

The Influence Of Greek Philosophy On The Development Of Christian Theology

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Early Christians were slow to develop a distinctly Christian philosophy. When they did, their philosophical environment was Neo-Platonic. This mind-set directly influenced the historic development of Christian philosophy and theology.

Flavius Justinus (Martyr), ca. 100 - 164, admired Plato's philosophy and used some Platonic terms, but not necessarily with Platonic meaning. Tatian, a pupil of Justin Martyr, did not share his teacher's admiration for Greek philosophy; he believed that if the Greeks possessed any truth, they must have received it from The Scriptures.

Theophilus of Antioch, who wrote Ad Autolyicum, esteemed Plato. Minucius Felix, a Latin apologist, held that the philosophers had at least recognized some truths.

It was in the catechetical school at Alexandria, however, that philosophy gained its greatest influence in Christian theology. Titus Flavius Clemens (Clement of Alexandria), born ca. A.D.150, was the first of what might be called the Christian philosophers. Though he rejected the crude speculations of the Sophists, he held firmly to the belief that philosophy held an element of truth. He taught that the passages of Scripture that declare the insufficiency of human wisdom and that warn against being spoiled by philosophy applied only to empty Sophism and Epicureanism, but not to what he considered the best of philosophy. He maintained that philosophy brought the Greek mind to Christ, just as the Law brought the Hebrew to Him. To Clement, philosophy provided a natural framework for the expression of truth (Stromata I:3, 5, 11).

Having devoted most of Book One and some of the remaining sections of his Stromata to a defense of his philosophical approach, Clement proceeded to build on a Neo-Platonic metaphysical foundation what was intended to be a Christian philosophy. To him, the God of the Christians is the God of Plato, now worshiped by Christians more perfectly than by the Greeks. According to Clement, Plato plagiarized revelation from the Hebrews; this gave the Athenian's highest ideas a flavor of divine authority in the estimation of Clement.

What began in Clement was expanded in one of his pupils, Origen (ca.185 - 254). To Origen, sin is negative, a privation (which makes man the victim of sin rather than its responsible cause).

The prevalence of dualistic ideas provoked controversies in the Church. Tertullian (ca. 155 - 222) vigorously opposed the intrusion of Neo-Platonic philosophy into Christian doctrine. His cry was "free Jerusalem from Athens and the church of Christ from the Academy of Plato." Historically, it was the attitude of Clement, not of Tertullian, that won out in ecclesiastical Christianity.

In the Third Century A. D., Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, taught that God, being One, could not appear substantially on earth; therefore He could not have become man in Jesus Christ but rather filled the man, Jesus, with His Logos and power. Lucian of Antioch, his follower, believed that the Logos became man in Christ; however, Lucian's Logos was a lower, created essence and not fully God.

Arius, one of Lucian's pupils, fully absorbed Lucian's Logos concept. In A.D. 311. Arius was ordained a presbyter in the church at Alexandria. After several years of controversy, Arius was excommunicated. Because many of the clergy sympathized with his views, a struggle was precipitated that threatened to split Christianity. The emperor Constantine became alarmed. The result was the Council Of Nicaea (A.D. 325). Christ was declared to be of the same substance as the Father. This settled the matter officially, but not historically.

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 265 - 340) agreed with Clement of Alexandria regarding the value of philosophy. He believed that Plato had been enlightened by God and was in agreement with Moses.

Augustine (A.D. 354 - 430) spent several years of his early life in Manichaeism. He was converted in A.D. 386 and later became Bishop of Hippo. His early writings, such as Contra Academicos, De Beata Vita, and De Ordine, have a strong Neo-Platonic flavor, which carried through into his later writings. He wrote, "Let every good and true Christian understand that truth, wherever he finds it, belongs to his Lord" (Epistle 166).

Augustine taught that the mind of God contains the eternal, changeless Ideas, Forms, or Archetypes of all things. These creative Ideas are independent of matter. They are the rationes seminales which the divine Creative Will developed within time into seen forms (De Ideis, 2). The view that these Ideas are in the Word goes back to Philo and the Stoic Logoi Spermatikoi, and, from Augustine, passed into medieval theology.

