

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

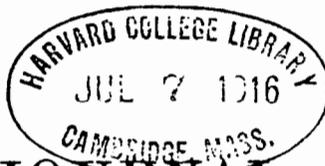
[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jbl-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php)



# JOURNAL

OF

## BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Volume XXXIII

Part IV

1914

### Christianity and Hellenism<sup>1</sup>

E. VON DOBSCHÜTZ

HALLE

IT was at the lovely shore of the lake of Galilee, in the midst of purely Jewish surroundings, that Jesus preached his gospel of the kingdom of God to come. Three centuries later Christianity had become the ruling religion in the Graeco-Roman empire; the Christian church was a power both in politics and in civilization. This development is certainly a marvellous one; the beginning was far from presaging this end. It is Hellenism which brought Christianity to this position.

In speaking of Hellenism I do not mean of course the classical Greek culture, adored by so many people as the ideal of wisdom and art. Since Alexander's conquest of the East, Hellenism had changed, by admixture with a great variety of oriental elements. Christianity in starting its mission could rely on the preparatory work done by Jewish Hellenism. But it not merely continued that work; it had a different goal and different ways.

In order to understand this development, let us begin with some affinities between Hellenism and the Gospel, studying at the same time the discrepancies. It is obvious that mutual influence was possible only when there were some affinities.

<sup>1</sup> This paper has been published in German in "Das Christentum". Fünf Vorträge von C. Cornill, E. v. Dobschütz, W. Herrmann, W. Staerk, C. Troeltsch. Leipzig, Quelle & Meyer 1908. It reappears here, somewhat altered, in the author's own free translation.

There is at first a thirst for revelation in Hellenism. It was not a period of scepticism. To be sure, philosophical criticism had shaken many a traditional belief; the newly arisen oriental cults made it clear that religion is a matter of personal conviction, that it requires faith. And faith looked out for a solid foundation, it longed for revelation. Trust in the efficacy of human intelligence had gone; the great problems of the world could be solved only by divine inspiration. But alas! the time of revelations had passed: the oracles were silent now. So one had to rely on the words of the wise men of old such as the divine Homer, Pythagoras, the Sibyl, or Hystaspes the Mede. Nay, Greek philosophers consult the Jewish lawgiver Moses. That was what made the oriental cults so impressive. They claimed to rest upon revelation from the very oldest time; people believed in them without hesitation, swallowing even the most ridiculous pseudepigrapha. There were plenty of old revelations; and yet the general feeling was desirous of a prophet who could bring an authentic present revelation. Neo-Pythagoreanism believed in such prophets, and all sorts of swindlers found faithful adherents; which proves how strong the desire for revelation was in the hearts of mankind.—Now Jesus comes and brings revelation; nay he is the revelation of God. He does not take his learning from any outward authority, be it a book or a teacher. Of course he knows the Scriptures, but it is not the Scriptures from which he draws his inspiration; he has it in himself; he speaks as one who has authority; he lives the life of inspiration. And yet what he says, what he does, has all the advantage of being in harmony with this old sacred book, the Bible of his people, so that it was easy to make use of the Old Testament in order to prove that this revelation was in fact the oldest. Jesus' Gospel thus corresponded to the demands of Hellenism by giving a revelation at once modern and ancient.

It did the same by proclaiming the unity of God and the absolute faithfulness of his fatherly care for man. Hellenism tried hard to find behind polytheism a divine unity, a real force to rely on in all the distresses of life as well as in death; men were already accustomed to identifying the gods of Greece and

of Rome with the oriental gods: Zeus was Jupiter and Baal and Ammon Ra; the priests of Babylon and of Egypt had already developed a doctrine about their gods as being only various forms of one supreme God; Hellenism went on and made them abstract attributes, as Reason, Wisdom, or turned them into physical forces by means of allegory. But this one supreme divine Being or rather Essence is the result of speculation, not a living God; it is identified by philosophers with the supreme Cause of all things, it is not an appropriate object for devotion. Stoicism does not cross the limits of a mere surrender to fate. Wherever piety is lively and strong, individual gods claim their rights, as e. g. Asclepios the healing saviour, or Isis who gives life, or the Great Mother, or Mithra the warrior. Even the emperor worship is for this people not a mere ceremonial of loyalty: it means something to them. And from the very fear of having neglected or offended some gods they built altars to unknown gods. The priests themselves who theoretically identify the various gods keep them in practice strictly separate for obvious reasons. The belief in miracles was flourishing, but it was a superstitious one, magic dominating every thing.—Now Jesus does not proclaim the unity of God—this was not necessary for the Jews among whom he worked—but all his gospel presupposes the unity of God as a matter of fact. The great feature about his doctrine is that he takes God as a reality in daily life, and that he knows and teaches that one can trust on Him in all human needs. God is not too exalted to take care of everything, even of lilies and ravens, far more of His human children; He is almighty, but He always works reasonably. He is not a mysterious God whose will is hidden, but He is known and His intentions are obvious; for He is the loving Father.

