



The Second Thoughts of a Captive Intellect: Pastoral Reflections on Paul's Letters to the Corinthians

JERRY K. ROBBINS

*Lutheran Campus Center
Morgantown, West Virginia*

SCHOLARLY TREATMENTS OF PAUL AND HIS LETTERS OVERFLOW THE BOOKSHELVES and trade journals of theology and biblical studies. I will not attempt to add to that canon, but will offer instead a pastoral reflection precipitated by a recent conversation with a student. This bright young man, soon to graduate from college, came to my office to tell me he was shortly to marry a woman who was a member of a charismatic evangelical church. His problem was he belonged to a mainline denomination with which he no longer maintained any contact. "My religion is an important part of my life," he confessed to me. "It means a lot to me, and has guided me all these years. But I don't know what I believe. Can you tell me what the beliefs of my church are?"

It was a serendipitous moment, for I had not long before read Robert Ell-

JERRY K. ROBBINS is Lutheran Campus Pastor at West Virginia University. He is the author of numerous articles on religion, the book Carevision (Judson, 1993), and editor of The Essential Luther (Baker, 1991).

In his letters to the Corinthians, Paul suggests that they think twice about the received wisdom of the world, and instead put on "the mind of Christ." The renewal of the Christian mind described here can help to re-center the church today.

wood's *The History and Future of Faith*,¹ in which he predicted the demise of formal Christianity and the rise of folk religion devoid of any doctrinal content. This student, likely following his boomer parents before him, was growing up with a religion without traditional content, a faith without historical grounding. He considered himself a religious person, but had lost the foundation or roots of his faith. He was part of a burgeoning generation that claims religious credentials without knowing any of the principles of membership.

How can we promote the recovery of basic Christian beliefs in the household of faith? What can we do to reinstate the core teachings of the Christian tradition? There is perhaps no issue more crucial to the survival of Christianity than this one. In this essay I want to suggest that, rather than follow the way of accommodation—the death-strategy of the modern mainline church—we need to point out the radical difference between Christian beliefs and the vacuous beliefs of the so-called “mental members” of organized religion. At the same time we need to show that Christian faith is not so anomalous as to be meaningless to modern understanding.

In particular, I want to propose that in the commonplace notion of “second thoughts” there is a helpful rubric for directing Christian renewal. Christians are people who have second thoughts about the received wisdom of the world, especially its popular religious tenets and piety. A prime illustration of this stance is Paul and his writings to the Corinthians. In that correspondence we find the call to a radically new way for the believer to look at self, world, and God—a re-vision that comprises the second thoughts of the Christian consciousness. This proposal is developed in three parts: (1) an exploration of the notion of second thoughts, (2) a study of themes in Corinthians that suggest conceptual revision, and (3) an overview of some of Paul's second thoughts as a way of re-centering the church .

I. SECOND THOUGHTS

Recently a book appeared with the intriguing title, *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway*. In this book, Clifford Stoll does an about-face from his earlier *The Cuckoo Egg: Inside the World of Computer Espionage*.² Stoll illustrates the two essential ingredients in second thoughts: the rejection of our first thoughts on a topic, and the reformulation of our thinking according to a new evaluation of the situation. Clearly, Stoll has reversed his position. At the same time, he does not give up thinking about the issue. Rather, he collects a whole arsenal of arguments against computers, arguments that comprise his second thoughts on the topic.

The first step in the dynamics of second thoughts is to call into question the initial thoughts we have on a subject. Some time ago a student said to me, “All my life I have wanted to be an engineer. Now I'm a senior and I'm having second thoughts about this. I'm pretty sure this is *not* what I want to do for the rest of my

¹Robert Ellwood, *The History and Future of Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

²Clifford Stoll, *Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway* (New York: Doubleday, 1995) and *The Cuckoo Egg: Inside the World of Computer Espionage* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

life." The crisis in this student's life was precipitated by a change in his self-image. The picture of a lifelong engineer no longer fit who he really was. That image, composed and cultivated by others, shattered and crumbled around him. As it collapsed, he began to rethink what he wanted to do with his life. The second thoughts he was having could occur because his first thoughts were no longer valid or compelling for him.

