

The Spirit, *Gnosis*, and the Corinthian Church: Paul's View of Pneuma and Mystical Communion for Ecclesial Concord¹⁾

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1. Introduction

This article studies Paul's understanding of the Spirit and *gnosis* (γνῶσις, knowledge) to inquire about the ethical implications as to the harmony of the Corinthian church. It will suggest that Paul articulates his notion of mysticism in term of *gnosis*²⁾ on the theoretical basis of his pneumatology and that such mysticism shows ethical implications for the ecclesial concord in Corinth. Mystical communion with God requires harmony among believers, and the unity in the church is based upon that communion.

Paul's mysticism³⁾ is not only based on his personal experience

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- 1) This paper was supported by the Research Fund, 2017, Pyeongtaek University in Korea.
- 2) This study employs the Greek term γνῶσις in relation to Paul's mysticism without any connection to Gnosticism which flourished generations later than the apostle. We should note that our epistler uses the term to articulate his understanding of the relationship between God and the believer, Jesus Christ and the believer, and between believers.
- 3) Paul was familiar with the mystical traditions of Judaism. Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 34-71; Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor. 12.1-12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate,

of the divinity (Gal 1:12; 1 Cor 15:8-2; 2 Cor 12:2-4)⁴) but also an intellectual understanding of God's mysteries, that is, Christ crucified on the cross and God's gifts bestowed upon believers. This understanding of the divine mysteries is possible through the Spirit's works. The Spirit functions as God's agent to enable believers to be in mystical communion with God and to understand "the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10), which is not allowed for unbelievers. The Spirit also enables the believer to be in mystical harmony with one another. This activity of the Spirit shows the aspects of communal ethics in the apostle's mysticism. God's gifts to believers are understandable to them

Part I: The Jewish Sources" and "Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance," *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993), 177-217 and 265-292; John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000). For Paul's mysticism, see the following: Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Adrie du Toit, "In Christ', 'In the Spirit' and Related Prepositional Phrases: Their Relevance for a Discussion on Pauline Mysticism," *Neotestamentica* 34 (2000), 287-298; Christopher Rowland and Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 341-419. Cf. F. F. Bruce, "Was Paul a Mystic?" *Reformed Theological Review* 34 (1975), 66-75.

- 4) April D. DeConick, "What is Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism?" in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. April D. DeConick (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 6; Ro Hun Park, "A Glimpse into Paul's Symbolic Universe in light of 2 Corinthians 12:1-13," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 81 (2012), 129-143. For a discussion on Paul's mysticism in Paul's epistles, see the following works. Min-Kyu Lee, "Mysticism in Pauline Epistles," *Korea Evangelical New Testament Studies* 6 (2007), 387-414 [written in Korean]; Y. J. Jeon, "Apostle Paul's Mystical Theology in 1 and 2 Corinthians," *The Catholic Theology* 15 (2009), 107-138 [written in Korean]. For a comparative study of Paul's experience of God and that of Dasuk, a Korean thinker, see the following: Tae-Sik Park, "St. Paul and Dasuk's Story of Experiencing God," *Studies in Religion/The Journal of the Korean Association for the History of Religions* 76 (2016), 145-170 [written in Korean].

only through the Spirit's revelatory work. Each believer enters a mystical communion through the pneumatic revelation and its understanding. Paul's concept of mysticism, nevertheless, refuses to remain individual. The Spirit dwelling in believers makes the mystical connection between them, not just between God and believers. Additionally, believers, when they have a true understanding of Christ and the divine gifts, function to interpret that to "those who received the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:12), that is, fellow believers. This interpretative interaction of believers demands harmony in the community. Besides, the true understanding of Christ also makes it imperative for Christians to be humble like the crucified one. The factionalism in the Corinthian church caused by self-boast of some church members, therefore, cannot but serve as a sign of their immaturity and lack of the true understanding of Christ in terms of mystical communion with God.

In pressing this argument, this paper will consist of three sections. Section 2 will discuss ethical-mystical aspects of the Spirit's functions to suggest that mystical communion with God is possible because the Spirit serves as God's revelatory agent relating God and believers and that the Spirit also both forms and sustains harmony in the Christian community. The section 3 will consider a transcendental dimension of Paul's *gnosis* mysticism to suggest that mystical *gnosis* of God's wisdom is critical in Paul's mysticism for communion with God and that such communion is complete when believers are also known by God. This motif of recognition has mutuality between God and the believer. Although Paul introduces the motif of love for God's recognition of believers in 1 Corinthians 8:6 (cf. 2:9), mystical *gnosis* and believers' love for God have a connecting point as to corporate ethics. Both knowledge and love are utilized to persuade the readership to accept and follow the author's argument for harmony in the Corinthian church. Section 4 will

study the communal ethical dimension of Paul's *gnosis* mysticism to suggest that the reception of the Spirit and God's mystical *gnosis* serve to form group boundary between the believer and the unbeliever and advocate harmony in the group of the believers. Besides, it will show that to become a mature believer requires an ethical change in life and that intellectual interactions among believers necessitate their unity in the church.

2. Ethical-Mystical Aspects of the Spirit's Works

2.1. The Spirit and the Mystical Communion with the Lord

Paul's worldview observed in 1 Corinthians is undoubtedly dichotomous. In 1 Cor 2, the apostle employs a series of contrast, such as those between "the spirit of the world" (v.12) and "the Spirit that is from God" (v.12), the "unspiritual person" (ψυχικὸς δὲ ἄνθρωπος, v.14) and "the spiritual person" (ὁ πνευματικὸς, v.15), and 'a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age' (cf. v.6) and 'a secret [ἐν μυστηρίῳ] and hidden wisdom of God' (v.7). These contrasts can serve to illustrate Paul's dichotomous worldview clearly. The distinction of this-worldly spirit and the Spirit of God especially reflects a cosmological dimension of Paul's worldview. Such a cosmological division is also seen in Paul's apocalyptic vision (15:24-26), in which the end of the world is portrayed as a cosmic event, and all enemies of God will be subjected to God. In Paul's worldview, the two opposite realms will never be reconciled with each other. The destruction of God's enemies is the only solution.

