THE SHAPING OF CHRISTIANITY

The History and Literature of Its Formative Centuries (100–800)

Gérard Vallée

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The Greek Legacy (50–170)

To examine the Jewish and Greek factors in the rise of Christianity in two separate and successive chapters is certainly artificial, though inevitable. Much as we wish to maintain the concomitance of the impact of the two factors on the Christian movement, we are bound to advance only one step at a time. The very subject matter calls for some distinction and ordering. Judaism was the native soil of early Christianity and that is why Judaism had to be treated in the first place. But now it must be emphasized: The Judaism that concerns us here was in a state of more or less advanced Hellenization.

For over a century scholars tended to neglect the Jewish roots of Christianity and to spend most of their concerted energies tracking down non-Jewish influences on the nascent movement; Greek, Hellenistic, Syrian, Oriental, or Roman parallels were itemized and deemed sufficient to account for the birth of the movement in the context of religions other than Judaism.

That situation changed around 1950. Because our knowledge of Judaism had improved (thanks to archeology, epigraphy, and spectacular finds like Qumran, but also after the horrifying uncovering of the Holocaust) and had successfully managed to overcome the ruts of academic prejudice, it became widely recognized that Hellenistic influences on Christianity had been chiefly mediated through the variously tinted Greek-speaking Judaism thriving in the Diaspora and in Palestine itself. Even elements that until then were thought to have directly shaped Christianity (pre-Gnostic tendencies, aspects of Hellenistic mystery religions, and popular philosophy) appeared now to have largely reached the young movement via their various Jewish embodiments. A consensus developed then that Hellenistic Judaism, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, exercised the greatest influence on the rise of the church. This must be kept in mind when dealing with the Greek legacy.

The Hellenistic Period

"Hellenism" first designates a historical period, the Hellenistic age ushered in by the Macedonian Alexander the Great (whose tutor had been Aristotle) and extending from 332 B.C.E. onward. It followed on the classical (Hellenic) age (sixth to fifth centuries) and overlapped with the most creative period of Greek cultural history, 500 to 200. Spreading from India to Spain and including Persian, Semitic, and Egyptian tracts, Alexander's empire made possible the universalization of Greek culture. On his death three dynasties divided the realm, though, and put a check on his dream of unification: The Antigonids in Macedonia were of little import; the Ptolemies (304–230) ruled from Egypt and its recent foundation, Alexandria; the Seleucids (312–295) governed Babylonia, Syria, and Palestine from their main center, Antioch. Ptolemies and Seleucids were most of the time at swords' point with each other. For over two centuries and a half, Palestine appeared as a toy in the hands of Egypt and Syria. It has been observed that at least 200 campaigns were fought in or across Palestine during that period. Rivalries between the two main dynasties spawned various alignments in the land and gave the native religious parties a distinctly political slant.

Hellenistic Culture

Above all, Hellenism refers to a specific cultural phenomenon, a world culture that permeated the western and eastern parts of the Mediterranean world; it extended well into Roman times. In fact, although the Romans were the ones who helped Greek culture to its victory, the Greeks' influence around the world was already felt prior to the Hellenistic period and the Roman takeover, and remained dominant in the East up to the fourth century C.E.

Mentioned for the first time along with "Judaism" during the Hasmonean period (2 Mc 2:21, 4:13), "Hellenism" received, from scholars in the nineteenth century, an extended meaning. It now denotes that blend of Greece and the Orient arising in the wake of Alexander's conquests and embracing all aspects of life. Beyond the command of the Greek language, it came to mean the adoption of Greek education and its ideals in matters of administration, warfare, trade, commerce, sport, rhetoric, literature, philosophy. Greek culture thus understood exercised

a pervasive influence and shaped all forms of life and thought among the people who came in contact with it.

Hellenistic culture was dominated by two figures: Alexander the Great, who dreamed it, and Augustus, who Hellenized the most important regions of the realm and made Romans the patrons of Greek culture. Claiming to originate from the Aeneas of the Homeric epic, the Romans took over the political and cultural heritage of Alexander, without properly initiating a new culture; along with Latin, Greek was to be the really effective language. The prestige of Greek culture in second-century society is well illustrated by the gesture of the Roman emperor Hadrian, on his grand imperial tour in 131/132 C.E., dedicating the temple of Zeus Olympios at Athens as a symbol of the religious and cultural unity of the Greco-Roman world. The consolidation of the empire rested on his panhellenic program, buttressed by a revived emperor cult and carried out under Greek auspices.