The second step is to fill the mind with new thoughts. I have strong memories of my first experience of whitewater rafting. For months my mind was filled with positive images and favorable feelings about the coming experience. However, the day of the event, things deteriorated rapidly. As we awaited our turn, a park ranger reported how many drownings had recently occurred on the river. Once we put in, our guide lost control of her kayak, several people in the group were swept overboard and injured, and my son, a reasonable swimmer, became trapped under our raft and nearly drowned. At that point, I began to re-think how much fun I was having. Gradually my first thoughts were replaced with more realistic thoughts that included the dangers and risks in the sport.

It is possible to have second thoughts about many things. Central to the Christian life is changing one's mind about who God is, not because of academic curiosity but a concern for one's own salvation. A Christian is one whose thinking has been interrupted or altered, whose understanding is discontinuous with the dominant religion of the marketplace and media-driven masses.

Themes in Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians suggest just how the mind of a Christian is changed.

II. THE CHRISTIAN MIND IN CORINTHIANS

Although Paul does not explicitly argue that the defining mark of the Christian is having second thoughts, his Corinthian correspondence contains themes which support that notion. While Paul deals with many practical problems among the Corinthians, it is in that community more than any other that he takes up the issue of maintaining correct beliefs in the midst of an alien or errant culture. It is with the Corinthians that he worries about "false apostles" (2 Cor 11:13) who spread a "different gospel," or teach about "another Jesus" (2 Cor 11:4). It is to the Corinthians that he writes, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves" (2 Cor 13:5). And the way he encourages proper faith among the Corinthians is to admonish them to reconsider some of the claims to truth that are being made in the society around them, and perhaps even within their own fellowship. He urges them to exercise some reflection and reserve toward these popular teachers and teachings, to think twice about what they are saying.

The context in which Paul passes on this instruction to the Christians at Corinth is "the wisdom of the world" (1 Cor 1:20) that pervaded Corinth. The exact nature of this worldly wisdom has been extensively debated by biblical scholars, but the scene that Paul encountered at Corinth probably included a congeries of ideas and doctrines. Of course, "wisdom" had a respectable meaning derived from its development in Hebrew history. But it is *worldly* wisdom that Paul must deal

with at Corinth. Given the cosmopolitan nature of the city, this could have included many traditions, movements, and schools, both religious and non-religious. Among the unbelievers of the city would possibly have been those who adopted one of the Greek philosophies. Surely there were some caught up in the imperial cult promoted by Tiberius, and the worship of the deities of the Roman state. Others paid homage to the gods and goddesses of Greece, or the deities of other foreign cults. Indeed, just before his visit to Corinth Paul had unsuccessfully preached about the “unknown god” of Athens (Acts 17:16-34).

Or was Paul addressing Christian believers who as former Jews were boasting in the Torah, or as zealots or super-Christians were smug in their new spiritual enlightenment that assured them they were already resurrected and already in the kingdom? Perhaps Paul had in mind colleagues or personal opponents, other preachers and teachers, who claimed a more eloquent and persuasive theology and preaching.

It is against the background of a formidable conceptual scaffolding of pluralism, secularism, and intellectualism that Paul writes. In effect, he suggests to the Corinthians that they might want to reconsider or develop some second thoughts about this worldly wisdom. It is possible to extract three themes in his advice that point in this direction.

1. *Surrender your thoughts to Christ.*

First, Paul calls on the Corinthians to *take their thoughts captive to Christ* (2 Cor 10:5). Clarence Jordan provides an interesting translation:

For even though we live in the world, we do not fight on its level. Our implements of war are not manufactured by the world but loaded by God for smashing into fortresses. With them we explode learned discourses and every highfalutin wisecrack against the true knowledge of God. With them we capture every idea and make it obey Christ.³

Jordan’s emphasis on knowledge and eloquence is suggestive. Margaret Thrall translates verse five in this way: “We demolish sophistries and all that rears its proud head against the knowledge of God; we compel every human thought to surrender in obedience to Christ.”⁴

While the range of Paul’s assault may be much broader or on another front, some scholars argue that his attack is precisely against intellectual brigands. The issue is “the seductive reasonings, i.e., sophistries and plausible fallacies with which Jews and Gentiles evaded the teaching of the Apostles.”⁵ Or, more directly relating to Paul’s work, “the strongholds which are demolished are the reasonings of those who would subvert the work of the Pauline apostolate.”⁶ What Paul is

³Clarence Jordan, *The Cotton Patch Version of Paul’s Epistles* (New York: Association, 1968) 87.