This human world is dichotomous just as the cosmos is. Paul's distinction of "the spiritual person" and the "unspiritual person" indicates such division of the human world and humans

themselves. Mystical communion with God is allowed only for those who are on God's side. Believers have received the Spirit and now belong in God's realm (2:12); they are "God's temple" because "God's Spirit dwells in" them (3:16); believers' body "is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you [i.e., believers], which you have from God" (6:19).⁵⁾ The reception of the Spirit is critical for mystical communion with God. Believers become God's temple because of the Spirit's presence. As seen in the Stoic notion of *pneuma* (see note 4), God's Spirit pervades God's realm and individuals in it.

However, believers' reception of the Spirit does not guarantee a 'mature' relationship with God (cf. 2:6; 3:1).⁶⁾ Only one thing is certain that recipients now have their places in God's sphere. In order to achieve a mature relationship, some significant changes, both cognitive and ethical, must happen in the recipient. The Spirit functions to cause such changes. As God's agent,

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- 5) We find intriguing similarities between the Stoic notion of *pneumalspiritus* and Paul's view of *pneuma*. The Stoics consider *pneuma* to be all-pervasive throughout the cosmos; whereas Paul regards *pneuma* as pervading throughout God's realm. Yet, a clear difference is also found between them. While *pneuma* of the Stoics permeates all cosmos, the Spirit in Paul's notion is bestowed upon believers only. In other words, the Stoic view of *pneuma* has no space for dichotomous world-view, but Paul's pneumatology is certainly based upon his dichotomous world-view. See the following: Michael Lapidge, "Stoic Cosmology," in *The Stoics*, John M. Rist, ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 161-185; Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 49-58, 124-125, 130-138. For discussions on ethical aspects of Paul's view of the Spirit and the Spirit-related issues (e.g., spiritual gifts and spiritual maturity) and the church as Christ's body, see the following studies: Sang Mok Lee, "Paul's Understanding of the Spirit and Christ's Body and Its Communal Meaning - The Corinthian Church as an Alternative Society," *Korean New Testament Studies* 23 (2016), 441-476 [written in Korean].
- 6) Sang Mok Lee, "The Spirit of God and the Ones Who Receive God's Spirit - A Study of 1 Cor 2:10-16 with Respect to the Ecclesial Situation at Corinth," *Korea Evangelical New Testament Studies* 14 (2015), 493-515 [written in Korean].

the Spirit performs various functions on individual and communal levels (see below).

In his admonition about sexual immorality (*πορνεία*), our epistler makes a statement which reveals his notion of mystical communion: “But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (6:17). By the same token, anyone who is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her (6:16). The common principle is that humans become one with whomever they join themselves to. Believers become one with God while unbelievers are sided with God’s enemies. The unbreakable division is observed between two spheres. Mystical communion is understood in terms of belonging.

2.2. The Spirit and the Mysticism of *Gnosis*

The residence of the Spirit in believers does not make a sufficient cause for their mature relationship with God.⁷⁾ God’s Spirit conducts various functions while dwelling in believers. One of them is that the Spirit makes God’s mystery known to the believer. Since the Spirit as God’s agent has ontological continuity with God, the Spirit can let humans know “the depths of God.” Paul applies the old principle “like by like.”⁸⁾ In

7) Paul makes a distinction in the group of believers. Paul’s differentiation of “the mature” from “men of the flesh” can serve an evidence for my position. For more discussion of this categorization of believers, see the following sections of this study. As for a scholarly argument against this suggestion, refer to Wendel Willis, “The ‘Mind of Christ’ in 1 Corinthians 2,16,” *Biblica* 70 (1989), 110-122.

8) Democritus: Diels, *Fragmente* 2:176 (68B.164). Plato, *Prot.* 337c-338a; *Resp.* 508a-511e; *Tim.* 45c (note 99). Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 66. For instances in the Stoa, Philo, Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, see the footnotes in the same page of the commentary.

1 Cor 2:11, *pneuma* has in the first instance a purely anthropological sense and is practically synonymous with nous, “mind” (v.16). Since the Spirit serves as a revealer of God’s secrets, each believer can access God’s mysteries. The Spirit’s residence is supposed to be together with a revelation.⁹⁾ Those who do not have a proper understanding of God’s mystery, therefore, are not regarded to be in “mature” relationship with God. Communion with God demands an intellectual foundation. Here, we see a conspicuous motif of *gnosis* in Paul’s notion of mysticism.

Since the Spirit discloses God’s mystery, it also enables believers to understand God’s gifts to them; “Now we have received ... the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God” (2:12). Although we may interpret the ἵνα clause in 2:12 to be either a result or a purpose clause, it is certain that the Spirit is critical to have a correct understanding of God’s gifts. The issue of spiritual gifts was debated in the Corinthian Christian community.¹⁰⁾ Paul relates

9) We can find a similarity between Paul’s notion of spirit and Hellenistic mystery-religious tradition. A tendency is found in Hellenistic mysticism that venerates *Nous* (i.e., the deification of nous). He was believed to bestow the *nous* as a heavenly gift upon his chosen ones. This divine gift produces omnipotence (πάντα γνωρίζειν) and immortality in the recipients. The chosen were called *enmous* and served as divine teacher for their fellows. Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions: their basic ideas and significance* (Pittsburgh, PA: The Pickwick Press, 1978), 432.