Hellenism in Palestine

The process of Hellenization in Palestine began with Alexander's conquest in 332 and was intensified thereafter. Greek became the language of commerce, government, and literature in the cities and in the upper levels of society. Aramaic and Hebrew continued to be used in other areas of life, so that a truly bilingual (or trilingual) society emerged, especially in cities like Jerusalem. From 250 on, all Judaism, scholars tell us, must be called Hellenistic, be it the Greek-speaking communities in the West or the Aramaic/Hebrew-speaking Jews in Palestine and Babylonia. All were under the spell of the ascending culture.

Palestinian Judaism stood in a situation of uneasy tension between acceptance and rejection of the Hellenistic zeitgeist. It was clear to mobile strata of society that, were they to climb the social ladder and share in the "blessings of civilization," they had to invest in better education, that is, Greek *paideia,* and multiply contacts with the non-Jewish world. A movement appeared around 175 B.C.E., predominantly made up of well-to-do aristocrats of Jerusalem around the high priest Jason, that espoused the so-called Hellenistic reform; it was symbolized by the construction, due to the same Jason, of a gymnasium at the foot of the temple mount. Encouraged by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes, it sought to transform the largely international

Jerusalem into a Greek polis, to alter the traditional way of life, and to bring about what was perceived by some as an excessive Hellenization of the land, even as an attempt to abolish Torah.

Against the penetration of that alien spirit the Maccabees revolted (168–164) and led a movement of self-assertion to overcome cultural and religious assimilation, and to counter the policy of alienation sponsored by the Jewish reform party. In spite of the success of the nationalistic revolt, the Hasmoneans did not stop nor even really slow down the process of Hellenization in Palestine; as soon as they themselves came to power they pursued it. In fact, with the passing of time, Jewish faith felt less and less threatened by Hellenization. Greek models were imitated without inhibition; a good example can be seen in the *gerousia,* made up of principal priests, rich lay nobility, landowners, and heads of clans, from Herod's time called the Sanhedrin. It was a borrowed Greek institution. With Herod and the Herodians the process reached a new climax. Jerusalem was then a Hellenistic city through and through. In Judea in the first century C.E., and still more in Galilee, epigraphic evidence shows that a strong minority spoke Greek as the mother-tongue; most inscriptions connected with the Temple and Jewish burials in the first century are in Greek. Paul, some of Jesus' disciples, the seven "Hellenists" of Acts 6, Josephus and the house of the patriarchs, all were conversant with Greek language and culture. It is likely that Jesus himself spoke some Greek. All of them were no less "Jewish" or "native" for that fact. Thanks to Hellenism and imperial rule, the rather fluid identities blossomed and actually became crystallized.

Jewish Break with Hellenism

Owing to the failure of the Roman procurators and their administration in the 50s C.E., the radical anti-Roman forces, at one and the same time anti-Hellenist, began again to gain ground and precipitated the final catastrophe. The Jewish wars between 66 and 135 had as a sequel the destruction of a flourishing Jewish-Hellenistic culture that involved a major segment of the population. That segment, made up of various interest groups (Herodians, high-priestly families, Jews returning from the Diaspora, well-to-do proselytes, landowners, merchants, etc.), joined the moderate Pharisees of the Hillel school and the Jerusalem middle class, and stood up to the Jewish revolutionaries. To

no avail. Their attempts to integrate Judea into the Roman Empire by encouraging Greek education and life-style had miscarried. The Roman repression bitterly put an end to their designs of a shared culture. Henceforth Judaism would be more concerned with its own difference; fixed on the letter of Torah, it would gradually renounce the dream of becoming a world religion.

That reaction did not prevent Talmudic and Midrashic literature from displaying a wide knowledge of Gentile language and literature, seen, for instance, in the abundance of loan words. Greek contacts could never be totally severed; the Hasmonean experience of over two centuries earlier, for all its nationalistic emphasis, remained a lasting reminder to that effect. The late Hebrew literature of the Old Testament produced during their rule had shown incontrovertible echoes of the influence of Greek enlightenment. At that time affinities with Greek views had even led some to claim that Greek philosophers of old had borrowed from Moses, a view that not few early Christian writers were to take up. In its turn, Rabbinic literature itself was not to be entirely immunized against Greek thought.

