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A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

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887TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING
HELD IN THE LECTURE HALL, NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION, 69, GREAT PETER STREET, S.W.1, ON MONDAY,
30TH JANUARY, 1950.

REV. D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES, M.D., M.R.C.P., IN THE
CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed and signed.

The following elections were announced:—R. T. Hewlett, Esq., Fellow; Rev. John Harries, Fellow; J. F. Wallace, Esq., LL.B., Fellow; C. M. Lambert, Esq., Fellow; Rev. Herbert H. J. Lockyer, D.D., Fellow; A. Sheridan Atkinson, Esq., B.Sc., Fellow; H. W. Pearce, Esq., F.C.A., Fellow; Rev. H. McKerlie, Fellow; Rev. Peter R. Joshua, D.D., Fellow; Rev. Robert J. McConnell, Fellow; Capt. A. L. Perry, Fellow; Miss Nellie M. Wyard, Member; A. H. Boulton, Esq., LL.B., Member; Charles C. Luck, Esq., Member; Gordon Judd, Esq., Member; Noel F. S. Thompson, Esq., Member; Geraint R. Morgan, Esq., B.A., Member; H. R. Ford, Esq., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., Member; H. J. Orr-Ewing, M.C., M.D., B.S., F.R.C.P., Member (on transfer from Fellow); A. D. Ehlert, Esq., Member; F. W. Davy, Esq., M.A., Member; Rev. Ivor F. H. Carr-Gregg, M.A., F.R.A.S., F.R.G.S., Member; H. B. Banks, Esq., Member; Victor G. Levett, Esq., Member; Rev. C. H. Titterton, M.A., B.D., Member; David M. Hum, Esq., B.Sc., A.R.C.S., Member; Professor Frank Pack, Ph.D., Member; Rev. W. E. Dalling, M.A., Member (on transfer from Fellow); J. D. T. Thompson, Esq., B.A., Associate; S. S. Wooldridge, Esq., Associate; A. J. Liddon, Esq., B.A., Associate; R. H. Reid, Esq., Associate; Rev. H. P. Scott, Associate (on transfer from Member); Kenneth D. Ramsbottom, Esq., Associate; John Ponsford White, Esq., Associate; Temple University, Philadelphia, U.S.A., Library Associate.

The CHAIRMAN then called on the Rev. Philip E. Hughes, M.A., B.D., to read his paper entitled "Platonism and the New Testament."

PLATONISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT.

By THE REV. PHILIP E. HUGHES, M.A., B.D.

SYNOPSIS.

I. The attitude of Christians towards Plato, generally acknowledged as supreme among philosophers, at first followed the view that Plato was indebted to the Old Testament for whatever was good and valuable in his doctrines. Later St. Augustine suggested that the truths of Platonism were an expression of the common grace which God bestows upon all men. Clement of Alexandria saw the two streams of the Jewish law and Greek philosophy leading up to and meeting in Christ.

II. Some account is given of the mingling of Jewish and Platonic thought in the apocryphal book *The Wisdom of Solomon* and in the system of Philo—both of them prior to the New Testament.

III. The main Platonic doctrines relative to the theme of the paper are surveyed and some account is given of the figure and character of Socrates.

IV. Christianity is proposed as the corrective and completion of Platonism, the chief error of which lies in its dualistic view of God and matter as eternally co-existent and irreconcilable. The removal of this error and the turning of the Platonic system to Christ as Redeemer, God-Incarnate, leads to a right perspective and a real harmony.

AMONGST the great philosophers of the pre-Christian world and, indeed, of any age, Plato must be adjudged *facile princeps*—"that unique man," to quote the homage of his illustrious pupil Aristotle, "whose name is not to come from the lips of the wicked; for theirs is not the right to praise him who first revealed clearly by word and by deed that he who is virtuous is happy. Alas," exclaims the Stagyrite, "not one of us can equal him."¹ In the ranks of Christendom it is the voice of no less a person than Augustine which declares that "among the disciples of Socrates, Plato was the one who shone with a glory which far excelled that of the others, and who not unjustly eclipsed them all"; and, further, that "he is justly preferred to all the other philosophers of the Gentiles."² Calvin, too, though he complains that Augustine is "excessively addicted to the philosophy of Plato,"³ yet acknowledges that Plato enjoyed a degree of enlightenment which is not equalled by any other philosopher.⁴

Apart, however, from any general estimate of Plato's supremacy in the hierarchy of philosophy, it has been felt by many even from the early days of our era that the system of Plato presents numerous points of affinity with the revealed truth of Christianity. "None come nearer to us," says Augustine, speaking for the Christians, "than the Platonists," and especially is this so inasmuch as they "have recognized the true God as the author

¹ Aristotle, *Fragm.* 623: a free rendering, practically as given by F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (Vol. 1, 1946), p. 261.

² *Civ. Dei* viii, 4.

³ But see Augustine's disclaimer in *Civ. Dei* ii, 14: "We for our part, indeed, reckon Plato neither a god nor a demigod; we would not even compare him to any of God's holy angels, nor to the truth-speaking prophets, nor to any of the apostles or martyrs of Christ, nay, not to any faithful Christian man."

⁴ *v. Comm. in Jn.*, i, 3; *Comm. in I Jn.*, ii, 3, 4. *Inst.* I, xv, 6.

of all things, the source of the light of truth, and the bountiful bestower of all blessedness."¹ Two centuries previously Irenaeus had remarked that Plato proved himself to be more religious than Marcion and his followers, "since he allowed that the same God was both just and good, having power over all things, and Himself executing judgment."²

This measure of affinity between the Platonic and Christian systems called for some explanation in the field of Christian apologetics, for during the first four centuries it was frequently urged by the opponents of Christianity that the noblest Christian sentiments had been more ably and clearly expressed by pagan philosophers at an earlier date, and especially by Plato. Thus the heathen Celsus assailed Christianity in the second century A.D. on the ground that Christ and His Apostles borrowed much of their teaching from Plato, whose writings they understood imperfectly and even perverted. To this charge Origen retorted that the alleged borrowings from Plato could without difficulty be matched with passages from the writings of the Old Testament, which are much older than those of Plato.³ Even at the conclusion of the fourth century (396 A.D.) Augustine in one of his letters expresses a desire to see certain books composed by Ambrose "with much care and at great length against some most ignorant and pretentious men, who affirm that our Lord was instructed by the writings of Plato."⁴ These books, unfortunately, are no longer extant; but Augustine evidently obtained his desire and perused them, for elsewhere he says that, when confronted with the calumnious assertion urged by Plato's admirers to the effect that "our Lord Jesus Christ had learnt from the books of Plato all those sayings of His, which they are compelled to praise," the illustrious Bishop of Milan "discovered, through his investigations into profane history, that Plato had made a journey into Egypt at the time when Jeremiah the prophet was there": accordingly Ambrose concluded that the Greek philosopher had been initiated by Jeremiah into the wisdom of the Old Testament, and had thus been able to express views which were not out of harmony with those of Christianity.⁵

In propounding this solution Ambrose is, of course, guilty of a

¹ *Civ. Dei.*, viii, 5.

² *Adv. Haer.*, III, xxv, 5.

³ *v. Con. Cels.*, v, 65, vi, 12-19, vii, 27-35.

⁴ Letter XXXI, To Paulinus and Therasia.

⁵ *Christ. Doct.*, ii, 28.

serious anachronism, since Jeremiah was antecedent to Plato by some 200 years, and consequently, even if Plato ever journeyed to Egypt, which in itself is debatable,¹ there is no possibility of his having met the Hebrew prophet in that country. In course of time Augustine came to realize the untenability of this theory and discarded it. "Certain partakers with us in the grace of Christ," he says, "are surprised when they hear and read that Plato had conceptions concerning God, in which they recognize considerable agreement with the truth of our religion. Some have concluded from this, that when he went to Egypt he had heard the prophet Jeremiah, or, whilst travelling in the same country, had read the prophetic Scriptures; and I myself also have expressed this opinion in certain of my writings. But a careful calculation of dates contained in chronological history shows that Plato was born about 100 years after the time in which Jeremiah prophesied."² Augustine further points out in this recantation that the Greek version of the Old Testament Scriptures was not commenced until some 70 years after Plato's death. "Therefore," he concludes, "on that journey of his Plato could neither have seen Jeremiah, who had died so long before, nor have read those same Scriptures which had not yet been translated into the Greek tongue."³ However, Augustine feels that Plato, who was so eager a seeker after knowledge, may have "studied those Scriptures through an interpreter, as he did those of the Egyptians"; and, while noticing significant similarities between the Mosaic and the Platonic doctrines, he declares that the consideration which most of all inclines him "almost to assent to the opinion that Plato was not ignorant of those Scriptures" is the revelation of the Divine Name to Moses as "I AM THAT I AM," whereby the truth is conveyed that God is He that truly *is*, "because He is unchangeable, in comparison with whom those things which have been created

¹ Gibbon (*Decline and Fall*, ch. xxi) seems to have accepted the story of a visit to Egypt by Plato on the strength of a statement of Cicero's—*Plato Aegyptum peragravit ut a sacerdotibus barbaris numeros et coelestia acciperet*, the reference of which he gives as *De Finibus* v. 25, but which I have been unable to trace. "The Egyptians might still preserve the traditional creed of the Patriarchs," says Gibbon. Dr. Lewis Campbell, however, asserts that for the account of Plato's alleged visit to Egypt and conversation with the priests there we only have a statement of Diogenes Laertius (i.e., some 200 years later than Cicero) which rests upon "more or less uncertain tradition" (Article on Plato in *Encycl. Brit.*, 11th Edn., 1911).