10) Advocating harmony in the Corinthian church, Paul discusses extensively the matter of spiritual gifts in the later chapters of our concerned epistle. Dealing with that issue, Paul gives a qualification to the issue in ethical terms and asserts that every members of the church forms a common body. Besides, the gifts were an important issue Paul needed to address in Romans with respect to the relationship among church leaders. Sang Mok Lee, “Charismata in Roman 12 and Their Communal Meaning: Discord among Church Leaders and Paul’s Exhortation of Concord,” *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 104 (2017), 55-82 [written in Korean].

the Spirit's work for the believer's communion with God to the debate and, also, tries to promote harmony in the Corinthian church. The residence of the Spirit and the accompanying revelatory works should lead the Corinthian believers to the correct understanding of spiritual gifts. The Spirit is presented to give teaching to the church (cf. *ἐν διδακτοῖς πνεύματος*, 2:13). The Spirit is God's agent to carry out the function of revealing and teaching.¹¹⁾ Paul defines the believer's relationship with the Spirit in terms of knowing and understanding.¹²⁾

2.3. Communal Ethical Aspects of the Spirit's Works

In addition to the function of revealing and teaching, the Spirit is to baptize believers into the body of Christ. This function of the Spirit as baptizer has both social and religious implications; the Spirit forms a faith community in social terms. From the religious perspective, the faith community formed by the Spirit has a mystical quality. Its members are supposed to have communion with one another in the Spirit.

Paul understands the Spirit as the actual agent of forming the body of Christ, that is, the faith community. The body cannot exist without its members; the body is one but has many members, and every member of the body forms one body (12:12). It is the Spirit that admits members to the body.¹³⁾ Believers

11) The Spirit's revelation and teaching are also a serious issue in early church. For instance, we observe debates and divisions over the Spirit's function, whether teaching or revealing, in the Johannine community. Sang Mok Lee, "Jesus' *Philoi* vs. Jesus' *Douloi*: Conflicts over the Paraclete's Function and Authority in the Johannine Community," *The Expository Times* 129 (2018), 356-365.

12) See below for the contents of the revelation and teaching.

13) The Spirit's function to admit members into Christ's body is also clear in 12:3, that is, "... no one speaking by the Spirit of God [*ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ*] ever says

are accepted into the body through their baptism by the Spirit;¹⁴ “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (12:13). The members of the church also drink of one Spirit. This drinking metaphor also serves to accentuate the unity of all believers.¹⁵ Unity among the church members is expressed in Paul’s ritualistic language.

This unifying function of the Spirit is also noted in 5:3. Paul, in that verse, tells his readers in the Corinthian church that he is present among them in spirit although he is away from them in body. This spiritual connection among believers is possible not because Paul possesses a special spiritual power, but because all believers become one spirit with the Lord, being united to him (6:17). Each believer is connected through the Lord and the Spirit,¹⁶ the generative and the ordering power.

Coherence provided by the Spirit to the body of Christ also functions to separate the insider from the outsider of Christ’s body. This boundary-drawing work of God’s Spirit is to found

‘Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit’s work is critical to confess that Jesus is their Lord. Every believer, therefore, is in the Spirit.

- 14) O’Donnell demonstrates, by means of his grammatical studies of other attestations in the New Testament, ἐν πνεύματι may be used to indicate agency with a passive verb and suggests a possible translation for 1 Cor 12:13: “For also by one spirit we all into one body were baptized.” Matthew Brook O’Donnell, “Two Opposing Views on Baptism with/by the Holy Spirit and of 1 Corinthians 12.13: Can Grammatical Investigation Bring Clarity?” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White*, Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, ed., (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 311-336.
- 15) Paul’s ritualistic language for unity of the church is well attested in 10:16-21. Participation in Christ’s blood and body delivers a strong message of unity. Enforcing unity is regarded as a political function of the communion
- 16) Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 205. Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 236.

an exclusive community and forms internal coherence.¹⁷⁾

We discussed above that the Spirit lets the believer understand the spiritual gifts; the Spirit serves as a kind of teacher. The Spirit, in the latter part of 1 Corinthians, is also presented as the one who grants a variety of spiritual gifts. The Spirit enables Christians to understand those spiritual gifts. They are given to the believer by the Spirit himself. Paul declares that, despite the variety of spiritual gifts, only one Spirit works through those gifts (12:4, 11); “All these [i.e., spiritual gifts] are inspired by the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (v.11). In addition to this common origin of the gifts, the gifts share one purpose, that is, “the common good” (τὸ συμφέρον, 12:7). Therefore, the apostle emphasizes the unity of the church through his discussion of the Spirit’s work and the common purpose.

Here the Spirit works as the ordering force for the unity of the body of Christ while functioning as the generative force in its baptizing believers into the body.¹⁸⁾ The whole body consists of various members, and its work is the cooperation of each part’s function. The Spirit, inspiring various gifts and apportioning them to each member of the body (v.11), brings about the transcendent, heavenly unity in the church. Christ’s

17) In comparison with Seneca’s view of *sacer spiritus*, the Holy Spirit is not present in all humans (see that Paul does not entertain cosmological all-pervasiveness of the cosmic *pneuma*). Becoming one spirit with Christ (1 Cor 6:17) requires believers’ baptism by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). In Paul’s notion, the Spirit gives coherence to the body of Christ and separates the insider from the outsider of Christ’s body. Throughout the baptism by the Spirit believers’ membership is shifted from the world to the body of Christ. The issue of belonging is at stake. Seneca’s *sacer spiritus*, nevertheless, is intrinsically present in human beings; there is no need of initiation for *spiritus*’ existence in humans (*Natural Questions* 2.9.4; *Epistles* 41.1-2, 73.16; cf. Paul’s dichotomous world view of “the spirit of the world” and “the Spirit of God”).

