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# Approaching Christianity: Exploring the Tragic Impact of Greek Philosophical Thought on Christian Thought

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# Approaching Christianity:

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*Exploring the tragic impact of Greek philosophical thought on  
Christian thought*

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July 20, 2012  
Olivet Nazarene University  
Dr. Dean

*APPROACHING CHRISTIANITY:  
Exploring the tragic impact of Greek philosophical thought on  
Christian thought*

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by  
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## Introduction

“Can you add just a little vomit to a glass of milk without spoiling it?”<sup>1</sup> In the film, *Alleged* (2011), depicting the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, distinguished columnist H.L. Mencken presents this question to his young protégé, Charles Anderson. During this time, America was culturally divided. The trial represented the conflict surrounding the nation; it was the voice of the cultural war between the liberals and conservatives. After listening to the trial arguments one day, the two journalists engage in a discussion about ideas for young Anderson’s next article. Mencken insists that “evolution is progress” and that “no legislation should attempt to steal this hope from the people.” Frustrated and perplexed, Anderson replies: “Can’t you believe in both – evolution and religion?” At this point Mencken asks Anderson to consider if a bit of vomit can be added to a glass of milk without spoiling it.

Now imagine the glass of milk is Christianity and the vomit is Greek dualism. Can you mix the two without spoiling the original contents of the glass (i.e. Christianity)? Essentially, this is the overarching argument of those scholars who emphatically reject any attempt to relate Christianity to Greek philosophy. Christian thought and Greek philosophical thought are two very different modes of thought, two different sets of lenses in which to view the world. Thus, in mixing them, as many thinkers argue, Christianity becomes tainted. Scholars have long debated the influence of Greek philosophy on Christianity. The argument focuses on the following questions: What is the relation between Christian thought and Platonism? Are Christianity and Platonism compatible? How much did Greek philosophy influence early Christianity?

Christian thinkers who assert Greek philosophy and Christianity are incompatible include: early Church Father Tertullian, Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd, reformers

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<sup>1</sup> *Alleged*. 2011. Director Tom Hines, Two Shoes Productions. This film depicts the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925. H.L. Mencken is played by Colm Meaney and Charles Anderson played by Nathan West.

James Skillen and Paul Marshall, Bishop N.T. Wright, and postmodern thinker Brian McLaren. Although these scholars represent different Christian traditions, they each suggest, in some way, that Greek dualism prevents a genuine biblical approach to Christianity. By combining the two modes of thought, believers often miss the centrality of the Gospel. These thinkers are not opposed to reason or the consideration of philosophical issues. They are, however, opposed to syncretism – combining different systems of beliefs. Syncretism taints our perception of faith.

St. Augustine, on the other hand, supported the fusion of Greek philosophy, specifically Platonism, and Christian doctrine. He asserted the two systems of belief were compatible. And where he disagreed with Platonic ideas, he simply altered those ideas to fit his theology. His writings demonstrate his attraction to Platonism. Following the days of early Christianity, Platonism continued to show itself in Christian thought. From Calvinism to Puritanism and realist evangelicals to reformers who support a two-kingdom theology, Greek dualism continues to plague Christianity. For as passionately as some scholars condemn mixing Greek philosophy and faith, others such as those mentioned above either support syncretism or fail to realize just how much Greek dualism is ingrained in their thoughts.

Christianity emerged from a two-fold ancestry: Israel and Greece. While the first generations of Christians were primarily Jews, they lived amidst a world shaped by Greek culture.<sup>2</sup> These two lineages saw the world through very different lenses. From the Greeks emerged a supreme deity viewed as perfect and passionless. The Hebrew nation, however, viewed God as all-powerful and passionately concerned about humanity, a personal deity who interacted with His creation. The Greeks made a sharp distinction between the body and the soul. According to the Hebrews, however, the body and soul were absolutely inseparable. Greek philosophy, especially the ideas found in Plato, split the cosmos in two placing greater value on

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<sup>2</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch. 2009. *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*. New York: Penguin, 2.

the realm that exists beyond this life. Humans and earthly things change, grow, and decay, which is a problem for Plato and others alike. Greek philosophical thought is concerned with that which does not change; according to the Greeks, “change is a defect.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, with Plato, begins a trend toward the devaluation of existence. This notion, when mixed with Christian thought, has profound implications for how believers approach Christianity.

In March 2011 at the regional meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers, Bishop N.T. Wright attacked the majority of western Christians who consider their beliefs orthodox theology. Wright said:

The western tradition, catholic and protestant, evangelical and liberal, charismatic and social-gospel, has managed for many centuries to screen out the central message of the New Testament, which isn't that we are to escape the world and go to heaven, but rather that God's sovereign, saving rule would come to birth 'on earth as in heaven.'<sup>4</sup>

Quite a serious charge! Nevertheless, Wright makes no apologies. He uses strong language but, at the same time, expresses sadness. Why? Because he is afraid the charge is indeed true. Is he right? Have Christians missed it? Have we failed to live under the Word? Instead of allowing Scripture to shape our worldviews, are we guilty of attempting to grasp the Bible from on top – our interpretation of it? Unfortunately, I have to agree with Wright. But his charge prompts more questions: What is the root of the problem? Where does the idea to escape this world come from? These questions lead us back to Greek philosophy.

Conventional Christianity is deeply rooted in Greek philosophical thought. For example, when viewed through Greek eyes, faith becomes a private matter; salvation becomes merely a ticket out of hell and more of an individual experience; the physical world is downgraded; and

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<sup>3</sup> James E. Faulconer . “Appendix 2: Hebrew versus Greek Thinking.” Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/> (accessed October 19, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> N. T. Wright. 2011. “Mind, Spirit, Soul and Body: All for One and One for All Reflections on Paul's Anthropology in his Complex Contexts.” Paper presented at the Regional Meeting for the Society of Christian Philosophers, Fordham University, (March 18). <http://www.ntwrightpage.com/> (accessed March 29, 2012).

the goal of human life is to die, to escape this imperfect world. Planet earth and life on earth are devalued. Humans eagerly await death so that the soul may be released from the body and ultimately from earth. Thus, rather than engaging in this world, becoming more involved, say, with the crises of our times or identifying with and liberating the poor and oppressed, believers distance themselves from the affairs of this world. In addition, believers end up separating life into categories, those things which are considered “sacred” and those things which are considered “secular.” Greek dualism fosters such fragmentation.

In the following study, I explore the impact of Greek philosophical thought on Christian thought. I shall argue that Greek dualism is the fundamental contradiction in Christian thought. Greek dualism creates problems for the doctrines of Christianity and ultimately thwarts a biblical approach to Christianity. From the early days of Christianity, Greek philosophy became absorbed into Christian thinking. Sadly, to this day, the pattern continues. Because of the nature of this topic, it is necessary to survey the subject matter over a wide scope of time. The tragedy is not simply that Greek philosophy has had such a profound impact on Christianity, but also the longevity of its impact. Therefore this study examines Christian thought, from the early stages to today, noting areas where Greek elements are present in Christian doctrine and assessing how the presence of Greek philosophical thought distorts doctrines of faith. Chapter 1 examines Greek dualism. In Chapter 2, I shall discuss the impact of Greek dualism on Christian thought. Chapter 3 looks at the ideas of those scholars who reject synthesizing classical Greek philosophy with Christianity. Chapter 4 presents contemporary examples of Christian thought that is in the tradition of Greek dualism. Finally, Chapter 5 analyzes the challenges related to dualism and presents alternate visions to approach Christianity.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Greek Dualism**

We begin this study by examining Greek dualism. To equip us in moving forward, however, we must first consider the meaning of dualism. Oxford dictionary defines dualism as “the division of something conceptually into two opposed or contrasted aspects, or the state of being so divided.”<sup>5</sup> Dualism is the doctrine that the world or reality is divided into two opposed principles. For example, mind-matter, heaven-hell, soul-body, spiritual-secular. Greek dualism not only divides the world or reality, but also deems one world as radically superior to the other. This is key to a proper understanding of dualism in the Platonic sense. Christian philosopher N.T. Wright suggests that “split-level worlds, the cosmologies they postulate and the epistemologies they encourage, are...leading us away from a truly biblical perspective.”<sup>6</sup> We shall discuss this point further in the chapters to follow, but bear in mind Wright’s assertion as we strive to understand the influence Greek dualism continues to have upon Christianity.

The origins of Greek dualism are found in the ideas of the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato (428-348 B.C.). Plato’s philosophy is dualistic in nature; this will become apparent as we examine his views on metaphysics, epistemology, and anthropology. Plato’s metaphysics and epistemology are intertwined and shape his anthropological views. Metaphysics and epistemology are branches of philosophy that deal with questions concerning the fundamental structure of reality and the sources and limits of knowledge respectively. And anthropology is the study of human beings. By examining Plato’s views on these different areas of study we will gain an understanding of the concept of Greek dualism. Such an understanding is fundamental in order to fully grasp the negative impact Greek philosophical thought has on Christianity.

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<sup>5</sup> “Dualism.” 2011. *Oxford Dictionaries.com*. <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dualism> (accessed August 23, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Wright. “Mind, Spirit, Soul and Body: All for One and One for All Reflections on Paul’s Anthropology in his Complex Contexts.”

First, we will explore Plato's metaphysics. In his metaphysical theory, the Theory of the Forms, Plato separates the cosmos into two worlds: 1) invisible, the world of the Forms or Ideas and 2) visible, the world of matter. The invisible realm is eternal, changeless, intelligible, and divine; it is the world of pure rational order. In the *Timaeus*, Plato describes the eternal quality of the Forms. The world of the Forms "always is and has no becoming."<sup>7</sup> Forms are not created. Plato differentiates between 'being' and 'becoming.' He writes:

For there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all parts of time, and the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to eternal being, for we say that it 'was,' or 'is,' or 'will be,' but the truth is that 'is' alone is properly attributed to it, and that 'was' and 'will be' are only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovably the same forever cannot become older or younger by time, nor can it be said that it came into being in the past, or has come into being now, or will come into being in the future, not is it subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause.<sup>8</sup>

The world of matter, on the other hand, is created; it is imperfect, constantly changing, and capable of being destroyed. The visible world, which is made up of physical objects, is only an imitation of the true Form. What is real is that which does not change. For Plato, the invisible world is more real than the physical world. Scholars John Hallowell and Jene Porter explain Plato's distinction between the visible and the invisible worlds in this way:

What is a chair? You might say that it is a wooden seat with four legs and a back, but a chair can be made of materials other than wood, and some chairs have fewer than four legs, some have none. In short, a chair cannot be adequately defined in terms of its physical characteristics. What makes a chair a chair is the function that it alone can perform, namely, to support a human body in a comfortable upright position. The idea or form of the chair is, in short, more real than any particular chair. Particular chairs are perishable, but the form or idea of the chair is not. Just as chairness is more real than any

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<sup>7</sup> Plato, Edith Hamilton, and Huntington Cairns. 1982. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, including the letters*. Bollingen series, 71. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1161.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 1167.

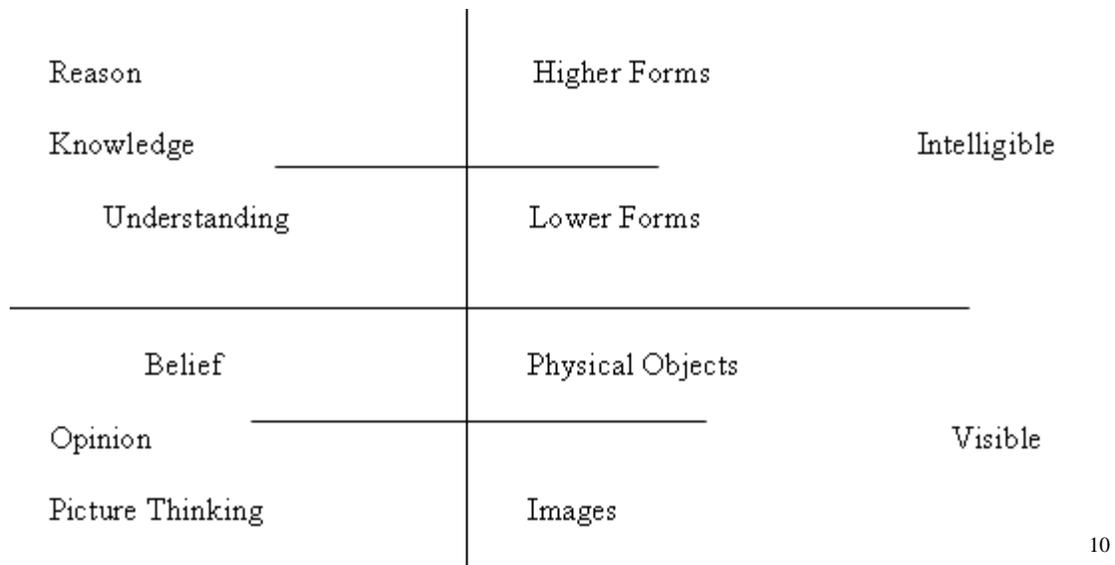
actual chair, no actual circle or square that we can draw perfectly represents the idea of circularity or squareness that we seek to represent in our drawings of circles and squares.<sup>9</sup>

It is not the things in and of themselves that are real, but the ideas of those things. Reality transcends the physical world. In addition, because the visible world is merely a replica of the world of the Forms, it is inferior. This is key. And not only is the inferior quality of the visible world key to understanding Plato's dualism, but it will also become central in understanding the overall tragic impact of Greek philosophical thought on Christian thought. For that reason, keep the substandard characteristic of the visible world in mind as we move forward.

