more submits, as if its supremacy were rooted in its own strength, to our King. And, unfortunately, the Christian world itself is by no means innocent in this. It has bound itself far too narrowly to the direct spiritual power that works by miracle, and has closed its eyes too much to the development of other spiritual powers that have been given to mankind over a period of twenty centuries through ingenuity, the use of talents, and the application of serious research into Nature. She has not believed in the liberation of spirits, she has distrusted experimental research, she has always wanted to grasp by special dispensation miraculous powers that could only be acquired by the sweat of the brow. They understood this work in the sweat of the face only from agriculture, and did not realize that it referred to the application and exertion of all human strength, body and spirit. It was then that the unbelievers in particular threw themselves into the field they had neglected, and the tendency arose to be hostile towards natural science. This created the deep rift that now separates science from faith. And then the church of Christ withdrew in powerlessness. It no longer possessed the power of miracles, and left the power of knowledge to the

unbelievers, while, on the other hand, the men of knowledge broke with the faith and set their science as a strength of man against the Kingship of Christ.

Gradually, however, this is changing. Spiritual Israel is coming out of its tether. It sees its error. It breaks with its former narrow-mindedness and narrow-mindedness. It no longer repudiates, but thankfully receives the victory of power, which has once again been won over Nature. Something is felt, at least, of the fact that Christ as our King is busy reestablishing the "kingdom of man" over the earth as well. The guilt of the past is recognized. A new light is being shed. People themselves are now grasping for the power of science. People are beginning to feel that the power of Christ is at work in science too, and they are preparing to glorify Christ as our King in science too. A new danger lurks here. Once reconciled to science, many circles go to the opposite extreme, and now imagine that they have to take over their theory from natural science, and already there are those who have gone over from the mystery of creation to the hypothesis of evolution. But all this is a state of transition, which only makes victims among the spiritually superficial. The true believers refuse to fall into this snare, and draw a sharp line between the true results of natural science, which are based on strict research, and between its theories, which are the imaginations of the erring mind of researchers.

This brings us to the second point which we have mentioned. Besides the regained power over Nature, it is especially the steady increase of our knowledge that has stimulated man's pride in being creaturely, to rise above the humble sense of the Gospel. You will recall our statement how the halt in the flow of religious life was due, not only to our control over Nature, but also, and in particular, to the increase in human knowledge and the rapid advance of science in almost every field. We must therefore examine whether Christianity opposes and is hostile to this rapid advance of science in principle, or whether it is also a blessing that comes from Christ, even though the men of science are trying to take it away from Christ, indeed to play it off against His Kingship.

In the course of this investigation, it seems at first as if Christianity is actually attacking science and wants to banish it. The Apostle Paul in particular is not outspoken about the foolishness of the wisdom of the world. "God has made the wisdom of this world to be foolishness." The "philosophy" is put to shame. It is not the noble and wise of the world who strengthen the congregation, but it is the simple, the meager, the people who are nothing in the eyes of the world, who constitute the congregation. It is the "searchers of this age," whom the apostle

exhibits. "Because in the wisdom of God the world has not known God through wisdom, so it has pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe." It is the Greeks who seek wisdom, and Christ is not only "an annoyance to the Jews, but also foolishness to the Greeks." Precisely "to shame the wise, God has chosen the foolish of the world." We are called "not to let ourselves be carried away by philosophy, by the persuasion of men, and by the first principles of the world." And Christ Himself had offered praise and thanksgiving to God, that it had pleased God to hide the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven "from the wise and prudent and to reveal them to the children." And this in so emphatic a sense that Jesus himself added: "Yes, Father, for so it has been well pleasing to you."

This attack on the "wisdom of the world" is so strong and persistent throughout Scripture that it is easy to see how those who relied on sound and considered all such statements out of context have become haters of all human science and opponents of the higher flight of human knowledge. Only sound preaching could have averted this evil, but it was precisely this sound preaching that fell so far short. Theology withdrew into its own territory, lost its connection with other sciences, and presented itself as a mistress who had to prevent other sciences from making their unwelcome progress! progress. Far too much was forgotten by her, that we, according to our beautiful confession, know God from two books; from the book of Scripture, but also from the book of Nature, in which, as if in golden letters, the majesty of the Lord is drawn before us. It wanted to rule all too much by coercion, coercion of the Church, supported by coercion of the State, and precisely this caused it to become impoverished, emaciated, petrified, and, in the face of the vigorously advancing science of nature, increasingly uneasy.

This view was totally wrong. Not according to the Scriptures, but completely at odds with them. Scripture does not say that from it alone you should derive all your knowledge of Nature and the world. What Scripture says is that there are things which you can only know from Nature and from the world and its course, and others for which Nature gives you nothing, and which you can only know from Revelation. But so little does it diminish the knowledge of Nature, that it rather shows you how God's great power and divinity can be understood and seen through the creatures from the beginning. It is therefore the utmost folly to imagine that, with the Scriptures before you, you should know from them Nature and the life of the world, also in its historical course, and now have no further examination of Nature and of the life and constitution of the world. Your body can only be known

by examining your body. The earth's crust can only be explored by digging into it. The plant kingdom must be known from the plant kingdom, the animal world from the life of animals, and likewise the history of the human world from its past. Scripture is at the forefront, of course, but next to it the whole realm of Nature, the whole course of history, the whole development of our human life in every field, lie open to us as the sources of our knowledge. And he does not honor his God, who turns to this second book of Nature, only to ponder over the Scriptures, but rather he, who, in silent obedience, diligently examines both the book of Scripture and the book of Nature. In Nature and in the life of mankind in our world lies a treasure of data for us, which God Himself lays bare for us, and it is a sin of inertia if, believing in Scripture, we set aside that other book, the book of Nature and of our human life, unread. Yet this is what we have done all too often, and thus those two currents have naturally arisen in our contemporary life, the one of which maintains: I have enough Scripture and do not care about the book of Nature, while the other, just as unilaterally, casts Scripture aside and considers that it can draw all its knowledge from the book of Nature and Life.

