

The Mystery of Christ

“Christ our God is much more visible now that he is in the Father” (Ignatius Romans 3:3).

Some years ago I saw a rather gripping Australian film called **The Last Wave**. It was set in Sydney and told the story of somewhat unreligious, secular, well-educated young man who had become aware of the supernatural realm by his association with a group of urban Aborigines in Redfern. In the middle of the film, he visited his stepfather, an Anglican priest, and sought, rather unsuccessfully, for help from him in dealing with his experiences. In exasperation he said to the hapless man, "Dad, you never told me that there were any mysteries." Indignant, the father replied, "That's not true! I've tried to explain the mysteries of Christianity to you again and again." At this the son exclaimed, "You never explained them, Dad; you explained them away!"

Many modern theologians and Christians tend to confuse mysteries with secrets¹. So when they explain the faith and commend it to others they explain it away. But a mystery is not the same thing as a secret. Even though both have to do with something that is hidden and unknown, a mystery differs from a secret in one important respect. A secret remains a secret only as long as you don't know it. Once it is revealed it ceases to be a secret, because a secret exists only as long as information is withheld or the facts remain unknown. But a mystery is still a mystery even when it is revealed. In fact, the more you know about it, the more mysterious it becomes². Think of the mystery of life or of love! You may be able to explain a mystery, but you can never explain it away. It remains a mystery.³

In ancient Greece mystagogues were stewards of a god's house, the caretakers of a holy place, a site or the shrine that was dedicated to a god or goddess. Their task was to show the devotees of that deity around the holy place. As they did so they told the stories, the myths, that were associated with the place. Those stories served to explain the nature of the deity that was present there and the rituals that were associated with worship of that deity. In this way they initiated people into the mystery of that god. They revealed what was hidden from human sight but experienced by those who were involved in the cult of that god. The mystagogue who had been initiated into the mystery “led” (*agô* in Greek) others together with himself into that mystery. In classical Greek “mystagogy” was the term for the initiation of people into the experience of a mystery.

¹ See the frequent translation of mystery as “secret” in the NIV (Matt 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; 1 Cor 2:7; 4:1; 2 Thess 2:7).

² Mystery is commonly defined as that which goes beyond normal human comprehension, like the perception of ultra-violet light to human eyesight and colour for a colour-blind person. The implication is that humans were more perceptive and intelligent they would be able to discern it clearly and understand it fully. In contrast to this view the writers of New Testament do not just use this term for that which is beyond normal human understanding but for that which is hidden from all human perception, no matter how acute and refined, like the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist. The mystery of the Christian faith has to do with what Luther calls “the theology of the cross,” God hidden and revealed in what is contrary to him, the human nature, weakness, suffering, and folly of the incarnate, crucified and yet exalted Son of God (“Heidelberg Disputation,” LW 31, 1957, 52-54.

³ The Greek word *mystêrion* is derived from a verb *muō* that means to walk about with shut eyes. Mystery therefore has to do with the experience of unseen, non-empirical realities.

My basic contention is that all teachers of the Christian faith are mystagogues. Their task is to initiate people into a wonderful mystery that is almost too good to be true, a mystery that evades human grasp and beggars all imagination. They deal with invisible realities (Heb 11:1; cf. 2 Cor 5:18), things that are hidden from human sight, gifts from God that no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and no mind has ever conceived for itself (1 Cor 2:9). The focus of that mystery is on the **presence** of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus in the church and on access to the heavenly realm through him in the divine service. Yet it goes beyond what happens in the divine service, for it embraces the whole history of the world and the whole of our physical lives as we journey with Christ from earth to heaven. It will remain a mystery until the reappearance of Christ on the last day. Only then will all that is now hidden be disclosed for all to see.