In his works, Plato uses metaphors to explain his theories on metaphysics, epistemology, and anthropology. For example, Plato's allegory of the Divided Line in *The Republic* provides the framework for his metaphysics. The illustration below represents the Divided Line. Notice the horizontal line segment separating the intelligible realm from the visible realm. The invisible or intelligible world exists above the main line. This realm represents the Forms – the Form of Reality, the Form of Truth, the Form of Justice, the Form of Beauty, etc. These Forms or Ideas exist in a transcendental way. Plato places the intelligible realm *above* the line showing its place of significance in relation to the visible realm which exists below the line. The diagram also shows subdivisions within each realm. For Plato, there are greater and lesser degrees of reality. Platonism defines the visible or material world as less real; the things we see and touch represent lower levels of reality. The physical world is merely a shadow or reflection of the true Form.

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<sup>9</sup> John H. Hallowell and Jene M. Porter. 1997. *Political Philosophy: The Search for Humanity and Order*. Ontario: Prentice-Hall, 28-29.



If the intelligible world represents true reality, how then do we learn about the Forms? According to Plato, we learn about the Forms through reason. Contrary to Greek thought, humans perceive this world as reality and understand the physical world through opinion and sense-perception. Plato inverts this: the ideas are real, not matter. He rejects human sensory observation. Our senses, Plato argues, are not reliable ways of gaining real knowledge. We cannot define objects from purely a sensory observation because such definitions are not free from compresence of opposites. The Forms, however, are free from the compresence of opposites. And only the intellect, through the process of remembering, can help us know about the world of the Forms, what is really real.

Terence Irwin’s discussion of Platonism is helpful in understanding why Plato rejects defining objects or virtues solely through sense-perception. In *Classical Thought* (1989), he explains the insufficiency of sensory observation from Plato’s point of view. He writes:

Plato argues that for some properties the senses by themselves give us the wrong sort of information. They tell us, for example, that the same thing is both big and small, or both heavy and light, in different comparisons; and if we rely on these observations alone, we

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<sup>10</sup> Rich Hannon. 2010. “The Exalted Father.” *Spectrum*. (March 14). <http://spectrummagazine.org/blog/> (accessed August 16, 2012).

will have no consistent conception of what largeness, smallness, and so on are. We may observe that two sticks of equal length are both three feet long, and if we rely incautiously on this observation, we will say that being equal is being three feet long; but in fact we have found a property that is both equal and unequal...to know whether an object has it [said property – largeness, smallness, etc.] we must know what it is being compared to, and what the relevant standard of comparison is (are we looking for big mice or big mammals?). For similar reasons, we cannot define beauty or just things.<sup>11</sup>

As we continue to grasp Plato's philosophy, we move to examine his views on humanity.

Plato's metaphysics shapes his philosophical anthropology. Just as he divides the cosmos placing greater significance on the invisible world which exists beyond earthly life, Plato also divides the human person placing greater value on the soul because it too belongs to the invisible world. In a conversation between Socrates and Cebes in *Phaedo*, Plato describes the two worlds and then shows how his theory applies to the human person. He writes:

[Socrates] Well, what about the concrete instances of beauty – such as men, horses, clothes, and so on – or of equality, or any other members of a class corresponding to an absolute entity? Are they constant, or are they, on the contrary, scarcely ever in the same relation in any sense either to themselves or to one another?

[Cebes] With them, Socrates, it is just the opposite; they are never free from variation.

[Socrates] And these concrete objects you can touch and see and perceive by your other senses, but those constant entities you cannot possibly apprehend except by thinking; they are invisible to our sight.

That is perfectly true, said Cebes.

[Socrates] So you think that we should assume two classes of things, one visible and the other invisible?

[Cebes] Yes, we should.

[Socrates] The invisible being invariable, and the visible never being the same?

[Cebes] Yes, we should assume that too.

Well, now, said Socrates, are we not part body, part soul?

[Cebes] Certainly.

[Socrates] Then to which class do we say that the body would have the closer resemblance and relation?

[Cebes] Quite obviously to the visible.

[Socrates] And the soul, is it visible or invisible?

[Cebes] Invisible to men, at any rate, Socrates, he said.

[Socrates] But surely we have been speaking of things visible or invisible to our human nature. Do you think that we had some other nature in view?

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<sup>11</sup> Terence Irwin. 1989. *Classical Thought: A History of Western Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 91-2.

[Cebes] No, human nature.  
[Socrates] What do we say about the soul, then? Is it visible or invisible?  
[Cebes] Not visible.  
[Socrates] Invisible, then?  
[Cebes] Yes.  
[Socrates] So soul is more like the invisible, and body more like the visible?  
[Cebes] That follows inevitably, Socrates.<sup>12</sup>

In Plato's view, man is composed of body and soul. The body belongs to the visible or material world and the soul belongs to the invisible world. Plato attempts to prove that the soul is immortal, that the soul existed before it was incarnate in the body. The soul's existence, Plato argues, is not dependent upon the body; death cannot destroy the soul, but instead liberates the soul. Plato's position rests upon several arguments. First, he believed that when the soul engages in thinking, it is acting independently of the body. Secondly, through recollection, the soul attains knowledge – the knowledge implanted in the soul before it entered the body. People come to know things by remembering. Upon entering the body, however, the soul becomes distracted and confused by the senses. According to Plato, the soul is the real person, not the body. "The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable, whereas body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble, and never self-consistent."<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, the human body is made up of matter. The doctrine that the flesh is bad is rooted in Plato's antithesis between spirit and matter. The body is not eternal like the soul; it is unable to function after death; it is an impediment to the attainment of knowledge; and it is driven by the carnal lusts of the flesh – money, power, sex, etc... According to Plato, the body is imperfect; it grows and deteriorates. Change implies imperfection. By contrast, Greek

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<sup>12</sup> Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, including the letters*, 62.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

philosophy is concerned with perfection, with that which does not change. The body, therefore, contaminates the soul and hinders its attainment of truth. Plato describes the body this way:

So long as we keep to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our object, which we assert to be truth. In the first place, the body provides us with innumerable distractions in the pursuit of our necessary sustenance, and any diseases which attack us hinder our quest for reality. Besides, the body fills us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense, with the result that we literally never get an opportunity to think at all about anything. Wars and revolutions and battles are due simply and solely to the body and its desires. All wars are undertaken for the acquisition of wealth, and the reason why we have to acquire wealth is the body, because we are slaves to its service....We are in fact convinced that if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul by itself.<sup>14</sup>

In Platonism, devotion to the soul is of the highest priority; we must despise the body and focus our attention on cultivating the mind. In doing so, one attains wisdom. For Plato, a life committed to philosophical contemplation leads to salvation. Plato says:

But when it [the soul] investigates by itself, it passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless, and being of a kindred nature, when it is once independent and free from interference, consorts with it always and strays no longer, but remains, in that realm of the absolute, constant and invariable, through contact with beings of a similar nature. And this condition of the soul we call wisdom....If at its release the soul is pure and carries with it no contamination of the body, because it has never willingly associated with it in life, but has shunned it and kept itself separate as its regular practice – in other words, if it has pursued philosophy in the right way and really practice how to face death easily – this is what ‘practicing death’ means...If this is its [the souls] condition, then it departs to that place which is, like itself, invisible, divine, immortal, and wise, where, on its arrival, happiness awaits it, and release from uncertainty and folly, from fears and uncontrolled desires, and all other human evils, and where, as they say of the initiates in the Mysteries, it really spends the rest of time with God....There is one way, then, in which a man can be free from all anxiety about the fate of his soul – if in life he has abandoned bodily pleasures and adornments, as foreign to his purpose and likely to do more harm than good, and has devoted himself to the pleasures of acquiring knowledge, and so by decking his soul not with a borrowed beauty but with its own – with self-control, and goodness, and courage, and liberality, and truth – has fitted himself to await his journey to the next world.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 62-63, 64, 95.

The problem with this view, however, is that, according to Plato, not all humans are capable of giving complete devotion to the soul. So, here again, Plato creates divisions. This time he is separating people into different categories – those capable of becoming philosophers and those who are not. Philosophers, according to Plato, are ahead of all other men because, in so far as it is possible, they free their soul from association with the body.<sup>16</sup> The true philosopher “is not concerned with the body, but keeps his attention directed as much as he can away from it and toward the soul.”<sup>17</sup> And how does the philosopher go about this? Plato explains:

This soul [that of the true philosopher] secures immunity from its desires by following reason and abiding always in her company, and by contemplating the true and divine and un conjecturable, and drawing inspiration from it, because such a soul believes that this is the right way to live while life endures, and that after death it reaches a place which is kindred and similar to its own nature, and there is rid forever human ills.<sup>18</sup>

Plato’s famous Allegory of the Cave in *The Republic* encapsulates his entire philosophy. It provides a visual representation of his ideas: his perception of what is real, what is imperfect and evil, and the wisest of all men – philosophers.



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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>19</sup> S. Marc Cohen. 2006. “The Allegory of the Cave.” Department of Philosophy, University of Washington. <http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/320/cave.htm> (accessed August 16, 2012). Illustration taken from *Great Dialogues of Plato* (Warmington and Rouse, eds.). 1999. New York: Signet Classics, 316.

The cave in Plato's allegory symbolizes the realm of senses, the earthly realm. The world of the Forms exists above the cave. Within the cave, prisoners are chained, bound to the cave, facing a wall. The wall is all they can see. The roaring fire behind them cast shadows on the wall in front of them of the objects presented by the puppet showmen on the roadway which is positioned between the fire and the prisoners. The prisoners understand the shadows and images cast on the wall to be reality. The shadows, however, are illusions; they represent only replicas of what is really real. Human senses, Plato argues, cloud our perception of reality; opinions are mistaken for truth. The intellect, however, provides path to reality. The individual, therefore, must focus on getting back to the Forms, a task which requires complete devotion to caring for the soul. As previously mentioned, the person most capable of doing this is the philosopher; his soul is attuned to the Forms. Sadly, according to Plato, most people cannot be turned from the carnal lusts of the flesh – the desire for power, money, etc. They are doomed to the shadows. Plato describes the allegory this way:

Imagine men in a cavelike underground dwelling with a long entrance, as wide as the cave and open to light. The men have been chained foot and neck since childhood. The chains keep them in place and prevent them from turning their heads, so that they only see forward. Light comes to them from a fire burning at a distance above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners, higher than they, imagine a road with a low wall built alongside, like the screen set in front of puppeteers, over which they show the puppets....Then see people walking along the road carrying things on their heads, including figures of men and animals made of wood, stone, and other materials. These extend over the top of the wall and, as you might expect, some of the people are talking, while others are silent....Do you think such prisoners would ever see anything of themselves or each other except their shadows thrown by the fire on the facing wall of the cave?<sup>20</sup>

Scholar Diarmaid MacCulloch captures Plato's understanding of human life. "Human life," MacCulloch writes, "is an imprisonment in the cave. The particular phenomena we perceive in our lives are shadows of their ideal 'Forms,' which represent truer and higher

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<sup>20</sup> Plato, Raymond Larson. 1979. *The Republic*. Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 174-5.

versions of reality than the ones which we can readily know.”<sup>21</sup> According to Plato, we can have true knowledge only of the invisible world, of the ideas. Of the material world, we can have only opinions. We cannot have knowledge about material objects. The human imprisoned in the cave is like the soul imprisoned in the body. Most people are trapped in the cave and are, therefore, unable to perceive true reality. Their souls are “drawn away by the body into the realm of the variable, and loses its way and becomes confused and dizzy, as though it were fuddled...”<sup>22</sup> The majority of people are unable to ascend from the cave because they are incapable of devoting themselves completely to a life of contemplation.