18) Lapidge, “Stoic Cosmology,” 168-169, 175-176.

body must be in harmony because of the Spirit's ordering work.

The Spirit's work in the Christian community as the generative and the ordering power is critical for Paul's body politic. The apostle's ethical concern about the harmony in the Corinthian church is based upon his pneumatology that the Spirit forms unity among church members by means of admitting new believers to the church and giving spiritual gifts to all believers. In 1 Cor 12:12-17, Paul applies body metaphor to the Corinthian factionalism. Believers comprise a common body while they are different in ethnic background and social status (v.13). They are all baptized into one body. Just as the body has many members, all the members of the body are one body (vv.12, 20). It is nonsense that the body consists of one member (v.14). Believers make the body of Christ, and each believer is a member of the body (v.27).¹⁹⁾ To sin against fellow believers, wounding their consciences, is to sin against Christ (8:12; cf. 6:17).²⁰⁾

We find a clear political *topos* for unity in 1 Cor 12:26, that is, the theme of co-suffering (*συμπάσχειν*) and co-rejoicing

19) The body metaphor is found elsewhere in 1 Corinthians (e.g., 6:12-20; 10:14-22; 11:29; cf. 1:13).

20) Paul endows a new political function to the body metaphor which is usually seen in Greco-Roman political and philosophical discussions of harmony, that is, a politically conservative function to maintain the status hierarchy of the society (*Paul and the Rhetoric*, pp.92, 94-96). The apostle questions the unquestioned hierarchy of status (12:22-25). The normally conceived hierarchy of body is merely "an apparent, surface hierarchy." Paul argues that the members, who are weaker and less honored, are in fact more honored than the apparently stronger and more honored members. In other words, he insists that honor does not accord with status; ". . . those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the grater honor . . ." (v.23). To Paul, discouraging conflicts and advocating harmony in the community cannot be done by supporting for the status quo just as "benevolent patriarchy" does, but by changing the Corinthian Christians' perspective on their internal relationship. His body metaphor is intended to correct their perspective which causes the factionalism.

(συγχαίρειν). Verse 26 reads, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” This topos is one of the standard ancient definitions of political unity and solidarity, rooted in the body analogy for the community.²¹⁾ The object of co-rejoice is the good of the community rather than individual fulfillment; each believer receives the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (12:7). There should be no discord (σχίσμα, 12:25) among believers, and they should have the same care for one another because God composed the body, believers’ community, in that way (vv.24-25; ὁ θεὸς συνεκέρασεν τὸ σῶμα, v.24).²²⁾ This compositional intention of God necessitates the unity in the church. The theme of co-suffering and co-rejoice is a political *topos* for such unity.

3. Transcendental Dimension of Paul’s Mysticism of *Gnosis*

3.1. Mystical *Gnosis* of God

Two phrases in 1 Cor 2:6-16 seem to denote God’s mystery: “a secret and hidden wisdom of God” and “the depths of God.”

21) Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language of Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 162-163. Dio Chrysostom states, “For is that man not most blessed who has many bodies with which to be happy when he experiences a pleasure, many souls with which to rejoice when his is fortunate? And if glory be the high goal of the ambitious, he may achieve it through the eulogies of his friends” *Or.* 3.108-109.

22) Since God intends the Christian community, the body of Christ, to have no factions in it, any divisions and conflicts are against the divine will; they are merely human faults. For instance, ἔρις and ζήλος (3:3) amount to ‘walking in a human way.’ Paul is drawing upon a well-attested *topos* in Greco-Roman literature. Factionalism is a “human” failing (3:1-4; 10:13; 15:32). *Ibid.*, 82.

Both refer to the mystical quality of the divine; therefore, God's mystery is not accessible to everyone. In other words, those quoted phrases denote the transcendence of God. This transcendental quality of God is not inaccessible. If it is the case, mysticism itself is not possible. The Spirit's intercessory work is necessary to access the divine mysteries. The Spirit itself shares the divinity of God. Also, God's secret wisdom and the depths of God make the content of what the Spirit reveals to and teach the believer.

As we discussed above, Paul makes a series of contrasts, one of which is that between "the wisdom of the wise" (1:19) or "the wisdom of the world" (1:20) and "the wisdom of God" (1:21). We can consider these two phrases to indicate the same object that is irreconcilably opposite to God's wisdom; God has "made foolish the wisdom of the world" (1:20) and "will destroy the wisdom of the wise" (1:19). The world, in the wisdom of God, cannot know God through its wisdom (1:21; cf. 2:6). Paul defines this divine wisdom as Christ crucified (1:23-4). God's wisdom is secret and hidden; "None of the rulers of this age understood this [i.e., God's wisdom]" (2:8). Christ crucified is what the Spirit reveals to believers. Paul also considers this wisdom of God as "the depths of God." The Spirit "searches everything, even the depths of God" (2:10). Christ, therefore, is God's mystery, and the believer should truly understand Christ to be in mystical communion with God.

Our apostle makes an intriguing connection between "the depths of God" and the spiritual gifts from God (2:12). Paul seems to understand that spiritual gifts are phenomena of God's mysteries and, without a true understanding of these gifts, believers cannot be "mature," that is, cannot be in a true mystical relationship with God. In 2:6, Paul writes that "we" impart God's wisdom among the mature and, in 2:12 he declares that "we" have received God's Spirit and become able to understand spiritual gifts. Concerning spiritual maturity, the understanding

of Christ and that of spiritual gifts should accompany each other.