Two Opposite Reactions

It remains that the final attitude toward Hellenism espoused by Jews and by Christians came to a distinctive branching off in the second century C.E. In spite of sporadic hesitations (seen, for instance, in the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian), Christianity was not prepared to follow Judaism in publicly breaking with Hellenism. On the contrary, it made a bid for a quasi-uninhibited use of Greek culture. It chose to put the Greek heritage to work in the task of shaping its own beliefs into a system fittingly stowed to travel on high seas.

Ultimately that evolution owed much to basic differences affecting Christianity's relationships to Judaism and to Hellenism. The relation of Christianity to Judaism had been one of dependence and, for that reason, it followed a one-way path. The rise of Christianity left Judaism quite unaffected. Not so with respect to Christianity and Hellenism. Here the relation was one of interaction by virtue of which each party appropriated elements of the other and sought mutual accommodation. For Christianity the reception of Greek culture was evidently to

be fraught with historic consequences, usually beneficial, though at times uncomfortable.

The First Christians and the Gentiles

It is not only the separation of nationalism and religion, which it favored, that gave Christianity an edge over other religious movements. Indeed, Christianity was greatly aided in its beginnings and expansion by the extensive Hellenization of Judaism in the first century. The roots of "the Greek-speaking Jewish community in which the message of Jesus was formulated in Greek for the first time clearly extend back to the very earliest community in Jerusalem."[1] Even before Paul and his associates deliberately turned to the Gentiles, Jesus' message, very early rendered in Greek, had attracted not only Palestinian Jews acquainted with the imperial culture but also Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem itself along with proselytes and God-fearers of Gentile descent. For a while Christian Hellenists and Christian Jews held separate worship in their respective languages, but it is significant that the former seem to have been there from the start.

The first bearers of the Christian proclamation are said to have come from the Palestinian creative middle class open to Hellenism, although their literary and philosophical education appeared rather superficial. At any event, it was natural, in the work of gathering all nations into a "new Israel," that the apostles first turned to Hellenized Jews in Palestine and abroad, and to those Gentiles in Palestine and abroad who had been already touched by the influential Jewish communities, and that they reaped special success among those groups.

Thus the Greek language in the form of *koine* (common Greek spoken in the Hellenistic and Roman periods) was the natural vehicle for the Christian proclamation in Hellenized Palestine, in Syria, Asia Minor, the Aegean, and Rome. In the Diaspora, besides native Gentiles, missionaries encountered Jews who, as mercenaries, slaves, peasants, craftsmen, or merchants, had long been established in their new lands. Jewish names are found in Greece itself in the fourth century B.C.E. Hellenized from birth, those Jews appear to have made

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1. M. Hengel, *The "Hellenization" of Judaea in the First Century After Christ*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989, p. 18.

common cause with Greek culture, rejecting only the surrounding polytheistic currency.

Encounter with the Real Gentiles

When confronted with more sophisticated Hellenists among Gentiles, for example, in Athens and Ephesus, the missionaries were apparently shaken and certainly made aware of the limitations of their own education. The overcoming of such limitations on the part of Christian spokesmen would be the decisive event of the second century.

In the meantime, the first confrontation with real Gentiles revealed a quality of Hellenism unfamiliar to the Palestinian apostles. Here we can look at the example of Paul, one of the better educated members of the community. His education in the Hellenized Semitic Tarsus and in Jerusalem ("at the feet of Gamaliel": Acts 22:3) had certainly included training in rhetoric and pharisaic exegesis, sprinkled with a shimmer of apocalyptic worldview. In philosophy his education seems to have been confined to its popular form. What else could be expected? After all, what gave impetus to the mission was less the level of culture of the missionaries than their vivid expectation of God's impending action.

Paul's education had ill prepared him for an encounter with the "real Gentiles," that is, those who had imbibed Greek education from birth and had noticeable knowledge of the philosophical tradition. They were the ones who posed the most disquieting challenge to the mission. To approach them and their views of the world was an invitation to an intellectual venture within the overall religious campaign.