In recent times Hugh Mackay has undertaken an extensive study of the attitudes of the so-called Generation Y. He has noted that it is the most intensely tribal group of young people in living memory. For me the most interesting finding from his research is his claim that this generation is fascinated by three things - community, imagination, and mystery. If that is so, the church should be well placed to commend the Christian faith to them. That, at least, is my belief. I think that, to meet the challenge of the Enlightenment, it may, in the past, all too often have misrepresented the faith by rationalising it and explaining it away. Christian preachers and teachers should, instead, treat the faith as a mystery and seek to be good mystagogues in the way that they deal with it.

Young people who have been steeped in the tenets of post-modernism have an inbuilt suspicion of abstract thought and universal theories. It focuses on our social construction of the world and our varied experience of it. Yet at the same time many people who are steeped in it hanker after some assurance that their experiences are grounded in reality, unlike a drug-induced hallucination, and therefore able to be shared with others in common discourse. It seems to me that we Christians may be able to use the concept and reality of mystery to commend the Christian faith to them. Mystery is a term that describes the common personal experience of the spiritual realm that pervades the material realm and helps a person to discover its full sense. The mystery of Christ is a commonly shared experience of him, a vision of reality that is subjective and yet objective, personal and yet cosmic, inward and yet outward, mental and yet physical, heavenly and yet earthly. It does not supply a theory that claims to explain everything, but provides a vision of life that helps each person to occupy their unique place in God's creation.

In this paper I aim to summarise the teaching of the New Testament on the mystery of Christ and our participation in that mystery. I will not deal with the matter comprehensively, but aim only to summarise what we can learn about it by an analysis of the use of the term *mystêrion*⁴ in the gospels⁵ and in the Pauline epistles.⁶

⁴ Until the second half of the twentieth century it was fashionable to assume that Paul and the evangelists borrowed this term from the pagan Hellenistic mystery religions. In his careful study of "*mystêrion, muō*," G. Bornkamm has argued that this is most unlikely (*TDNT*, vol IV, 1967, 802-28). He shows that it was first used in the LXX to translate the Aramaic term *râz* in Dan 2:18,19,27,28,29,30,47 to refer to "an eschatological mystery, a concealed intimation of divinely ordained future events whose disclosure and interpretation is reserved for God alone and for those

1. The Mystery of God's Kingdom

While the theme of Christ's teaching as the revelation of a mystery is implicit in all the gospels, Christ himself only uses this term once in his explanation of the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:11; cf. Matt 13:11; Luke 8:10). After Jesus had taught this parable to the crowd, the Twelve apostles and his other disciples asked him about his use of parables. Before he explained the Parable of the Sower, he remarked that the mystery of God's kingdom had been given only to them; it was inaccessible to those who are outside his circle of disciples even though they saw him and heard what he said. His parables were utterly opaque to them because they were still outside God's kingdom.

In Mark Jesus has five main things to say about the mystery of God's kingdom. First, good and gracious God's rule on earth is concealed from human sight and yet revealed in Jesus the Messiah. Jesus embodies the mystery. He ushers in God's kingdom, mysteriously, by his incarnation, his teaching, and his sacrificial death. Paradoxically, that mystery is concealed in his humanity in order to be revealed in a hidden way by his teaching in parables (4:11-12). The parables reveal what is otherwise hidden (4:22). Second, God himself reveals the mystery of his kingdom through his word, the word that Jesus preaches and teaches. Jesus is the sower of the seed, the word of God that produces repentance and speaks forgiveness to those who receive it.⁷ Third, only his disciples have access to that mystery. They alone are in on it (4:11). This is rather surprising, for the word that reveals the mystery is preached to all. Yet Jesus explains the word only to his disciples who have faith in him (4:1, 10-13, 33-34). He initiates them into the mystery of God's kingdom. They alone have ears to hear the mystery (4:9, 23), because the mystery is always a divine gift that can only be had as it is received through hearing God's word. It comes to the disciples of Jesus through hearing his word, rather than through seeing him. Four, the word that reveals the mystery is like a lamp that lights up a one-roomed house at night (4:21-23).⁸ The preaching of the gospel produces a theophany by enlightening the disciples of Jesus. It produces the harvest of light in them. Fifth, the preaching of Jesus begins the revelation of the mysteries of God's kingdom. On the last day, everything that is now hidden will be fully manifest (4:22). Sixth, mysteriously the power of the kingdom resides in the word, the seed that produces the harvest without human assistance (4:26-29), the tiny seed that grows the kingdom and becomes the largest plant in the garden. So for Mark Jesus conceals the mystery of God's kingdom in his humanity in order to reveal it to his disciples through his teaching of God's word.