Plato’s dualism leads to a gloom and doom view of humanity and life on earth. Basically, being born is the worst day for the soul. In birth, the soul leaves the realm of the Forms and enters the human body. The individual now resides in the material world. Prior to being born, the soul had complete knowledge of the Forms, of true reality. After being born, however, the body serves as a hindrance to the soul, a hindrance to knowing. The soul left perfection and is now trapped in the body. Consequently, knowing is much more difficult now and only attainable through the process of recollection. The soul must aim to achieve a state of contemplation through the intellect in order to remember the Forms. Recall, once again, Plato’s cave. Humans can only ascend from the cave through this process of recollection. The task requires complete devotion to the soul or mind, an undertaking in which only philosophers are capable. For Plato, the chief goal of man is to die, to escape, in order to get back to the Forms. Death releases the soul from the body.

After examining Plato’s philosophy, we see, then, that Greek philosophical thought, as revealed in the works of Plato, is rooted in dualism. Platonism separates the universe into two

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<sup>21</sup> MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, including the letters*, 62.

worlds: the visible and the invisible. Humans and the things of the earth are merely copies of transcendent ideas, which are absolute and eternal and therefore good. The invisible realm is superior and ought to be the highest priority. The physical world is a shadow of the real world, the world of the Forms. This dualistic view of the cosmos leads to a dualistic view of man whereby man's body is basically evil and a hindrance to the soul. Greek philosophy separates God from his creation, splits the universe into two opposing worlds, and divides the soul from the body.

So, what does Greek dualism have to do with faith? Plato's dualism ought to prompt us to ask the question: In what ways does Greek dualism, when mixed with faith, affect the doctrines of Christianity? For instance, how does Plato's legacy of escapism influence the doctrine of salvation? Do we approach Christianity with Greek eyes? Also, does Plato's metaphysical dualism, in any way, shape the way in which Christians view different disciplines in higher education? We shall address these questions over the next few chapters.

## Chapter 2 Impact of Greek Dualism on Christian Thought

In the previous chapter I attempted to provide a brief sketch of Greek dualism through the ideas and writings of Plato. In this chapter, we will learn how Christianity, when mixed with Platonic dualism, fails to foster a biblical approach to faith. Many Christian thinkers from the early days of Christianity borrowed heavily from Greek philosophical thought. Consequently, Greek philosophy shaped their approach to Christianity. Instead of living under the Word, they often read Scripture with Greek eyes. Sadly, this became a pattern, one that continues today. As we shall see, this has profound implications for Christianity. Our discussion will focus on three different eras of Christian thought: 1) early Christianity 2) the development of Christianity in America, and 3) the realist position among evangelicals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though we will be covering material that spans a wide scope of time, this arduous task is necessary to understand the tragic and tremendous influence of Greek thought on Christianity.

Greek philosophy had a profound influence on early Christianity. Scholars such as Terence Irwin and Diarmaid MacCulloch make this point. In his discussion on “Christianity and Greek Thought” in *Classical Thought* (1989), Irwin explains that “the formation of Christian thought was influenced from the beginning by Greek philosophy.”<sup>23</sup> He insists that Philo of Alexandria (c.25 B.C. – 47 A.D.), a Hellenized Jew, began a Christian tradition when he attempted to explain Jewish religion in Platonist terms. More than simply impacting Christianity, MacCulloch seems to suggest Greek thought exercised an even more powerful control over the development of Christianity, especially in the early centuries. In his remarkable work on the history of Christianity, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (2009), MacCulloch says:

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<sup>23</sup> Irwin, *Classical Thought: A History of Western Philosophy*, 202.

Christians inherited Graeco-Roman culture and thought, and when they have talked about questions of faith or morals or have tried to make sense of their sacred books, it has taken an extraordinary effort of will and original imagination to avoid doing so in ways already created by the Greeks. It was particularly difficult in the early centuries, when Christianity was so much dominated by the Classical thought-world around it, at the very time when it was having to do a great deal of hard thinking as to what it actually believed.<sup>24</sup>

Many Christian thinkers used Greek terms and concepts to communicate their faith. Some of the early Church fathers opposed any such attempt to blend Greek thought with Christian thought; however, the majority of Church fathers “regarded Greek philosophy, especially the thought of Plato, as a preparation for the reception of the Christian faith.”<sup>25</sup>

Consider this analogy. In the field of medicine, “transplant rejection” is a process whereby a transplant recipient’s body rejects the transplanted organ. In such a case, the body considers the transplanted organ alien and therefore harmful to the body. Consequently, the recipient’s body attacks the transplanted organ. On the other hand, the more similar the antigens of the donor and recipient are, the less likely it is that the organ will be rejected. This analogy is useful in examining how early Christians treated Greek philosophical thought. The majority of early Church fathers did not view Greek philosophical thought as alien and hostile towards Christianity. Though not all parts of Greek philosophy were considered applicable to Christianity, the Greek heritage was not viewed as harmful.<sup>26</sup>

In the eyes of many early Christian thinkers, Greek philosophy was viewed as an ally of Christianity, not an enemy. Christian apologist Tertullian (c. A.D. 155 – c. 222), however, challenged this view, asking “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the

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<sup>24</sup> MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> John H. Hallowell and Jene M. Porter. 1997. *Political Philosophy: The Search for Humanity and Order*. Ontario: Prentice-Hall, 138.

<sup>26</sup> “Transplant rejection.” 2012. *A.D.A.M. Medical Encyclopedia*. National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S. National Library of Medicine. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/> (accessed March 29, 2012).

Academy, the Christian with the heretic?”<sup>27</sup> Tertullian opposed the intrusion of Platonism into Christian. He explains:

Our principles come from the Porch of Solomon, who had himself taught that the Lord is to be sought in simplicity of heart. I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic or a dialectic Christianity. After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research. When we come to believe, we have no desire to believe anything else; for we begin by believing that there is nothing else which we have to believe.<sup>28</sup>

Tertullian’s argument represents the opposing viewpoint. Consequently, the debate about whether or not Christianity and Platonism were compatible began with the early Church fathers. In chapter three we will discuss more in-depth/we will look more closely at Christian thinkers who challenged any attempt to relate Christianity to Greek philosophy. But for now, we have at least established that the beginning of this ongoing debate dates back to early Christian theologians. This is important in understanding the longevity of the influence of Greek philosophical thought on faith. The question of whether or not Christianity could be reconciled with Greek philosophy was a hot topic.

Early Christian thinkers St. Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 110 – c. 164), Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150 – c. 219), and St. Augustine (A.D. 354 – 430) viewed Christian faith as more the completion of Greek philosophy. In other words, Greek philosophy could only lead men so far in the quest for truth but the coming of Christ completed the task. St. Justin Martyr, for example, explained it in this way:

I am proud to say that I strove with all my might to be known as a Christian, not because the teachings of Plato are different from those in Christ, but because they are not in every way similar....The truths which men in all lands have rightly spoken belong to us Christians. For we worship and love, after God the Father, the Word who is from the Unbegotten and Ineffable God, since He even became Man for us, so that by sharing in

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<sup>27</sup> Hallowell and Porter. *Political Philosophy: The Search for Humanity and Order*, 138.

<sup>28</sup> S.L. Greenslade, ed. and trans. 1956. “On Prescription Against heretics,” ch. VII, Library of Christian Classics, Vol. V., *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome*. London: SCM Press, 36. [http://www.tertullian.org/articles/greenslade\\_prae/greenslade\\_prae.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/greenslade_prae/greenslade_prae.htm) (accessed April 12, 2012).

our sufferings He also might heal us. Indeed, all writers, by means of the engrafted seed of the Word which was implanted in them had a dim glimpse of the truth.<sup>29</sup>

St. Justin Martyr even goes so far as to suggest that Greek philosophers who led “men away from error towards truth” were in fact Christians. According to Martyr, these men were on the right path. “Those who lived by reason are Christians, even though they have been considered atheists: such as, among the Greeks, Socrates, Heraclitus, and others like them...”<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, Clement of Alexandria declared:

Thus philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness, until the coming of the Lord. And now it assists towards true religion as a kind of preparatory training for those who arrive at faith by way of demonstration. For “thy foot shall not stumble” if thou attribute to Providence all good, whether it belong to the Greeks or to us. For God is the source of all good things; of some primarily, as of the old and new Testaments; of others by consequence, as of philosophy. But it may be, indeed, that philosophy was given to the Greeks immediately and primarily, until the Lord should call the Greeks. For philosophy was a “schoolmaster” to bring the Greek mind to Christ, as the Law brought the Hebrews. Thus philosophy was a preparation, paving the way towards perfection in Christ.<sup>31</sup>

St. Augustine, considered the most influential of early Christian thinkers, attempted to synthesize Greek thought with Christianity arguing that Christianity came to complete Greek philosophy, not destroy it.<sup>32</sup> Truth, according to Augustine, was partially revealed to Greek philosophers, but not in full view until the rising of Christianity. Given this, he asserted that such a synthesis was indeed possible and could succeed by making philosophy, with its Greek foundation, subservient to Christian theology. Educated in the classic Greek tradition, but living amidst the emerging Christendom, Augustine inhabited two worlds. Consequently, his writings demonstrate an effort to combine the ideas of these two worlds. And this was not a stretch in the

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<sup>29</sup> Ludwig Schopp, ed. Thomas B. Falls, trans. 1965. *The Second Apology*, xiii, in *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. VI, *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 133-34. Quoted by John H. Hallowell and Jene M. Porter. 1997. *Political Philosophy: The Search for Humanity and Order*. Ontario: Prentice-Hall, 138.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

<sup>31</sup> *Stromateis*, I, v. 28. Quoted by Hallowell and Porter. *Political Philosophy: The Search for Humanity and Order*, 139.

<sup>32</sup> Irwin, *Classical Thought: A History of Western Philosophy*, 221.

theologian's eyes; both philosophers and theologians seek truth. By mixing faith and philosophy, specifically Platonism, Augustine produced a sophisticated interpretation of Christianity. In *City of God*, Augustine recognizes a harmony between Platonism and Christianity. Augustine says: "If Plato says that the wise man is the man who imitates, knows and loves this God, and that participation in this God brings man happiness, what need is there to examine the other philosophers? There are none who come nearer to us than the Platonists."<sup>33</sup>

Platonists, notes Augustine, are not completely free of error, hence the need for faith. They are however, most deserving of recognition because they acknowledge the need of the supreme Good, which Augustine equates with God. Augustine writes:

Now we selected the Platonists as being deservedly the best known of all philosophers, because they have been able to realize that the soul of man, though immortal and rational (or intellectual), cannot attain happiness except by participation in the light of God, the creator of the soul and of the whole world. They also assert that no one can attain this life of blessedness, the object of all mankind's desire, unless he has adhered, with the purity of chaste love, to that unique and supreme Good, which is the changeless God. And yet those philosophers themselves have either yielded to the futile errors of people in general or, in the Apostle's words, 'have dwindled into futility in their thinking', in that they have supposed (or were willing that it should be supposed) that many gods are to be worshipped.<sup>34</sup>

It is important to note that, while Augustine regards Platonists as the best of all philosophers, he does not always agree with their ideas. In areas where he disagreed, he modified Greek philosophy to fit faith. In other words, where Platonism conflicted with Christian doctrine, he simply altered it. Thus, in Augustine's writings we notice an attempt to reconcile what is perhaps irreconcilable: Greek philosophy and faith.