The Challenge of Greek Thought

To turn to those Gentiles, then, was to turn to a world of thought that, to be sure, had already affected Judaism to some extent (there were Hellenized poets and philosophers of the Stoic and eclectic brand in Palestine). That world of thought, however, went beyond what the Jews had generally perceived of it; it had its own history and vitality. Christianity had now to define itself in relation to the culture that had been shaping the Mediterranean world for centuries.

In the first and second centuries the philosophical ground, difficult to reconnoiter with total clarity, was mainly occupied by the conglomerate called Middle Platonism. After the mid-third century, Neoplatonism took its place. How had it come to the philosophy of the day called Middle Platonism in the first place?

Philosophical Schools

For centuries there had been widespread talk about "schools" *(haireseis)* to designate loose associations of like-minded people espousing the way of life recommended by a particular philosopher. Judaism itself had been referred to by the Jew Aristobulus (ca. 175 B.C.E.) as "our school of philosophy."[2] From the fourth century B.C.E. what the various philosophical schools had in common was a keen interest in virtue and happiness, and a flaunted dissatisfaction with the human condition. Philosophers taught people to turn from a life of luxury, self-indulgence, and superstition to a life of discipline, freedom, and wisdom. They promised tranquillity and happiness to those who did. To those general concerns each school added its own specific ingredient and offered "differing ways of deliverance from the uninformed and mentally footloose life."[3] Teachings and life-style of the schools are particularly relevant to an understanding of early Christianity.

The Cynics, of either mild or austere allegiance, appealed to many in the Mediterranean world. They were dogged critics of those received ideas and customs that encouraged falsity in society and religion. Yet they had nothing to do with our popular label cynical, but were deeply concerned with how to live a better life. Making use of philosophical anecdotes of the kind that marks Jesus' sayings and style and the life of the first desert ascetics, Cynics insisted on a conduct based on frugality, simple demeanor, and personal decision. The notion of world-citizenship was also one of their leitmotivs. The Skeptics, for their part, shared the Cynics' attitude toward ancient dogmas. Ironically, they came to be located mainly among the traditional Platonic Academy.

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2. See Praep. ev. 13.12.7f.

3. A. D. Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964, p. xv.

The Stoics had a lasting impact on Christian ethics and conceptuality. In many matters quite close to the Peripatetics, the followers of Aristotle, the Stoics recommended the virtuous life and a life according to nature, an ideal wrought by mental discipline and *apatheia* (a kind of active indifference), and they insisted that one's worth is to be judged by the canons of virtue, not by one's descent. Stoicism came close to constituting a religion. At least it represented a philosophy of life that, in addition to the attention given to one's conduct and to self-mastery, enjoins people to see the divine reality in everything and to detect a Providence at work in the world. Stoicism was to fade into the kind of Christianity represented by Clement of Alexandria or into the resurgent Platonism.

Seeking, as the Stoics also did, to liberate humans from fate and from dependence and reliance on externals, the Epicureans were well known for their unrelenting critique of religious fear. They formed highly organized communities *(collegia),* taking an oath of obedience to their founder and teachers. Their ideal in ethics was summarized in *ataraxia* (tranquillity) and expressed itself in the concern to free oneself from illusory anxieties and false needs. With the Christians they were to share the same suspicions of presumed atheism, misanthropy, social irresponsibility, and sexual immorality.

Nothing prevented one from picking left and right bits of philosophical wisdom for the conduct of one's life. Around the turn of the era all thinkers had a good dose of eclecticism, well illustrated by Cicero, who was hard pressed to decide between Plato and the Stoic Cleanthes; he personally came up with an unbinding blend of disparate wisdom and, as a true Roman, finally reverted to the traditional religion of the ancient gods. Eclecticism certainly satisfied his intellectual curiosity although it seems to have been of little use in his personal life. Others were able to make a better use of the "philosophical supermarket."

The major trends of centuries of philosophical debate and search came together in Middle Platonism, seasoned by a contemporary revival of Pythagorean lore. Here we find Plato and Aristotle to a large extent reconciled, and allied to Stoic ethics and Neopythagorean metaphysics. Such amalgamation was intended to express better what Plato was assumed to have really meant. Reflections on God's transcendence and immateriality moved to the center of the philosophical quest; as normative life, "likeness to God" replaced the traditional "conformity with nature."