Matthew and Luke interpret the mystery in a slightly different way. In Mark Jesus speaks about **the mystery** (singular) of God's kingdom, because Mark wants to emphasise its embodiment in Jesus; in Matthew and Luke he speaks about **the**

inspired by His Spirit" (814f). It was then used in a similar sense in Jewish apocalyptic and Rabbinic literature.

⁵ Mark 4:11; Matt 13:11; Luke 8:10.

⁶ See Rom 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor 2:1(?), 7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thess 2:7; 1 Tim 3:9, 16.

⁷ The term "the word" appears eight times in the explanation of the parable.

⁸ The parable the lamp in 4:21-25 has, most likely, been added to explain the nature of the harvest that is mentioned in 4:20.

knowledge of its mysteries (plural). Their focus is on their human appropriation of God's manifold gifts, the reception of Christ and his teachings.

Matthew puts the emphasis on **understanding the word** (13:13,14,15,19,23).⁹ He omits the parable of the lamp, apart from its interpretative sentences about the abundance of gifts for those who are enlightened. This is added to the words of Jesus to his disciples about God's gift of knowledge to them (13:12), the knowledge that leads to repentance and divine healing (13:15). He also adds the congratulations of Jesus to his disciples for seeing and hearing what all the prophets had longed for so ardently (13:16-17).¹⁰ So then, for Matthew the people who understand the word of the kingdom produce the varied harvest of healing according to their level of understanding. Theophany comes through understanding, insight into the mysteries of God's hidden rule.

Like Matthew, Luke puts the emphasis on the knowledge of the mysteries of God's kingdom that comes from hearing the word. On the one hand, he stresses the role of the church as the place for theophany and outreach by adding the clause "so those who come in can see the light" (Luke 8:16). He seems to envisage the house churches where the gospel was preached in his day. The enlightening word lights up each congregation and shines out from it into the world of darkness. The proclamation of the gospel therefore draws those who are outside the church into it and the light of Christ.¹¹ On the other hand, instead of focusing on **what** is heard, as in Mark and Matthew, Jesus speaks in Luke about **how** the word of God is heard (8:18). It needs to be heard and retained so that it produces saving faith (8:12) and the harvest of enlightenment (8:16-18).¹² Only those who hear the word with a good and honest heart and retain it receive the gift of knowledge, the knowledge of the mysteries. So then, in Luke the word of God initiates the disciples into the mysteries of God's kingdom by giving the knowledge of salvation and the enlightenment that comes from the persistent retention of the word in their hearts. The gospel lights up the circle of Christ's disciples, shines out from them into the world, and attracts people from its darkness to the light of God's presence. The church therefore is the place for theophany, the place where God's mysteries are revealed.

2. Paul's Teaching on Mystery.

⁹ Matthew picks up the verb *syniemi* (Hebrew *bin* from Isa 6:9,10. See also a possible echo of this in Paul's *synesis* in Col 1:9; 2:2; Eph 3:4.

¹⁰ Luke places this unit in 10:23,24 after his prayer of thanksgiving to the Father for his revelation of himself to the disciples through him as the Son.