In Paul's notion, God's wisdom is something to be known and understood. We can regard this as a matter of intellectual activity. Although this intellectual element is not the only one in his mysticism,²³⁾ it is still significant in establishing communion with God.

Paul seems to distinguish knowledge into two categories: true knowledge of God and imperfect knowledge to puff up. The intended readership of 1 Corinthians certainly possessed knowledge; Paul gives thanks to God that "you [i.e., the recipients of his epistle] were enriched in him [i.e., Christ Jesus] with all speech and all knowledge" (1:5) (*italics added*). The Spirit's teaching and revelation enable them to know God whom the world cannot know through wisdom (2:12). The dichotomy of the worldly spirit and God's Spirit makes the separation between those who understand God's gifts and those who cannot. On the other hand, there is a sort of knowledge which causes conflicts in the community; it puffs up and harms the edification of the church (8:1). Paul distinguishes the wisdom of the world and that of God and denies the former (1:19). Knowledge which harms the unity of the church is not true knowledge of God; "If anyone imagines that he knows something [in other words, has knowledge], he does not yet know *as he ought to know*" (8:2) (*italics added*). Our apostle does not criticize the content of the knowledge itself: "we know that 'an idol has no real existence,' and that 'there is no God but one'" (8:4). What is problematic to Paul is not the knowledge itself, but the attitude of those who possess that knowledge and harms the concord of the church. According to Paul, their knowledge is imperfect. This imperfect knowledge is considered later not like the knowledge of God: "some [of you: the recipients] have no

23) The cognitive aspect of Paul's mysticism has a strong concern about communal ethics. This ethical overtone will be discussed in detail in later part of this paper.

knowledge of God” (15:34). Here, Paul develops a subtle argumentation: if anybody’s knowledge puffs up and harms the unity of the community, it means that he does not know God as he ought to. Again, if anyone has such imperfect knowledge of God, in fact, he has no knowledge of God at all.

These two categories of believers are presented with Paul’s metaphor of “milk” and “solid food”; “I [i.e., Paul] fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it” (3:2). What the strong members of the Corinthian church possess is not intended for the mature, but for babes. Their knowledge is imperfect and, therefore, those who possess that knowledge cannot but puff up. Therefore, they expose their spiritual immaturity. Even though what they know about God (1 Cor 8) is correct, this knowledge is not complete itself. To correct this, Paul attempts to transform their cognition and make them realize what is wrong with them because it is necessary for them to have a true mystical communion with God. Trying to change their cognition, Paul, again, emphasizes Christ crucified because Christ is the wisdom of God itself.²⁴⁾ Their factionalism is wrong; every believer is Christ’s (3:23). It is Christ who died on the cross and in whose name all Corinthian Christians were baptized (1:14). Besides, Paul introduces the motif of being known by God, and this new motif has an ethical undertone (see section 3.2 and 4).

24) God’s spirit performs a cognitive activity, transforming human cognition. Paul intends, in his argumentation of the Spirit’s revelation of God’s mysteries (2:10), for a fundamental transformation of believers’ cognition from the immediate and inadequate, merely empirical approach to the phenomena into the true, transcending apprehension of reality. The Spirit revelatory work is a selective activity, drawing boundaries between ones who receive and who do not. This revelatory activity changes believers into the ‘*pneumatikoi*’ from the ‘*psychikoi*.’

3.2. Mutuality of Mysticism of *Gnosis*: Mystical Knowledge and the Love of God

God's mysteries are secret and hidden but still accessible. This accessibility of the divine mysteries indicates that God is knowable to the believer. We already discussed the Spirit's mystical functions to establish mystical communion between God and the believer. Communion with God can be articulated in intellectual terms. We may call Paul's mysticism intellectual mysticism. Besides, his heavenly journey and mystical encounter with God (2 Cor 12:1-10) show a form of experiential mysticism (cf. Acts 9:1-9). It will be safe to say that Paul has both forms of mysticism. Outstanding in 1 Cor 2:6-16, nevertheless, is a form of intellectual mysticism. It can be explained that over-emphasis by some Corinthian church members upon the knowledge of God's mysteries necessitates Paul to place more weight on intellectual mysticism in 1 Cor 2:6-16. They certainly possessed correct knowledge of God although it was not perfect (8:1-7). They, however, did not understand mutuality of *gnosis* mysticism that the act of knowing cannot be complete unless done by both sides: the believer and God.

Paul directs his recipients' attention from knowing God to being known by God. Knowledge possessed by "the strong" in the church (cf. 8:1-7) is imperfect; they are not ready for "solid food" and "jealousy and strife" exist among them (3:3). Moreover, even perfect knowledge should be with love. Knowledge loses its priority and becomes subordinate to God's knowledge of believers (cf. 13:8). In order to enlighten and make "the strong" correct the imperfection of their knowledge, Paul asserts that believers should be known by God; "if one loves God, one is known by him" (8:3). Mystical communion with God demands mutual cognition between God and believers.

In other words, being known by God completes believers' mystical relationship with God because the mystical communion is a mutual relationship.

Being known by God also has a social, ethical implication. Edification of the church is Paul's main concern in dealing with the factionalism in the Corinthian church (cf. 1:10-17). It is love that builds up the Christian community (8:1). Paul's emphasis on love is outstanding in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. In the former chapter, the apostle argues for the church's unity and, in the latter, presents love as the superior virtue. Only those who have both knowledge and the virtue of love can claim that they have true knowledge of God and, accordingly, true communion with God. Their possession of the true knowledge is proved with their cooperation for the edification of the community.