⁴Margaret E. Thrall, *First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1965) 166.

⁵Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985) 276.

⁶Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*. (New York: Doubleday, 1984) 458. See also Ralph Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 40, 2 Corinthians* (Waco: Word, 1986) 305-306.

after are the “ideas and opinions” that may turn people aside from the truth in Christ.⁷ Paul’s weapons were meant to “destroy the way people think, demolish their sinful thought patterns, the mental structures by which they live their lives in rebellion against God.”⁸ In short, Paul is calling for some reconsideration of “the arguments...in which people fortify themselves against the invasion of the knowledge of God (the gospel).”⁹

The effect of Paul’s spiritual arming is a deadly blow against worldly wisdom, in two stages. First, it involves the destruction of worldly wisdom. Adept at using imagery from the ordinary world, Paul employs a military metaphor that would have been well known in Greco-Roman circles. The demolition in siege warfare of a city’s walls, bulwarks, or ramparts, and the heavily guarded strongholds within, would have been a familiar image to Corinthians under Roman rule. Describing the resistance as “the proud obstacle” also would have called to mind the high towers from which the soldiers would defend their city.

Second, the assault involves making prisoners of those who have been overcome, namely all the militia of worldly wisdom, all the “human thoughts” that are “the enemy soldiers.”¹⁰ Perhaps recalling what it meant to be a captive to the enemy, sin (Rom 7:23), Paul now turns the tables and suggests the time has come to take captive all those ideas that lead believers astray, all those teachings that lure the righteous into the pathways of false beliefs. Paul does not counsel irrationality—a point well made by many biblical scholars. Yet to introduce notions of bondage, slavery, and imprisonment is an extraordinarily strong move for Paul. Perhaps it is his zeal for God such that “anything that conflicts with divine interests and the claims of Christ is within the range of his artillery.”¹¹ Perhaps he is thinking of his own captivity, the sacrificial aroma of his suffering for God (2 Cor 2:14-16). Perhaps it is because he so celebrates and covets the liberty of the gospel (1 Cor 15:54-57; Rom 6:14) that he can speak of locking up the enemy and “punishing” the disobedient. In any case, Paul is an impassioned teacher charging the Corinthians to bring their thoughts under control, to collar whatever ideas lead them away from Christ, to put a clamp on any speculations that would replace the gospel.

2. *Know only Christ crucified.*

According to Paul, the Christian cannot think anything he or she wants. After rendering harmless any religiously criminal thoughts, the believer must next fill her or his consciousness with the correct thoughts. Paul describes the proper

⁷Ernst Best, *Second Corinthians*. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987) 93.

⁸Donald A. Carson, *From Triumphalism to Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10-13* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1984) 47.

⁹Colin G. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 174.

¹⁰Robert G. Bratcher, *A Translator's Guide to Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians* (London: United Bible Societies, 1983) 106.

¹¹Frederick W. Danker, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: II Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989) 153.

content: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Others in the community claimed to know very much more. They were wise in their knowledge of the law, or rich with the guidance of the Spirit, or full of the wisdom that allegedly assures salvation. As a learned Jew, Paul certainly had command of a great arsenal of knowledge. But he decided to know nothing but the crucified Christ. To make his point, Paul cleared his mind of all thoughts except thoughts of his Lord's self-sacrifice. This became the sole content of his thinking and behavior. And he expected the Corinthians to follow him in this discipline.

It can be said that Paul was a man with one thing on his mind in the sense that all his thinking and acting turned around one center. Although he was not a systematic theologian, his work had the order and unity of a system with a singular focus. That center was the reality of the cross. It was the cross that empowered his mission to the Corinthians. The cross is at the forefront of his message: "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23). The cross is the mold in which he shaped his Christ-mysticism. Paul believed that conversion to Christianity meant that an ordinary person became a Christ-like being. The operative principle in this change was the crucifixion/resurrection or death/rebirth of the devotee (Phil 3:8-11).