¹¹ In his commentary on Luke 1:1-9:50 (St Louis: Concordia, 1996, 352-53) Art Just summarises this point well: "The Lukan hearer will connect the light to Christ and his Gospel. The one who places the Gospel on the Lampstand is Christ, working in the Christian community through those who have been catechized and baptized. After having heard and believed the Word, the baptized are not to hide Christ's Gospel. The illuminating Word that is in them should light up the house church and shine from it, like a beacon, to others journeying toward it. And when the others come after a long journey, the baptized will illuminate the house church for them when they enter it. This illumination would involve the interpretation of the Word of God within the community of the baptized....The light of Christ's presence in the faithful community shines out from the house church so that those who leave the world and enter the church may learn how to hear the Gospel by observing the faithful community at worship."

¹² Luke reworks the sentence to put all the emphasis on the retention of the word: "they are those who, having heard the word with a good and honest heart, **hold onto** it..."

In his letters Paul speaks about himself as a mystagogue. He picks up the teaching of Jesus and applies it to the life of the church after the ascension of Jesus. In fact, he regards the Christian faith as a mystery, something that is not reached by mental deduction and human understanding, but a hidden reality that is received and held with a clear conscience (1 Tim 3:9). While that mystery is both concealed and revealed in Jesus the risen Lord, it involves God the Father and the Holy Spirit as well. Human beings have full access to that mystery only in the church.

The mystery of the faith involves all three persons of the Trinity. Thus Paul speaks about the mystery of God (1 Cor 2:1; Col 2:2), as well as the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1). In his wisdom God the Father conceived its nature before the foundation of the world (1 Cor 2:7). It involves his hidden plan to unite heaven and earth, angels and human beings, through the incarnation of his Son (Eph 1:9-10). They have been appointed to form one choir that stands in his presence and praises him for the riches of his grace¹³. That cosmic mystery includes some puzzling features of his plan for the salvation of humanity, such as Israel's apparent rejection of Christ (Rom 11:25), the transformation of both the living and the dead at Christ's appearance at the close of the age (1 Cor 15:51), and the restricted operation of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:7). God the Father was "silent" about it and kept it "hidden" and "unknown" for ages before the advent of his Son (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 3:5,9). God's mystery has to do with his administration of his grace through Paul and the other apostles (Eph 3:2). It involves our hidden glorification as those who already now stand with Christ in his glorious presence (1 Cor 2:7), our enjoyment of the good things that he has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9), and our reception of the invisible gifts that he has freely given to us (1 Cor 2:12).

The mystery of the Christian faith is contained in the crucified, risen Lord Jesus (1 Cor 2:1-2).¹⁴ Paul therefore speaks about the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:4; Col 4:3). The mystery of God is "Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:2,3). In his letters Paul does not concentrate on the revelation of that mystery in the historical events of Christ's life, death and resurrection, but on its present revelation. He sums up the mystery of Christ, the great mystery of our spirituality that we all confess, in an intricate little poem about him in 1 Timothy 3:16:

Great, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:
He was revealed in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the Gentiles,
believed in throughout the world,

¹³ By their translation of *eclêrôthêmen* in Eph 1:11 as a reference to our election (NIV) or our heavenly inheritance (RSV) most English translations obscure Paul's picture of the church as a choir that has been given its "allotted place" in God's presence to proclaim his grace (cf. Eph 1:6,12,14). This sense is confirmed by the following verse where Paul maintains that God's people are to be praise-singers of God's grace (see R. Schnackenburg, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, EKK vol x, Einseideln: Benziger Verlag and Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982, 61). As in Col 1:12 Paul here speaks about the allotment of Christians to membership in the heavenly chorus, just as the Levitical musicians, like all the priests, were assigned by "lot" into their division for service at the temple in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Chr 25:8,9).

¹⁴ See Gregory Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, St Louis: Concordia, 2000, 81,82, for the reading of *mysterion* (mystery) rather than *martyrion* (testimony) in 1 Cor 2:1.

taken up in glory.¹⁵

The risen Lord Jesus bridges heaven and earth. By his incarnation on **earth** he has been revealed in the flesh, proclaimed among the nations, and believed in on earth; by his bodily resurrection and ascension into **heaven** he has also been vindicated by God's Spirit, seen by the angels, and taken up in glory before the Father.