The same contrast existed in the days of the Apostles. In the Roman and Greek world people knew nothing of the Scriptures and sought salvation in the science of the day, whereas for Israel the Old Testament was practically the only source of knowledge, and science in the narrow sense was virtually non-existent. There were many learned schools among the Jews, but all these schools were schools of scholars, who devoted themselves to the interpretation of the books of the Old Testament and studied a scholarly series of theses based thereon. Then, as now, it was only Scripture (that is, the Old Testament) on the one hand and philosophy, science and the wisdom of the Greeks on the other. Since neither the interpretation of the Old Testament by the scribal Rabbis nor the wisdom of the Greeks was feasible with the Gospel, the Apostle opposes both, and declares that his Gospel can only be an annoyance to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. For the Jewish scribes it was a reproach, because it brought down their pride in their people. They understood the Old Testament as if the destiny of Israel were not prophetic and figurative, and therefore transitory and ending with Christ, but permanent and lasting. A Messiah would come, but he would be the earthly King on David's throne in Jerusalem. They were therefore to be annoyed and remain annoyed that Christ, by his coming, and the Apostles, by their preaching, overthrew the whole edifice of their national pride, acknowledged Israel only as the people preparing for salvation, and called upon it to enter the Kingdom of Heaven at the same time as

all other nations. But the Gospel of Christ must have been equally foolish to the learned Greeks. They had thought that they could build a system of their own concerning the origin and nature of things, and they felt themselves hurt and insulted when the Apostle of Christ overturned their structure and allowed the light of divine revelation to shine into the darkness of paganism. The wise and educated men among the Greeks looked down disdainfully on the idolatrous worship services in their cities and villages, which the country people and the less educated bourgeoisie imitated. They, as educated, learned, and developed men, felt themselves far above that idolatrous folly, and judged it foolishness. And now that Christianity presented itself as a new religion, they saw in it nothing but a counterpart to the religions of their own people, which they had come to respect, and they therefore applied the brand of foolishness to the Gospel as well. Paul heard this, and far from shrinking from it, he accepted this brand, but in order to turn it against the wise men of the day. It is not the Gospel, but your wisdom that is foolishness. Thou hast by thy imagined wisdom closed thyself to the Gospel. And yet in that Gospel is the only true, the essential wisdom, for in that Gospel, not the wisdom of man, but the wisdom of God comes to you; and to make this clear, it pleased God to shut the hearts of the Jewish scholars and the Greek sages to it, and to call to it all that was considered the foolishness of the world, all that was considered weak and base and insignificant in the world.

Is this wisdom of the world, rejected by Christ and his apostles and branded as foolish, the same as what we call the science of nature, the science of history and the science of the wonderful tapestry of human life? Such is the question that matters. And to that question the answer is in the most definite sense negative, and to understand this you only have to grasp the difference between what all these sciences have to offer as the result of strict research, and between what they build up as a system from themselves and rest on guesses and suppositions. The results of experimental research are certain and must be accepted by everyone, because they can show us that it is like this and no other, and that it works in this way and no other. That a lightning rod can attract and deflect a lightning bolt and thus save the house is a fact that everyone must acknowledge, and those who refuse to install a lightning rod on the ridge of their roof do so not because they do not accept the fact, but because they are under the impression that they cannot protect themselves against lightning. Such religious timidity, however, does not in the least diminish or add to the recognition of the truth of well-researched facts. And so little do we think of dismissing these well-substantiated facts that we make use of railroads and

electric tramways, telegraphs and telephones without the slightest hesitation, and gratefully accept the help of the physician, as often as he can alleviate our sorrows or heal our wounds in case of illness or accident. In Paul's day the wise men of Greece had not yet come far in this study of nature and history, which does not alter the fact that they too had made far from insignificant discoveries in the field of nature, and had also made considerable progress in their knowledge of the human body and in the methods of curing illnesses. So little, however, did the Apostle think of rejecting these achievements that he rather allowed himself to be hired as a personal physician by Luke on the second leg of his journey through the pagan land. There is not a single word in any of his letters that would suggest that the Apostle was opposed to science, or even the science of nature. Anyone who derives this from his words does not understand the Apostle. Rather, his spiritual admonition: "Examine all things, hold fast to what is good" is also applicable here without limitation. The study of nature and history and of the entire condition of this world and of human life is not only not to be rejected, but is to be praised and encouraged. Provided, and this should never be lost sight of, that one approves of preserving only what is good and rejecting what is evil.

And this was then, and still is, the duty of every Christian in the examination of everything that presents itself as science. In those days, too, the science or wisdom of the Greeks mixed in what it offered two entirely different fruits of their labors. On the one hand, the results of rigorous research and, on the other, the systems of the world and life, which were wrongly founded on conjecture, and it was precisely the latter that they presented as their wisdom and their philosophy. The Apostle, turning against the highly elevated wisdom of the Greeks, does not, therefore, say a word against what is strict science, but only bans what men of science have marketed concerning things of which they know nothing.