A third point for comparison: Hellenism is individualistic and cosmopolitan at the same time, and so is Jesus, but in quite a different sense. The civil war had swept away the old national organizations; a man could feel himself a citizen of the world; the Stoics encouraged this by taking man as an individual being, without historical tradition, loosened from his native soil and left to rely on himself; by making much of the unwritten law and the common rights of mankind they effected a certain

leveling of the national and social differences. This cosmopolitanism however was rather theoretical; practically it meant the retreat from politics, the surrender before the centralized power of autocracy. In spite of a sometimes foolish admiration for the Orientals as people of ancient culture and wisdom, the love for the barbarians remained a rather platonic one, and in a matter like slavery there was not much practical change. The new tendency was strong only on the negative side. The old traditions were broken off, there was no power for reconstruction. Individualism, without religious foundation, turned easily into brutal contempt of human life. Ethical idealism, though reminding us sometimes of the Gospel, had not strength enough to create new life; as may be seen with Seneca, the tutor of Nero: splendid words but feeble deeds. Stoicism tries to rely on the good will of man, but forgets that moral energy comes to nought when left without religious stimulus. Hellenism does not overlook the fact of sin; a strong sentiment of guilt, a keen desire to get rid of it is found in large circles. But the essence of sin is not understood; it is dealt with as outward contamination, against which lustrations, sprinkling of water or blood, immersions, aspersions and so on are to be used. It is not so much moral sin as mortal nature of which one tries to get rid by all sorts of asceticism.—Now Jesus is free from all national prejudices; he takes man as man. He is delighted to find faith in a pagan as well as in a Jew; he presents the Samaritan heretic as a model of true charity. His gospel is for mankind; for it is for man. Jesus has respect for man, as he has devotion for God; he knows how much God appreciates each individual soul. And he believes in man; he thinks him capable of the highest actions; if only man's mind is directed towards God, he *can* do and *will* do everything; if one's heart is in the kingdom of heaven, he will not insist upon his rights, nor look for revenge; he will endeavor only to help his brethren and sacrifice for their good even his own life. It is the new relation to God given to mankind by Christ himself which changes all values. Though he is an optimist, Jesus does not neglect the existence of sin: it is forgiveness of sin which he brings to man in order to comfort him; and he does it only by means of his words and

of his own personality; it is through faith that one gets forgiveness and therewith all bliss.

There is finally a fourth parallel: Hellenism longed for immortality and life everlasting, but people felt very uncertain about this. It was not from trust in God or from belief in the value of an individual soul that they tried to gain assurance, but from nature in its perpetual change from dying to reviving. It was from this change that the religious mysteries of Greece started: at first they were intended to strengthen fertility; later they were supposed to secure individual immortality by making man share the life of the god. This was what made the oriental cults so popular; they could easily be turned into mysteries with still better guarantees for eternal life. Isis asked for asceticism, Attis for sensuality, the Magna Mater had a hateful rite of bloody initiation and Mithra frightful ceremonies; all this and hard moral obligations the men would willingly bear in order to secure these guarantees.

Now Jesus' gospel proclaimed the eternal value of individual life in the boldest terms; in opposition to the Sadducees, who tried to keep to the ancient views of Israel, he strongly supported the progressive view of the Pharisees, that continuity was to be looked for not only for the people but for the individual; that the individual is to share the future bliss of the kingdom. He is sure from his faith in God that man's life cannot end with death: God is not a God of the dead but of the living. That is to him a matter of fact. But it is obvious to him also that life everlasting is a good which one is bound to work for; moral life is the condition of eternal life. Nay this earthly life may be sacrificed in order to gain life everlasting. But one cannot get it by any ceremonies or magic spells.

We see from these parallels how much Hellenism was fitted to receive the Gospel: people found here living revelation combined with old scriptures; faith in God, the one omnipotent God of miracles; individualism and universalism; ethical idealism combined with assurance of future life, guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ in a far better way than in all the mysteries. On the other hand differences are evident which account for the fact that Hellenism in adopting Christianity was bound to change its aspect.