The mystery of Christ has to do with his hidden presence in the church. When the disciples of Christ gather together for worship, they are involved in a great mystery, something hidden from sight and all the other four senses, something invisible and yet real. St Paul speaks of it in this way in Col 1:25-28:

"I became the servant (of the church), according to the task of keeping God's house¹⁶ that was given to me to you, to proclaim the word of God fully¹⁷, the **mystery** that has been kept hidden away¹⁸ throughout the ages and generations but has now been disclosed¹⁹ to his saints. To them God chose to make known²⁰ how great among the Gentiles are the riches²¹ of the glory of **this mystery**, which is **Christ among you**²² (plural), the hope of glory."

Here Paul depicts himself as a mystagogue, a person who initiates others into a mystery. That mystery is the dwelling of the risen Lord Jesus with his people in the church, the assembly in God's presence that is open to both Jews and Gentiles. Thus the inclusion of Gentiles in the church through Christ is part of that mystery (cf. Eph 3:4). Since Christ is among the saints, God's glory is there too in all its riches, for the fullness of divinity dwells bodily in Christ (cf. Col 1:19; 2:9). Through him they therefore have access to his heavenly presence. Paul discloses that mystery to the saints, those who are united with Christ and so share in his holiness. They alone have

¹⁵ This layout of the poem emphasises its arrangement in three couplets that describe three shifts of location: from earth to heaven, from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven. It shows how the risen Lord Jesus joins together the earthly and the heavenly domains. It could also be read as a poem with two parallel stanzas of three lines that deal with his appearance in three domains: the world, the church, and heaven. It could then be arranged as follows:

He was revealed in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels;
proclaimed among the Gentiles,
believed in throughout the world,
taken up in glory.¹⁵

¹⁶ Paul uses the Greek word *oikonomia*. This term refers to the management of a household and the administration of its business by an *oikonomos*, a steward or administrator. He envisages the church both as God's household and his house, his holy temple, the place where he resides with his glory. Paul uses both these terms elsewhere in connection with his explanation of the mystery of Christ (1 Cor 4:1; Eph 1:10; 3:2,9).

¹⁷ Rather surprisingly, Paul uses the verb *plêroô* here. It normally means to fill or complete or bring to completion. It is used similarly in Rom 15:19 where it refers to commission to bring the gospel to its completion by preaching it all over the world. By its use Paul seems to combine two ideas, the full enactment of God's word and its full proclamation. It seems to me that we have here verbal cross references to his use of *plêroô*, "fill," in Col 1:9; 2:10; 4:17, his use of *plêrôma*, "fullness," in Col 1:19 and 2:9, and his use of *plêphoria*, "plenitude" or "full extent" or "full assurance" in Col 2:2 (cf. 4:12)

¹⁸ See too the use of the passive participle *apokekrymmenon* in Luke 10:21; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 3:9; cf. Mark 4:22.

¹⁹ The verb *phaneroô* is also used for the disclosure of a mystery in Rom 16:26; 1 Tim 3:16.

²⁰ The verb *gnôrizô* is also used for making known of a mystery in Eph 1:9; 3:3,5,10; 6:19.

²¹ See too this mention of the riches of mystery in Eph 3:8-13.

²² Or "in you." If we go with the image of the church as an assembly then we would translate this phrase as above, but if we go with the image of the church as the temple of God then we would translate it by "in you."

access to it. Thus Paul reveals the presence and activity of the risen Lord to the saints by proclaiming God's word fully to them, the gospel that proclaims Christ and makes him known to them (cf. Rom 16:26-27; 1 Cor 2:1-2; Eph 3:6). Apart from God's word they have no access to the risen Lord Jesus; they have no knowledge or experience of him apart from the gospel. That word initiates them into the mystery of Christ, something that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has ever conceived (1 Cor 2:6-10). The disclosure of his hidden presence gives the faithful a glimpse of their future glory, a foretaste of heaven here on earth. Thus, since the preaching of the gospel reveals the hidden presence of Christ in the divine service, Paul also speaks about "the mystery of the gospel" (Eph 6:19).