² 150 years would have been a more accurate estimate.

³ *Civ. Dei*, viii, 11; cf. *Retract.* II, iv, 2.

changeable *are* not,—a truth," he adds, "which Plato vehemently held and most diligently commended."¹

Ambrose and Augustine were certainly not the first to suggest that Plato had been enriched by an acquaintance with the Old Testament writings. It is a theme that recurs not infrequently in the works of the Christian Apologists and of the Alexandrian School from the second century onwards. Clement, to take an example, apostrophizes the Greek philosopher in the following terms: "Whence, O Plato, is that hint of the truth which you give? . . . You have learned geometry from the Egyptians, astronomy from the Babylonians; the charms of healing you have got from the Thracians; the Assyrians also have taught you many things; but for the laws that are consistent with truth and your sentiments respecting God, you are indebted to the Hebrews."² Plato, he affirms, "fanned the spark of the Hebrew philosophy," and "was not unacquainted with David."³ Clement, indeed, says that the Pythagorean and Platonist philosopher Numenius, who was a contemporary of his, expressly writes: "What is Plato, but Moses speaking in Attic Greek?"—*Μωυσης ἀττικίζων*.⁴

We must not imagine, however, that this opinion which postulated the dependence of Plato, and indeed of the other Greek philosophers, upon the Old Testament Scriptures was limited to the confines of the Christian Church, or even of the Christian era, for it was strongly maintained in the first century A.D. by the Jewish scholars Philo and Josephus; and even before Christ's advent, as early as the second century B.C., we find it expressed clearly by the Alexandrian Hellenistic philosopher Aristobulus, who, besides being pre-Christian in period, was also not even a Jew. Clement, who flourished in

¹ *Civ. Dei*, *ibid.*

² *Exhortation to the Heathen* vi.

³ *Instructor* ii, 1; cf. also ii, 10, and *Strom.* i, 15, 19, 25, 29; v, 14.

⁴ *Strom.* i, 22. Schürer says (*Hist. Jewish People* II, iii, p. 319) that it is not credible "that Numenius should have used just this expression," and he favours Eusebius's statement that it is an expression only "ascribed to Numenius, viz. by oral tradition"—*v. Praep. Evang.* XI, x, 14. Bigg, however, maintains (*Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, p. 6) that "Clement's language is so clear and positive (*Νουμήνιος . . . ἄντικρυς γράφει*) that Schürer cannot be right in doubting whether that philosopher was really the author of the phrase." In view of the fact that Clement and Numenius were contemporaneous, we should be inclined to accept Clement's statement. But anyway, the thing that deserves our attention here is that Plato was at this time referred to as *Μωυσης ἀττικίζων*. Origen calls Numenius "a surpassingly excellent expounder of Plato" (*Con. Cels.* iv, 51).

Alexandria some 300 years later, was not unaware that he had had predecessors in this respect in his own city, for in the same passage from which we have already quoted he makes reference to a work by Aristobulus, addressed to Ptolemy Philometor in which the author asserts that Plato had followed the Mosaic laws and had "manifestly studied all that is said in them"¹; and in an earlier passage Clement cites Philo and Aristobulus as examples of those who had demonstrated the precedence which the Jewish enjoys over the Greek philosophy.² In another place Clement says that Aristobulus composed "abundant books to show that the Peripatetic philosophy was derived from the law of Moses and from the other prophets."³ It would have been more accurate, as Schürer remarks,⁴ had Clement said Greek philosophy in general rather than just the Peripatetic philosophy, since the extant fragments prove that Aristobulus maintained the indebtedness to Moses of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and even the ancient poets Hesiod and Homer. Indeed Aristobulus went so far as to affirm that the Pentateuch had been rendered into Greek, in its essentials at least, many years prior to the appearance of the Septuagint version, and had thus been available to the Greek sages from a very early date⁵—a view which, as we have seen, Augustine was reluctant to abandon.

There is no doubt that Augustine leads us to surer ground when he explains that it is needless to determine whether or not Plato derived his wisdom from the books of the ancients who preceded him, since a more trustworthy solution to the problem is provided by the Apostle Paul when he tells us respecting the heathen that "what may be known concerning God has been manifested among them, since God has manifested it to them; for His invisible things from the creation of the world are clearly

¹ *Strom.* i, 22.

² *Ibid.* i, 15.

³ *Ibid.* v, 14.

⁴ *Hist. Jewish People*, II, iii, 240.

⁵ Cf. Clement, *Strom.* i, 22, where, besides citing the statement of Aristobulus that Plato studied and followed the Jewish laws, Clement affirms that "previous to the dominion of Alexander and of the Persians" a translation had been made of the Exodus and of the whole code of laws of the Hebrews—"so that it is perfectly clear that Plato derived a great deal from this source, for he was very learned." Cf. also Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* ix, 6; xiii, 12. Eusebius is, however, in error when he speaks of Aristobulus as having been one of the Seventy who were responsible for the translation of the Old Testament into Greek under Ptolemy Philadelphus (*Hist. Eccl.* vii, 32)—a misconception which probably accounts for a similar mistake by Clement in *Strom.* v, 14, where he says that Aristobulus "lived in the time of Ptolemy Philadelphus."

seen, being understood by those things which have been made, even His eternal power and Godhead."¹ And elsewhere, invoking the support of this same passage of Scripture, Augustine says: "Truly there have been some philosophers of this world who have sought for the Creator by means of the creature; for He can be found by means of the creature."² In other words, the truth which appears in the writings of Plato, and of any other heathen philosopher, is an expression of that common grace which God bestows upon all men.

Clement of Alexandria, in fact, sees two streams meeting in the advent of Christ, that of the Jewish Law and that of Greek Philosophy, though in his view the truth of the latter was originally derived from the former as its source, and that which is derivative is inferior to that which is original. "Before the advent of the Lord," he declares, "philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness." God "is the cause of all good things, of some primarily, as the Old and the New Testaments, and of others secondarily, as philosophy." As the Law was a schoolmaster to bring the Hebrews to Christ, so also philosophy to bring the Hellenic mind. "Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ."³ And in another place he enunciates the principle of common grace in the following manner: "The Lord of all is God; and I say the Lord of all absolutely, nothing being left by way of exception." The "spirit of wisdom," spoken of in Exodus xxviii, 3, is "nothing else than Understanding, a faculty of the soul, capable of studying existences, . . . and it extends even to philosophy itself." "Rightly, then," says Clement, "to the Jews belonged the Law, and to the Greeks philosophy, until the Advent."⁴

Origen seems to be even more bold when he affirms that "all who are rational beings are partakers of the Logos, that is, of reason," and when, citing Romans x, 8—"The Logos is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart," he says that "the Apostle Paul shows truly that all have a share in Christ," for

¹ *Romans* i, 19, 20; Augustine, *Civ. Dei* viii, 12. Cf. Augustine's suggestive paraphrase of this same passage, *ibid.* viii, 10—"God has manifested His invisible things to them by those things which are made, *that they might be seen by the understanding—per ea quae facta sunt Deus illis manifestavit intellectu conspicienda invisibilia sua.*"

² *Tract. in Joann.* ii, 4.

³ *Strom.* i, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.* v, 14; vi, 17.