There is still another moment: the gospel is purely religious; Jesus cares for nothing else but man's relation to God, and so do his first disciples and apostles. There is a certain oneness in this exclusively religious aspect; all other facts of human life—culture, aesthetics, philosophy—do not enter their minds. Hellenism on the other hand represents a comprehensive civilization not lacking religion but with many other features besides. Hellenism is proud of its learning and wisdom; Jesus thanks his father for hiding his mysteries from the wise and understanding. Hellenism is glorious in its art even in the period of decline; Jesus looking at the beauties of Herod's temple sees stone by stone fall down. The Roman lawyers develop the Law in the most brilliant way; Jesus expects his disciples not to insist upon their rights. It is not that he is hostile to civilization; he is indifferent to it as long as it does not touch the things of God. With the kingdom of God everything comes to man, without it nothing has any value. Hellenism has to face a multitude of problems and tasks, among which the religious question is of only inferior importance.

This is the situation: Hellenism, anticipating the Gospel in the religious field, is interested at the same time in many a question which has no meaning for the Gospel. One can imagine the changes which the Gospel had to undergo on entering this world of Hellenistic civilization.

The process of Hellenization has three steps. In the *first* period Christianity is imposing itself upon Hellenism with all its vigor; in the *second*, Hellenism tries to absorb the new religion; in the *third*, Christianity, organized as a church, comes back to itself, establishes a religious compromise between the Gospel and Hellenism, and enters the circle of Hellenistic civilization. Each period covers, roughly speaking, about a century.

I. It was Jews from the Hellenistic diaspora who first preached the Gospel among the Greeks. The very fact that the Gospel had to be translated from the Aramaic into Greek, was of great importance; with the new words new notions came in. To be sure the Seventy and the Hellenistic Jews had prepared the way; nevertheless it was a great step for the Gospel. Son of

God with the Jews meant the Chosen one of God, the Messiah; the Greeks were reminded of their mythological sons of gods. Likewise truth was understood by the Jews in a moral sense: justice and truth go together; truth is something to be done; to the Greek it was intellectual, it meant knowledge.

We do not know enough of these first Hellenistic missionaries of Christianity to say much more. The first clear figure is the gigantic personality of Saint Paul. He was not a Hellenist, but a Pharisee, a trained rabbi, and yet he also preached in Greek. It is under discussion just now how far Palestinian Judaism, his native soil, had been influenced by Hellenistic culture, how far he himself underwent Greek influence before his conversion to Christianity. I do not think that influence was great. While preaching to the Greeks he tried to become a Greek to the Greeks just as he was a Jew to the Jews. But we see him abhor the spirit of Hellenistic demonism; it is therefore improbable that he consciously adopted Greek religious rites or institutions. I would not deny that subconsciously he was influenced by the Hellenistic spirit: notions, such as kingdom of God and Messiah, so familiar to the Jewish Christians, he uses relatively seldom; the Greeks whom he was addressing did not understand them; therefore he prefers to speak about the Lord Jesus and the Church. Paul makes it clear that Christianity was not a mere Jewish movement, but a new world religion. He breaks with Judaism in principle and externally. He uses sometimes expressions which remind us of Greek philosophy and Hellenistic mysticism, but this does not mean that he really became a Greek; he always relies on the Old Testament and its Jewish interpretation. His hearers however were Greeks and they often misunderstood his teaching, as is seen in his letters.

The very next generation of Christianity was led by men whose conceptions were entirely different from Paul's because they were Greeks or Hellenistic Jews. They speak of Jesus as the Saviour, a word which puts him on the same level with the healing gods or makes him appear as the expected bringer of the new golden age; many people at this period endeavored to look upon Augustus as this Saviour. Now Jesus was announced as the Saviour, in particular by Luke, the evangelist of Hellenism;

Jesus' relation to his own people and to the parties in it, his debates with the Pharisees and the scribes become unimportant; the problem of the law, so important once in Paul's time, is not understood; rational and mystic elements enter Christianity from Hellenism. The so-called First Epistle of Clement bases the Christian belief in resurrection upon the story of the bird Phoenix. The letter of Barnabas allegorizes the Old Testament laws exactly in the same way as the Pythagoreans and Philo. Hebrews rely on the Platonic idea that this visible world is but a mean reproduction of the invisible one. The prologue to the fourth Gospel starts from the philosophical notion of the Logos in order to make Jesus understood as the one great and final revelation of God. Baptism and holy communion become entangled with mystery-elements: baptism is called a bath of regeneration exactly as in the mysteries the initiated claims to be *renatus in aeternum* (born anew for ever); the baptismal font is said to be sanctified by Jesus' baptism. The bread and wine are called a medicine of immortality by Ignatius. The most important sign of the new era is to be found in the decrease of the eschatological strain. Luke turns eschatology into history by suggesting that the judgement passed upon Jerusalem is in fact a realization of the parousia. The fourth Gospel spiritualizes the eschatology: Christ is to visit his faithful ones spiritually, not to come outwardly; as for the judgement, the crisis has been passed already; belief and unbelief—that is man's own decision—constitute the judgement. The end of the world is supposed to be far distant in Matthew as well as in Second Peter.