For example, similar to Platonists, Augustine supports the distinctiveness of the soul and the body. Not in the same sense as Plato, but nonetheless Augustine makes a distinction between body and soul. Moreover, he not only distinguishes between the body and soul but also

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<sup>33</sup> St. Augustine. 2003. *City of God*. Translated by Henry Bettenson. London: Penguin Classics, 304.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 371.

prioritizes the soul over the body. The mind rules over the body. Unlike the Platonists, however, Augustine places a little more value on the body because he sees the two as united. Augustine says:

Man is not merely a body or merely a soul, but a being constituted by body and soul together. This is indeed true, for the soul is not the whole man; it is the better part of man, and the body is not the whole man; it is the lower part of him. It is the conjunction of the two parts that is entitled to the name of 'man' ...<sup>35</sup>

Now remember, Plato argued that the body hindered the soul. On this point, Augustine modifies Platonism arguing that the body only *appears* to hinder the soul, but that sin is, in fact, the real problem. Humans, according to Augustine, experience inner conflict because of sin, not our physical bodies. Sin makes the body a problem for the soul. Augustine explains:

For the flesh never ceases to have 'desires which resist the spirit' and vice versa, so that 'we do not do what we would like to do,' though this conflict is sometimes fierce, sometimes comparatively slack. We would wish to annihilate all evil desires; but what we have to do is, with divine help, to employ our best efforts in the subjection of those desires to our will by refusing to consent to them.<sup>36</sup>

Augustine also adopts from Platonism the hierarchy of being. For Augustine, God is the Supreme Being; the rest of creation reflects greater and lesser degrees of being. Augustine writes:

For God is existence in a supreme degree – he supremely *is* – and he is therefore immutable. Hence he gave existence to the creatures he made out of nothing; but it was not his own supreme existence. To some he gave existence in a higher degree, to some in a lower, and thus he arranged a scale of existences of various natures.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike the Platonists, Augustine insists that resurrection includes the body. Christianity states that the whole body is immortal – that the body will rise again when it is resurrected.

Augustine explains:

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 541.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 1069.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 473.

The faith declares...that at the resurrection the saints will inhabit the actual bodies in which they suffered the hardships of this life on earth; yet these bodies will be such that no trace of corruption or frustration will affect their flesh, nor will any sorrow or mischance interfere with their felicity.<sup>38</sup>

Overall, Augustine finds Platonism attractive. He deems Greek philosophy and faith compatible because they both seek truth. But is this enough to make them companions? They each may seek truth, but perhaps the bigger issue is what constitutes truth or reality for each side. What is the source of reality? For Augustine, it is God; the Creator is the source of all things. He says:

Nevertheless, all things were made not of the very substance of God but out of nothing, because they are not being itself, as God is, and a certain mutability is inherent in all things, whether they are permanent like the eternal House of God or if they suffer change, like the human soul and body. So the common material of all things invisible and visible...is that from which heaven and earth originate.<sup>39</sup>

For Plato, truth is found in ideas or the Forms. This is drastically different from Augustine's concept of reality. Augustine, however, links Plato's Forms to the ideas or mind of God. Perhaps, here is where Augustine's error lies. Though the source of reality is completely different for Greek philosophy and faith, Augustine tries to combine them. He modifies Platonism to accommodate Christian doctrine. But is it possible to mix them together without spoiling Christianity? We will discuss this question more in the coming chapters.

Thus far, we have learned that Greek philosophy significantly impacted early Christianity. We have also established that with the emergence of Christianity arose a debate concerning the compatibility of Greek thought and Christianity. Now, it is necessary to take a huge leap forward in time in an effort to show that Greek philosophy, centuries later, still

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 532.

<sup>39</sup> St. Augustine. 1992. *Confessions*. Translated and edited by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 258.

continued to influence Christian thought and why this is problematic. To accomplish this purpose we will briefly discuss the ideas that shaped the development of Christianity in America.

Similar to Augustine, a physical dichotomy presents itself in the ideas of Puritanism. My point in exploring Puritanism and the instrumental part Puritans played in the development of Christianity in America is simply to point out the extent to which Greek philosophical thought continued to shape Christianity.

Puritanism had a great impact on America, both in the development of Christianity and on the nation as a whole. The implications of this are enormous (e.g. the manner in which Christians participate in politics often compartmentalizing the sacred from the secular, American exceptionalism, and U.S. foreign policy). The Puritans followed a largely Calvinist system of beliefs. Thus a brief discussion of Calvinist theology is necessary. Based on the theological beliefs and teachings of John Calvin, the central tenets of Calvinism include: depravity, covenant, predestination, grace, and the perseverance of the saints. For Calvinists, sin is rooted in the physical world, which includes the body. Consequently, humans can never be free of sin as long as they exist on earth. The physical world is inherently evil. The goal of faith then for humans is to rise above the material. This idea, rooted in Greek philosophy, shapes the way in which Calvinists and Puritans view the world.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, an influx of Puritans, totaling approximately 21,000, immigrated to America. Persecuted English Puritans such as John Winthrop migrated to America in hopes of setting up new political societies which ultimately led to changes in theology. In his sermon, “*A Model of Christian Charity*,” Winthrop shares his vision, his hope that the Lord would make

their new home “like that of a New England.”<sup>40</sup> The Puritans believed they were a people destined by God to lead a nation. In describing the fabric of the New England culture, scholar Kenneth Addison notes the Greek thought present in the basic worldview of Puritans. “From the Puritan perspective, the world was an evil place where the forces of darkness and light were at constant war, a belief rooted in Greek dualism and medieval theology.”<sup>41</sup> The visible world, according to the Puritans, was but a copy of the invisible world.

Now, not only did Puritanism contain Greek elements, but scholars also compared colonies set up by the Puritans in America to the Greek *polis*. Scholar George McKenna notes the similarity:

By the 1830s their voluntary organizations of evangelization and moral reform had combined budgets larger than that of the federal government. They brought with them their distinctive brand of ‘moralistically inflected republicanism.’ Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*: the watchword of the ancient Greek city-states as they created new colonies could also apply to the Puritan *polis*, whose people brought with them their own matter-of-fact assumptions of moral rectitude and cultural superiority.<sup>42</sup>

In the *United States Democratic Review* (1855), we also see language that mirrors the ancient Greeks. The writer compares the Greek Dorian hive to the Puritan “New England hive” thereby equating the influence of Dorians in the widespread establishment Greek city-states to that of the Puritans in America. The writer says:

The New England hive is always full and always swarming. No class of people are so prone to emigration, and they are found in every part of the United States. But wherever they go they are sure to combine together, and act in concert for the furtherance of the own peculiar opinions and interests. They have no national feelings, and if they recall with a proud satisfaction the events of the Revolution, it is not so much because it

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<sup>40</sup> John Winthrop. 1630. “*Model of Christian Charity*.” In *Classics of American Political & Constitutional Thought: Vol. 1 Origins through the Civil War*, edited by Scott J. Hammond, Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard L. Lubert. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2007, 18.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth N. Addison. 2009. “*We Hold These Truths to be Self-evident-- "an interdisciplinary analysis of the roots of racism and slavery in America.*”” Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 138-139.

<sup>42</sup> George McKenna. 2007. *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism*. New Haven: Yale University Press. <http://www.mylibrary.com?id=173512>, 3.

achieved the independence of the United States, as because they claim to have been the great instruments in its attainment.<sup>43</sup>

The latter part of this excerpt signifies the Puritan attitude of superiority which McKenna also describes. The Puritans believed they were a people destined by God to lead a nation. In *Oldtown Folks*, Harriet Beecher Stowe also links Puritans to the Greeks. “New England has been to these United States what the Dorian hive was to Greece.”<sup>44</sup>

Each of these scholars comparing the great influence of the Greeks to that of the Puritans demonstrates the profound impact both groups had on society. This is key as we trace the continued influence of Greek philosophy upon Christianity. Puritans set up and led their colonies with fervor. Thousands arrived in America hoping to flee religious persecution, but ended up unofficially establishing Protestantism as the nation’s religion. Consequently, ideas grounded in Greek philosophy were woven not only in the fabric of Christian doctrine, but in the fabric of America as well.

A brief look at America’s view of itself in relation to the nations around the world further demonstrates the tragic impact of Greek philosophical thought on Christian thought. American exceptionalism is rooted in Puritanism. We already established the significant influence of Puritan beliefs, which are rooted in Greek ideas, in the development of Christianity in America. And given that believers were also instrumental in shaping our nation, elements of Greek thinking impacted America’s view of itself and its interaction with the rest of the world. Unfortunately, America came to view itself as God’s chosen nation and developed a “me first” strategy in international relations. In doing so, America placed a higher value on itself over other states.

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<sup>43</sup> Conrad Swackhamer. 1855. *The United States Democratic Review, Volume 5*. New York: Lloyd and Campbell, 82.

<sup>44</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe. 1869. *Oldtown Folks*. Boston: Field, Osgood & Co, preface.

Consider this question: Why did U.S. leaders fail to consider the aims and motivations of the attackers on 9/11 before implementing strategies to deal with them? Perhaps the U.S. did not strive to understand its neighbors, such as extremists who hold deeply religious beliefs, because of its view of itself (i.e. God's chosen nation). In other words, maybe American exceptionalism leads the nation to believe it has all the answers and thus need only "tell" or demand the way in which other states ought to govern themselves rather than "listen" to the ideas that shape other states in an effort to achieve peaceful relations.

James Skillen asserts "America's sense of itself as a new Israel, God's chosen nation, a city on a hill, is a corruption of the biblical story. The structure of the United States as a constitutional republic has roots in Greece and Rome and late medieval Christendom."<sup>45</sup> America, says Skillen, "is not God's people, a new Israel, but a state like all states."<sup>46</sup> The implications of Greek philosophy's polis-confinement are significant in assessing America's view of itself and America's view of its role among the nations of the world. Skillen suggests states shaped by Greek thought will either: 1) emphasize the internal ordering and preservation of their state or 2) emphasize the priority of transpolitical rational standards.<sup>47</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, which aims to show how Greek dualism influences America's foreign policy and that this influence negatively affects America's interaction with other states, we will focus on the former. Greek philosophy, Skillen argues, provides no framework for thinking globally, for "governance of all peoples, nations, and states together."<sup>48</sup> "A biblical view of government...requires a creationwide perspective grounded in the recognition that this is *God's*

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<sup>45</sup> James Skillen. 2005. *With or Against the World? America's Role Among the Nations*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, x.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*.

*one world* in which all peoples and governing authorities are subordinate to God's demands for justice."<sup>49</sup>

Turning our attention back to the development of Christianity in America, the Puritans thought of themselves as the children of Israel, sought to purify the church and wanted to create a covenant with God. As the colonies in America became more established, however, the communal covenant of the Puritans died out and was replaced by an individual entrepreneurial spirit. During this period, colonists also began questioning Calvinistic certainties.

The Great Awakening represented an attempt to reawaken the church. Jonathan Edwards, a major leader in the revival, sought to rejuvenate traditional Protestant piety. Unfortunately, civic piety was replacing Christian piety. It is important for this study to consider whether Edwards' theological roots contain Greek components. Thinker Robin Phillips suggests there is an element of dualistic thinking present in his worldview. According to Phillips, Edwards devalues the material world. The following passage from Edwards' writings mirrors the language of Plato. Edwards writes:

The material world...[God] makes the whole as a shadow of the spiritual world...That the earth is so small a thing in comparison of the distance between us and the highest heaven, that if we were there, that not only the high palaces and highest mountain would look low whose height we gaze and wonder at now, but the whole earth would be less than nothing...it seems to typify how that worldly things, all worldly honor and pleasure and profit, yea, the whole world or all worldly things put together, is so much lower and less than heavenly glory, that when the saints come to be in heaven, all will appear as it were infinitely less than nothing...one thing seems to be made in imitation of another, and especially the less perfect to be made in imitation of the more perfect, so that the less perfect is as it were a figure or image of the more perfect – so...why is it not rational to suppose that the corporeal and the visible world should be designedly made and constituted in analogy to the more spiritual, noble and real world?...when the soul of the saint leaves the body and goes to heaven, it will be like coming out of the dim light of the night into daylight...We can't in the present state see clearly, because we have a veil before us, even the veil of the flesh."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Robin Phillips. 2011. "Was Jonathan Edwards a Gnostic?" *Jonathan Edwards Society*.

While Edwards' language resembles Plato's, I am not so sure that Edwards' necessarily distinguishes between two realms, the spiritual and the physical, but rather the connection to the physical dichotomy found in Greek philosophy lies in Edwards' devaluation of the world. For example, in describing man's inner depravity, Edwards' uses the physical body to make his point. He explains it in this way:

Man's inwards are full of dung and filthiness, which is to denote what the inner man, which is often represented by various parts of his inwards – sometimes the heart, sometimes the bowels, sometimes the belly, sometimes the veins – is full of: spiritual corruption and abomination. So as there are many folding and turnings in the bowels, it denotes the great and manifold intricacies, secret windings and turnings, shifts, wiles and deceits that are in their hearts.”<sup>51</sup>

Thus far, we examined the influence of Greek thought in early Christianity and in the development of Christianity in America. We also looked briefly at how Greek dualism perhaps influenced America's view of itself and its role in the world. In this last section, we will explore the political views among realist evangelicals in 20<sup>th</sup> century America. A look at Christian involvement in politics reveals yet another aspect of the tragic impact of Greek thought on Christian thought.