“ Christ is in the heart of all, in respect of His being the Logos or reason, by participating in which they are rational beings.”¹ His words, however, must be understood as referring to common, not to special, grace. Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on John i, 9, where the Evangelist states that the Logos “ was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” speaks to the same effect: God, he says, “ engrafteth in each one that is called into being the seed of wisdom and of Divine knowledge, and implanteth a root of understanding, and so rendereth the living creature rational, showing it to be a partaker of His own nature, and sending into the mind as it were certain luminous vapours of the Unutterable Brightness.”²

By the commencement of the Christian era the influence of Platonism was widely extended in the Mediterranean world, and its impact, as we have already observed, was not limited to the Gentile nations. The Hellenistic age witnesses the development of a strong hellenizing party amongst the Jews in Palestine itself—a repercussion from the Jewish dispersion in lands where Greek culture and thought were predominant, assisted by the general policy of the country’s “ foreign ” governors of this period which encouraged the establishment of distinctively Greek institutions of culture, recreation, and even dress. Josephus records Aristotle’s account, as preserved in a book by his pupil Clearchus, of his meeting in Asia Minor in the middle of the fourth century B.C. with a learned Jew, who “ was a Greek not only in language, but in spirit also ”—*Ἑλληνικὸς ἦν οὐ τῆ διαλέκτῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆ ψυχῆ*, and from whom the great philosopher confessed that he received more information than he gave.³ This Hellenic Jew is representative of the close confluence of Greek and Hebrew thought which had taken place in certain circles prior to the advent of Christ, and which achieved its high-water mark in the writings of Philo at a time when Christianity was still in its formative stage. We must not overlook the fact, however, that this Hellenic-Jewish movement was only fractional, and had to push its way against the wider and deeper stream of Jewish conservatism which strongly opposed its progress.

An important tributary to the Hellenic-Jewish current was the apocryphal book known as “ The Wisdom of Solomon ”—

¹ *De Princ.* I, iii, 6; cf. II, vii, 2.

² *Comm. in Joann.* ch. ix.

³ *Con. Apton.* i, 22.

a product in all probability of Alexandrian origin which helped to prepare the way for Philo, and which also exercised a strong influence in the Christian Church of the second and third centuries. Wisdom is hypostatized in this work, as in the book of Proverbs, and is supreme amongst the Divine emanations: “ Wisdom is more moving than any motion; she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness; for she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure effluence flowing from the glory of the Almighty . . . She is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness.”¹ With this passage, which he treats as canonical, Origen links up the Apostolic declarations of Colossians i, 15, and Hebrews i, 3, which set forth Christ as “ the image of the invisible God,” “ the first-born of every creature,” and “ the brightness of God’s glory, the express image of His Person ”; and his comment is, “ that Wisdom has her existence nowhere else save in Him who is the beginning of all things, and from whom also is derived everything that is wise.”² The terminology of this apocryphal book would appear to identify Wisdom with “ God’s all-powerful Word ” or Logos³, for Wisdom too is all-powerful, and effective as the Divine agent of regeneration: “ Being but one, she can do all things; and remaining in herself she maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and prophets.”⁴ She is “ privy to the mysteries of the knowledge of God,” and by means of her, says the author, “ I shall obtain immortality, and leave behind me an everlasting memorial to them that come after me.”⁵ Such expressions, while strongly reminiscent of Platonic sentiments, are yet not out of harmony with Hebrew thought. The most distinctively Platonic feature of the book is its dualistic view of soul and body. The soul’s pre-existence is assumed: a good soul enters “ an undefiled body.”⁶ The body is an encumbrance to the soul; nor is there any hint of its resurrection: “ The corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth upon many things.”⁷

¹ *Wisd.* vii, 24–26.

² *De Princ.* I, ii, 5.

³ *Wisd.* xviii, 15.

⁴ *Ibid.* vii, 27.

⁵ *Ibid.* viii, 4, 13.

⁶ *Ibid.* viii, 20.

⁷ *Ibid.* ix, 15.

It was this soil (to change the metaphor that we have been using) that Philo tilled and developed with such diligent ingenuity. By a process of synthesis and allegorical exegesis he sought to demonstrate that, despite any external appearances to the contrary, an essential harmony existed between the verbally inspired Law of Moses and the doctrines not merely of Plato, but of Pythagoras and Zeno also, and, indeed, that the explanation of this internal harmony was that these philosophers had drawn their wisdom from the pure Mosaic source. It is with the Platonic elements in Philo's system that we are here concerned. Since early times Philo has frequently been spoken of as a Platonist. Thus Jerome, who calls him "the most erudite man among the Jews,"¹ refers to him as "Plato's imitator."² There is also the old proverb: "Either Plato is a philonizer, or Philo is a platonizer"—ἢ Πλάτων φιλωνιζεῖ ἢ Φίλων πλατωνιζει.³ The cosmogony and anthropology of Philo illustrate most distinctively the Platonic aspects of his system. His transcendental doctrine of God as the supreme spiritual Being whose nature is incomprehensible, ineffable, and incommunicable gives rise to his formulation of the dialectal way of negation (the *via negativa* adopted by the Alexandrian theologians of the early Church and later developed by the mediaeval Schoolmen, and in our own day reasserted in the Barthian and Neo-Thomist systems), which he insisted must be followed if we wish to speak at all about Him who is infinite. The material universe alone, as finite and perceptible, may be described; but to attempt to define God, or even to name Him, except metaphorically, is to degrade Him and to be guilty of the greatest impiety.

Thus God and matter are at opposite poles. The degree of this dualism is intensified when Philo adds the Platonic concept of matter as both inherently evil and eternally existent. The creation of the world was, according to him, from matter that was already in existence—matter, however, in a chaotic state: "without form and void."⁴ God, who is entirely good and perfect, cannot be regarded as the Creator of matter, which is evil and imperfect. Hence to designate God as the Originator of the world is to designate Him as the author of evil. The statement of Genesis i, 31, "God saw everything that He had

¹ *Preface to the Book on Hebrew Names.*

² Letter XXII, to Eustochium.

³ Quoted in Schürer, *Hist. Jewish People*, II, iii, 364.

⁴ *Genesis* i, 2.

made, and behold it was very good," is expounded by Philo as referring not to matter, which, being pre-existent, God had not made, but to the reduction of disorder to order, the organization of ἀμορφος ὕλη. Yet even this modified form of creation was not performed directly by God, but mediately, through the agency of "creative and regulative powers" or, to use the Platonic term, "ideas." The intervention of these intermediary beings for the execution of the creative operations preserves the Godhead from any defiling contact whatever with matter. The highest of these powers, the source from which all the others flow, and the sum and quintessence of them all, is the Logos. This Logos is for Philo the archetypal Idea, the Divine Viceregent, the efficient Mediator between the infinite and the finite, the creative Word of God, the Divine Reason everywhere immanent, the soul of the world. Philo even goes so far as to call the Logos the Son, the First-begotten of God, the Second God, and, indeed, God—θεός, however, not ὁ θεός. Yet these can only be regarded as titles of eminence, for any doctrine of hypostatic union or identification with the Godhead would at once invalidate the reason for the existence in the Philonic system of such an intermediate being, which is to relieve God of the contamination resulting from contact with matter in creation or in any other way.

Philo's view of the nature of matter could not fail to colour his doctrine of man, and in the expression of this doctrine, as was the case with the Wisdom of Solomon, the influence of Plato is again clearly to be observed. The body, being composed of corruptible matter, is evil. The souls of men are pre-existent and are, in fact, divine powers or emanations which have descended into and been imprisoned in human bodies. The wise man will strive after liberation from the corporeal senses and passions, and his ultimate ambition is the enjoyment in a disembodied state of the immediate vision of God, which alone is true knowledge and perfection. The unspiritual have no understanding or experience of these things: the attainment of them is progressive, at first through the "powers" of God in a mediate sense, but ultimately by the direct knowledge and intellection of God in Himself.¹

If we now direct our attention more closely to the doctrines of

¹ Such a multiplicity of references, scattered throughout most of Philo's numerous works, may be adduced for his doctrines briefly set out above, that I have not felt it desirable to reproduce them in a paper of this scope.

Plato himself, we shall see how marked is the relationship to them of these views of Philo. God, according to Plato, is absolutely good, and the cause of all good; in no way is He deficient in beauty or excellence; His nature is entirely free from falsehood and undergoes no change or variation of any kind.¹ His being is "according to sameness, unproduced and not subject to decay, receiving nothing into itself from elsewhere, and itself never entering into any other nature, but invisible and imperceptible by senses, and to be apprehended only by pure intellect."² He is "the heavenly Architect,"³ "the framing Artificer," and "the Creator and Father" of the universe, which has been modelled in accordance with an "eternal pattern."⁴ Yet by terminology of this sort we should not understand the creation of matter as such, but the creation of form and design in the universe: God "took everything that was visible and not in a state of rest, but in excessive agitation and disorder, and then reduced it from disorder to order."⁵ Yet, again, this formative and regulative operation was not directly performed by God, but was entrusted by Him to the "junior gods," who were charged with "the duty of constructing mortal bodies."⁶ These "junior gods" correspond to the "forms" or "ideas," and owe their existence to Him who is the One and the Good, the supreme God; and it is through them, mediately, that the creative operations are accomplished. We are instructed by Aristotle that the Platonic forms "are the cause of the essence of all other things, and the One is the cause of the essence of the forms."⁷ The ideas, says Plato, "are perceived by the intellect, not seen by the eye"; the Good is the source of their intelligibility, and it is "from the Good that their being and essence are derived, whereas the Good is not essence, but beyond essence and superior to it both in dignity and power."⁸

In view of these considerations, "to discover the Creator and Father of this universe, as well as His work, is indeed difficult; and, when discovered, it is impossible to reveal Him to mankind at large."⁹ The reason for this incommunicability of the Divine

¹ *Repub.* ii, 380-383. Cf. *Hebrews* i, 10-12; *James* i, 17.