I would not be misunderstood; primitive eschatology is not entirely abandoned. Side by side with the fourth Gospel there is the Book of Revelation bearing the same name of John and originating in the same circle. Here the coming of Jesus is passionately implored; the blood of the martyrs demands revenge, this world is to be destroyed and a new world is to come. Jewish and Hellenistic elements are often struggling one with another. The Jewish conception of a dramatic catastrophe bringing about the change in the world, is sometimes balanced by a Hellenistic one which is interested in the fate of the individual, picturing the penalties of the impious as well as the bliss

of the pious in colors taken from Orphic imagination. The beautiful garden with fine fruit-trees, and delicious odour, as described in the so called Revelation of Peter is represented also in the decorations of the catacombs; the burial-place is turned into a blissful paradise.

Christianity, so far recruiting mostly among the lower classes, begins to enter higher circles; members of the nobility, nay of the imperial family, begin to join the Christian congregations; naturally the leadership passes from the tradesman and craftsman to these people of higher culture and rank. It is notable, however, that at first these men stand rather aside, behind the regular officials of the congregations.

II. We now come to the second period. It is the time of Christian philosophers, the so-called apologists. Men of the type of Justin Martyr had gone through various schools, searching for truth until they found it in Christianity. Christianity appealed to them as the true philosophy; they recommended their faith to the heathen as practical wisdom. They did not realize that Christianity by this very fact became changed; in fighting for monotheism they used as their weapon a radical criticism of the myths, started by Greek philosophers; in establishing the unique position of Jesus Christ they made him fit into the cosmological speculations of eclectic philosophical systems or they looked upon him as the model of a great teacher of wisdom. Athanagoras' discussion of the resurrection is much more like a philosophical treatment than an expression of Christian belief.

To win such men meant a triumph for Christianity; but it was no gain to be represented in such a way; essential religious features were lost. Christianity did not understand Paul; it rejected the primitive Jewish Congregations as heretical. Having been looked upon in former times by Roman officials as a Jewish sect, it had become now entirely distinct: something Greek instead of something Jewish.

At the same time other circles were reached by Christianity, people who were not so much interested in philosophy and morals as in the means of getting salvation; suffering under the pressure of fatalism, according to the teaching of the astrological

pseudo-religion; oppressed by the experience of sin, of being unable to rise and get rid of the limitations of human nature, they were thirsting for deliverance. They imagined the world filled with numbers of divine beings, grouped according to oriental mythology in pairs, in heptads, octads or decads, and ranging from the most high inaccessible God to the lowest spirits; they conceived the creation of this material world and man in particular as caused by a prehistoric sin of one of these divine spirits or angels; man was a spark of light from the higher world, captured by this material world and tending to be released from its prison. When hearing of Jesus as the Saviour, these people did not think of the deliverance of God's chosen people from foreign tyranny, nor of the deliverance of man from sin and Satan; they thought of deliverance from the chains of nature and matter. Jesus must fit into their speculations: he must be one of the highest spirits, come down for the very purpose of delivering the sparks of light from their imprisonment in matter, and bringing them back to the world of light. We do not go into the details of these fanciful systems, which in spite of all their varieties come all to the same result. Nor do we insist here on the transformation of the mythological figures into philosophical notions, a process which caused these people to be honored with the title of speculative philosophers. Our main point is: Gnosis is not a product of Christianity, it was earlier than Christianity. Here too it was a triumph for Christianity that it made these people believe in Christ and give him an important position in their thoughts. But it was a real danger for Christianity at the same time. Christ became one among many other divine spirits; his life on earth was dropped out of sight by allegorical interpretation; his humanity faded away under the influence of docetism; he had no body, or his body was an immaterial one, without weight, with no shadow, no footsteps. He appeared, according to every one's power of conception, as a child, a youth or a grown man; being a God he was incapable of dying: it was all a mere appearance. While crucified before the eyes of the stupid mass, he manifested himself to his chosen disciple in a cave on the Mount and revealed the mysteries of the cross of light. Such treatment of the gospel

history is possible only when the Gospel is cut off from the Old Testament. The Gnostics either did not recognize the Old Testament at all, or they submitted it to a thorough allegorical transformation according to the method developed by Stoicism for explaining Homer. The danger is increased by the moral consequences of this system: sin is but man's nature; therefore it is necessary to get rid of this nature. This can be done either by an ascetic training which was as alien to the true Gospel as it was congenial to the general tendencies of that period—or by undisguised sensuality, cynicism in a Christian masque, a blasphemy and sacrilege resented by all sober Christians.