Both Christ and the church are part and parcel of the same great mystery. They are, in fact, inseparable from each other. Thus Paul claims that the union of husband and wife as one flesh in marriage reflects the even greater mystery of the invisible union through baptism of Christ with the church, his holy bride (Eph 6:32). By virtue of its union with him the church does not just make the mystery of God's wisdom known to both Jews and Gentiles; it also makes it known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (Eph 3:8-12). And the core of that mystery is this. In Christ "we (Jews and Gentiles) have access²³ to God (the Father) in boldness and confidence through faith in him." Thus just as a wife has access to her father in law through her husband, so the church has hidden access to God the Father through his Son.

The mystery of Christ also involves the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul claims that this mystery was originally revealed by the Spirit to Christ's holy apostles and prophets (Eph 3:4-6). The Spirit taught them what they had to say. They then were the original custodians of this mystery. But they did not keep it to themselves, nor did they restrict access to some secret initiates. They publicised it for the benefit of the whole human race. Their public proclamation of this mystery has been passed on to us through the books that were canonised as the sacred Scriptures for use in the divine service. These books are, if you like, mystery books. Through them the Holy Spirit continues to reveal the mystery of Christ to those who have ears to hear what they have to say.

The Holy Spirit did not just reveal the mystery of Christ to the apostles in the early church. Through his Spirit God also revealed the mystery of Christ and his invisible gifts to those who heard their preaching (1 Cor 2:7-16). Both the preachers and the hearers are inspired by the Spirit. Through the work of the Holy Spirit the hearers have access to the mystery that Paul proclaimed to them. Like them we too have the Holy Spirit, so that we may know what we receive from God through Christ (1 Cor 2:12). The Spirit opens us up to the invisible mystery of God. He attunes our minds to Christ's mind, so that we can understand God's thoughts and acts, his hidden dealings with us. God the Father "enlightens"²⁴ us by his Spirit, so that in Christ we already now know the riches of our inheritance and experience his resurrecting power that energises us (Eph 1:15-23).

²³ See also Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18. Like the verb *prosaĝô* which is used in the LXX for the presentation of an animal as an offering (eg. Exod 29:10; Lev 1:3; 3:3; 4:14; 7:6; 23:8) or a person as a priest to God (eg. Exod 29:4,8; 40:12; Lev 8:9,10), the noun *prosaĝôĝê* is a liturgical term (K.L.Schmidt, "*prosaĝô*, *prosaĝôĝê*," *TDNT*, vol I, 1967, 131-33). This verse recalls 2:18 with its reference to the access of both Jews and Gentiles to God the Father in his new temple through Jesus by the Holy Spirit for an audience with him.

²⁴ See 1 Cor 4:5; Eph 3:9; 2 Tim 1:10; Heb 6:4; 10:32.

The mystery of Christ is revealed in his hidden epiphany, the manifestation of his divinity in human flesh, which is also the theophany of God the Father, his manifestation as God. Unlike the theophanies of pagan gods, that epiphany of Christ does not give us access to God visibly through the human eye in the form of an idol; it gives us access to him **aurally** through his name and word, the message of the gospel. The organ for spiritual sight, the organ for the reception of his epiphany, is the human heart, the conscience. It must be cleansed and remain pure if it is to receive and retain the mystery of God (1 Tim 3:9; cf. Matt 5:8). A clear conscience receives insight into the hidden mystery of Christ that is revealed by God the Father through his word by the power of the Spirit. The cleansing that is given in baptism and received by faith “enlightens”²⁵ the eyes of the heart²⁶, so that it receives and knows what God the Father gives to the saints both now and in the age to come (Eph 1:15-22). Thus the mystery that is hidden from human sight is known by the human heart that receives the life-giving, energising, revealing light of Christ.