² *Timaeus* 51, 52.

³ *Repub.* vii, 530.

⁴ *Timaeus* 28-30.

⁵ *Ibid.* 30.

⁶ *Ibid.* 42, 69.

⁷ *Metaphysics* 988

⁸ *Repub.* vi, 507, 509.

⁹ *Timaeus* 28. Cf. *Romans* xi, 33-36.

nature is that it is entirely imperceptible by the ordinary senses; it is "colourless, formless, and intangible, visible only to the intelligence which sits at the helm of the soul,"¹ and thus in no way definable by human predicates. It is by the method of dialectic alone that the eye of the soul may be conducted upwards to the true vision of real existence,² and the achievement of this end is by a progressive exercise and concentration of the soul. A person commences this upward journey of the soul with the love of forms that are beautiful, and proceeds thereafter to a contemplation of the beauty which is in souls, as a beauty "more excellent than that which is in form" and unaffected by external appearance, "even though the flower of the form should be withered," with the result that he learns "to esteem little the mere beauty of the outward form." Thence he is conducted to science, or knowledge, "so that he may gaze upon the loveliness of wisdom" and "turn towards the wide ocean of intellectual beauty, . . . until, strengthened and confirmed, he should at length steadily contemplate one science, which is the science of this universal beauty." Thus "those who discipline themselves upon this system . . . ascend through transitory objects which are beautiful towards that which is beauty itself, proceeding as on steps from the lover of one form to that of two, and from that of two to that of all forms which are beautiful, and from beautiful forms to beautiful habits and institutions, and from institutions to beautiful doctrines; until, from the meditation of many doctrines, they arrive at that which is nothing else than the doctrine of the supreme beauty itself, in the knowledge and contemplation of which at length they repose." All other things are beautiful through a participation of this supreme beauty which is "eternal, unproduced, indestructible, subject neither to increase nor decay, not, like other things, partly beautiful and partly deformed, not at one time beautiful and at another time not, . . . but eternally uniform and consistent, and monoeidic with itself, . . . the divine, the original, the supreme, the monoeidic beautiful itself."³ The knowledge of the absolute Beauty is not other than that of the absolute Good and of the ultimate Unity: it is, in fact, the vision of God.

This noble ascent is possible of attainment to the soul because of all things it is "most like that which is divine, immortal,

¹ *Phaedrus* 247.

² *Repub.* 531 ff.

³ *Symposium* 210-212.

intelligent, uniform, indissoluble, and which always continues in the same state."¹ The soul itself is immortal and imperishable, and so "it is impossible for the soul to perish when death approaches it." "When, therefore, death approaches a man, the mortal part of him dies, but the immortal part escapes safe and uncorrupted, having withdrawn itself from death."² In contrast to the soul, however, "the body is most like that which is human, mortal, unintelligent, multiform, dissoluble, and which never continues in the same state."³ This being so, the true philosopher, the true lover of wisdom, despises the pursuit of material display and ambition, and occupies himself, not about his body, but about his soul: indeed, he "frees his soul as much as he can from communion with the body," for "the soul then reasons best when none of these things disturb it, neither hearing, nor sight, nor pain, nor pleasure of any kind; but it retires as much as possible within itself, taking leave of the body, and, as far as it can, not communicating or being in contact with it, it aims at the discovery of that which is."⁴ The body is actually an encumbrance to the soul, and subjects us to innumerable hindrances which prevent us from attaining the unimpeded enjoyment of the divine vision. It is an evil and "as long as we are encumbered with the body, and our soul is contaminated with such an evil, we can never fully attain to what we desire." Thus, "if we are ever to know anything purely, we must be separated from the body, and contemplate the things themselves by the mere soul."⁵ It is only at death that the lover of wisdom is released from this encumbrance, and, consequently, "those who pursue philosophy rightly study to die, and to them of all men, death is least formidable." For such men to dread death would be very irrational. In life, then, the philosopher will have only such commerce with the body as is absolutely necessary; he will not be carried away by its passions; and he will endeavour increasingly to purify himself from its defilement, until at death the soul is "delivered as it were from its shackles."⁶ Then at length he will be free, no longer "entombed in that which we now drag about with us and call the body," no longer "fettered to it like an oyster to his shell."⁷

¹ *Phaedo* 80.

² *Ibid.* 105-107.

³ *Ibid.* 80.

⁴ *Ibid.* 64, 65.

⁵ *Ibid.* 66.

⁶ *Ibid.* 67, 68.

⁷ *Phaedrus* 250; cf. *Timaeus* 81.

The soul, moreover, being immortal and uncreated, has existed prior to its imprisonment in the body, and in this previous existence it has enjoyed the vision of absolute truth. It is, in fact, the recollection in his soul of this perfect vision that impels the philosopher to lay aside every carnal consideration in order that he may himself attain to this blissful experience. The soul's prior participation in absolute knowledge is also the fount of man's innate knowledge and intelligence: "our souls existed before they were in human form, separate from bodies, and possessed intelligence."¹ Even the process of learning things is nothing else than a process of reminiscence²—"a recollection of those things which in time past our soul beheld when it travelled in the company of the gods, and, looking high over what we now call real, lifted up its head into the region of eternal essence." It is the mind of the philosopher alone that "to the best of its power is ever fixed in memory on that glorious spectacle. . . . And it is only by the right use of such memories as these, and by ever perfecting himself in perfect mysteries, that a man becomes really perfect." Because, however, such a person "stands aloof from human interests, and is rapt in contemplation of the divine, he is taken to task by the multitude as a man demented, since the multitude fail to see that he is a man inspired by God."³ "Though every man's soul has by the law of his birth been a spectator of eternal truth," yet "few, few only, are there left with whom the world of memory is duly present," and who have a yearning for a happiness that is past.⁴

The soul, then, which at death departs, "in a pure state, taking nothing of the body with it," departs "to that which resembles itself, the invisible, the divine, immortal and wise," and on its arrival there "its lot is to be happy, free from error, ignorance, fears, wild passions, and all the other evils to which human nature is subject," and it "passes the rest of its time with the gods." But a soul that departs from the body "polluted and impure, as having constantly held communion with the body, and having served and loved it, and been bewitched by it, through desires and pleasures, so as to think that there is nothing real except what is corporeal," will be "stamped with that which is cor-

¹ *Phaedo* 76.

² *Ibid.* 72.

³ *Phaedrus* 249.

⁴ *Ibid.* 250.

poreal;” it will be “ponderous and earthly,” “weighed down, and drawn again into the visible through dread of the invisible and of Hades.” In this state the souls of the wicked “wander about until at length, through the desire of the corporeal nature that accompanies them, they are again united to a body; and they are united, as is probable, to animals having the same habits as they have given themselves up to during life. For instance, those who have given themselves up to gluttony, wantonness, and drinking, and have put no restraint on themselves, will probably be clothed in the form of asses and brutes of that kind. And such as have set great value on injustice, tyranny, and rapine, will be clothed in the species of wolves, hawks and kites.”¹ At the top of the scale of bodies which a soul may indwell in accordance with the quality of its former incarnate existence is that of the man, then that of the woman, and then other kinds of bodies in a progression of inferiority.² In this variety of changes the soul never ceases from labour until, “having overcome by reason its turbulent and irrational part, . . . it at last returns to the first and best disposition of its nature.”³

This doctrine of metempsychosis, besides involving belief in the value and immortality of the individual soul, also implies the ethical responsibility of each human being. There is no suggestion that the lower animals are to be regarded as morally responsible: the entry of a soul into one of them seems to have a significance which is merely disciplinary as far as the soul is concerned. The soul in man, however, “resembles the combined efficacy of a pair of winged steeds and a charioteer. The charioteer is intellectual reason, and, of the two horses, the one is good and noble-spirited, and is “driven without stroke of the whip by voice and reason alone,” whereas the other is bad and clumsy “a friend to all riot and insolence,” and “scarce yielding to lash and goad combined.” The latter steed has to be tamed and chastened by unremittingly violent treatment until “he follows with humbled steps the guidance of his driver.”⁴ By this parable Plato illustrates graphically his view of the tripartite nature of the soul. The immortal part of the soul, which corresponds to the driver of the chariot, is situated in the head, the seat of

¹ *Phaedo* 80–82.

² *v. Timaeus* 42, 90–92; *Repub.* x, 620.

³ *Timaeus* 42.