Philosophical conflicts in the second century led to the triumph of

mysticism and prepared the way for Neoplatonism, which was to evolve in the direction of a religious philosophy and thereby itself become a serious rival of Christianity. When church fathers refer to the "Platonists" they usually mean the "modernized" Platonic tradition as it appeared from the second century, eclectically enriched, among the Middle Platonists, before it became embodied mainly in the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Porphyry.

Philosophy, a Competitor

These are some of the formidable constructions the still tiny community of second-century Christianity hit on; it was tempting for a group described by the critic Celsus as an ill-educated plebeian rabble to develop an inferiority complex that would express itself in an aggressive denigration of philosophy. Denunciation of Greco-Roman culture and its arrogance occurred occasionally among the church fathers, for instance in the Syrian Tatian. On the whole, however, admiration prevailed, then emulation. The initially ambivalent attitude toward philosophy might be attributed to the perception that Hellenistic philosophy, much as it criticized traditional religions, constituted a rival religion of sorts. As encountered in the various schools, it had all the appearances of a religion, proposing a way of life based on specific beliefs and practices, offering a coherent worldview along with practical guidance. Schools were like sects (*hairesis* means school and sect) with their gurus, holy men, rivalries, conversion stories, promises of rewards such as tranquillity of mind and happiness. Philosophers "preached" by word and example, their exterior trappings (life-style, coarse cloak, long and ill-kempt beard) reinforcing their message. It is significant that concepts such as "conversion," "virtue," "dogma," and "heresy," which became central to Western religion, were first coined by philosophical sects and it is as a nag to them that Clement of Alexandria proclaimed Christianity to be the best *hairesis*.[4]

Very little of the philosophical tradition is reflected in the New Testament writings and in the apostolic fathers. Besides references to popular philosophy (Acts 17) and attacks on pagan learning, little attention was paid to philosophy per se. Because philosophers were predominantly addressing an elite, their doctrines did not seem, at first,

4. Str. 7.15.

to be of concern to the first missionaries, but this is precisely the situation that Christianity was going to alter. Moral exhortation, the core of philosophical culture, was appropriated by the Christian fathers of the second century and firmly rerouted to address all classes. Through that redirection the philosophers' upper-class culture became democratized, and a truly universalist morality, based on the equality of all before God's law, was now proposed to all. Writing on private life in Late Antiquity, P. Brown asserts:

> Anyone who reads Christian writings or studies Christian papyri...must realize that the works of the philosophers...had drifted down, through Christian preaching and Christian speculation, to form a deep sediment of moral notions current among the lower classes in those regions: Greek, Coptic, Syriac and Latin.[5]

Alliance with Greek Thought

It therefore became natural for Christian writers to show interest in the moral teaching of the philosophers and to associate themselves with them—in fact Christianity made few innovations in morality—in order to involve the masses and thereby try to alter the moral texture of the Roman world. Current religions (see chapter 4) did not offer to Christianity that kind of promise. Morality was quite without interest to Greco-Roman cults, not known for proposing codes of ethics. This, admittedly, was the reason why "pagan philosophy had often been very cool towards popular religion."[6] Seemingly aware of the double meaning of "Hellenism" (paganism, Greek culture), the church fathers made a clear distinction between pagan religion and Greek philosophy. They generally chose to make common cause with philosophy and to oppose pagan cults with the same energy they displayed from the second century in their opposition to "heresies" (now understood as doctrines at variance with prevailing "orthodox" beliefs). Both cults and heresies, in the end, will be traced back to demonic origins.

The option in favor of philosophy, its ethical seriousness and its

5. P. Brown in P. Veyne, ed., *A History of Private Life,* vol. 1. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 251.

6. R. A. Markus, *Christianity in the Roman World*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1975, p. 41.

intellectual resources, is best illustrated by the work of second-century Apologists in their efforts to defend, prove, and recommend Christianity. Justin Martyr was eminent among them and shows eloquently the kind of problems the Apologists had to wrestle with. Apologists often described Christianity as a philosophy and were in general inclined to see a convergence between the Bible and Greek philosophy, provided the Bible was interpreted correctly (allegorically, according to the Alexandrians, but typologically, according to Justin).