To Augustine, created things tend toward non-being; but so long as they exist, they must assume some form. That form is the reflection of the eternal and immutable Form (De Libero Arbitrio 2, 17, 46). Evil is that which tends to non-

being and also tends to make what is cease to be (De Moribus Ecclesiae, 2, 2, 2).

Others also contributed to the influence of Neo-Platonism. Boethius (A.D. 480 - 524) wrote a Platonic theodicy, On The Consolation Of Philosophy, which had considerable influence in Christian theology.

Neo-Platonic ideas also influenced Christianity, especially in the west, through the pseudonymous Dionysius The Areopagite, a work dated not earlier than A.D. 500. The author took the Neo-Platonic ideas of Proclus and developed them into an esoteric Christianity. Erigena, Peter Lombard, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and others carried on the pseudo-Dionysian theme.

Not all leaders of the Latin Church held a high regard for Greek philosophy. Jerome cried, "What has Horace to do with the Psalter, Virgil with the gospels, and Cicero with Paul?" (The Virgin's Profession).

The influence of the ancient philosophies is evident in various contemporary religious views and practices.

The Platonic concept of God as an impersonal One, pantheistically immanent in nature and of which all visible beings are emanations, the concept of mystical reunion of the human soul with the Divine Mind and the acquisition of esoteric *gnosis* through meditation, inner mental and psychic development and ecstasy, and the concept of the more or less unreality of material being are all present in the various modern "mind science" sects. In most of these systems, Christ is considered to be some kind of demigod, a second-rate Platonic Logos who has attained to a high degree of liberation from the mundane and achieved an advanced spiritual (metaphysical) state. The Arian view of Christ is vigorously taught by the Watchtower Society ("Jehovah's Witnesses").

Some (but not all) of these concepts are deeply ingrained in the theology of eastern Orthodoxy. This is to be expected because the roots of the eastern Orthodox churches are deeply planted in ancient Greek thought and culture. Some of these roots are found in the ontology of Athanasius (ca. 298 - 373). Eastern Orthodox concepts such as the divinization of nature through the Incarnation of Christ, and *theosis* (the process of man becoming divine) are based on Greek philosophy. This philosophical premise leads to an ontological interpretation of 2 Peter 1:4 ". . . you may be partakers of the divine nature" "Divine nature" (*physis*) is automatically assumed to mean the very essence of God rather than His moral character (as the context clearly demonstrates).

It is in morality and ethics that philosophy has had its most far-reaching practical influence in Christian theology. This has developed on the one hand from the Neo-Platonic view of sin, and on the other from the Stoic concept of ethical self-sufficiency.

In Platonism and its subsequent variations the question of the cause and nature of evil was basic. The general assumption that sin and evil are ontological (that they have actual essence) contributed to and forms the basic premise of the doctrine of original sin. To be inherited, sin must have essence, real being; it must consist in some thing that causes evil choice and action, instead of being the moral character of the choice itself. With this mind-set it is common to regard sin in the heart as an essence instead of a voluntary choice; hence the term "sinful nature." This evil essence is regarded as a part of human nature. Although Augustine did not originate the concept, he passed it on to subsequent generations. Calvin built heavily upon it. It is with us today.

It appears that the early framers and proponents of the doctrine of original sin did not use the Bible as their starting point. That is, the doctrine did not emerge on its own out of Biblical exegesis. Even though Tertullian objected to the influence of Greek philosophy on the Church, his stoic psychology was a tributary of the emerging new doctrine. The main stream, however, goes back to its headwaters in Plato and his notion of the fall of the soul. From this and from the assumptions behind infant baptism, Origen contributed to the doctrine. But even these in themselves would not have institutionalized the doctrine of original sin in the Church without the concepts of the prevailing philosophical milieu at the time of Augustine.

Largely out of his own personal experience—his struggle with temptation and his life of defeat in sin—rather than out of the Scriptures themselves, Augustine advanced the new doctrine. Being the bishop of Hippo, in North Africa, and being within the sphere of influence and authority of the Bishop of Rome and the developing papacy, Augustine had a strong position from which to inculcate the theology that emerged in his brilliant mind.