Realist evangelicals represent the Christian right, the religious conservatives. And according to them, they are the good guys, fighting against the bad guys, the secular liberal humanists. It's a battle: good vs. evil. Realists aim to reclaim America's Christian heritage (i.e. America as the City upon a Hill). It is important to remember that these religious roots are deeply embedded in Greek thought. For realists, a just society requires moral order and individual freedom. They tend, however, to separate the spiritual from the secular. Realists support

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[http://www.jesociety.org/2011/02/10/was-jonathan-edwards-a-gnostic/#foot\\_26](http://www.jesociety.org/2011/02/10/was-jonathan-edwards-a-gnostic/#foot_26) (accessed October 20, 2011). Here Phillips draws from Edwards' *Typological Writings* to demonstrate the dualism present and the connection Plato's philosophy.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Christian involvement in politics, but make distinctions between two kingdoms, a higher godly kingdom and a lower earthly kingdom.

Such distinctions are evident in the expressed views of Charles Colson and Doug Bandow, two voices within the realist evangelical community. Colson writes:

The Christian, therefore, follows two commandments: to live by Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, modeling the values of God's Kingdom – *the one yet to come in its fullness* – and at the same time to support government's role in preserving order as a witness to God's authority over the *present* kingdoms of this world.<sup>52</sup>

The problem with Colson's two-kingdom view, however, is that it attempts to divide God's kingdom and dominion. Former director of the Center for Public Justice James Skillen points out that God gives us one command, the "love command," which "embraces all of life within God's one and only kingdom."<sup>53</sup> There are not two independent kingdoms as Colson's view suggests.

Colson asserts that Christians must not "keep their faith private, out of the public realm."<sup>54</sup> He praises the Statesmanship of William Wilberforce, whose work led to the abolition of slavery and Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity. Wilberforce worked "through government structures and by political means to bring Christian influence into the culture."<sup>55</sup> Fuller's ministry earned recognition from liberals and conservatives alike. Colson admires the efforts of those such as Fuller and Wilberforce who put faith in action in the public. Colson himself began putting his faith in action decades ago when he took up the mission to seek the transformation of prisoners by founding Prison Fellowship.

Although Colson commends believers for their Christian witness in the political arena, he also warns them that the "everyday business of politics is power" and the hunger for political

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<sup>52</sup> Charles Colson. 2007. *God & Government: An Insider's View on the Boundaries Between Faith & Politics*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 100.

<sup>53</sup> James Skillen. 1990. *The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 66.

<sup>54</sup> Colson. *God & Government: An Insider's View on the Boundaries Between Faith & Politics*, 294.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 300.

power lures many men and women.<sup>56</sup> In part, Colson attempts to allow faith to penetrate all of life; however, his efforts ultimately fail. On one hand, he supports Christian involvement in politics. On the other hand, however, he seems to place the political arena “below” Christian morality and the church. Colson argues that the history of the last half a century validates Nietzsche’s argument that the driving force behind humanity is the “will to power.” According to Nietzsche, man is basically a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Shockingly, Colson agrees with Nietzsche’s diagnosis of human nature.<sup>57</sup> Given this, we, once again, see the emphasis on the implications of the Fall, the sinful nature of man and government.

Should Christians, however, focus on the Fall? Recognize it, yes, but make it the lens through which they view humanity, the lens through which they approach politics? In part, it’s almost as if Colson is saying the whole thing is hopeless. Reformed evangelical Paul Marshall, on the other hand, states: “We live with the reality of sin but we seek and expect the righteousness and justice of God.”<sup>58</sup> In the next chapter, we will discuss Marshall’s ideas more fully, but in this one statement alone it is already clear that he holds a more integrated view of faith. Because Colson begins with too great a gap, stressing the *kingdoms* in conflict, he lacks a more complete political vision. “He swings back and forth between a higher ‘kingdom’ view of the Christian life and a lower ‘earthly’ view of politics.”<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, Colson fails to develop a fully integral view of faith and the political order.

Much like Colson, Doug Bandow also speaks of two kingdoms, distinguishing between superior kingdom principles among Christians and the lower earthly kingdom where sinful

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 300-301.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Marshall. 1984. *Thine is the Kingdom: A Biblical Perspective on the Nature of Government and Politics Today*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Skillen. *The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square*, 67.

politics take place. The following passage demonstrates the influence of St. Augustine and Greek philosophy on Bandow's ideas. Bandow writes:

Religion and politics do go together. However, their partnership should emphasize transcendent principles rather than specific policies. And the relationship between these two kingdoms, as Augustine referred to them, should never be a comfortable one. The state is ordained of God, but it is a temporary, worldly institution run by sinful man. In fact, the twentieth century has demonstrated again and again that the power of government to do evil is far greater than its potential to do good.<sup>60</sup>

Holding a libertarian political perspective, Bandow asserts that the most limited government possible is best. The Bible, according to Bandow, is opposed to expansive governments that have a tendency to become like gods. "Individuals have a virtually absolute right to control their own lives, the collective good is primarily advanced by giving free rein to personal initiative, and the state is to be as small and unobtrusive as possible."<sup>61</sup> Skillen notes the connection between Bandow's stress on human sin and his insistence on a highly limited government. This connection is evident in Bandow's criticism of federal policies over the past fifty years. Bandow says:

The roots of America's crisis in government lie in man's sinful nature, of course. But if politics cannot provide an earthly utopia, the right kind of government could help promote a social order that was more rather than less godly. In fact, the original constitutional scheme did a reasonable job of containing the worst effects of human failings; unfortunately, that legal structure suffered severed blows in early upheavals such as the Civil War and essentially collapsed during the 1930s and the Great Depression...Over the last five decades government has become an immoral god, turning envy into policy, stripping individuals and communities of their traditional social responsibilities, destroying economic opportunities for the disadvantaged, engaging in amoral foreign intervention, and fostering a general spiritual decline.<sup>62</sup>

Bandow contrasts the days when America operated on the ideas of small government compared to the expansive government of the last fifty years. He blames expansive government

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>62</sup> Doug Bandow. 1988. *Beyond Good Intentions: A Biblical View of Politics*. Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 41.

for everything from social irresponsibility to the spiritual decay of individuals, communities, and our nation as a whole. Remember, the realists focus on the Fall. Basically, the larger and more dominant the earthly kingdom, the worse off we are. Moreover, Bandow argues that Christians “have fallen prey into an easy acceptance of what is, in fact, a sinful and corrupt world.”<sup>63</sup> Do we live in a sinful world or is there sin present in the world? According to the realists, the earthly kingdom is sinful and if it expands then evil will prevail. By looking at the political perspective of realists, we see how the influence of Greek dualism distorts a Christian view of political engagement. It is not enough to assess whether or not Greek roots are present, but also how such elements effect the way we live out our faith.

In each of the examples we have examined, Greek philosophical thought has, in some way, shaped Christian thought. Augustine asserted that Platonism and Christianity were compatible. And where he disagreed with Platonic ideas, he modified those ideas to fit the framework of his Christian theology. Other Christian thinkers followed in his footsteps. They may not have directly engaged in the debate over the relationship between Greek philosophy and Christianity, but their thoughts about faith are rooted in Greek dualism. The Puritans viewed the world much in the same way as the Greeks, believing that the physical world was basically evil. The realists held a two-kingdom view that separates the spiritual from the secular. Up to this point, we have largely focused our discussion on strands of Christian thought shaped by Greek philosophical thought. In the next chapter, we shall turn our attention to those strands of Christian thought which seek to destroy Greek dualism.

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<sup>63</sup> Jerry S. Herbert, ed. 1993. *Evangelical Politics: Three Approaches*. Washington, D.C.: Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, 185.

### **Chapter 3**

## **Challenges to Greek Dualism in contemporary Christian Thought**

Some early Christian theologians, such as Tertullian which we briefly mentioned in chapter two, saw problems with reconciling Christianity with Greek philosophy and therefore challenged any projects aimed at doing so. A number of contemporary Christian thinkers also challenge the idea that Christianity and Platonism are compatible. In this chapter, we shall examine the ideas of Reformed Dutch Christian philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd, reformed evangelicals James Skillen and Paul Marshall, and postmodern thinker Brian McLaren.

Unlike realist evangelicals that we examined in chapter two, reformed evangelicals hold a very integrated view of faith, linking the new transformational life in Christ to all areas of life. They emphasize the implications of creation; God's redemptive work is meant for all of creation. This is key. The reformed movement attempts to overcome dualism. Reformers look at institutions such as the church, family, school, and government in terms of how each bears witness to the kingdom breaking in, the already, but not yet. In contrast to the realists approach towards politics, the reformed battle for rights of mediating institutions rather than the rights of individuals. The pursuit of individual rights, according to the reformed, will erode any institutional right.

First, we shall examine the ideas of Herman Dooyeweerd. Dooyeweerd rejects any attempts to synthesize Greek motives with Christianity asserting the Greek form-matter motive is incompatible with the scriptural motive of creation, fall, and redemption through Christ. Dooyeweerd explains the scriptural ground-motive in this way:

Fall, redemption through Jesus Christ, and the revelation of creation are unbreakably connected in the Christian ground-motive. Apostate ground-motives do not acknowledge sin in its radically scriptural sense; for sin can only be understood in true self-knowledge, which is the fruit of God's Word-revelation. To be sure, Greek religious consciousness knew of a conflict in human life, but it interpreted that conflict as a battle in a person

between the principles of form and matter. This battle became apparent in the conflict between uncontrolled sensual desires and reason....The matter principle, the principle of the ever flowing earthly life stream, became the self-determining principle of evil.<sup>64</sup>

In *Roots of Western Culture* (1948), for example, Dooyeweerd argues that the Greek form-matter motive leads to a dichotomy in the relation between the soul and the body and that this view contrasts a biblical view of the relations between the soul and the body. Scripture “reveals to us that the soul or spirit of a human being is the *absolute central root-unity* or the *heart* of the whole of that person’s existence, because the human being has been *created in God’s image*.”<sup>65</sup> We miss the beauty of God’s creation when we adopt a Greek view of the body and perhaps the meaning behind life here on earth.

Dooyeweerd traces the influence of Greek thought upon the Christian ground-motive, noting the tendency throughout history to combine the scriptural ground-motive with impure motives. Although the Trinitarian doctrine sought to fight off the temptation of dualism, the infiltration of Greek ideas continued. Dooyeweerd explains: “Neither Creation, nor the fall, nor redemption were understood in their scriptural meaning. Even after the Christian church established the doctrine of the Trinity the influence of the Greek religious ground-motive continued in the thought of the church fathers”<sup>66</sup>

In chapter two, we learned that Augustine attempted to combine Platonism and Christian doctrine. Dooyeweerd critiques St. Augustine’s attempt to synthesize Greek motives with Christianity. Though Augustine held a scriptural ground-motive, Greek ideas, argues Dooyeweerd, provided the lenses with which he viewed this motive thus hindering God’s revelation. Dooyeweerd says:

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<sup>64</sup> Herman Dooyeweerd. 2003. *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian options*. Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 35. This book originally appeared as a series of articles in the weekly paper *Nieuw Nederland* after the Second World War, from 1945 to 1948.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 114.

Augustine did accept the ground-motive of revelation in its purist. But he could not develop it radically because the Greek ground-motive, transmitted by Greek philosophy, placed a firm hold upon his entire worldview. For example, he read the creation account with Greek eyes. According to him “the earth without form or void” signified still unformed “matter,” although in opposition to the Greek notion he believed that this matter was created by god. Likewise, he conceived of the relation between the “soul” and the “body” within the framework of the Greek ground-motive. For him the soul was an immortal substance characterized by the faculty of theoretical thought. The body was merely a “material vehicle” of the rational soul. The divine revelation of the religious root-unity of human existence was thus again undermined by Greek dualism.<sup>67</sup>

Dooyeweerd also explains the dangerous impact of Augustine’s view of “original sin.” According to Augustine, “original sin” was linked to sexual desire. The problem with this is that marriage was merely a tool to control lust thereby crippling Christian marital ethics.<sup>68</sup> Greek dualism shows up in Augustine’s ideas in the Christian confusion about sexuality. Christians inherited the residual idea that celibacy is nobler than sexuality, even within marriage. Augustine failed to recognize original sin was rooted in the heart, “not in a temporal, natural drive.”<sup>69</sup> Augustine wrote to defend the faith but his error, Dooyeweerd argues, lay in the Greek philosophical influence that shaped his thinking. Though Augustine held a scriptural ground-motive, Greek ideas provided the lenses with which he viewed this motive thus hindering God’s revelation.