Justin Martyr (100–165) and Greek Philosophy

Born in Palestine, a descendant of Greek or Roman colonists settled in Samaria since 72 C.E., Justin, he tells us in a stylized account, embarked on a spiritual pilgrimage in search of "the knowledge of reality and a clear understanding of truth."[7] That quest for the sources of religious and moral knowledge took him through the main philosophical schools of the time: Stoic, Peripatetic, Pythagorean, Platonist. Having exhausted what philosophy could offer him and still unsatisfied, he came into contact with the writings of the Jewish prophets and finally those of the Christian church. There he found the end of his philosophical pursuit, convinced that Christianity was the true philosophy. He converted (probably in Ephesus) and then became a philosophy teacher in Rome—wearing the philosopher's cloak and looking much like a Cynic philosopher—where he was martyred for his faith around 165, after having repeatedly confessed that as a Christian he was atheist "so far as gods of this sort (i.e., pagan gods) are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God."[8]

In his extant writings, the largest set of writings from one single Christian author until the middle of the second century, Justin addresses a double audience. (A lost writing, the *Syntagma,* dealt with heresies and had a Christian audience.) First in his *Dialogue with the Jew Tripho* (a Hellenized Jew!), Justin musters all the resources of typological exegesis to convince the Jews that their scripture, the Old Testament, is superseded, that Judaism has been replaced or crowned by Christianity, that the Old Testament promises have been fulfilled in the career of Jesus

7. Dial. 3.4.
8. Apol. 1.6.

and the life of the church. (Note that Justin is not able to call on a book called the New Testament, which does not yet exist; he can appeal only to the "memoirs" of the apostles.) Christians constitute a "third race" between or beyond Greeks and barbarians (Jews). They have begun to gather all people into the new and true Israel and they invite the Jews to recognize the signs of the times. Justin hoped to win over more cultured Jews, encouraged by the fact that around 155 there were still a good number of Jews in the Christian ranks.

It is in his *Apology,* a petition addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius, the Roman senate, and the Roman people on behalf of the maligned Christians whose civic loyalty and reliability he wishes to vouch for, that Justin conducts the most searching interpretation of Greek philosophy from a Christian perspective so far, and thereby offers what might be the first instance of a real encounter with pagan culture. Perhaps prompted by Polycarp's death at the stake in 156, Justin is eager to respond to current prejudices and slanders affecting the Christians. In doing so, he is led to make quite daring claims for Christianity; the critic Celsus seems to have taken Justin's arguments seriously enough to try in his turn to discredit them in his work, the *True Logos*.

Justin's main argument is this: Among Christians is found Christ the universal Logos, who is divine Reason and embodies the whole truth; but teachings similar to Christian teachings are also found, right or distorted, in various forms of pagan thought. To account for this state of affairs Justin offers three theories that were to keep recurring in the history of Christian thought.

1. The agreements with Greek philosophical tenets are due to the fact that philosophers read or "borrowed from the prophet Moses"[9] and the Old Testament, a bizarre argument already put forward by Aristobulus in 175 B.C.E. and taken over by Philo. (It is interesting to note that Celsus thought the opposite—that the prophets had stolen from the Greeks!) This is the "loan theory"; its purpose was to vindicate the antiquity of Christianity. It was to become, in the hands of Justin's disciple Tatian, the "theft theory"; without too much regard for ethical niceties, Clement of Alexandria was to add that the thief genuinely possesses what he steals.[10]

9. Apol. 1.44.4.
10. Str. 1.20.100.5.

Perhaps surprisingly to us, a contemporary of Justin, the philosopher Numenius of Apamea, agreed with Justin on that score and used to ask: "What else is Plato but Moses in Attic Greek."[11]

2. Distortions of the truth encountered, for instance, in Greek mythology with its immoral stories, but also in philosophical aberrations, are the works of the demons' "wicked disguise."[12] This is the "demons theory"; it explains both the disagreements with Christian views and those among philosophical schools.