Pelagius (ca. 360 - 420) came to Rome from Britain. Coming from the purer form of Christianity that existed at the time in Scotland and Ireland, Pelagius was scandalized by the lack of holiness and the excuse of moral inability, and set out to correct the situation. Pelagius published his objections in the capital city. Coelestius, a pupil of Pelagius, adopted his teacher's ideas and promoted them aggressively. When Rome was sacked by the Goths in 410, Pelagius and Coelestius moved to Africa. Not long afterward Pelagius went to Palestine.

Coelestius remained in Carthage. A council met at Carthage in 412 and condemned Coelestius on several doctrinal points. In 417 the Bishop of Rome, "Pope" Innocent I, confirmed the condemnation of Coelestius and also censured Pelagius.

The regions ecclesiastically under Rome were strongholds of the new doctrine of original sin. Innocent I was succeeded by Zosimus, who reversed the judgment on Coelestius. An influential council in Africa protested the action of

Zosimus. The Roman Emperor Honorius compelled Zosimus to reinstate the condemnation of Coelestius and the censure of Pelagius. The bishops of Italy were required to sign the condemnation. At least 18 refused to sign and were banished from Italy by imperial decree. And so the doctrine of original sin was officially established in the Church, first in the West and eventually in the East (Ephesus, AD 431).

Certainly Pelagius and Coelestius held doctrines that are indefensible; however, so did Augustine and his supporters, notably the doctrine of original sin. Although Augustine did not originate the concept, he formulated it and passed it on to subsequent generations. Calvin built heavily upon it. It is with us today, with all of its pleas of moral inability as an excuse for sub-Christian living.

The supporters of the doctrine of inherited original sin appeal to several Bible passages that have come to be viewed from the presuppositions of an essentially Platonic/Neo-Platonic frame of reference. That frame of reference is a prism that determines the definitions and connotations of certain Biblical words and phrases, notably "sin." Because these Biblical passages did not in themselves teach the later doctrine of original sin, they had to be "retrofitted" by *eisogesis* to conform to a Greek philosophical template.

It is important that we consider and understand these Biblical passages from a Hebrew/moral frame of reference instead of a Greek/ontological frame of reference. That is, we will regard the Scriptures in their natural definition of sin and holiness as voluntary moral choices, not ontological (metaphysical) essences. "*Spiritual*" does not mean "*mystical*." It has to do with moral choices and character, and a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Let us start with Job 14:4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!" This verse is pressed into service to support the doctrine of original sin only because the doctrine it claims to support is first presupposed. Taken in its context and in view of the Bible's definition of sin as voluntary, this verse can mean no more than this: infants born in a morally and spiritually degenerate cultural environment will themselves become such. They will slide into the prevailing moral depravity by following the course of least resistance. This is made all the more certain by the brevity and difficulties of this life.

Job 15:14, "What is man, that he could be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous?" At most these words of Eliphaz teach the same as the previous passage. Every person who is "born of a woman"—that is, the entire human race—falls into voluntary moral depravity because of the combination of influences in that direction (the world, the flesh, and the devil).

Psalms 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin my mother conceived me." If taken precisely, the psalmist is speaking of the sinful character of his mother at the time of his conception and gestation. To make this verse

teach the supposed "sinfulness" of David's natural being is to go against God's own definition of sin as a voluntary and therefore responsible choice. This is the strong poetical language of David's penitential psalm, expressing the fact that he had been a sinner from the inception of his moral ability and accountability, and that his mother had also been a sinner. He is confessing his generational pattern of sinning, not some supposed sinfulness in his human substance.

We find the same strong poetical language in Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." No one has ever seen a newborn baby get up and walk around the nursery telling lies to its parents, the other newborns, and the nurses! This verse affirms what the other verses we are considering affirm: people yield to temptation from the beginning of their ability to make moral choices. Trace the lifelong pattern of the wicked back as far as possible, and it will be discovered that they began their pattern of sinful choices as early as they were capable of making moral choices at all. To make this verse teach otherwise is to make it teach nonsense.

James 1:14 tells us that temptation comes from our own human desires. These are not evil in themselves, because Jesus Himself had them; otherwise, He could not have been tempted. Temptation does not come from some "indwelling" sinful nature; it comes from our humanity, just as it came from Jesus' humanity. In infants and small children, desire is developed before reason; couple that with the influences of the world and the devil, and it is no marvel or mystery why people universally sin before being enlightened by the Scriptures, influenced by the Church, and drawn by the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil." This verse itself refutes the assumptions of original sin. The moral bondage is the result of being accustomed to doing evil, not one's birth.