Thus Paul said of himself, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). When he wrote, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27), he probably meant that the death/resurrection of Christ taking place within the human being is the hope of the believer. Both baptism and the Lord's supper (1 Cor 11:23-26; Rom 6:4-11) incorporated the believer into the drama of the cross. Believers are those who have died to their old nature (Col 3:3; 2 Cor 5:14). They are the ones who share in Christ's sufferings (2 Cor 1:5; 1 Thess 1:6), beginning with Paul who is a sacrificial aroma to God (2 Cor 2:14-16). The drama of dying and rising is the inescapable rhythm of the Christian life. The believer carries in his or her body "the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested" (2 Cor 4:10).

The cruciform life of the believer includes the mind or cognitive/deliberative center of his or her human nature. And the sign that one's being is wholly "in Christ" is an openness to and understanding of the "wisdom of God." The wisdom of God is the content that Paul wants the Corinthians to embrace, rather than the wisdom of the world. This will not be easy, for not many are wise in this wisdom (1 Cor 2:8). It is a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles (1 Cor 1:22-24). Its offense lies in the fact that it contains God's plan of salvation, a plan that culminates in the crucified Christ. As such it is a hidden wisdom known only by the spiritual person (1 Cor 2:6-16). To the world it is nonsense and a scandal, but for believers it is a precious truth whose keynote is the cross.

In putting himself forth as an example for the Corinthians to imitate (1 Cor 4:16-17), especially his being "in Christ" through suffering, Paul helps us today to gain some insight into the debate about whether he was anti-intellectual or con-sorted with the thought patterns of his day. In his thinking about salvation, Paul will know nothing but the crucified Christ. But Paul certainly will continue to

traffic with the thoughts and reasonings of the learned culture around him. In fact, he will incorporate some of the ideas and arguments from the intellectual milieu in his writings. He will be "all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22), employing the images and allusions of his time in order to make his point.

Yet his point in all this will be that, whatever the case before, now Christ is our wisdom (1 Cor 1:30). Paul does not think or write in a vacuum. The learning of the day is part of his heritage. But he orders his knowledge in such a way that what God has done to redeem the world is foremost in all his reasoning. That is the one assumption without which he will not engage in any discussion or debate. Everything he thinks and does issues from that premise. He will know only Christ crucified in the sense that all of this knowledge will operate with that principle at its head. Not only his speaking, but all his understanding will now be informed by "words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:13).

Paul urges the Corinthians to imitate his life and his manner of thinking. Between the lines of his discussion of wisdom, discerning readers will hear his counsel that they take their *first* thoughts, comprised of all the popular religious knowledge of the day, and put them in *second* place in their thinking. He writes that those who think they are wise should become as fools (1 Cor 4:10), which is saying, in effect,

You once thought such and such a way, but I entreat you to think in a new way. Place all that worldly wisdom out of your minds, or at least put it far away in a corner of your mind. It is my desire that all faithful believers put away falsehood (Eph 4:25). So you, too, must put aside all influences that distract you from your devotion to the true God (2 Cor 6:14-16), and bring to the forefront of your thinking, replenish the content of your minds, with the wisdom of God.

Ever full of practical advice for the Corinthians, Paul urges them forward in their thinking also. Just as their situation in the world must be adjusted by their allegiance to Christ (2 Cor 7:1), so they must make their thinking holy. His intent is a people who have learned the art of second thoughts. They are to be a changed people with *renewed* minds (Rom 12:1-2). The nature of that renewal comprises a third theme one can find in Paul's writings to the Corinthians.

3. Put on the mind of Christ.

By his writings and example, Paul describes the Christian as a person who has both taken his or her mind captive to Christ, and has determined to know only Christ crucified. Finally, Paul says that a Christian is one who has *put on "the mind of Christ"* (1 Cor 2:16). In this text, Paul is contrasting the foolish pride of the unspiritual man with the superior position of the spiritual man who has "the mind of Christ." His phrase, "the mind of Christ," makes an important contribution to our thesis. The believer does not just discipline or direct the mind as pointed out in the previous section. As there is a dying and rising with Christ in the general pattern of discipleship, so there is a resurrection of the mind. The believer is buried with Christ so that he or she may be raised with Christ. This includes a new life of the mind, a life supplied by the indwelling Christ.

Of course it is not unusual for Paul to talk about putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).