Dooyeweerd explains that many Church Fathers attempted to rid pagan elements from Christian theology. He also reminds us, though, that these scholars were educated in Greek philosophy. Thus, many “had come to absorb the Greek way of thought.”<sup>70</sup> Consequently, their attempts to remove Greek thinking from their thoughts on Christianity often failed. Dooyeweerd argues that the foundation of Christian religion demands an *inner reformation* of one’s view of

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 114.

the world and temporal life. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Dooyeweerd says: “Instead of *reformation* they sought *accommodation*; they sought to adapt pagan thought to divine revelation of the Word.”<sup>71</sup>

Attempts to synthesize Greek philosophical thought with Christianity were present in the Roman Catholic Church as well and the Protestant Church. Scholasticism, which seeks a synthesis between Greek philosophy and Christianity, permeated the Protestant world as evident in the thoughts of Ockham and Luther. Karl Barth’s dialectical theology fused the nature and grace ground-motive with humanism. For Barth, the creational ordinances were useless because of the fall. Hence the creation aspect of the scriptural ground-motive lost its significance. In each of the above mentioned examples, Dooyeweerd notes the tendency to combine the scriptural ground-motive with impure motives.

Next, we move to discuss the ideas of reformed evangelicals James Skillen and Paul Marshall. Skillen repeatedly reflects upon “the question of what constitutes obedient politics in the service of God.”<sup>72</sup> This was evident in his critiques of Charles Colson and Doug Bandow that we examined in the last chapter. Skillen asserts that Christian citizens engaging in politics should work for a “just political order in obedience to the Lord.”<sup>73</sup> He does not separate life into spiritual and secular realms. Skillen writes:

Biblically speaking...the body of Christ has as its *first calling* to love and obey the Lord in all of life – with heart, soul, strength, and mind. In this sense, politics, family life, business, and everything else constitute an integral part of the church’s *first* and only calling. Evangelicalism, administering the sacraments, and prayer may be the primary responsibilities of certain office holders such as pastors and evangelists. But the church (the body of Christ) is made up of more than “churchy” activities. Of course, a pastor, as pastor, does not run an auto shop or raise a family or govern a state. But Christians in all of these other capacities should surely function obediently before God as members of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>72</sup> James W. Skillen. 1990. *The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 69.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Christ's body...Christians in other offices (parents, teachers, business people) should not see themselves as secular individuals outside the churches. They are members of the body of Christ at all times and in all places and should serve God together in those arenas in obedience to his commandments. An approach such as this, however, requires a solidly Christian view of family life, education, business, and politics.<sup>74</sup>

Paul Marshall also reminds us that Christian service is as wide as creation. We must not separate life into spiritual and secular categories placing a higher value on those things which we deem 'spiritual.' Our faith should penetrate the very core of our being. If Christ is our foundation, then *everything* else, work, family, education, marriage, church, government, etc., etc. builds upon that foundation; they are not separate from it. In *Thine is the Kingdom* (1984), Marshall explains:

We must realise that God is concerned about politics, about architecture, about food and furniture, about poverty, suffering, about play, art and music, about neighborhoods and economics, about animals and trees, about sex and intimacy, about *reconciliation*, and healing from sin, *of all things* within the creation.<sup>75</sup>

Unlike the Greek worldview which devalues life on earth and longs for the afterlife,

Marshall asserts that life here on earth does matter. In *Heaven is Not My Home* (1998), Marshall says:

What we need is *not* to be rescued from the world, not to cease being human, not to stop caring for the world, not to stop shaping human culture. What we need is the power to do these things according to the will of God. We, as well as the rest of creation, need to be redeemed...

The Bible is the story of how sin has been, is being, and will be overcome through Jesus Christ. It is the story of how humankind has been, is being, and will be redeemed and restored to fellowship with God. The creatures God has made to love and rule and steward the earth will be redeemed.<sup>76</sup>

In addition, Marshall argues that the concept of *going* to heaven when we die is an unbiblical idea. The earth and all that is in it will be restored. Scripture teaches there will be "*a new heaven and a new earth.*" Marshall explains:

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 68-9.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Marshall. 1984. *Thine is the Kingdom: A Biblical Perspective on the Nature of Government and Politics Today*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 35.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Marshall and Lela Gilbert. 1998. *Heaven is Not My Home: Learning to Live in God's Creation*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 33, 38.

Our destiny is an earthly one: a new earth, an earth redeemed and transfigured. An earth reunited with heaven, but an earth, nevertheless.

If we think that the earth and everything on it is simply going to disappear, why labor long and hard to write something, perform something, build something, create something that will only be consumed by fire? If we think that being human is only a passing and trivial phase of life, why take the present seriously? Why not regard ourselves merely as apprentice angels, stuck for the moment in an earthly waiting room but better suited to and anxiously awaiting life on some disembodied, heavenly plane?

The truth, however, is that we are embodied, earthly creatures made in God's image. And if we are really to begin to live in God's world, we need to see what the Bible actually says about the goodness of the creation and the purpose of human life. To do this, we should begin where the Bible itself does, in the book of Genesis.<sup>77</sup>

Following this passage, Marshall proceeds to discuss our responsibility to creation, our struggle with sin, redemption, and our perspectives on work and life in general. We were made to care for the earth, for creation, which God stated in Genesis, was *good*. Marshall draws from the writings of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament to support his argument that Christ came to redeem *all things*. Paul says:

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:15-20

Of these verses, Marshall explains that Paul "stresses that the gospel is *for all things*." Marshall continues: "*Everything was made by and for Jesus Christ. Everything holds together in Jesus Christ. Everything will be reconciled by Jesus Christ.*"<sup>78</sup> God will restore all of creation.

Marshall also strikes down sacred-secular dualism in presenting his views on the world of politics. He seeks to help readers *understand* politics from a biblical perspective, not that he

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 11-2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 46.

necessarily puts forth a concrete Christian political agenda, but rather he hopes Christians will see politics from a biblical standpoint. “God made the world, all the world is God’s, all the world is equally holy. The sacred is not compartmentalized apart from what people popularly call the secular.”<sup>79</sup> On this point, he also draws from Paul. Paul, notes Marshall, viewed work differently from the Greek culture of his time; work was not separate from religion but rather it was just as religious when done for the glory of God. Paul “regarded all aspects of life as equally religious when done in service to God.”<sup>80</sup> Scripture does not teach us to compartmentalize sacred from secular. That being said, Marshall does recognize that the Fall affects everything, every dimension of existence. “But redemption in Jesus Christ brings salvation, brings healing to every dimension of the world.”<sup>81</sup>

In addition to Dooyeweerd, Skillen, and Marshall, postmodern Christian thinker Brian McLaren also opposes dualistic Christianity. McLaren is concerned about the health of Christianity and argues that if it falls apart “everyone loses, Christian and non-Christian.”<sup>82</sup> Thus he offers a new kind of Christianity drastically different from the biblical narrative shaped by Greco-Roman thought. The purpose of much of his writing is to “help us realign our religion and our lives at least a little bit more with that Someone [God].”<sup>83</sup> According to McLaren, we are stuck in a defective story. Thus, realigning our lives with God requires deconstruction of our defective framework (i.e. Greek dualism). He suggests we reframe Jesus.

McLaren argues for “eschatological engagement rather than abandonment.”<sup>84</sup> He writes:

Jesus’ message is not actually about escaping this troubled world for heaven’s blissful shores, as is popularly assumed, but instead is about God’s will being done on this

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<sup>79</sup> Herbert. *Evangelical Politics: Three Approaches*, 212-213.

<sup>80</sup> Marshall. *Thine is the Kingdom: A Biblical Perspective on the Nature of Government and Politics Today*, 25.

<sup>81</sup> Herbert. *Evangelical Politics: Three Approaches*, 213.

<sup>82</sup> Brian McLaren. 2004. *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 22.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Terry L. Heaton. “10 Questions for Brian McLaren.” Interview with Brian McLaren. <http://www.thepomoblog.com/> (accessed May 12, 2011).

troubled earth as it is heaven. So people interested in being a new kind of Christian will inevitably begin to care more and more about this world, and they'll want to better understand its most significant problems, and they'll want to find out how they can fit in with God's dreams actually coming true down here more often.<sup>85</sup>

McLaren adopts an alternative way of seeing people, which in turn shapes his theology.

We are all human and loved by God. He rejects the walls we build that cause division. Jesus tore down the walls that divide us. Paul makes this point in the Book of Galatians. Paul says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>86</sup>

McLaren strives to remind believers of this.

In *A New Kind of Christian* (2001), the first book in the trilogy, McLaren begins to sketch the framework of his theology. Here he talks about our tendency to create division. For example, in a conversation between two characters in the story, Neo and Dan, Neo tells Dan that "the need to put everything into nice neat categories is part of the problem. Modern people believed that they could create a nice framework that would pigeonhole everything."<sup>87</sup> McLaren argues that we need to deconstruct such thinking. In the second book of the trilogy, *The Story We Find Ourselves In* (2003), he suggests that dividing the world into two categories – the natural and the supernatural – is not, perhaps, how God intended for us to view the world. These are human constructions, "modern constructions, arising out of our Western intellectual history."<sup>88</sup> Again, McLaren is probing deeper. He is challenging us to see the universe from a different perspective arguing that Christians bought into the ideas of modernity, adopting the "mechanistic model of the universe right along with the scientists," a very narrow view that limits God.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Brian McLaren. 2007. *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 4.

<sup>86</sup> Galatians 3:28, NIV.

<sup>87</sup> Brian McLaren. 2001. *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 47.

<sup>88</sup> Brian McLaren. 2003. *The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 48.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

McLaren suggests there are two dimensions to salvation: 1) eternal and 2) historic. The biblical view includes not only “saving one’s soul from hell” but also “saving the human race and the planet from destruction.”<sup>90</sup> In this work, we see McLaren wrestling with how this works theologically. He seems to think a key component working it out has to do with our idea of the church and the kingdom and their relation to one another. They are not, McLaren argues, one and the same, nor are they completely separate. The church represents a small part in God’s kingdom; it exists “to be a catalyst for the kingdom.”<sup>91</sup> The kingdom “represents God’s work in the world at large – God’s concern for the environment, God’s work with people of other religions, God’s identification with the poor and oppressed, God’s dispensing of artistic gifts so that artists can express beauty and glory and truth...”<sup>92</sup>

In the last book of the trilogy, *The Last Word and the Word After That* (2005), McLaren continues to discuss this more holistic view of salvation and thus his new kind of Christianity. “Should the purpose of Christianity be reduced to this: to increase the population of heaven and decrease the crowdedness of hell?”<sup>93</sup> Our view of hell, according to McLaren, depends upon what we believe about God. Do I view God as a loving father that teaches, guides, and disciplines his children or one that tortures children? McLaren does not pretend to have all the answers concerning hell nor does he think we ought to seek to solve the mysteries of the doctrine of hell. Hell is not, according to McLaren, “intended to provide literal or detailed fortunetelling...nor is it intended to satisfy intellectual curiosity, but rather it is intended to motivate us in the here and now to realize our ultimate accountability to a God of mercy and

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<sup>90</sup> McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, 83.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>93</sup> Brian McLaren. 2005 *The Last Word and the Word After That: A Tale of Faith, Doubt, and A New Kind of Christianity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 8.

justice and in that light to rethink everything and to seek first the kingdom and justice of God.”<sup>94</sup>

McLaren urges Christians to actively engage in this world, to see where God is working and join Him, and to be a part of God’s redemptive work on earth.

According to McLaren, Christians have missed the mark, perhaps *the* key element in understanding Jesus. The conventional view is dualistic and hinders Christians from actively engaging in the concern of this world. We accept the gospel to avoid the death sentence of eternal punishment. However, this conventional view of salvation primarily focuses on the individual and the afterlife. McLaren suggests a more biblical view of salvation includes restoration for all creation. In the last book of his trilogy, McLaren continues to discuss salvation in a holistic sense. “Should the purpose of Christianity be reduced to this: to increase the population of heaven and decrease the crowdedness of hell?”<sup>95</sup> The biblical view includes not only “saving one’s soul from hell” but also “saving the human race and the planet from destruction.”<sup>96</sup>

McLaren’s view of salvation parallels scholar George Eldon Ladd. Salvation, according to Ladd, is to be understood from a Hebraic perspective, not Greek. Before delving more deeply into our discussion about the differences between Greek thought and Hebrew thought, it is necessary to draw conclusions from our analysis of McLaren’s philosophy. Ladd explains salvation in this way:

Salvation is achieved not by a flight from the world but by God’s coming to man in his earthly, historical experience. Salvation never means flight from the world to God; it means, in effect, God’s descent from heaven to bring man in historical experience into fellowship with himself...it does not mean the gathering of the souls of the righteous in

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>95</sup> Brian McLaren. 2005. *The Last Word and the Word After That: A Tale of Faith, Doubt, and A New Kind of Christianity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 8.