⁴ *Phaedrus* 246, 253, 254.

the intellect; the mortal part of the soul is divided into two sections—a higher and spirited section, which is situated in the upper portion of the thorax, and corresponds to the willing steed and a lower and sensuous part, which is situated below the midriff, and corresponds to the rebellious steed.¹ The ethical task of man, then, is to subdue the appetitive part of his nature and to discipline it together with the spirited part, in such a way that they may co-operate without friction under the wise and ennobling direction of that portion of his soul which is immortal. The beauty and health of a man’s soul are of far greater importance than the beauty and health of his body, and he who is ruled by intelligence “always appears to adjust the harmony of the body for the sake of the symphony which is in the soul.”² Such a man will not be moved by what the majority may say about him, but rather by what “he will say who knows what is right and what is wrong, and by the truth itself.” “Under no circumstances can wrong-doing be good and beautiful,” but always “evil and shameful to the doer.” Further “we ought never to return evil for evil and never to harm any man at all, whatever we may suffer at his hands.”³ Thus it is that Plato wishes his ideal republic to be governed by men who are true lovers of wisdom, men who, being themselves ruled by the noblest reason and not by passion, will exercise their governing office, not as something adding honour to their own reputation, but as a thing necessary for the good of the state. These philosopher-statesmen will, in fact, “despise present honours and deem them illiberal and of no value; but they will esteem, above all things, rectitude and the honours derived from it; they will account justice as a thing of all others the greatest and most absolutely necessary, and by ministering to it and advancing it, will thoroughly regulate the constitution of the state.”⁴

Yet Plato maintains that “no one is voluntarily bad.”⁵ The diseases of the soul, of which the greatest are excessive pleasures and pains, result from the habit of the body, and in particular from “a privation of the intellect,” that is, either madness or ignorance. “All the vicious are vicious through two most

¹ *Timaeus* 69, 70, 77.

² *Repub.* ix, 591.

³ *Crito* 48, 49.

⁴ *Repub.* vii, 540.

⁵ *Timaeus* 86; *cf. Repub.* ix, 589.

involuntary causes," namely, weakness of physical constitution and unsuitability of environment and training. "But still," he adds, "it should be our anxious endeavour, as far as we can, by education, studies, and learning, to fly from vice and acquire its contrary, virtue."¹ Plato's reason for this position is his belief in the indefectibility of knowledge: "Knowledge is a noble thing, and able to govern man, and if a man knows good and evil he can never be overcome by anything, so as to do anything else than what knowledge bids him."² This view, further, is based on the belief that "no one who either knows or thinks that other things are better than what he is doing, and that they are possible, still continues to do the same, when it is in his power to do the better."³ Thus Plato holds "that no wise man thinks that any person errs willingly, or willingly commits base and evil actions, but that wise men well know that all those who do base and evil things do them unwillingly."⁴

This estimate of the involuntary nature of vice, however, does not exempt a man from responsibility for his evil-doing, nor does it guarantee that he may expect to go unpunished. It is rather to be understood as teaching the importance of knowledge and wisdom for the best regulation of one's life, and the calamity of ignorance. The wise man will assiduously pursue virtue at all costs; for "what is evil destroys and corrupts everything, and what is good preserves and profits."⁵ Righteousness is, indeed, its own best reward, but a righteous man receives prizes and honours from both gods and men, both now and hereafter, whereas unrighteousness never fails to bring retribution in its wake.⁶ Our innate sense of justice demands this, "for if death were a deliverance from everything, it would be a great gain for the wicked, when they die, to be delivered at the same time from the body, and from their vices together with the soul: but now, since it appears to be immortal, the soul can have no other refuge from evils, nor safety, except by becoming as good and wise as possible."⁷ After death, then, we are to look for a judgment which will separate the righteous from the unrighteous, exalting the former to a heavenly bliss, and punishing the latter

¹ *Timaeus* 87.

² *Phaedo* 107.

³ *Ibid.* 612, 613.

⁴ *Repub.* x, 608

⁵ *Ibid.* 345.

⁶ *Ibid.* 358.

⁷ *Protag.* 352.

with the torments of hell (Tartarus), either eternally if their condition is beyond reclaim, or for a prolonged period of time before they return to earth to be reincarnated in another mortal form,¹ when they are further punished "by leading a life suited to that to which they are assimilated."² God, of course, "is never in any respect unrighteous, but as righteous as possible, and there is not anything that resembles Him more than the man amongst us who has likewise become as righteous as possible."³ "On account of these things, then, that man ought to be confident about his soul who during his life has disregarded all the pleasures and ornaments of the body as foreign to his nature, and who, having thought that they do more harm than good, has zealously applied himself to the acquirement of knowledge, and who, having adorned his soul not with a foreign but with its own proper ornament, temperance, justice, fortitude, freedom, and truth, thus waits for his passage to Hades, as one who is ready to depart whenever destiny shall summon him."⁴

In the heathen darkness which preceded the advent of Christ there is one whose figure shines conspicuously, like a morning star in the pagan sky, and whose life was both a most remarkable attempt at a consistent enactment, and also the spring and inspiration, of these lofty principles which have been engaging our attention. The figure was that of Socrates, who outstripped all other personages of the pagan world in nobility of character, penetration of vision, and devotion to conviction. To such an extent does his moral stature compel our admiration, that we do not hesitate to acknowledge the justness, at least in some respects, of the opinion that "the Platonic Socrates, like John the Baptist, was a forerunner of Christ."⁵ Socrates lived, indeed, under a constraining sense of Divine vocation and mission, and he devoted his time to the earnest prosecution of his divinely imposed task, namely, to convince people that God alone has wisdom, and that the wisest man is he who, like himself, has learnt that his own wisdom is worth nothing. "Such has been my search and my inquiry in obedience to God," testified this great man, "whenever I found anyone—fellow-citizen or foreigner—who might be considered wise; and if he

¹ *Ibid.* 107, 108; *Repub.* x. 613 ff.

² *Theaet.* 177.

³ *Ibid.* 176.

⁴ *Phaedo* 114 115.

⁵ The opinion of Marsiglio Ficino, quoted by Neander, *Church History*, i. 25.

did not seem so to me I have borne God witness, and pointed out to him that he was not wise at all. And through this incessant work I have had no leisure for any public action worth mentioning, nor yet for my private affairs, but I live in extreme poverty because of this service of mine to God."¹ In prosecuting this mission Socrates did not fail to stir up much bitter enmity against himself, especially on the part of those whose pretensions to wisdom he exposed as unsubstantial—those who, to use his own description, "think they are somewhat when they are worth nothing;"² and in the end his enemies succeeded in arraigning him on a charge of inventing a new theology and corrupting the youth of the state with his doctrines. His shining integrity is finely displayed in his bearing and defence before his accusers. There is one thing, he declares, and one alone, that a man of any worth ought to consider, "and that is whether what he does is right or wrong." "The post that a man has taken up," Socrates tells his Athenian hearers, "because he thought it right himself or because he thought his captain put him there, that post, I believe, he ought to hold in face of every danger, caring no whit for death or any other peril in comparison with disgrace."³ "I must obey God rather than you," he testifies, "and, while I have life and strength, I will never cease to follow wisdom and urge you forward, explaining to every man of you I meet, speaking as I have always spoken, saying, See here, my friend, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city in the world, the most famous for wisdom and for power; and are you not ashamed to care for money and money-making and fame and reputation, and not care at all, not make one effort, for truth and understanding and the welfare of your soul?" "It is God's bidding, you must understand that," he expostulates; "and I myself believe no greater blessing has ever come to you or to your city than this service of mine to God."⁴ "I am given

¹ *Apol.* 23 (*cf.* *1 Cor.*, i, 20: "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?") iii, 19: "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." *Acts.* xxvi, 20: "Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to great and small").

² *Ibid.* 41 (*cf.* *Gal.* vi, 3: "If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself").

³ *Ibid.* 28 (*cf.* *Matt.* v, 10: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven").

⁴ *Ibid.* 29, 30 (*cf.* *Acts* v, 29: "We ought to obey God rather than men." *Matt.* xvi, 26: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" *Luke* xii, 15: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth").

by God to the city," he assures them. Hence his unbending steadfastness of purpose: "I will never consent to injustice at any man's command for fear of death, but would die on the spot rather than give way. . . . For death, to put it bluntly, I did not care one straw—but I did care, and to the full, about doing what was wicked and unjust. . . . All through my life you will find that this has been my character—never yielding to any man against right and justice. . . . trying to persuade every one of you not to think of what he had but rather of what he was, and how he might grow wise and good."¹ "The difficulty," he reminds them, "is not to flee from death, but from guilt: guilt is swifter than death."² "Remember," he concludes, after sentence of death has been passed upon him—"remember this at least is true, that no evil can come to a good man in life or death, and that he is not forgotten of God."³

"He cares not for mere beauty," said Alcibiades in his encomium of Socrates, "but despises all external possessions more than anyone can imagine, whether it be beauty or wealth or glory, or any other thing for which the multitude felicitates the possessor."⁴ The heart of Socrates is enshrined for us in his own prayer: "Grant me to be beautiful in the inner man, and all I have of outer things to be at peace with those within. May I count the wise man only rich; and may my store of gold be such as none but the good can bear."⁵ Thus this pre-Christian apostle adhered unflinchingly to his principles and discharged faithfully his mission, even to the death of martyrdom—an event which presents itself as the most calm and moving in pagan

¹ *Ibid.* 31–33, 36 (*cf.* *Acts.* xx, 24–27: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself. . . . Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God").