But what does he mean by his focus on putting on the *mind* of Christ? In ancient thought, the mind was often identified with the heart as the moral and spiritual center of a person. Thus, the mind that we are to have among us is a spirit of humility and service (Phil 2:5-11). To put on the mind of Christ is to put on a life of holiness. To “set your mind on the things that are above” is to seek the higher path of a noble morality (Col 3:2, 12-17). To have the mind of Christ is to give up childish ways for the maturity demanded by love (1 Cor 13:11-13). It is to seek the good of the community or fellowship of the faithful as this is nurtured by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 1:9; 10:16-17; 2 Cor 13:14). Indeed, much of the Corinthian correspondence is about putting on the mind of Christ in this sense.

But Paul, well educated and exposed to the ideas of the learned culture around him, may well intend something more by his particular phrasing. In biblical context, the mind is not a brain exclusively engaged in thought. But there is a rational, contemplative part of the unified self. Even though “spirit” is the preferred translation of 2:16 for some commentators, others suggest “mind” should be rendered: “we think the way Christ does.”¹² Morna D. Hooker’s commentary on Phil 2:5, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,” sides with the commentators who expand the notion of imitation to include not just behaving like Jesus but having the “mind and attitude which belongs to him.”¹³ While another word for mind is spirit, it is the *thoughts* of Christ that are revealed by the Spirit.¹⁴ In writing about the mind, then, did Paul want to give importance to an intellectual or cognitive side of the Christian life?

The notion of a mind and its thoughts was not unknown in biblical times. Certainly the concept of understanding or comprehending was familiar to Paul (1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 2:11; Rom 1:20). The agent of this understanding was the mind, and while Paul often links the mind to the heart or will (1 Cor 1:10; Eph 4:18-19), he also *contrasts* it with the spirit (1 Cor 14:14-15).¹⁵ Although to come to one’s right mind means to sin no more (1 Cor 15:34), faithfulness pays dividends to the mind also, for it is enabled to see “the light of the gospel,” “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:4-6). Indeed, the Christian life is distinct in its new knowledge which, even though it is about the “depths of God” (1 Cor 2:10; Eph 1:17-18), is still a content in the mind. That is to say, even though the renewal of the mind through the mind of Christ is a recovery of “moral judgment,” it entails a revamped “*perspective* proper to the New Man” in Christ.¹⁶

The importance of the intellectual life for Paul is suggested also in his concern

¹²Paul Ellingworth and Howard A. Hatton, *Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994) 64.

¹³Morna D. Hooker, *A Preface to Paul* (New York: Oxford, 1980) 79-80.

¹⁴Gordon H. Clark, “Wisdom in First Corinthians,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15 (Fall 1972) 205.

¹⁵D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 43.

¹⁶Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Becoming Human Together: The Pastoral Anthropology of St. Paul* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1984) 212-13. My italics.

that Christians *know* what they believe. Even though Paul does not seem to affirm the gnostic belief that salvation requires a special knowledge, specially received, he does claim that Christian belief includes knowledge. Some of the more theological teachings a believer should know are: the relationship of Christ to the cosmic powers (1 Cor 8:4-6; Col 1:15-20), the place of man in the universe (Rom 8:18-25), the meaning of Christianity among the religions (Rom 1-3), the variety and value of gifts of the spirit (1 Cor 12-14), and the nature of the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15). Also, the importance of correct knowledge to Paul is evident in his struggles with false knowledge and false teachers (1 Cor 1:17-25; 2 Cor 11:12-15; Col 2:8). As well, Paul seems to have religious knowledge in mind when he writes about overcoming ignorance or increasing understanding (1 Cor 10; 12:1; Rom 11:25; 1 Thess 4:13).

III. PAUL'S SECOND THOUGHTS AND CHURCH RENEWAL

Paul's theology of rational revision is a therapy the church needs for its renewal. This becomes more evident when we add to the themes already noted Paul's explicit call to the Corinthians that they think again about some of their ideas and behavior. Already on the mission field fifteen years, including a stay of eighteen months at Corinth, Paul describes the Christians at Corinth as his children, and his relationship to them as that of a father (1 Cor 4:15). Like any disappointed parent, his tone can be harsh, especially in the biting irony of his "painful letter" (2 Cor 10-13). However, I like to think of his approach as similar to many parents who want to be good mentors. He sits with them in his letters, as it were, and encourages them to reconsider what they are doing.