<sup>96</sup> McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, 83.

heaven, but the gathering of a redeemed people on a redeemed earth in perfected fellowship with God.<sup>97</sup>

McLaren humbly approaches theology in a new way. He focuses on hope, social justice, and action; he desires for Christians to take the hope of Christianity to everyone; he envisions a more holistic view of salvation and allows room for the mysteries of God; he suggests we stop building walls that cause division; and he recognizes the weaknesses of Christianity's past history but suggests that we take the good from the traditions of the past era and move forward together – seeking, grappling, and growing in community with one another. McLaren invites us to be a part of a bigger story, a story of ongoing creation and redemption. He presents a new kind of eschatology: one of hope, anticipation, and participation. He suggests that this view of the future “will produce vision and motivation to help us participate in the creation of a better future for ourselves and for the world, in this life and history and in the glorious mystery beyond.”<sup>98</sup>

Herman Dooyeweerd, James Skillen, Paul Marshall, and Brian McLaren strive to rid Christianity of Greek dualism. These thinkers seek to eliminate the spiritual-secular divide that has plagued Christianity from the beginning. The task, however, is an arduous one. There is another side. Unfortunately, some scholars continue to present ideas about Christian which are rooted in Greek philosophy. In the next chapter, we will explore some contemporary examples of Christian thought that are rooted in Greek dualism.

Just as passionately as Dooyeweerd, Skillen, Marshall, and McLaren speak out against mixing faith and Greek philosophy, other scholars present ideas about Christian thought that are firmly grounded in Greek dualism. In the next chapter, we will explore some contemporary examples of Christian thought in the tradition of Greek dualism.

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<sup>97</sup> George Eldon Ladd. 1968. *The Pattern of New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 14.

<sup>98</sup> McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith*, 206.

## Chapter 4 Contemporary Examples

Though perhaps a bit masked, arguments about how one should approach faith are often rooted in the longstanding debate concerning the relationship between Greek philosophy and Christianity. In other words, one side of the argument is often approaching Christianity, in some form, with Greek eyes. When we look below the surface and consider the tradition out of which an idea stems, this becomes evident. In this chapter, I shall present contemporary examples of Christian thought that are in the tradition of dualism. Our discussion will focus on critiques of Rob Bell's heaven, Rick Warren's distinction between our mission and our vocation, and David VanDrunen's two-kingdom alternative.

First, a brief look at critiques of Rob Bell's view of heaven. Bell's view of heaven differs from the traditional view of heaven. Heaven, from a traditionalist perspective, contains elements of Greek dualism. Bell paints a vivid picture of this view by telling readers about a work of art he remembers hanging in his grandmother's house. In the center of the picture is a cross, suspended in air, which provides a pathway to heaven. People are walking across the bridge, the cross, to get to the other side. They are trying to get somewhere, somewhere other than where they are. The point of life is to get to the next realm. Sadly, Bell says, the story depicted in the painting reflects how many Christians perceive heaven. Bell explains it in this way:

It's a story of movement, from one place to the next, from one realm to another, from death to life, with the cross as the bridge, the way, the hope. From what we can see, the people in the painting are going somewhere, somewhere they've chosen to go, and they're leaving something behind so that they can go there. But the story also tells us something else, something really, really important, something significant about location. According to the painting, all of this is happening *somewhere else*.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Rob Bell. *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. New York: HarperOne, 23.

Bell's analogy of the Christian story accurately represents a faith that blends Christianity and classical Greek philosophy. This interpretation of heaven draws heavily from Platonism; the world, being imperfect and thus significantly inferior to the invisible realm, is a place that we must escape from. Consequently, believers not only focus on the afterlife, but also place more importance on the next life thus devaluing life now. Of this view, Bell says:

Dominant cultural assumptions and misunderstandings about heaven have been at work for so long, it's almost automatic for many to think of heaven as ethereal, intangible, esoteric, and immaterial. Floaty, dreamy, hazy. *Somewhere else*. People in white robes with perfect hair floating by on clouds, singing in perfect pitch.<sup>100</sup>

For Bell, however, the goal is not to get to heaven, but rather to bring heaven here (i.e. kingdom living). Bell argues that the kingdom is breaking in now; grace through Christ's sacrifice on the cross does not mean for the next world, but transformation here and now. This position allows for God's redemptive work in the present life. What's more, when we recognize that the kingdom is already, but not yet, our perception of life here on earth changes. Bell writes:

How we think about heaven...directly affects how we understand what we do with our days and energies now, in this age. Jesus teaches us how to live now in such a way that what we create, who we give our efforts to, and how we spend our time will all endure in the new world. Taking heaven seriously, then, means taking suffering seriously, now. Now because we've bought into the myth that we can create a utopia given enough time, technology, and good voting choices, but because we have great confidence that God has not abandoned human history and is actively at work within it, taking it somewhere.<sup>101</sup>

Bell explains that "when Jesus talked about heaven, he was talking about our present *eternal, intense, real*, experiences of joy, peace, and love in this life, this side of death *and* the age to come. Heaven for Jesus wasn't just 'someday'; it was a present reality."<sup>102</sup> At the end of his discussion on the doctrine of heaven, Bells summarizes his view: "Jesus invites us, in this

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 56-7.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 44-5.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 58-9.

life, in this broken, beautiful world, to experience the life of heaven now. He insisted over and over that God's peace, joy, and love are currently available to us, exactly as we are."<sup>103</sup>

Many scholars attack Bell's interpretation of the doctrine of heaven, criticizing Bell for challenging traditional Christian views. For example, Denny Burk, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Boyce College, argues there are biblical and theological difficulties with Bell's view of heaven. He charges Bell with launching a "heterodox, unbiblical accounting of...heaven."<sup>104</sup>

Jeff Iorg, president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, says "redefining heaven and hell to explain away the reality of God's judgment contradicts clear biblical teaching affirmed by orthodox Christians for centuries...Making the Gospel more understandable in our culture is a worthy goal. Amending the Gospel to make it more palatable is not."<sup>105</sup> Iorg expresses concern that Bell is attempting to take Christianity away from its traditional views (i.e. views rooted in Greek dualism). Kevin DeYoung, Senior Pastor at University Reformed Church, also attacks Bell for moving away from "traditional Christianity."

In each of these critiques, scholars attack Bell for moving away from the traditionalist interpretation of the doctrine of heaven. Now, I am not suggesting that Bell is completely without error in his approach to Christianity; his teachings have sparked a great amount of controversy. However, in many of his views about Christianity, Bell challenges traditionally accepted doctrines.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>104</sup> Denny Burk, reviewer. 2011. "Revising Hell into the heterodox Mainstream." "Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived (Book Review)." *The Sword and the Trumpet* 79.8 (August): 19-25. <http://www.dennyburk.com/> (accessed February 27, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> Foust, Michael, reviewer. 2011. "Rob Bell book 'Love Wins' stirs controversy, denies core Christian beliefs." "Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived (Book Review)." *Baptist Press* (March 15). <http://www.bpnews.net/> (accessed February 27, 2012).

The next example of contemporary Christian thought that demonstrates ideas grounded in Greek philosophical thought comes from Pastor Rick Warren, one of America's prominent church leaders. Warren's distinction between our mission our vocation, though rather subtle, has roots in Greek dualism. In *Purpose Driven Life* (2002), Warren argues there is a dichotomy between our mission, which has eternal significance and relates to the spiritual sphere, and our vocation, which is temporary and relates to the realm of matter. Warren writes:

Your mission has eternal significance. It will impact the eternal destiny of other people, so it's more important than any job, achievement, or goal you will reach during your life on earth. The consequences of your mission will last forever; the consequences of your job will not. Nothing else you do will ever matter as much as helping people establish an eternal relationship with God. This is why we must be urgent about our mission...the clock is ticking down on your life mission, so don't delay another day. Get started on your mission of reaching out to others now! We will have all of eternity to celebrate with those we have brought to Jesus, but we only have our lifetime in which to reach them.<sup>106</sup>

Warren pits the material against the spiritual. Ordinary everyday life is significantly downplayed, a result of the influence of Greek philosophical thought.

The last contemporary example of dualistic Christian thought In *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* (2010), VanDrunen suggests a two-kingdom approach to faith. VanDrunen embraces Augustine's heritage and attempts to develop it further. VanDrunen asserts he is not out to defend every two-kingdom approach that exists. Instead, he argues that his approach does not fit into dualistic stereotypes, whether warranted or unwarranted, but rather his vision is grounded in Scripture. VanDrunen writes:

Though many writers in recent years have ignored, mischaracterized, or slandered the idea of "two-kingdoms," it has a venerable place in the annals of Christian theology. It stands in the line of Christian thinking famously articulated by Augustine in *The City of God*...<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Rick Warren. 2002. *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here for?* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 284.

<sup>107</sup> David VanDrunen. 2010. *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture.* Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 13-14.

VanDrunen stresses that his two-kingdom approach embraces the ideas of Augustine. His two-kingdom alternative, however, is rooted in Greek dualism. VanDrunen argues that Christian leaders such as Augustine “made very clear that the Christian’s cultural activities have to be carefully distinguished from the coming of the kingdom and the hope of the new creation.”<sup>108</sup>

VanDrunen explains his approach in this way:

Scripture requires a high view of creation and of cultural activity, but it also requires a distinction between the holy things of Christ’s heavenly kingdom and the common things of the present world. It requires a distinction between God’s providential sustaining of human culture for the whole of the human race and his glorious redemption of a chosen people that he has gathered into a church now and will gather into the new creation for eternity. Some people indeed fall into unwarranted “dualisms,” but dualism-phobia must not override our ability to make clear and necessary *distinctions*. Some people indeed are guilty of promoting a godless and amoral “secular” realm, but the fear of a godless secularism should not eliminate our ability to speak of a *divinely-ordained common* kingdom that is legitimate but not holy. The two-kingdoms doctrine enables us to affirm the goodness of creation and culture without losing sight of crucial distinctions.<sup>109</sup>

VanDrunen attempts to sway readers into believing that his interpretation of Scripture is not dualistic. Not surprisingly, he disguises dualism by changing the terminology in several ways: 1) he uses the term “distinctions” rather than “dualism” 2) he replaces the term “sacred” with the phrase “Holy things of Christ’s heavenly kingdom” and 3) he replaces the term “secular” with the phrase “common things of present world.” VanDrunen simply changes the language. Readers must be careful as to not be deceived by VanDrunen’s jargon; he is interpreting Scripture through Greek lenses.

Elsewhere, VanDrunen discusses what the Christian perspective should be concerning the common kingdom. Consistent with the physical dichotomy underlying Greek dualism, VanDrunen devalues life on earth. He claims the New Testament calls for Christians to detach themselves from the things of this world. He says:

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 26-7.

The New Testament calls us to engage in cultural activities with deep sense of detachment from this world and of longing for our true home in the world-to-come. Our cultural engagement is important, but it is not *that* important. In comparison to “the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18) our cultural labors – with their temporary successes and failures, their joys and disappointments – can only seem fleeting. What are the treasures of this life in comparison with the “treasures of heaven” (Matt. 6:20; see vv. 19-20) and with the life “which is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:19)?...Even honorable activities of human culture such as marriage and commerce are of modest importance in relation to eternity...This sense of detachment from the present world and longing for the world-to-come is the attitude that the New Testament impresses upon Christians. It is the attitude appropriate for sojourners and exiles.<sup>110</sup>

Like Plato, VanDrunen’s view of salvation is vertical. In Platonic Christianity, the destiny for Christians is upward in heaven; a person attains salvation and then eagerly waits to leave earth to get to his or her real home. Christians, according to this view, are saved *from* this world rather than as a part of this world. Thus, daily life on earth is of little importance compared to the afterlife. VanDrunen encourages believers to recognize the goodness of creation, but, at the same time, urges believers not to lose sight of crucial distinctions. He hopes to free Christians from “well-meaning but nonbiblical pressure from other Christians to “transform” your workplace or to find uniquely “Christian” ways of doing ordinary tasks.”<sup>111</sup>

Unfortunately, VanDrunen’s approach falls short of a biblical approach. God’s love is transformative here and now. Believers ought to perceive and perform ordinary tasks for the kingdom of God. VanDrunen’s two-kingdom approach to Christianity limits the scope of the God’s kingdom.