The saints have access to the mysteries of God through the unseen presence of Christ in the church. The church is the place where people are initiated into them and experience them by virtue of their hidden access to God the Father and his grace in the divine service. Those who are ministers of the gospel are therefore custodians of those mysteries. Thus Paul claims that he and Sosthenes should be regarded as “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1). In Greek, the term steward, *oikonomos*, is quite literally a “housekeeper,” the chief slave in charge of his master’s household and the management of its affairs. Paul’s use of this term here for his vocation as a minister of the gospel recalls his mention of the church as God’s temple in the previous chapter, his place of residence (1 Cor 2:16-17). As stewards of God’s mysteries they work with what is unseen. The quality and success of their work will be evident only on the day when Christ appears to light the things that are now hidden in darkness (1 Cor 4:2-5).

Our confessions quite rightly equate the administration of the divine mysteries with the ministry of word and sacrament, the ministry of the apostolic gospel and its enactment (Apol XXIV 80). Like Paul and Sosthenes, all pastors are called to be mystagogues; they all are responsible for the mystery of Christ and for the initiation of people into it. As they lead the divine service they enact and proclaim that mystery. They use the word of God to reveal what is otherwise concealed until the close of the age. Their task is to proclaim Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:1-2).

Conclusion

If we are to commend the Christian faith to post-modern people we ourselves will need to be captivated by the wonder of it and live in the mystery of it. This does not mean that we will engage in ritual mystification and intellectual obscurantism, for even though the mystery of Christ is hidden it is open and accessible to all people. The heart of it is his enlightening presence in the church. The church is the place

²⁵ See also Eph 3:9; 2 Tim 1:10; Heb 6:4; 10:32; cf. 2 Cor 4:4,6.

²⁶ Paul may be reflecting on the words of congratulation by Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 13:16-17 and Luke 10:23-24. In his Gospel Luke develops the motif of the eyes that see Christ and his salvation (2:30; 10:23-24; 11:34-36; 24:31) in contrast to eyes that are blind and closed to him (4:20; 6:33-42; 19:42; 24:16).

where theophany occurs, the place where the glory of the triune God is revealed here on earth. This happens in the divine service as we hear the voice of God from heaven and eat the heavenly meal in his holy presence. There, through the risen Lord Jesus who brings the Father to us and us to the Father, we have access by the Holy Spirit to heaven here on earth. That heavenly mystery is revealed to us and all the saints by the proclamation of God's word and its enactment in the divine service.

God's word initiates us and all people into the mystery of Christ and his wonderful presence with us. Through God's word and our faith in it we get to know the triune God as we are drawn into the fellowship of the Son with the Father and receive all the spiritual blessings that he gives to us in his Son. We begin to share in the divine life of the Holy Trinity here on earth through our union and communion with Jesus. Through our ongoing reception of the Holy Spirit "the eyes of our hearts" are enlightened so that we see what is otherwise unseen (Eph 1:17-19), the riches and weight of God's glory that is as yet too large for us to take in and enjoy in all its fullness. By our attention to God's word and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we begin to see ourselves and the world around us with the eyes of God. And that transforms our imagination. Our vision of God's hidden presence with us, our vision of his glory, colours our perception of reality, so that we begin to see had previously remained unnoticed and unappreciated by our darkened imagination. We see everything as it is in the light of Christ.

So as long as we live here on earth we walk by faith and not by sight. We live as citizens of heaven here on earth. Our vision of God shapes us and our behaviour. And that is how we commend the mystery of Christ to our friends and acquaintances. We know that our life is hidden with Christ in God, even though that is by no means self-evident to others or even to us. We know that wherever we go the triune God goes with us, for Christ is in us as we are in him. We know that when Christ appears, we shall appear with him in glory. Then the mystery of Christ will be fulfilled. We shall be like him, for we shall see him face to face.

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