For example, they are to think again about how the pagan cults separate morality from religion, and, with their new thoughts on the matter filling their minds, they are to follow Christ in holiness and purity (1 Cor 5:1, 11; 6:9-10, 15, 18). Paul admonishes the Corinthians to rethink their attitude toward possessions. They are to "buy as though they had no goods" (1 Cor 7:30), remembering that in Christ they possess everything (2 Cor 6:10). Rather than live in judgment upon each other or take each other to court (1 Cor 6:1-6), they are to forgive one another (2 Cor 2:5-11). They are to think twice about the maxim, "All things are lawful." They are to treat their body as holy rather than abuse it as though it were somehow separate from the spirit (1 Cor 6:12-20).

Some people were claiming that speaking in tongues was a more excellent way. Paul suggests that they think about it, and consider that words of edification may be better (1 Cor 14:1-19). There were some among the Corinthians who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Paul advises that they think through this matter again in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15). Paul asks that they reverse their attitude of disdain toward servanthood, and adopt love as their *modus operandi* (1 Cor 13). Most important, Paul calls the Corinthians to take a second look at suffering. Usually interpreted as evidence of sinfulness and God's judgment, suffering is the badge of faithfulness to God (2 Cor 4:7-14; 1 Cor 4:9-13).

This means that the Corinthians also should shake up their thinking about what is real in the world and what is mere appearance (1 Cor 7:31; 2 Cor 4:16-18).

Paul's advice for the Corinthians is rooted in a basic revision in his own thinking: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer" (2 Cor 5:16). Paul once thought of the lowly life of Jesus and his shameful crucifixion as evidence that God had disowned him. But in this writing, he thinks of Christ as Savior deserving our full allegiance. Jesus from a human point of view is a failure, but in faith he is the one in whose face we see God (2 Cor 4:6). For this reason, Paul could admonish the Corinthians to think twice about those who teach a theology of glory and who encourage Christians to cultivate signs of power and status (1 Cor 4:8-13). The crucial turning point in all this is a different way of looking at the cross.

Paul could have second thoughts about the cross because of his own conversion experience. His encounter with the risen Lord was the beginning of a dying/rising pattern that would come to dominate all his thinking and writing. His temporary blindness is a symbol of the trauma that shattered his old way of thinking and led to his resurrection or re-seeing in the light of his faith in Jesus Christ. Although Paul's conversion was not so much a move from no religion to religion, but a metamorphosis within his religious consciousness that did not completely void his past, the event effected such a radical reversal of his understanding that the cross became the controlling formula for his life. We see this change especially in 2 Corinthians where it is reported that he became a servant (4:5) who would not commend himself (5:12), or take gifts for his labors (11:7-11). He played the fool (12:11, also 1 Cor 3:18; 4:10), envisioning triumph in the midst of failure (2:14), and describing the fate of the servant of God in painfully paradoxical terms (6:9-10).¹⁷

Paul suffered the loss of all things in order to know Christ (Phil 3:8). This is his message to a church in search of renewal. William Barclay writes,

The word for *penitence* or *repentance* is *metanoia*....The meaning of *metanoia* is clear; it means an *after-thought*. *Meta* is *afterwards* and *noia* is a *thought*....Originally and by derivation, *metanoia* simply meant the condition in which a man had second thoughts about something.¹⁸

If second thoughts are a possible rubric for renewal in the church, repentance is the necessary prior condition or concomitant attitude to second thoughts. Paul's writings to the Corinthians suggest that the church today, as in the first century, will recover its beliefs when it faces two of its most deadly foes, secularism and fanaticism.

The church will learn to think correctly when it repents of all its alliances with the world. William Baird describes Corinthian secularism as "the temptation

¹⁷C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 48-49.

¹⁸William Barclay, *Turning to God: A Study of Conversion in the Book of Acts and Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 47-48.

to conform to the patterns of the world.”¹⁹ The church today is plagued by the same temptation. Indeed, it was the “patterns of the world” that hijacked the student who came to my office looking for his beliefs. He was overwhelmed by all the ideas that churn in the secular and academic cauldron and impinge on consciousness, but have nothing to do with the Christian vision of reality. What would Paul have to say to a church that has taken on many of the values of the society around it, including its marketing, self-maintenance, and entertainment principles? Paul's words to the Corinthians, calling them to think again about where they are going, are painfully relevant to the church today.