John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." This means that as flesh is produced from parental flesh, so a redeemed, purified and renewed human spirit is the product of the influence of the Holy Spirit.

John 9. The disciples asked if the man had been born blind because of his sins or his parents' sins. Jesus replied that neither was the case. Later, the Pharisees treated the man with contempt, saying that he had been completely born in sins (verse 34). In the first place, Jesus dismissed the rabbinical assumptions of the disciples. In the second place, we cannot base doctrine on an insult by the Pharisees.

Romans 5:12-19, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken

into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died because of the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (NIV).

Of course sin was introduced into human experience by one man. Adam started it. Because God saw that sin would become the universal practice, He placed a limitation on the human life-span to set boundaries on mankind's opportunity to sin in this life. So *physical* death came to all men. The fact that all have sinned demonstrates the wisdom of God's pre-emptive action.

No Bible passage is interpreted correctly if that interpretation leads to a conclusion that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible as a whole. Any such interpretation is in error. If this passage is taken to mean that Adam's sin automatically made everyone guilty, consistency necessarily drives us to the inescapable conclusion that Christ's sacrifice automatically saved everyone. It does no good to plead otherwise. The Greek is very strong: "just as" ... "so also." To conclude otherwise one has to make an arbitrary assertion contrary to the fact. This *misinterpretation* forces its adherents and defenders to the error of Universalism—that everyone will be saved. The Augustinian view of this passage is a stronghold of Universalism.

In this passage Paul teaches that Adam's sin brought about a tragic universal result, but Christ's obedience (His death on the cross) brought about a glorious universal result. It states that each affects everyone without going into the specifics of *how*, beyond opening the door to universal sinfulness and condemnation by Adam and opening the way of salvation to all by Jesus Christ. Involved in this are universal *physical* death and universal *physical* resurrection (the latter taught also in 1 Corinthians 15:21).

Romans 7:7-25. This passage is quite lengthy. Please refer to it in your Bible. By no reasonable standard of Biblical interpretation can this passage refer to Paul's experience as a born-again believer. It is impossible for anyone to live in Romans chapter 7 and chapter 8 at the same time. To force this passage to

teach the notion of "two natures" in the believer, it is necessary to fall back on the mysticism of Greek and middle-eastern dualism.

Paul is *not* describing the believer's on-going struggle with temptation. To illustrate and personalize the point, he is putting himself in the place of the unconverted person who is experiencing the war between that person's reason and his or her desires. It was his own miserable state before *his* conversion. These are the two laws that are in conflict within every sinner, producing the wretchedness mentioned in verse 24. The result of this conflict between reason and desire in every person who is a voluntary slave to desire is constant defeat, bondage, and spiritual death (death in sin is alienation from God because of one's sin). This is the "law of sin and death."

Sin "dwells" in sinners because choices are made within us. Please keep in mind the Biblical definition of sin as a voluntary commitment to and pursuit of self-gratification (Romans 8:5-7). That commitment "dwells" in us because it is the stubborn set of the soul (the "will"). For example, if greed "dwells" in us, it is because we put it there; we choose the passion and hold on to it in our souls.

Sinners are "sold under sin" because they voluntarily sell themselves to sin (1 Kings 21:20; 2 Kings 17:17; Isaiah 50:1; Isaiah 52:3).

The latter part of Romans 7:25 is not a conclusion; it is a summary of what had been said before. The conclusion is in chapter 8:1 and 2—"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made them free from that law of sin and death described in Chapter 7. So good news, believer! You do not live in perpetual sinning. You live in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! So, get out of Romans 7 and live in Romans 8. There is where every true believer stands.

Romans 8:3. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh." Some suppose that the phrase "sin in the flesh" means that sin is a mystical substance that resides in and permeates our human flesh. This supposition is contrary to the Bible's teaching that sin is a voluntary choice, not an essence. Also, it misinterprets the Greek. If "in the flesh" refers to "sin," it would read "the sin *the* in the flesh." But it does not. Therefore, "sin" connects with "condemned." That is, in His flesh (His Incarnation, as in "the days of his flesh" in Hebrews 5:7) Jesus condemned sin by demonstrating that it is not an unavoidable necessity. We are not in bondage to it unless we choose to be. In His humanity Jesus overcame sin by the same spiritual resources that are available to all believers in the power of the Holy Spirit. "He condemned the sin of men and the condemnation took place in the flesh of Jesus" (A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures In The New Testament, Volume IV, page 372).