We have seen that Paul, arguing against the knowledge to puff up, promotes God's wisdom (i.e., the right knowledge of God revealed through the Spirit) and love for God (i.e., the virtue for believers to be known by God)²⁵) and that they denote the mutuality of Paul's *gnosis* mysticism. Believer's communion with God requires them to be known by God as well as to know God's secret and hidden wisdom. The knowledge of God's wisdom and love for God has a commonality that they are articulated in terms of corporate ethics. Firstly, in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, the wisdom of God is presented to be opposite to the wisdom of the wise and intended to dissuade the readership from "jealousy and strife." Identifying God's wisdom and power with Christ, Paul urges harmony in the Corinthian church. Faith is not to be "in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (2:5). Regarding love's attributes in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul seems to make an implicit argument against arrogance and boastfulness (13:4-5). Besides, advocating harmony, the apostle makes an

25) Brian S. Rosner, "Known by God": The Meaning and Value of a Neglected Biblical Concept," *Tyndale Bulletin* 59 (2008), 211-219.

ethical argument of Christ; “Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose” (1:10) and “*Is Christ divided?* Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” (1:13, italics added).

Secondly, “love to build up” is also articulated in ethical terms. It has obvious aspects of corporate ethics (13:4-7).²⁶⁾ Regarding the factionalism in the Corinthian church, Paul intended love to serve as a rhetorical weapon against the factionalism. It is not a coincidence that in 1 Cor 12, the apostle makes a strong argumentation for the unity of the church utilizing the body metaphor.

The revelation of God’s mysteries through the Spirit is “what God has prepared for those who *love* him” (2:6, emphasis added). Here, we find an interesting connection between the pneumatic knowledge and the love of God. God’s recognition of ones who love him cannot be disconnected from the reception of God’s mysteries. Love is another articulation of Paul’s intellectual mysticism.

4. Communal Ethical Dimension of Paul’s Mysticism of *Gnosis*

4.1. Mystical Knowledge and Boundary Formation

Since we have already discussed Paul’s dichotomous worldview above, we do not have to repeat it in this section.

26) The text reads, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or *boastful* or *arrogant* or rude. *It does not insist on its own way*; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (italics added).

Rather, it will suffice to point out that mystical knowledge and communion with God is granted only to a certain group of people who receive the Spirit from God. They make a counterpart of those who are the recipients of the spirit of the world (2:12). Here, membership is a significant issue. Social belonging is to reveal the cosmological belonging as well (cf. 1 Cor 15). Mystical communion with God has a very exclusive characteristic. The boundary between the two realms is sharp and clear. It does not allow any dim area.

This exclusivity, at the same time, can mean strong internal unity. It will emphasize the concord among members of the same group, and it is true in the case of 1 Corinthians. Strong sense of belonging is formed, and communion with each other is considered as critical just as the communion with God is considered as significant. Every believer belongs to the same God; he or she is “Christ’s and Christ is God’s” (3:23). The Spirit is all-pervasive among believers in the realm of God. Internal unity ought to be present in the church; phenomena should reflect reality.

God’s Spirit performs a cognitive activity, transforming human cognition.²⁷⁾ Paul intends, in his argumentation of the Spirit’s revelation of God’s mysteries (2:10), for a fundamental transformation of believers’ cognition from the immediate and

27) In the Hellenistic world of ideas, a substantive congruity between the perceived world of phenomena and true cognition is assumed. The cosmos is considered as a reflected image of the cognition and *vice versa*. This notion of congruity underlies some transcendent figures in various philosophical and religious traditions, such as Sophia in the Jewish wisdom tradition, Logos in Greek philosophy (and in Jewish philosophy, e.g., Philo), *Angelus Interpres* in Apocalypticism; they have two inseparable aspects: a cosmological, object one and a cognitive one. Henrik Tronier, “Hellenistic Hermeneutics and Paul’s Idea of the Spirit in First Corinthians,” in *The New Testament in its Hellenistic Context: Proceedings of a Nordic Conference of New Testament Scholars, held in Skálhóld, Studia theologica islandica* 10 (Reykjavik, 1996), 37.

inadequate, merely empirical approach to the phenomena into the true, transcending apprehension of reality. The Spirit's revelatory work is a selective activity, drawing boundaries between ones who receive and those who do not. This revelatory activity changes believers into the state of πνευματικοί (*pneumatikoi*) from that of ψυχικοί (*psychikoi*). This terminology is a parallel expression used by the Corinthians Christians for different levels of spiritual status. The *psychikoi* are those who, remaining in lower religious status, do not have intimacy with the divine. They need instruction and are still susceptible to corruptible earthly and bodily influences.²⁸⁾ The *pneumatikoi*, on the other hand, enjoy intimacy with the divine and are no more susceptible to those corruptible influences. The *psychikoi* cannot know God; "the world did not know God through wisdom" (1:21), whereas πνευματικοί are taught by the Spirit, not by human wisdom; they can even interpret spiritual gifts (πνευματικά) to the spiritual people (πνευματικοίς) (2:13). Here, Paul introduces a new criterion of status. Critical is the possession of pneumatic knowledge, not of conventional "high-status indicator."²⁹⁾

4.2. Mystical Knowledge among Believers

Paul saw a serious discrepancy in the Corinthian church: the factionalism in the community. To the apostle, their phenomena did not reflect the reality. By definition, those who cause or participate in the factionalism are certainly the *pneumatikoi*, but they lack pneumatic knowledge and do not

28) Richard A. Horsley, "Pneumatikos vs. Psychikos: Distinctions of Spiritual Status among the Corinthians," *Harvard Theological Review* 69 (1976), 269-288.

29) Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 63.

have true communion with God.³⁰⁾ To deal with this ‘inconsistency,’ our author introduces a sub-category: “babes in Christ” (3:1) which is in contrast with “the mature” (2:6). The mature seems to be equal with “the spiritual man.” The secret and hidden wisdom of God is imparted among the mature because they are ready for the “solid food.” Some of the Corinthians church members, however, remain to be “babes in Christ.” They cannot digest the solid food. Only milk is suitable for them. The term that is in opposition to “the spiritual man” is “the unspiritual person” (ψυχικός, 2:14), not “the man of the flesh” (3:1). The unspiritual man does not receive the Spirit. The reception of the Spirit makes a distinction between the insider and the outsider. It is consistent with Paul’s dichotomous worldview. “The spiritual man” and “the unspiritual man” respectively belong to a different sphere.

How can the babes in Christ become spiritual? This change is possible only when they are ready for the solid food: true and mature knowledge of God. To gain such knowledge is to transform cognition in order to have a true understanding of Christ crucified and the Spiritual gifts and to transform view on true Christian life (cf. Phil 1:27; 2:5-11).³¹⁾ To be spiritually mature means to be in unity with other members of the body of Christ and to edify the church (cf. 1 Cor 3:3-4). The recipients of 1 Corinthians are admonished by Paul to realize that they are in organic unity and, accordingly, avoid any discord in the community. The problem of factionalism in the Corinthian Christian community, Paul argues, can be solved only through the transformation of cognition and the following change of life.

30) Conzelmann understands that the pneumatics in 1 Cor 2:16 comprise a superior class, not all Christians. *1 Corinthians*, 57.

31) Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 127.

Each believer who receives the “solid food” is to assume the Spirit’s function of teaching; “And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit” (2:13). Every mature believer is not to provide new teachings but to interpret spiritual truth³²⁾ as to God’s wisdom and God’s gifts to the believer (2:10-12). This interpretation is intended only for the insider, that is, “those who possess the Spirit” because the unspiritual are incapable of understanding (2:14). Church members are expected to interact with each other by interpreting the mystical knowledge of God to each other and guiding the “babes in Christ” to the spiritual maturity.³³⁾ This interaction among believers has an undertone of Paul’s *gnosis* mysticism. As the motif of knowledge serves for mystical communion with God, it also works for the unity among the church members. Mature believers enter the mystical communion with God through their pneumatic knowledge of God’s mysteries. This mystical relationship requires concord among believers. To interpret God’s mysteries to fellow believers means to lead them to mystical communion with God. In this communion, Christians form a mystical unity in the community. Ecclesial harmony is understood in terms of the mystical relationship among believers.

Concerning intellectual interactions among believers,

32) Gillespie argues that 1 Cor 2:6-16 represents one instance where early Christian prophecy is the unlabeled subject matter and that, according to its testimony, the function of such prophecy is the interpretation of the apostolic kerygma. Thomas W. Gillespie, “Interpreting the Kerygma: Early Christian Prophecy according to 1 Corinthians 2:6-16,” in *Gospel Origins & Christian Beginnings: In Honor of James M. Robinson* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1990), 151.

33) We find a similarity between Paul’s view on mature believers’ function and the prevailing schema in the wisdom school in that the procedure is taken from elementary teaching to higher *gnosis* and the wise are autonomous and teach each other wisdom. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 59.

prophecy can be understood to have an interpretive function and to be a mode of communal relationship for the mystical unity in the community. Paul promotes prophecy as a spiritual gift considered to be higher than speaking tongues in the hierarchy of spiritual gifts; “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kind of tongues ... However, earnestly desire the higher gifts” (12:28, 31; cf. 12: 4-11). Paul’s choice in favor of prophecy is because of his strong concern about the church’s edification; “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church” (14:4). For this reason, Paul eagerly promotes prophecy; “Now I [i.e., Paul] want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy” (14:5).

Paul considers prophecy, not speaking tongues, to be beneficial to edify the church because of its intelligibility. The unintelligibility of speaking tongues alienates church members from each other and destroys the church’s internal unity; “if you utter in a tongue speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air” (14:9; cf. 14:11). Some may argue that speaking tongues is placed under prophecy because of the trance³⁴)-like mode of speaking tongues.³⁵) Nevertheless, whether the tongue speaker is in a trance or not is not the question in 1 Corinthians 14. It is still possible that the tongue speaker utters an intelligible message to the listener in his or her trance.³⁶) Besides, speaking

34) Trance is an anthropological term for ecstasy that means “a psychological and physiological state, typically ‘marked by reduced sensitivity to stimuli, loss or alteration of knowledge of what is happening, [and] substitution of automatic for voluntary activity.’” Terrance Callan, “Prophecy and Ecstasy in Greco-Roman Religion and in 1 Corinthians,” *Novum Testamentum* 27 (2, 1985): 126.

35) For this, see Callan, “Prophecy and Ecstasy.”

36) We find an instance in *Aeneid*, Book VI, 42-101. In this part of the famous Roman epic, Virgil sings that a sybil possessed by Apollo utters in a trance-like

tongues does not necessarily involve trance. Moreover, Paul does not mention the mode of speaking tongues but concerns himself with the unintelligibility of speaking tongues.

Why is the intelligibility significant to Paul? It is because the interpretation and the transmission of the divine mysteries among church members are possible only through intelligible communication. The communion with God is also based on intelligible communication and recognition between God and the believer through the Spirit's revelatory work. To Paul, mutual understanding is the way of forming a mystical communion with God and mystical harmony in the church.