3. More valuable is the *logos* or "*logos spermatikos* theory," in which *logos* refers both to Christ the Word and to human reason, and which says: The whole of *logos* is in Jesus Christ, the sowing *Logos,* but portions of it are also found among Jews and Greeks, in the words of prophets and philosophers. These are seeds of truth implanted in human hearts, being the formative principle of right knowledge and right living. Thus Christ was "known by Socrates, for He was and is the *Logos,* who is in every man."[13]

Being the first substantial attempt at articulating the problem of the relationship of revelation to reason, of Bible to Middle Platonism, the *logos* theory was to have a long and distinguished career. It is to Justin's credit, drawing on Philo, the Bible, and Stoicism, to have been able to see not only that Christianity adds something crucial to philosophy but also that philosophy had a contribution to make to Christian thought. His positive reception of elements of philosophical systems—for his theory does not grant a character of revelation to philosophical systems in their entirety but only to some elements such as selected ideas of God, the critique of idolatry, and basic moral notions—led to the optimistic view that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are identical. Still more, and this shows Justin's courage and open-mindedness, it holds that the God of the Bible and the God of the philosophers are one and the same God.[14]

A searching exploration, his position has been variously assessed by theologians—applauded by most, seen by some as a case of naive harmonization and by others as a melding of Christianity into Platonism (i.e., Middle Platonism), by still others as a dangerous contamination of

11. Ibid., 1.21.150.3.
12. Apol. 2.13.1.
13. Ibid., 2.10.8.
14. Ibid., 1.46.3.

Christianity by philosophy, which, under the cover of a clumsy camouflage, was able to make inroads into Christianity and ended up rendering a fatal disservice to Christian thought.

However Justin's contribution is judged, it ought to be maintained that thanks to the work of second-century Apologists Christianity raised itself to the level of respectability that was up to then the exclusive preserve of philosophy. Pagans soon began to acknowledge that promotion. For instance, it has been noted that Galen (131–201) is "the first pagan author who implicitly places Greek philosophy and the Christian religion on the same footing."[15] The way was thus prepared for philosophical theology and, we might say, for theology altogether.

The Threat of All-Out Hellenization

Over the centuries it has been a recurrent criticism of Paul, mainly in Jewish circles, that as he turned to the Gentiles he succumbed to Hellenism and that he was rightly censored for his presumed apostasy to Hellenistic syncretism. Paul is sometimes blamed for having begun a process that would result in people's thinking they converted to a religious faith when in fact they were merely embracing a new philosophical position. Some scholars see a similar ambiguity even in Augustine's conversion. Affirmations of that kind, however, tend to short-circuit a complex process that still is in need of greater exploration and remains an object of research. As for Justin and the Apologists, in their impassioned effort to make Christianity understandable and acceptable to well-educated people in particular, one would be hard pressed to demonstrate how they have unduly watered down the religious element. They were rather involved in a novel contest and fought expressly for the cause of Christ; the sincerity of their commitment was paid for by many with their lives.

But the danger of excessive Hellenization was there and it is a sign of its potential noxiousness that, when it was not resisted, it led to marginality in relation to the mainstream church, as will appear below. In principle Christianity intended to interact with Hellenism, not to be subordinated to it. But the debate continues and it remains a valid and

15. R. Walzer quoted by R. M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988, p. 110.

creative query to investigate the extent to which Christianity was Hellenized as well as the extent to which Hellenism was Christianized.

The Burden of Greek Categories

The move to an alliance of Christianity with Greek *paideia* was an imperative one, if Christianity wanted to gather all the nations into a single community. Greek culture in the early centuries C.E. helped Christianity become a universal movement. The rapid expansion of Christianity after the second century showed the validity of the option for the Greek medium. Nevertheless it is one of those ironies of history that, in the long run, the imprint of Greek thought has ended up making Christianity seem a parochial movement when native traditions in the West and non-Western traditions abroad are taken into account. What had been an instrument of cosmopolitan reception could possibly become later an obstacle to a wider acceptance. Christianity transcended its condition of being a mere Jewish sect and became a world religion thanks to the creative use it made of Greek thought. But after that initial adaptation to the Mediterranean world, Christianity had to be on its guard against refusing further inculturation; it had to resist privileging Greek culture one-sidedly to the detriment of other cultures and at the risk of its own downfall into provincialism.

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