Also, "sinful flesh" means the members of the body that people use as tools to sin. They use their flesh in a sinful way. "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments [tools] of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:11 - 13 NKJV).

Romans 11:32, "For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all" (NASB. Also Galatians 3:22). Both of these passages contain the first aorist active indicative of *sunkleio* ("to shut together completely," as in a net—Luke 5:6). The King James Version reads "concluded," an obsolete use of the word that meant "to shut in, enclose". A.T. Robertson states, "This is a resultant (effective) aorist because of the disbelief and disobedience of both Gentile and Jew."

There are two essentially different perspectives on this word as it is used in these passages. Moulton and Milligan give it the meaning, "put them under compulsion to be disobedient or given them over to disobedience." Thayer says, "(the Scripture has shut up or subjected, *i.e.*, declared them to be subject)." In Galatians 3:22 the NIV reads, "the whole world is a prisoner of sin," but in Romans 11:32 the NIV reads, "God has bound all men over to disobedience." Both are interpretations of the word *sunkleio*.

To charge God with compelling people to sin is an outrageous slander on the character of God. It leads us to declare with Elihu, "I will ascribe justice to my Maker" (Job 36:3). This cannot be the meaning, as it is totally inconsistent with everything God has revealed about Himself and His own definition of sin as a voluntary choice. Also, consistency would tend to lead those who hold this view of these verses to universalism.

The other view is completely harmonious with both reason and revelation. Paul is his own best interpreter. When he writes in Galatians 3:22 that the Scriptures teach that everything is a prisoner of sin, he is referring to the Scriptures that he quotes later in Romans, Chapter Three. By using the neuter Paul is also affirming what he wrote in Romans 8 about the consequences of Adam's sin on the physical creation.

Accordingly, Romans 11:32 simply states that all moral agents (Jew and Gentile) have sinned and therefore are under the same sentence. They chose it; God let them have it with the all the bondage it brings. They are now locked up in "death row." The Law cannot save us; therefore we have only one hope—the mercy of God that is *offered* to all through Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 7:14, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy." This and other passages have been misused to teach the monstrous doctrine that babies of unregenerate parents are morally defiled and therefore go to hell (or at least to the imaginary place called "limbo") if they die in infancy. All that this verse teaches us is that by the grace of God the influence of the believing spouse is able to overcome the influence of the unbelieving spouse, create a prevailing godly influence in the marriage and home, resulting in holy children. At the very least, it teaches that the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever is still a valid marriage in God's sight, so that children born as a result of that marriage are fully legitimate.

Ephesians 2:3, "we all ... were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." (Notice, "were.") God is never angry with people because of their ontological nature—how and with what they were born. Guilt cannot be predicated of essence (substance). No one is guilty of something that is beyond his or her control. The Bible always teaches that God's wrath rests upon people because of their sinful choices and the resulting deeds and practices, not for their natural being. To teach that God's wrath rests upon people because they were born a certain way is an outrageous blasphemy, a charge against God, Who is the Creator of our natural being (unless one holds to the notion of dualism). It is an offense to His justice and a stumblingblock to unbelievers. "Nature" (*physis*) has the same meaning here as in 2 Peter 1:4. It is the moral nature of sinners, acquired by their own choices, that offends a holy God. "Nature" here can also refer to our corrupt cultural heritage. This concept is found also in 1 Peter 1:18 and 19. Sin is "natural" to sinners only in the sense of the combination of their culture, other influences, and habitually yielding to the desires of the flesh and of the mind. If sin were truly "natural," it would be beneficial, because it would conform to our nature. The fact that sin is so destructive shows that it is totally unnatural.