² *Ibid.* 39 (*cf.* *Heb.* ix, 27: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment").

³ *Ibid.* 41 (*cf.* *Heb.* xiii, 5: "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me").

⁴ *Symposium* 216 (*cf.* *Phil.* iii, 7, 8: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ").

⁵ *Phaedrus* 279 (*cf.* *1 Pet.* iii, 3, 4: "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price").

history. Who will deny that this man's vocation was indeed of God, and that in life and in death he was an example to the Gentiles of the distance to which the human spirit may travel by following that natural light which is available to man even apart from a special revelation—an illumination which may truly conduct him to recognize the "eternal power and Godhead" of the Supreme Being and the surpassing value of man's immortal soul?

But it cannot conduct him further than this: the inmost mysteries of the Divine nature and purposes are not open to his gaze, simply for the reason that they are beyond his natural capacity—a capacity, let it be remembered, which, while being finite, is further disabled by the perversion of sin. A revelation from God was necessary if these great secrets were not for ever to be hidden from him; and it was just such a revelation that the Platonic philosophy required to lead it into the fulness of truth. It arrived with the advent of Christ.

Christianity is not, as some theorists seem to see it, an ingenious syncretism of a diversity of elements from a variety of sources, Hebrew, Greek, Egyptian, Oriental. It is unique among religions inasmuch as it is a religion of revelation, and, as revealed, a universal religion, displaying the one God as the universal Creator, exposing the universal sinfulness of the human race, and proclaiming the universal scope of man's redemption in Christ. Thus that there should be points of contact with other religions is not surprising, especially since in heathendom, apart from the light of common grace, there are remnants, though debased and defiled, of the original truth.¹ To regard the use in the New Testament of terms which are characteristic of Hellenic thought and religion as plagiarisms, whether conscious or unconscious, from Greek sources, is to misunderstand the nature of the New Testament, as well as to overlook the practical inevitability of the usage, in any era and amongst any people, of a specific terminology which is fundamental to religious and metaphysical expression. It is one thing to notice Platonic affinities in the writings of the New Testament, but it is quite another thing to judge them as Platonic influences or insinuations.

Of the New Testament authors there are two in particular,

¹ The history of heathenism is condensed for us by St. Paul in that notable passage, *Romans* i, 18-32; v. also ii, 14-15.

St. Paul and St. John, whose writings exhibit in places what appear to be affinities with Platonic thought. Neither of these Apostles was likely to have been a stranger to Hellenic terms and concepts, the former owing to his connection with Tarsus where, as the historian Strabo, Paul's contemporary, tells us, the greatest of all the Greek universities was situated,¹ and the latter through his prolonged residence in Ephesus, a nuclear point of both Western and Eastern thought. There can be little doubt that in employing Greek religious and philosophical terms they were perfectly well aware of their connections with Greek thought. Moreover, it is clear from their writings that the object of the Apostles in using such terminology was that its true significance might be seen in its proper perspective, namely, in relation to God's purposes as revealed in the person and work of Christ. This is admirably summed up for us by St. Paul's declaration made at Athens before an audience of philosophically inquisitive Greeks: "Whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you."²

It is in Christ alone that terms such as *σοφία*, *γνώσις*, *λόγος*, and *τέλειος* achieve their full significance. Just as Christ's person is the pivot of human history, so also must it be the focus both of philosophy and of the Old Testament revelation. It is in Christ, as St. Paul tells us, that the two streams, Jewish and Greek, meet and find their consummation: "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom," says the Apostle; "but we preach a crucified Christ, . . . unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." The Greek quest for wisdom attains its realization in Christ Jesus, "who of God is made unto us wisdom."³ The Apostle even makes use of language which could not fail to recall to the minds of his Greek readers at Corinth the terminology of the pagan mysteries—language, however, now employed for the first time in its proper setting: "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect," he writes, "yet not the wisdom of this world; . . . but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory (or, for the sake of our enlightenment—*εἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν*)"⁴

¹ Strabo xiv, p. 673; v. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays*, p. 205.

² *Acts* xvii, 23.

³ *1 Cor.* i, 22-24, 30.

⁴ *1 Cor.* ii, 6, 7.

This Divine wisdom is by no means within the grasp of the unaided spirit of man ; it does not lie within the sphere of common grace. It is the result of revelation by God's Spirit, who alone knows and can reveal those things of God which are entirely hidden from the natural man. That is why St. Paul claimed to speak, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." To be instructed in this spiritual wisdom is to possess none other than "the mind of Christ,"¹ for the wisdom of God and the Christ of God, the Logos, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," are identical.² Any man, then, who wishes to be τέλειος, perfect, truly an initiate into Divine mysteries, must and can only be so "in Christ"—τέλειος ἐν Χριστῷ³.

There are "two species of things," says Plato, "the one visible and the other invisible," the visible being perceptible to the senses, but the invisible apprehensible by thought alone, "the invisible always continuing the same, but the visible never the same."⁴ The Christian, says St. Paul, applying this truth in a manner not discordant with Platonic thought, centres his attention "not on the things which are visible, but on the things which are invisible ; since the things which are visible are temporal, whereas the things which are invisible are eternal."⁵ His is, in fact, a heavenly perspective : he yearns after the beatific vision. The glorious goal is the knowledge of the Son of God, which is the only true gnosis, and that perfection whose measure is "the stature of the fulness of Christ."⁶ The process of "growing up into Christ" here, the formation of Christ within the Christian, will be crowned hereafter with complete Christ-likeness, indeed, oneness with Him in whom "all

¹ 1 Cor. ii, 10-16.

² Col. ii, 3. Plato uses the expression "treasure of wisdom"—θησαυρὸς σοφίας—in *Philebus* 15.

³ Col. i, 28. Cf. *Phaedrus* 249 : "It is only by ever perfecting himself in perfect mysteries, that a man becomes really perfect"—τέλειος ἀεὶ τελετὰς τελούμενος τέλειος ὄντως μόνος γίγνεται. Lightfoot comments (on Col. i. 28) : "The language descriptive of the heathen mysteries is transferred by him (i.e. Paul) to the Christian dispensation, that he may thus more effectively contrast the things signified. The true Gospel also has its mysteries, its hierophants, its initiation : but these are open to all alike. In Christ every believer is τέλειος, for he has been admitted as ἐπόπτης of its most profound, most awful, secrets."

⁴ *Phaedo* 79.

⁵ 2 Cor. iv, 18.

⁶ *Eph.* iv, 13.

fulness dwells."¹ To see God, is to know everything. "We know," says St. John, "that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." "Now we see through a glass darkly," says St. Paul, "but then face to face ; now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known."² This is not merely the knowledge of sight : it is the knowledge of assimilation.

While we acknowledge the numerous similarities that are to be noticed between the Platonic system and New Testament teaching, yet it is essential that we should not blind ourselves to the fact that the differences between them are great and fundamental. The cardinal Christian doctrines of Creation *de nihilo*, the Fall, the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Trinity, are, in fact, alien to Plato's philosophy. This is said not so much in condemnation of Plato as of those who seem to be eager to precognize him as a sort of fully-fledged Christian ; for we have already seen that doctrines such as those just mentioned are beyond the scope of the natural man, and therefore we must not hope to find them developed in any pagan philosophy. The Platonic and the Christian ethic are practically identical, as is adequately demonstrated by the quotations already given, but the Platonic doctrine that the knowledge of what is right and good is sufficient to ensure its performance follows from no accurate estimate of the vitiation through sin of the human heart and will. This is evidenced, not only by the steady degeneration of the Greek race from the time of Plato onwards, and by the ethical failure of the Hebrews despite the fact that they were entrusted with the very law of God, and so could not possibly plead the excuse of ignorance, but also by the common experience of the human heart, so tellingly depicted by the Apostle : "What I would, that I do not ; but what I hate, that I do . . . For the good that I would I do not ; but the evil which I would not, that I do."³ Liberation from this bondage to the law of sin, and from its ensuing condemnation, is to be experienced only through faith in Christ, the Redeemer, from sin. A heart and will renewed by the power of God are essential if man is to fulfil the law of God. But Plato quite fails to recognize the inability by which man is bound because

¹ *Eph.* iv, 15 ; *Gal.* iv, 19 ; *Col.* i, 19.

² 1 *John* iii, 2 ; 1 *Cor.* xiii, 12.