Christianity met this Gnosticism rather early. Already St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians combats the idea of putting Christ among other spirits and of worshipping by self-humiliation. The first Epistle of St. John and Ignatius warn the communities of Asia Minor against docetists. The Book of Revelation and the Epistle of St. Jude fight against gnostic libertinism. But it is only about 130 A. D. that gnostic communities come in sight, and leading personalities such as Basilides, Valentinus, etc. are recognised. These schools are organized after the model of Greek philosophical schools. We hear of attempts at realizing the Platonic Utopia of communism. Marcion, too, was a gnostic school-leader, in spite of the fact that he himself pretended to be a church reformer: he rejected the Old Testament, denied the reality of Christ's body and demanded ascetic training. His theology shows clearly how difficult it was for a former pagan to understand Paul's conceptions. The contrast of Law and Grace, to Paul a part of God's plan to save mankind, representing two successive ways of salvation, becomes with Marcion a metaphysical contrast of two incompatible principles; he does not care for the development of revelation in the history of Israel.

While the tendency of the Apologists results in a weakening of Christianity by transforming it into philosophy, religion into morality, Gnosticism implies the much greater danger of eliminating its very essence. Christianity could bear the former; the latter caused a violent reaction. Gnosticism has the merit of having forced upon the leading men the necessity of making up their minds as to the foundations of Christianity.

A third attack of Hellenism upon Christianity is to be found in Montanism; it was an enthusiastic movement started in Phrygia and spreading quickly all over the church as far as Gaul and Africa. It is usual to look upon this movement as a revival of primitive Christianity in opposition to worldliness; in fact Eschatology is one of the most prominent features in Montanism: it resulted in a strict rigorism opposed to all compromise, a fervent desire for martyrdom. This is however not genuine Christianity, not an offspring of Jesus' Gospel; it is the entrance into Christianity of the enthusiastic Phrygian religion, itself scarcely Hellenized. May be, this too is to be counted as a triumph of Christianity; but here again a great danger was implied in the way in which Christian hope was turned into exaltation, Christian life was shaken at its basis, and Christianity was brought into contrast with civilization. It is characteristic that the notion of the Paraclete here is used to invalidate the historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

It was in opposition to this riotous attack of Phrygian Hellenism, that the Christian communities began to consolidate around their bishops. The Gospel did not contain an ecclesiastical constitution. St. Paul, fond of order as he was, laid more stress on voluntary services than on rights. Only towards the end of the first century a fixed organization develops among the Christian communities, growing more and more fixed during the second century. This development of a constitution may be viewed as a process within the ecclesia, the forms being fluid at the beginning and becoming more and more rigid as time went on; but it is remarkable that the result equals in an astonishing measure forms already found before Christianity: ecclesia, episcopos, diaconos remind us of the organization of the Greek city. It is also remarkable that this development was accelerated by the contrast to Gnosticism and Montanism: the church wanted a strict organization and the form of a school surely influenced the development of the monarchical episcopate.

III. This brings us to the third period. The religious situation is a compromise: the church secures historical continuity by building up the twofold canon of the Old and the New Testa-

ment. Thus the original interpretation of the Gospel seems guaranteed; on the other hand the church builds its doctrine upon a Hellenistic thought: the lost immortality has to be restored by a union between the divine nature and the human nature in Jesus Christ. Whosoever by faith and by means of the sacraments becomes united with Christ shares the immortality of his divine nature: "Thou art become God, thou art deified, reborn immortal". That is the way in which a Christian preacher about 200 A. D. addresses his congregation. It is Hippolytus, the strong antagonist of Gnosticism; but it sounds like Gnosticism; it is not Gospel, but Greek religion. And yet, it is Christian; the physical idea turning into a moral one by the introduction of notions like love of God, forgiveness of sin, doing the will of God, etc. Christian conceptions of this time are never confined to one consistent scheme; that is fortunate indeed.

It is due to Hellenistic influence that Christianity develops something like a theology. What is usually called Pauline theology is not a system in the later sense of the word. It is a number of inconsistent deductions and conclusions. Paul knows that the death of Christ is for our benefit; and in expanding this idea he gives different arguments every time, without caring for their harmony. The Greek mind is otherwise; it feels bound to think with consistency, to develop everything from the same principle and to combine all individual lines of thought: it is only on the basis of Hellenized Christianity that theology arises.

It seemed necessary to combine the belief in God with the philosophical notions of the supreme cause, to relate it with the notions of being and becoming, spirit and matter, immanence and transcendency; it was a matter of tact to steer between the rocks of Pantheism and Atheism or Deism; all this is absent from Jesus' gospel—and yet he knew so much more about God. Faith in God, surrender to God, had become a knowledge of God, a Gnosis, often nothing else than an assent to ecclesiastical traditions.