The second step the church should consider for its recovery is to reclaim the knowledge central to its life. The other danger to Christianity today is a fanaticism in which faithful knowledge is overcome by unenlightened enthusiasm. It could be argued that the above-noted “folk religion” described by Robert Ellwood is the early stage of this extreme. Paul's theology of rational renewal does not encourage fanaticism, but a hope for fuller understanding (1 Cor 13:12). He would rather instruct intelligibly than speak impressively (1 Cor 14:19). His writings prescribe an agile rationality and a resurrection of the mind, not its removal. Only people who *think* can be admonished to have second thoughts, and *thoughts* remain in the end, even though they have been rehabilitated.

This is an important detail. The position of the believer is not anti-rational or anti-intellectual. The sacrifice of first thoughts does not lead to a mindless religion. It is more like the rethinking Jesus called for when he taught using the formula, “You have heard it was said... But I say to you” (Matt 5:21-48). Jesus left his listeners with plenty to think about. The believer is a person who has given up one kind of thinking for a different kind of thinking. The value in the rubric of second thoughts is precisely at this point. The thoughts of a believer have been radically renovated, but they are *thoughts*, nevertheless.

This means that the believer ends up with important ideas in his or her mind. Another term for second thoughts is “faith.” While faith means a commitment and relationship, it also has to do with the beliefs in a mind that has had second thoughts, a mind that has been changed by the Holy Spirit. Paul commends the Ephesians for “their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,” and then goes on to talk about knowledge and enlightenment about Jesus' exaltation through his death and resurrection (1:15-23). For Paul “the word of faith” is “the knowledge of Christ” (2 Cor 2:14; 4:6).

The result of Paul's advice to the Corinthians, and his example, is a body of beliefs that define the Christian consciousness. Some of these ideas are: (1) the spirit of Christ reveals the ways of God to us (1 Cor 2:12, 16); (2) our life is rooted and grounded in God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 8:6); (3) we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6); (4) the key to the power and wisdom of God is the crucified Christ (1 Cor 1:23); (5) all things are yours and you

¹⁹William Baird, *The Corinthian Church: A Biblical Approach to Urban Culture* (New York: Abingdon, 1964) 89.

are Christ's (1 Cor 3:22-23); (6) we are secure in God's grace alone (1 Cor 10:1-5); (7) through Christ we are made righteous before God (2 Cor 5:21); (8) at the Lord's supper the bread is the body of Christ, the wine is the blood of Christ (1 Cor 11:23-26); (9) the church is like the human body; it is one organism with many members (1 Cor 12:14-31); (10) we should exhibit self-forgetfulness so that by dying with Christ we shall also live with him (2 Cor 5:14-15); (11) bear your burdens bravely, for in that way you testify to the life of Jesus in you (2 Cor 4:7-11); (12) whenever you are uncertain, choose love over knowledge (1 Cor 8:1-13); (13) to be a Christian live "in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1); (14) travel lightly through this world—it is passing away (1 Cor 7:29-31); (15) things are not what they seem, especially with regard to the power of evil (1 Cor 15:24-26); (16) we live in a new era in which God's reign has begun (2 Cor 5:17); and (17) in the resurrected Christ all will be made alive (1 Cor 15:20-22).

During his last visit to Corinth, Paul began a correspondence with the Christians at Rome. The letter to the Romans is often given preeminent place in the New Testament. The Romans could have thanked the Corinthians for helping Paul hammer out many of the ideas that were to come to fruition in his Roman correspondence. Truly Paul, whom Thomas Aquinas called the "professor" among the apostles, learned his trade with the Corinthians. And the church, in turn, learned what it ought to think. His letters to them contain invaluable ideas and principles. Through such beliefs Paul also calls the church today back to its center. They are the beliefs that will anchor my searching student and the future of the church. The way ahead for Christendom is to take its mind captive to such thoughts, and to become a faith-filled – beliefs-filled – community in Christ. ⊕