³ *Rom.* vii, 15, 19.

of his sin, and consequently he fails to envisage the necessity for atonement and reconciliation and the new birth. It is true that in one passage of almost prophetic penetration the philosopher declares that the just man, when stripped of everything but his justice, "will be scourged, tortured, fettered, have his eyes burnt out, and, lastly, suffer all manner of evils and be crucified"¹—a prediction so nearly fulfilled in the sufferings and death of Christ, the only entirely just man, that Clement of Alexandria feels that Plato, in writing these words, "all but predicted the economy of salvation."² This is true as regards the manner of Christ's death, but in no sense as regards its meaning—a distinction that it is important to urge here.

There have been some, indeed, who have thought that they could discern in Plato's theology a trinitarian concept comprising the three elements God, the Ideas, and the World-Spirit, or, alternatively, τὸ ἀγαθόν, νοῦς, and ψύχη. But to read into concepts of this nature the doctrine of the Trinity which affirms the essential hypostatic union of three Persons in the one Godhead is fair neither to Christianity nor to Platonism.³ The Philonic terminology more nearly approaches the Christian, sometimes almost startlingly so, but here, too, as we have seen, it is vain to seek a trinitarian doctrine, since such a doctrine would bring God into direct contact with matter—a sentiment strenuously rejected by both Platonism and Philonism.

The New Testament, on the contrary, teaches that the perceptible material world was brought into being, *not* from pre-existing phenomena, but by a Divine fiat *de nihilo*;⁴ and, furthermore, that all things, both in heaven and in earth, both visible and invisible, were created by the Son of God, who is Himself before all things.⁵ St. John also speaks explicitly to the same effect: "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God; the same was in the beginning with God: all things were made by Him, and apart from Him was not anything made that was made."⁶ In these passages the Apostles employ language which has a Platonic

¹ *Repub.* ii, 361. Cf. *John* viii, 40: "Now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth."

² *Strom.* v, 14.

³ Cf. Plato, *Epinomis* 986; *Epist.* ii, 312; Athenagoras, *Plea* xxiii; Clement Alex., *Strom.* v, 14; Theodoret, *De Affec.* ii, 750; Plotinus, *IV Ennead* iv, 16.

⁴ *Heb.* xi, 3—μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὸ βλεπόμενον γεγενῆσθαι.

⁵ *Col.* i, 16, 17.

⁶ *John* i, 1-3.

or Philonic ring about it, but in such a way as to correct Platonic and Philonic errors. The Logos may be called Θεός by John, but in a context which makes His oneness with ὁ Θεός indisputable. He may be, according to St. Paul, "the image of the invisible God" and "begotten before all creation,"¹ but eternally so, and not in any wise temporally so. The world may have been organized by a Divine word so that chaos was replaced by cosmos,² yet the matter on which this operation was performed was also brought into being by the same supreme agency. He who was "in the beginning" and "before all things" must also Himself be the originator of all things: He is, in fact, as the New Testament declares, "the Beginning."³ Had Plato but applied his famous argument for the immortality of the soul with equal strictness to his doctrine of matter, as Thomas Aquinas did 1,500 years later,⁴ he would have abandoned his view of matter as eternally pre-existent: "A beginning," he wrote, "is uncreated; for everything that is created must be created from a beginning, but a beginning itself from nothing whatever: for if a beginning were created from anything it would not be a beginning. Again, since it is uncreated, it must also of necessity be indestructible . . . else must all the universe and all creation collapse and come to a standstill."⁵

It is the Platonic dualism between God and matter, as constituting two co-eternal entities, which is at the root of the opposition which exists between the Platonic and the Christian systems. Scripture teaches that man, body and soul, was originally created perfect, as the crown of the whole material creation which God saw to be "very good," and that through sin he fell from his original happy state and his human nature was perverted and corrupted. For Plato, however, it is matter as such that is inherently evil, and the only fall that appears to be deducible from his philosophy is the "fall" of the soul into

¹ *Col.* i, 15.

² Cf. *Heb.* xi, 3—κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι Θεοῦ, "the universe was reduced to order by God's word." Whether this was in accordance with some archetypal idea or form is not stated. But any idea of the eternity of matter is immediately excluded, as we have seen, by the next clause of this verse, which affirms the creation of matter *de nihilo*.

³ *Rev.* i, 8.

⁴ *Summa Theol.*, Part 1, Q. 2, Art. 3.

⁵ *Phaedrus* 245; cf. *Repub.* x, 608-610.

the "dungeon of the body."¹ So, also, the basic Christian doctrines of the Incarnation, of God in Christ enduring physical suffering and death, and of bodily resurrection from the dead, are as entirely repugnant to the Platonic system as they are of the essence of the Christian system; for the union of the Divine nature with human nature, a harmony between spirit and matter, is unthinkable to the Platonist for whom matter and spirit are irreconcilably antagonized. Not only Philonism, but the Docetic and Gnostic heresies of the early Christian centuries imitated Plato in postulating this fundamentally erroneous dualism. The prologue to St. John's Gospel, however, sets before us the true perspective, declaring that the Logos, who is God, and the Creator of all things, also "became flesh and dwelt in our midst."² And it is further evident that the Johannine Epistles, as well as portions of St. Paul's were expressly intended to rebut the heresies of Docetism and incipient Gnosticism, which were but a form of Platonism, thinly disguised under a Christian veneer, and decorated with embellishments from a variety of other cults.

To sum up: the points of affinity between Platonism and New Testament Christianity are remarkable, but the points of disparity are even more so. Yet these latter revolve, in the main, around one chief error of the Platonic system, namely, the dualistic concept of God and matter as co-eternal and as mutually exclusive. The removal of this fundamental error would seem to open the way for the Platonist to move on straight to the heart of Christian truth. For Platonism points the ethic of Christianity, without the dynamic of Christianity: it discerns the infinite value of the human soul, without knowing the means of its salvation: it acknowledges the supremacy and perfection of God, without being able to shake off the clinging bogey of meaningless matter: and its desire penetrates even to the glorious reward of the just, the ineffable beatific vision of God, while still awaiting

¹ This Platonic doctrine was reproduced, *via* Philo, in Christian garb by Origen in the third century, the souls of men being identified with the fallen angels, who are punished by the degradation of having to inhabit human bodies, until through this discipline all will ultimately be restored. It is interesting also to find that Augustine, although he repudiates Plato's doctrine of learning by reminiscence of the soul (*De Trin.* xii, 15), propounds, somewhat tentatively, it is true, a theory of reminiscence in order to explain man's innate knowledge of a better and happier state—a memory, he suggests, of the bliss which he enjoyed before the fall. Such a suggestion seems not inconsistent with the traducianist views which Augustine held. *Confessions* x. 20, 21.

² *John* i, 1-3, 14.

the Good News that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life," and that "no man comes to the Father, but by Him."¹ The New Testament shows that Plato's ideal republic (*πολιτεία*) will actually be realized in the "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," in the new Jerusalem, "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,"²—a consummation the possibility of which Plato seemed to envisage when he wrote: "The state which we have now established exists only in our reasoning, and has, I think, no existence on earth. However, it is probable, that there is a model of it in heaven."³ And elsewhere he declares: "We are plants, not of earth, but of heaven;"⁴ to which the Apostle responds: "Our republic—*πολιτεία*—is in heaven; from whence also we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself"⁵—a quotation which may fittingly conclude our investigation into the subject of Platonism and the New Testament.

DISCUSSION :

The Rev. Dr. D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES (Chairman) said that the subject of this paper was very important at the present day, in view of the current controversy regarding the Barthian theology. The material point of the paper is contained in Section IV of the Synopsis. We need to beware of philosophy masquerading as theology, and to keep clear in our minds the relation between philosophy and theology.

The author appeared to show too great a tendency to say that Philosophy had been a schoolmaster to bring the Greeks to Christ, as the Law had been in the case of the Jews. Thus, on page 25 he refers to the view of Clement of Alexandria of two streams meeting in the advent of Christ, that of the Jewish Law and that of Greek Philosophy. The Law is unique, and the two are not parallel. So again on page 37 where Socrates is compared to John the Baptist: John the Baptist was unique, and any glimmering of truth on the

¹ *John* xiv, 6.

² *2 Pet.* iii, 13; *Rev.* xxi, 1-7; *Heb.* xi, 10.

³ *Repub.* ix, 592.

⁴ *Timaeus* 90.

⁵ *Phil.* iii, 20, 21.

part of Socrates is not to be compared with the uniqueness of the New Testament. On page 39 Socrates is called "this pre-Christian Apostle." The next paragraph is reminiscent of the Roman Catholic view of revelation as a supplement to reason.

On page 41 the author speaks of the two streams, Jewish and Greek, meeting in Christ, and quotes St. Paul: "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." The attitude of Jew and Greek is a contrast, not a continuation. There is a complete contrast between the Hebrew and the Greek outlook; the Hebrew, concrete, "materialistic"; the Greek, abstract, "ideal."