It was further necessary to have a good Christology. Bishops and teachers were expected to guide the congregations and protect them against heresy by teaching the right formula. It is to the credit of the so-called doctrine of the two natures

that the historical Jesus was protected against docetic dissipation, that the unity of the eternal Logos with the human Teacher of wisdom found strong expression, and that it was combined with the notion of salvation. But the church had to pay dearly for this; simple faith was turned into sophisticated speculations. It is an interesting point in the history of dogma to investigate how formulas of Plato and Aristotle are made to express the belief regarding Jesus. Christian theology in these early days is helplessly balancing between the notion of a highly inspired man and an incarnate deity; for the great mystery that God was in Christ cannot be expressed appropriately in physical terms.

Greek theology found it very hard to conceive of a history of revelation and salvation. Greek philosophy got its orientation in nature; everything seemed to be on the same level, there was no perspective. So the Old Testament had to be brought not only into harmony with the New Testament but almost into identity. The notion of preëxistence adapted to Jesus as well as to the church helped to bring this about. It was Jesus who spoke in the Old Testament, and it was Jesus who was spoken of in the Old Testament. The doctrine of the holy Trinity was to be found in the first chapter of Genesis. There was no development whatever. And yet the church insisted upon the historical character of the life and work of Jesus.

In constructing the doctrine of the church and its sacraments, two points were to be combined. The church represented the communion of saints, of the elect; and on the other hand it had become an institution for securing salvation, *Corpus mixtum* of saints and sinners. Likewise the sacraments were supposed to work in a physical (not to say magical) way; and yet, on the other hand, their ethical character was retained.

The same theory of compromise holds true regarding the determination of Christian morals. From Hellenism the ascetic tendency entered Christianity and tried to establish itself as the rule. The morality of the Gospel, however, did not allow this; ascetic behavior was not fixed as a general obligation, only as a higher ideal of morality. The asceticism of Gnosticism made it undesirable to follow quite the same path; so the church established the two moral standards.

The Hellenistic influence is seen not only in dogma and theology; it is still more evident in devotion. The service, which in primitive Christianity lays all stress upon the word, God speaking to man in the sermons of apostles and prophets, and man speaking to God in prayer, tends more and more to become like the old pagan rite, a sacred ceremony aiming to produce an effect upon God. The congregation, instead of being a gathering of inspired people who all contribute to common edification, is now divided into clergy and laity. The clergy themselves are divided into several classes, and the laity become a mere object of the priestly function, content to be attentive spectators of a sacred performance. We cannot discuss here the question how far this development was influenced by the Old Testament notions of priests and sacrifice; it is a matter of fact that Hellenistic tendencies were working in the same direction. The mysteries aimed at something secret, only to be approached by a priest in saintly awe. The Christian congregations from the third century down shared this tendency, it influenced their liturgical language, and caused the so-called *disciplina arcani*.

The religion of faith, of happy assurance of salvation and joyful expectation, was in danger of becoming a religion of fear, of frightful horror, of something inexplicable, of a salvation to be attained by severe self-denial. This development of Christianity into the Greek spirit was held in check however by the Gospel and its assurance of a given salvation. It remains Christianity, even when it becomes Hellenistic.

While making compromises in the field of religious thought and feeling, Christianity came much nearer to Hellenism in taking over the entire Hellenistic civilization. This most important change became possible for Christianity by renouncing its former enthusiastic eschatology. The beginnings we have noted already in the Johannine circle. Gnosticism transmuted eschatology entirely into Hellenistic transcendence. It began at the same time to appreciate the benefits of civilization, education, the fine arts, refined standards of life. The Gnostics in spite of all their ascetic behavior, are often accused of being too worldly by their opponents, the Catholics, who still take worldliness as being apostasy from Christianity. But before long they were Hellenized

too. The great teachers of Alexandria, headed by Clement, made room for a new conception: they discovered that Jesus had not meant to be understood in an ascetic way. But it was not so much the spirit of Jesus, as the spirit of Hellenism, which caused them to appreciate civilization.

Clement in his *Paedagogue* gives a minute description of the Christian life. The Gospel had only given principles; St. Paul had left it to the influence of the Holy Spirit to form the Christian life, supporting, however unconsciously, Jewish customs in his congregations. Now we have a Christian bill of fare, Christian rules for dressing, a Christian's behavior at a dinner party. We are told how to discriminate between smiling and laughing, between harmless fun and bad jokes. Clement's rule aims to tell whatever is fit for a Christian; but in fact it is the way in which Greek philosophers rule fashion and behavior, which is applied here to Christianity.