2 Peter 2:14, "Having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin." This verse teaches that people who pursue the indulgences of the flesh are never able to get enough and so cease. This is a voluntary, never-ceasing bondage to sin. It is a voluntary slavery (verse 19; also Romans 6:16). The pursuit of the gratification of the flesh is like chasing a carrot on a stick. They who do so can never get enough to provide permanent satisfaction and thus end the pursuit.

1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Although this passage is written to believers, it is not written exclusively *about* believers. It refutes the teaching that "we" (human beings) have no sin (considering one's total personal moral history). All who hold this gnostic error are self-deceived. John is affirming universal sinfulness and therefore the universal need for the Savior. It certainly cannot teach that believers have some kind of essence called "sin" down inside of them. Here

again, such a notion is contrary to the consistent Biblical definition of sin as a voluntary act of the will. Moral depravity is just that—moral, voluntary. It is not depravity of the "will" itself but of its acts, its choices. That is, that part of our human being that makes choices (the soul) is not depraved ontologically (in its essence), but voluntarily (in its commitment to selfish desires and the choices and acts that flow from that commitment). Sinners are not depraved in their being (except as their sinful lifestyle has a deteriorating effect on them—body, soul, and spirit); they are depraved in their moral choices and resulting lifestyle.

"The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16).

If sin is an ontological substance or essence instead of a moral choice, if it is a metaphysical principle that causes choice instead of being the evil choice itself, the logical and necessary result is to remove the blame for evil from the human moral agent and to place it instead on the metaphysical essence itself. Man becomes the victim of this thing called "sin," rather than the responsible perpetrator. Human depravity is regarded as a metaphysical state rather than a moral and voluntary choice. God's grace is needed to overcome, not voluntary depravity (depravity of choice), but an involuntary helplessness and a natural inability to choose in any way other than evil. This holds out to communicants no real hope of being rid of sin in this life (because it is said to be inherent in them), and leaves them in a continuous cycle of confession of sinfulness and appeal for forgiveness, even when no actual sins might have been committed. They are kept under condemnation for what they *are*, rather than for what they have chosen to do. ("Pray for us poor sinners. But don't hold us responsible, because we are helpless victims").

Spiritual regeneration becomes, then, a metaphysical rather than a moral change. It is the essence of the will ("heart") itself rather than its voluntary direction that is viewed as being changed in salvation. The Holy Spirit's agency becomes metaphysically generative (following Augustine's idea of ideogenetic illumination) rather than morally persuasive and efficient. The new birth is viewed as metaphysical ("spiritual") rather than moral and therefore truly spiritual. The voluntary moral and spiritual change is regarded as the result of an inner regenerative process rather than regeneration itself.

Not only is sin viewed metaphysically, but so are virtues and qualities. We hear God's attitudes, dispositions, and choices spoken of as having essence. For example, God's "grace" is swallowed in the Eucharist or is poured into the heart by faith much as light is poured through a window glass.

From Stoicism and Neostoicism evolved a system of ethics and morality in which moral character is ascribed directly to outward actions instead of to the motive from which the actions spring. Moral duty becomes a certain minimum of

outward works beyond which a surplus of merit is accumulated, instead of loving God and others and acting at all times in accordance with that love.

The idea that moral agents are able to accumulate works of supererogation ("surplus righteousness") has been a prime factor in the practice of praying to "the saints." It also vitally affects one's view of the redemptive work of Christ. It is behind the notion that Jesus Himself provided a surplus of righteousness that is dispensed to believers either by faith or by the Eucharist to make up for their moral failures. It tends to the idea that real holiness belongs only to the esoteric few, whose moral surplus will somehow compensate for the moral and ethical deficiencies of the many. Anyone who testifies to a life of victory over sin through Christ is regarded as spiritually proud and self-righteous.

This Christian duality, exoteric and esoteric, has resulted in a paradox, a double standard. High Stoic ethics are essential to Christ and to the initiated elite to provide a reservoir of good works to be distributed by "grace" to the mass of the adherents, who are generally deficient and to whom a life of holiness is at best a desirable option. Christ is viewed as assisting the helpless and making up for their unfortunate deficiencies rather than conquering our deliberate rebellion, breaking the power of voluntary sin in our hearts, and giving us victory over sin.

Perhaps a few more thinkers of the caliber and persuasion of Tertullian will yet arise to "free Jerusalem from Athens and the church of Christ from the Academy of Plato."