5. Conclusion

The present paper made two suggestions. First, Paul's mysticism found in 1 Corinthians can be termed the mysticism of *gnosis* because the mystical communion with God is based upon the right understanding of the divine mysteries. Second, Paul's mysticism of *gnosis*, defining communal harmony in terms of intellectual mysticism and cognitive change, serves to promote the internal unity of the Corinthian church. These two points are so closely related that one cannot stand without the other. Mystical communion with God requires harmony among congregational members, and the unity in the church is founded

state. She is controlled by Apollo but still gives clear answers to the questions raised by Aeneid and his fellows (cf. lines 46-51 and 77-80). The figure of horsemanship in 77-80 likely indicates the trance in which the sybil was. Lines 98-101 tell us that the prophetess utters both intelligible and unintelligible words: "*Talibus ex adyto dictis Cumaea Sibylla horrendas canit ambages antroque remugit, obscuris vera involvens: ea frena furenti concutit et stimulos sub pectore vertit Apollo.*" Clyde Pharr, ed., *Virgil's Aeneid: Books I-VI* (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1998).

upon such communion with God. The Spirit's function is critical for both the communion with God and the communal unity. The Spirit serves as God's agent to reveal God's mysteries prepared for those who love God and enable "the spiritual" (πνευματικοί) to understand and interpret them to fellow believers. Believers are supposed to assume the Spirit's function to teach. This function of interpretation is to forming and extending mystical harmony among Christians. Paul's mystical notion makes a circular movement between the mystical communion with God and the harmony in the church. Our apostle both articulates his mysticism in terms of communal ethics and gives mystical quality to the Christian communal life.

<주제어>

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<초록>

성령, 그노시스 그리고 고린도교회

-교회의 화합을 위한 바울의 성령 이해와 신비한 교제-

이상목

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본 연구는 고린도교회의 정황을 배경으로 성령과 그노시스(*gnosis*, 지식)에 대한 바울의 이해를 살피고, 그것이 지닌 고린도교회 일치를 위한 함의를 밝힌다. 바울의 신비주의는 하나님에 대한 개인적인 경험만이 아니라 하나님의 신비에 대한 지적인 이해를 기초로 한다. 바울 자신의 기록과 사도행전의 간접 기록은 바울이 유대교의 신비주의 전통에 익숙하였고 그 자신이 신비주의를 수행하였음을 보여준다. 바울은 영적인 현상이 강하였던 고린도교회의 내부 갈등에 대해 권면하면서 영적인 체험이 아닌 지적인 이해와 윤리적 변화를 강조한다. 바울은 자신을 하나님의 신비들을 맡은 자로 소개한다. 그에게 있어서 십자가에 달린 그리스도와 신자들에게 주어지는 영적인 은사는 하나님의 신비이다. 성령은 신자들을 하나님과의 신비한 연합으로 이끌며 “하나님의 깊은 것들”(고전 2:10)을 이해하도록 한다. 신자들은 십자가와 영적인 현상을 체험하는데 그치지 말고 그것을 바로 이해하는 단계로 나아가야 한다. 이것은 영적으로 성숙해가는 과정이다. 신자들은 오직 성령의 활동을 통해 그러한 성숙의 단계에 이를 수 있다. 성령의 활동은 신자들의 체험과 이해를 모두 포괄한다. 따라서 양자 중 하나에만 머문다면 성숙한 신앙 윤리를 실천할 수 없고, 그것은 교회의 갈등으로 이어진다. 신자들은 영적인 체험과 그에 대한 이해를 통해 서로 교제하고 서로가 하나의 몸 안에서 신비하게 연합되었음을 알게 된다. 이러한 점에서, 바울의 성령 이해와 신비주의는 공동체의 화합을 위한 함의를 지닌다.

본 논문은 다음 두 가지를 제안한다. 첫째, 고린도전서에서 발견되는 바울의 신비주의는 그노시스 신비주의라 부를 수 있다. 그것은 하나님과의 신비적 교제가 하나님의 신비들에 대한 지식 및 이해에 기초하기 때문이다. 둘째, 바울의 그노시스 신비주의는 고린도교회의 화합을 고양시키려는 바울의 의도를 담는다. 성령의 역할은 하나님과의 교제와 교회 공동체의 화합을 위해 중요하다.

<Abstract>

**The Spirit, *Gnosis*, and the Corinthian Church:
Paul's View of Pneuma and Mystical Communion
for Ecclesial Concord**

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This article studies Paul's understanding of the Spirit and *gnosis* (γνῶσις, knowledge) regarding the ethical implications as to ecclesial concord in Corinth. Paul's notion of mystical communion is based on both his personal experience of the divine and an intellectual understanding of God's mysteries: the Christ crucified and God's spiritual gifts to the believer. As the accounts in Paul's own letters and Acts show, the apostle was familiar with Jewish mystical traditions and practiced mysticism. Dealing with the internal discord of the Corinthian church, which experienced strong spiritual phenomena, Paul elaborates the ethical implications of the believer's experience of spiritual matters. The Spirit lets the believer to understand the divine mysteries; the Spirit serves as God's agent to lead the believer into the mystical communion with God and understand "the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10). Believers' communion with God is not possible without intelligible communication and recognition between God and believers through the Spirit's revelatory work. The Spirit also works for the congregational harmony; through the Spirit's work, believers can be in mystical harmony with each other in the church. Each believer enters a mystical communion through the pneumatic revelation and the right understanding of it. Paul's concept of mysticism has aspects of communal ethics.

This study makes two suggestions. First, we can call the apostle's notion of mysticism in 1 Corinthians the mysticism of *gnosis* because the mystical communion with God requires the correct understanding of the divine secrets. Second, Paul's *gnosis* mysticism serves to promote the ecclesial concord of the recipients. The Spirit's work is critical for both the communion with God and the concord of the church. The transmission and interpretation of the divine mysteries among believers are possible only through intelligible communication. In this regard, Paul's exhortation for prophecy and against speaking tongues in communal worship makes perfect sense. To the apostle, mutual understanding is the way of forming mystical communion with God and mystical harmony in the church.