Christianity began with an attempt at displacing law by morals, love being supposed to renounce the legal pursuit of its rights. St. Paul encouraged arbitration between brethren. But soon this turned into clerical courts competing with the regular law courts. Of course their competence was not acknowledged till the fourth century by the Christian empire. They developed a canonical (i. e. ecclesiastical) law, parallel to the Roman law, the *decretales* of the Roman bishop corresponding to the *decretum praetoris*, and the *canones* of the synods to the *senatus consultum* of the Roman legislature. Both the eastern and the western Church acknowledge the affinity between these two sets of law, the Byzantine combining them in the *Nomocanon*, the Roman church keeping them separate but parallel as *Corpus iuris canonici et Corpus iuris civilis*.

The field in which one expects to find thorough-going improvements made by Christianity is the social life, Christianity appearing at first as a large organization of charity, as a kind of assurance company for all oppressed and outlawed people. But here also Christianity took over the given conditions of Hellenistic civilisation. Christian households as well as pagan include slaves. The legal propriety of slavery is not disputed, and the rules for the personal treatment of the slaves are in

many instances so conformed to the rules given by Stoic philosophers that some scholars in our time have maintained that Christianity really changed nothing. They ought rather to say: Christianity accelerated a process initiated by Stoicism, in particular by Stoic lawyers. Still better may we say: Christianity by its moral strength made it possible for Hellenism to attain the demands of Stoic philosophy. The person of the slave was protected; religious and moral freedom was given to him. Nevertheless he remained a slave, and it was looked upon as perfectly appropriate for a Christian to go to the market and buy or sell a slave as well as any other property.

• Christian life included education. Clement of Alexandria is fond of quoting from Greek poets and philosophers. Origen his pupil teaches philosophy quite as much as Christian doctrines. He comes (as von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff puts it) among the Greek philosophers as an esteemed colleague. To his contemporary Hippolytus the congregation dedicates a memorial statue representing him sitting on his chair like a Greek philosopher. At the same period Julius Africanus, a Christian, is tutor of the princes at the royal court of Edessa. He publishes a chronicle of the world and handbooks on military tactics as well as on agriculture. Methodius, bishop of Olympus, a strong opponent of Origen's spiritualizing theology, nevertheless publishes a book called *Symposion* after the model of Plato's famous work; with Methodius it is however a *symposion* of ten virgins praising chastity.

Art begins to enter Christian life, true Hellenistic art. Where in former times many scholars spoke of an original Christian art, we now see that in fact the beginnings of Christian art do not represent anything but a particular branch of the classical art. Technique as well as motives belong to Hellenism. Christ appears as Orpheus, or as a shepherd in a pastoral scene. Jonah's whale, Noah's ark, Lazarus' tomb are taken from common motives of ancient art. Christ has in his hand the magic rod of a thaumaturge. It is Hellenism which decorates the walls of the catacombs as well as the furniture of the house—Christian Hellenism, of course. Clement of Alexandria prescribes what symbols a Christian may safely choose for his seal.

Art is not merely decoration. The Greek populace was so accustomed to worship images that to the Christian the images of saints were liable to become objects of adoration. That is the reason why many Christian leaders in the first centuries depreciated art. We must however not overvalue their testimony; we learn that some Christian schools had portraits of Christ and worshipped them in the Greek manner as early as the second century. The apocryphal acts of John tell the story of a certain Lycomedes who had a portrait of the Apostle painted and worshipped it, putting flowers, lights and offerings before it. This sounds quite likely. It is the beginning of a Christian hero-worship—a cult of saints. This is another instance of Hellenization:

In this way Christianity conquers all the branches of contemporaneous civilization. It goes slowly, but irresistibly; it does not create something quite new; but it shows energy striving upwards. The programme is expressed as early as 150 A. D. by Melito of Sardis, who declares that the contemporaneous rise of empire and church shows their harmony to be intended by God. How different from primitive Christian eschatology with its belief in the immediate end of the world! About 200 A. D. the letter to Diognetus still separates Christianity from civilization. Christians share the traditional fashion in dress, food and behavior; but in their native country they are like strangers. Soon the idea appears of a Christian civilization superseding the pagan. We have it pictured on a grand scale in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*.

It is a common view that Christianity was started on this development only by the establishment of the church through Constantine. This view, however, is wrong. Of course during persecutions by the government the contrast is strongly felt. It is not safe for a Christian to be an official, or to serve in the army, or to take part in the artistic and scientific life of the time—so said Tertullian, the rigorist. In the days of Diocletian many a Christian officer felt that his military position was incompatible with his Christian faith. But in the intermediate periods of peace between the persecutions, especially during the forty years falling between Valerian and Diocletian (261—300), Christianity began to make itself comfortable in this world. It is a

mistake to think that for three centuries Christianity had an underground existence. Not in Constantine's time alone did churches spring up from the catacombs. Diocletian before him had many churches ready to be destroyed. Constantine made his peace with the church because of its enormous influence, even after the clergy had been decimated by the persecution.