In his final paragraph, Mr. Hughes speaks of "the removal of this fundamental error (dualism)." As there is need of the new birth, it is not quite so simple as that.

Mr. F. W. CHALLIS said:

I endorse the chairman's tribute to the painstaking labour of the lecturer, but I feel the *contrast* (rather than *similarity*) between Platonism and the New Testament needs much stronger emphasis. Not approximation, but a gulf between them—and nothing in Nature to bridge it. Christianity cannot possibly be proposed as a "completion" of Platonism. Platonism could never "evolve" into the Gospel. *Grace came down. Incarnation* is what the Gospel insists on in the stark reality of it (incomprehensible to the Platonic mind with its view of matter as evil and the human body a "dungeon," instead of the New Testament conception of the body as the organ of the Divine Obedience). Jesus Christ came in *flesh*: this is the touchstone of the Apostle John who, so far from losing himself in a world of "ideas," keeps his feet firmly on the ground. Also, contrast the philosophic coterie in Athens with the Gospel-preaching Apostles. According to Plato *φιλόσοφος . . . πλῆθος ἀδύνατον εἶναι* (*Republic 494a*). Plato's theory of Ideas has no Gospel for the masses. Contrast: "the common people heard Him gladly."

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS:

Mr. R. T. LOVELOCK wrote:

May I please thank the Rev. P. E. Hughes for an extremely interesting paper in which the religious and moral attitude of Plato has been admirably summed up. From a much more limited know-

ledge of Plato than he possesses, I would judge him correct in placing the major difference between Plato and Jesus in the antithesis between "dualism" and "humanity" (using this latter term reverently and with reticence, of the manifestation through our Lord). On the other hand his emphasis on the importance of Plato's ethic, in which that philosopher is likened to John the Baptist as a "forerunner," is open to serious question.

In the ancient world, dualism, or the idea that the body was essentially incapable of good, inevitably led to decline in personal morals through a sense of "helplessness" induced by the theory. Jesus demonstrated that the true function of the body was to be subject to God in holiness, and that if the personality was cleansed through the saving power of His sacrifice, the gift of a glorified body in resurrection would eventually perpetuate that for which the life had been spent. The essential difference between the two outlooks, as it is reflected in the personal life of the body distinct from that of the mind, is well contrasted by the teaching of St. Paul in 1 Cor. vi, 10-20 and that of Plato in the *Symposium*. Reference is made in the paper to the statement in Romans that the invisible things of God have been clearly manifested from the beginning, but it is in this particular context that St. Paul instances the teaching of the *Symposium* as a perversion of true religion particularly abhorrent to God; it is for this reason that the eulogies here poured upon Plato would seem to be out of place from the viewpoint of Christian personal morality, however great he may have been intellectually.

The modern tendency to place so much importance on intellectual prowess is itself tending to produce a modern dualism—by looking on a man's ideas as separate from his actions, the tendency is to think of the animal nature as something to be 'excused' as unalterable; and in our own day we can see a regress along the path which undermined Greek civilisation. If we attempt to correct the balance by realising that personal service to God is the essential prerequisite to which God can add, we rate that patriarchs with a more elementary mental equipment than Plato were nearer to the God revealed through Jesus than was any citizen of Athens. In this connection it should be noted that the quotation in the paper from 1 Corinthians implies that the Greek philosophy led men to see in

Jesus the power of God; in the context not quoted we are told that to the natural Greek the whole lesson of the cross was foolishness, and we remember that it was in Athens that men laughed to scorn the idea of life through death.

We must not, of course, forget that much of the detailed agreement between Plato and Christianity is in the "theoretical" fabric of theology: this latter was the building of second-century theorists upon the foundation of the New Testament, and although it is essentially moulded upon the Bible, its form was determined to some extent by the fact that it was the product of men trained in the system of Plato. To disentangle entirely the two relationships is no easy task, and the solution is bound to be controversial in many points.

Mr. TITTERINGTON wrote: The outstanding impression I have derived from this paper is of the yawning gulf between Pagan philosophy at its best, and the Bible. Plato's doctrine of the inherent evil of matter would have made the Incarnation impossible. This doctrine also, with his further doctrine of "ideas" and "junior Gods," not to speak of metempsychosis, puts Platonism firmly into the pattern of Pagan philosophy generally. Where Platonic thought did crop up was not in the teaching of the Apostles, or anywhere in the New Testament, but in that first great opponent of the Christian faith—the Gnostic heresy. This did not of course prevent the New Testament writers from making use of words and concepts familiar in Greek philosophy, but in doing so they gave the words and concepts an altogether new content. This is what Bible translators do today; they have to make use of the inadequate language of the people for whom the translation is required, but in doing so they enrich the language by adding a new content to the words they are using.

There is however one remarkable thing about Plato—that steeped as he was in the debased and degrading mythology of Greece, he yet had the conception of God as a God of righteousness. That is, so far as any human conception of righteousness can extend; the righteousness of God as revealed in Scripture is, of course, on a different level entirely, almost of a different kind. But there is one question I should like to ask Mr. Hughes: is there any evidence whether Plato ever contemplated God as possessing personality?

AUTHOR'S REPLY.

I am grateful to the chairman and others who have expressed criticism as well as appreciation of my paper. For a paper of this nature not to have evoked critical discussion would have been disappointing. In response to the points brought forward during the discussion, I should like to make it quite clear that I fully grant the uniqueness of the Jewish Law as opposed to the philosophy of the Greeks. Yet, to be fair, we must recognise that the Socratic-Platonic philosophy does give evidence of and witness to God, the immortality of the soul, and the responsibility of man; and this, as I see it, is in line with the Scriptural statements of Psalms xix, 1-3, cxxxix, 14, and Romans i, 19, 20 and ii, 14, 15, which indicate the ability, and indeed the responsibility, even of fallen man in this connection. Fallen man is still fallen *man*, in possession of those faculties which are characteristically human—the faculties, namely, of intuition, reasoning, and judgment. The total depravation which his faculties are sometimes spoken of as having suffered through the fall, is not total intensively, but extensively. The exercise of these faculties can lead to an apprehension of truth, but the perspective of unredeemed man is so distorted that such an apprehension will never be free from an admixture of error. A good illustration of this is seen in the Platonic belief in the immortality of the soul, with which is mixed the belief in the eternity of matter. To this factor of the depravity of fallen man's perception must be added the further factor of the inevitable finitude of man's perception. These considerations are sufficient to show that if man is to have an ultimate and sure knowledge of metaphysical truth it can only be by revelation, and that revelation is in a category totally different from that of ratiocination. Thus (by way of reply to Mr. Titterington's question) Plato conceives of the unity, the goodness, the beauty, and the justness of God, but he does not appear to have viewed God as a personal Being. It is only the revealed Christian doctrine of the Trinity that can assure us of this truth.

Likewise I fully grant the uniqueness of John the Baptist and the Christian Apostles as opposed to the person of Socrates. Yet the appearance of Socrates in the pagan world is a phenomenon that cannot be overlooked, and we should be prepared to consider sympathetically his own deep conviction that he was a messenger of God to the people of his day.

When, in the Synopsis, I propose Christianity as the "completion" of Platonism, I do so simply in the sense that it is only in the Christian setting that those elements of Platonism which are true and valuable can be given their full content and be seen in their proper perspective. Any such "adjustment" of Platonism to Christianity would, of course, be of a radical nature in view of the radical divergencies between the two systems. I hoped that my paper had made this sufficiently plain, where I have stressed that, despite similarities, the differences are "great and fundamental" and that the points of affinity are less remarkable than the points of disparity.

I readily admit that, viewing my paper as a whole, it may be judged that too little space has been apportioned to the statement of the Christian position, and I should have welcomed the opportunity of setting it out at greater length. But this is a disability which I found it difficult to avoid in a paper of this nature, and I felt it desirable in the circumstances to give a somewhat full statement of the Platonic position before a Society which is professedly Christian, and therefore well able to draw and develop the necessary comparisons between Platonism and Christianity. Even as it is, there are many things on the Platonic side which I very much desired to include for the sake of completeness, but which limitations of space made it necessary to omit.

I would ask members to allow due weight to what I have explicitly, though more briefly, stated when endeavouring to compare critically Christianity and Platonism—for instance, when I say that "Plato quite fails to recognise the inability by which man is bound because of his sin, and consequently he fails to envisage the necessity for atonement and reconciliation and the new birth." It seems to me that what is now needed to complete the picture is a fuller statement of the Christian position, particularly concerning its view of man as fallen, as redeemable, and as redeemed, which would involve the consideration of the doctrines of incarnation and resurrection, and would show that the effect of Christ's atonement operates not only upon men as individuals, but upon mankind as a race—that men are redeemed *as men*, not merely, as in the Platonic system, as disembodied souls which as such have ceased to be truly human.