To be sure, from the time of Constantine the process of Hellenization went on on a larger scale, and more quickly. Through the wide-open doors of the church people of all classes floated in; and with them came all those elements of Greek civilization which had been kept away hitherto. Now the so-called religion of the second order (i. e. superstition) gains influence, and the resistance of the clergy against this popular sub-current decreases rapidly. The more paganism abroad vanishes and ceases to be a danger, the more it is allowed to enter from within dressed in Christian garb. A good example is furnished by Augustine's mother, who brought her offerings of cake and wine to the tombs of martyrs exactly in the same way as heathens did to the tombs of their heroes. Incubation (i. e. the practice of sleeping in temples in order to get information by dreams) was transferred from the temples of healing gods to the churches of famous saints. Turning its attention to this religious under-current, modern research has discovered an astonishing number of Christian charms, amulets and so on. It may be that this began relatively early and was not limited to Gnostic circles. Still it is true that the under-current did not appear on the surface before the fourth and fifth century. And the Hellenization does not come only from the lower classes. The leaders themselves are attracted. The first great Synod of Nicea resembles the parliament of the state: the docket is like that of the Senate. Eusebius, the Christian bishop, celebrates Constantine in a panegyric which follows exactly the rules of Greek rhetoric. It comes near to apotheosis, and neglects shamefully the demands of Christian sincerity. Bishops begin to be ashamed of the boorish rusticity of the language of the Gospels. Others translate the Psalter into Greek verse. Only monasticism reacts against this Hellenizing tendency and keeps to vulgarity as representing a higher standard of sanctity.

These are the outlines of a great development. One question remains: what judgement are we to pass upon it? There can be no denying under the compulsion of a *semper idem* theory that there was change; it is equally wrong to say that it was but a development of inherent features, present implicitly from the beginning. Facts are too strong. It is evident that external influences contributed to the change. The outcome of the seed depends on the soil it has been laid in. The question is: What did this development mean to Christianity?

Two views oppose one another. The one looks upon this development as a desirable progress. It was necessary; for Christianity could reach its fullest success only by becoming a speculative system of religion and a developed civilization. The other complains that the change altered wofully the essence of Christianity. It ceased to be pure religion when it gave itself to the Greek spirit and Greek culture. The first view, started by Hegel, was supported by Baur and his school. The second is the view of Ritschl, brilliantly maintained by Harnack. No historian will deny that there was a necessity; and in so far the development was right. In history everything works according to immanent principles. The Gospel could not become a power in the Hellenistic world without being in touch with the religious spirit and the culture of Hellenism. The payment for this was compromise and the making of concessions which in fact spoiled the purity of the Gospel. It would have been fatal indeed if the Gospel had been done away with entirely. This was the danger of Gnosticism. But Christianity overcame it. The Gospel remained as a factor in the mixture, and after all the most important one. It worked like a leaven, which leavened the Hellenistic civilization, and made the mixture so complete that it needs the sharpened eye of scholarly research to discriminate the different elements in it.

It is a different question whether this mixture is the only possible one, and therefore normal and fundamental for all time. Hellenistic culture has vanished, notwithstanding this combination with Christianity. Other forms of civilization have come in. Christianity still lasts. It is due to Christianity that some elements of Hellenistic culture still survive. They are often

taken as integral parts of the Christian system. This, however, is wrong, and we must draw the logical conclusions. As we have given up slavery and other elements of this Hellenistic Christian civilization, so may we safely give up—not to say we must give up—the Platonic and Aristotelian and Stoic forms of thought. Our civilization is Teutonic-Christian. It is based on the new conceptions of our great Reformers.

The Gospel, making its transition from Judaism to Hellenism, divested itself of many apparently integral elements, and assumed others which did not belong to it originally. It is possible to repeat this process without damaging the Gospel. For Jesus—and Jesus alone in the history of religions—represented religion in its purity. He was of course a child of his nation and of his time. Nevertheless we feel sure that all attempts at representing him in the oriental costume of his period are unjust to him. His preaching is transferable into all human languages; for he speaks as man to man. Now it is a sad fact that we men cannot tolerate religion in its purity. Being on this earth, corporeal, bound to space and time, man needs forms—forms of cult and of culture. It is inevitable that the Gospel should become connected with these forms. It does not mean loss; it means gain. Only the distinctive character of the Gospel must be kept unaltered, and the full energy of its life-giving power must be maintained. The Gospel is sure to work, and the more so the less it is mixed with alien elements.