Christ’s message of reconciliation, redemption, and restoration is as wide as creation. At this point, it is noteworthy to mention, once again, the passage from the Book of Colossians.

These verses emphasize that redemption is for *all things*:

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things of heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 27.

thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:15-20

Unlike VanDrunen's view of salvation, the following commentary expounds on this passage from Colossians, suggesting that believers ought to work to transform the structures of this world:

Since Christ is the one at work in creation as well as in redemption, then the created world is immeasurably enhanced, not relegated to some inferior status by the work of reconciliation. Salvation is not rescue from a totally evil world but the claiming of the rightful possession of this world by the one who was an agent in its creation. The scope of salvation is as broad as life and as vast as the cosmos.

The effect of such a belief should be to make redeemed humans more fully human. It should enable them to appreciate the creation and to work to transform the structures of this world rather than to produce a private piety or spirituality that attempts to cut itself off from the body, ignores the natural environment, and disdains culture. If reconciliation of all things in Christ is at the center of God's purposes, then the pursuit of peace and acts of reconciliation by Christians serve those purposes. Working for a fair distribution of the world's resources, being concerned for animal welfare, and struggling to prevent the collapse of the ecosystem through the pollution of air, soil, and water have everything to do with this passage's celebration of cosmic reconciliation.<sup>112</sup>

To summarize, Greek dualism continues to present itself in contemporary Christian thought as evident in the ideas of David VanDrunen, Rick Warren, and in those scholars who critique Rob Bell's ideas about heaven. VanDrunen and Warren approach Christianity in a way that constitutes an admixture of Classic Greek philosophy and Christianity.

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<sup>112</sup> *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for each book of the Bible including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in Twelve Volumes, Volume XI, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon.* 2000. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 610.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Analysis, Assessment, and Alternate Vision**

For centuries, Greek dualism has tragically impacted faith. For the Greeks, the material world was basically evil and the human body was burden to the soul thus promoting a world-flight legacy evident in the works of Plato. In the Old Testament, Hebrews viewed God as the creator of the world, one world, and thus in and of itself the world is good. Evil is not found in the world of matter, the material, but rather in human sin, in our rebellion against God. Plato's view of reality, however, "propelled one basic impulse in Christianity, to look beyond the immediate and everyday to the universal or ultimate."<sup>113</sup> The goal of life, for Plato, was to die, to rid the soul of the imperfection body and of the material world altogether. In Platonic Christianity, Plato's world of the Forms becomes the sacred realm and the world of matter becomes the secular world. Likewise, the secular world is less valuable than the sacred world.

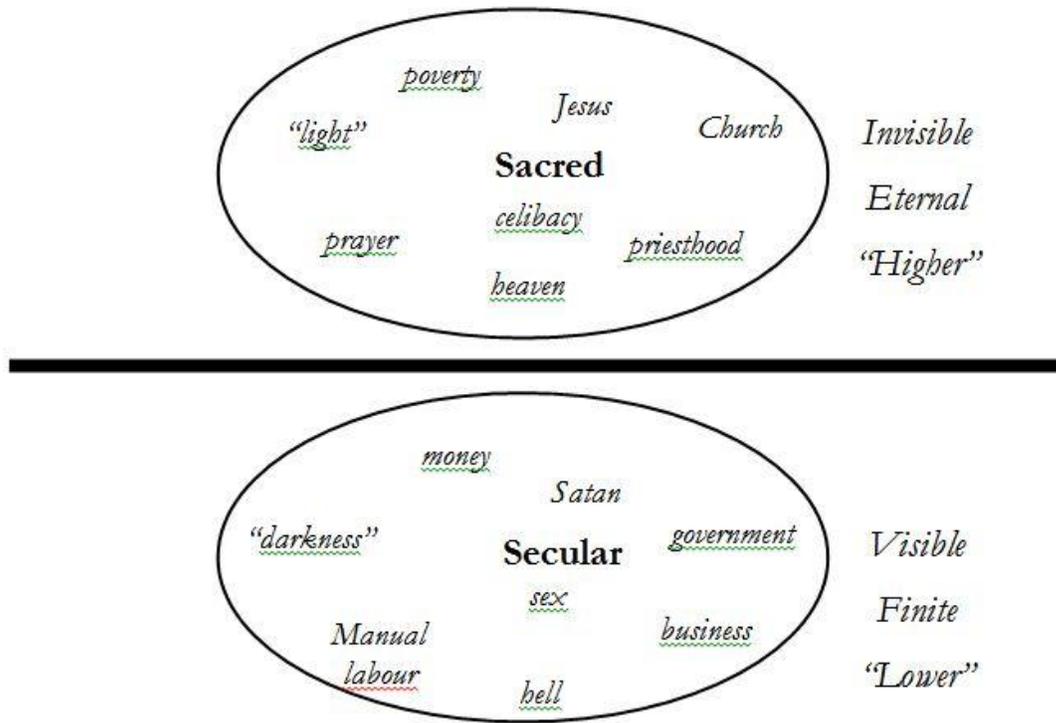
At the end of chapter one, I posed this question: Does Plato's metaphysical dualism, in any way, shape the way in which Christians view different disciplines in higher education? Consider, for example, the field of discipline a college student chooses. When we approach Christianity with Greek eyes, the student who chooses to study ministry chooses a profession relating to the sacred or spiritual realm, the superior realm, the discipline that will please God. Likewise, the student, who, on the other hand, chooses political science, chooses to study a field that relates to the secular realm, the world filled with evil and corruption and thus is not as pleasing to God.

Separating life into different spheres, however, leads us away from a biblical view of faith and, by extension, life in general. Sadly, we have learned to separate God's kingdom and all that is in it: the universe, man, and family and religion from business, government, and

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<sup>113</sup> MacCulloch. *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, 31.

economics (i.e. private vs. public). Furthermore, and even more unfortunate, in dividing reality, we deem one part or world more superior than the other. Pastor Jeff Strong offers a noteworthy illustration of dualistic Christianity:



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In the diagram above, Plato’s invisible intelligible world turns into the invisible spiritual world. Plato’s invisible world consists of reason, truth, and knowledge. Ultimate truth is found in ideas. And a life of contemplation leads to eternity spent in the world of the Forms. Salvation, according to Plato, comes through knowledge. The visible world, where reality is perceived through the senses, hinders the soul’s attunement to the invisible realm. Therefore the material world is considered the “lower” of the two worlds. Christianity modifies Plato’s divided line. The spiritual realm consists of Christ, Church, heaven, ministry, and poverty. True knowledge

<sup>114</sup> Jeff Strong. 2011. “Transforming the Vision (Part Three),” Mere Disciple, (June 30). <http://mredisciple.com/> (accessed April 18, 2012).

comes from God's revelation. And salvation comes through Christ, not intellect. The material world consists of evil, money, power, greed, sex, government and things of this sort. Thus, it becomes more important to fix our minds on "spiritual" (e.g. heaven) things rather than problems in this world.

Unlike the Greek view of the world, fundamental to Hebrew thought is the belief that the world is good. Since God is the creator and the world is God's creation, it is good. Scripture supports the idea that creation, the earth and all that is in it (i.e. including humans), is good. The account of creation is found in Genesis. Repeatedly, those things which God created, the heavens and the earth, light, sky, water, land, seas, sun, moon, stars, animals, and man and woman, are said to be good. "And God saw that it was good."<sup>115</sup> The Creator evaluates his work. This phrase is repeated seven times and the seventh time is particularly noteworthy: "God saw all that he had made, and it was *very* good."<sup>116</sup>

In comparing Greek thought with biblical thought, we have established that these worldviews are drastically different worldviews. Greek philosophical thought, as revealed in the works of Plato, is rooted in cosmological and anthropological dualism. Platonism separates the universe into two worlds, the visible and the invisible; humans and the things of the earth are merely copies of transcendent ideas, which are absolute and eternal and therefore good. The invisible realm is superior and ought to be the highest priority. The physical world is a shadow of the real world, the world of the Forms. This dualistic view of the cosmos leads to a dualistic view of man whereby man is basically evil and a hindrance to the soul. Greek philosophy separates God from his creation, splits the universe into two opposing worlds, and divides the soul from the body.

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<sup>115</sup> Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 17, 21, 24, 31, NIV.

<sup>116</sup> Genesis 1:31, my emphasis added.

So, what is the biblical alternative to Greek dualism? Scripture teaches that God is not only the Creator, but also that the Creator interacts with his creation. God’s act of creating was not a one-time interaction. “The Word became flesh.” God became one of us; the fullness of God came to earth in the body of Jesus. Jesus’ earthly life set forth an example of how human life is supposed to be lived – loving others, serving others, and submitting to the Father’s will. In the life of Christ, God interacted with his creation. God becoming human (i.e. matter) also affirmed the goodness and value of man. Indeed, the fall affected all of creation, but, just the same, Christ’s saving grace also impacted all of creation. Christ is the reconciler of all things. And man is invited to join God in his redemptive work on earth.

Christian scholar Albert Wolters reminds believers that “we have been entrusted with the ‘ministry of reconciliation.’”<sup>117</sup> Therefore, no matter where our vocation leads us, we have a redemptive task. Wolters explains:

No invisible dividing line within creation limits the applicability of such basic biblical concepts as reconciliation, redemption, salvation, sanctification, renewal, the kingdom of God, and so on. In the name of Christ, distortion must be opposed *everywhere* – in the kitchen and the bedroom, in city councils and corporate boardrooms, on the stage and on the air, in the classroom and in the workshop. Everywhere creation calls for the honoring of God’s standards. Everywhere humanity’s sinfulness disrupts and deforms. Everywhere Christ’s victory is pregnant with the defeat of sin and the recovery of creation.<sup>118</sup>

Wolters argues that a biblical approach to the doctrine of salvation means that salvation is creation-wide. Wolters explains it in this way:

Salvation is “re-creation” – not to imply that God scraps his earlier creation and in Jesus Christ makes a new one, but rather to suggest that he hangs on to his fallen original creation and *salvages* it. He refuses to abandon the work of his hands – in fact he sacrifices his own Son to save his original project. Humankind, which has botched its original mandate and the whole creation along with it, is given another change in Christ; we are reinstated as God’s managers on earth. The original good creation is to be restored.

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<sup>117</sup> Albert M. Wolters. 2005. *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 73.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

The practical implications of that intention are legion. Marriage should not be avoided by Christians, but sanctified. Emotions should not be repressed, but purified. Sexuality is not simply to be shunned, but redeemed. Politics should not be declared off-limits, but reformed. Art ought not to be pronounced worldly, but claimed for Christ. Business must no longer be relegated to the secular world, but must be made to conform again to God-honoring standards.<sup>119</sup>

Bishop N.T. Wright also speaks of redemption in a creation-wide sense. However, instead of focusing on specific areas of life on earth – professions, emotions, and institutions, as Wolters does, Wright emphasizes *cosmic* redemption. Wright points out that God’s redemption includes the redeeming of time and space. Wright explains:

Creation is to be redeemed; that is, space is to be redeemed, time is to be redeemed, and matter is to be redeemed. God said “very good” over his space-time-and-matter creation, and though the redeeming of this world from its present corruption and decay will mean transformations we cannot imagine, the one thing we can be sure of is that this redeeming of creation will not mean that God will say, of space, time and matter, “Oh, well, nice try, good while it lasted but obviously gone bad, so let’s drop it and go for a nonspatiotemporal, non-material world instead.”<sup>120</sup>

Christ’s restoration is also a process in which God is a part of each stage of that process. Restoration is a developmental process and God is present and at work in all stages of the restorative process of all of creation. Albert Wolters makes this point. He says:

Salvation in Jesus Christ, conceived in the broad creational sense, means a restoration of culture and society in their present stage of development. That restoration will not necessarily oppose literacy or urbanization or industrialization or the internal combustion engine, although these historical developments have led to their own distortions or evils. Instead, the coming of the kingdom of God demands that these developments be reformed, that they be made answerable to their creational structure, and that they be subjected to the ordinances of the Creator.

Biblical religion is historically progressive, not reactionary. It views the whole course of history as a movement from a garden to a city, and it fundamentally affirms that movement. Once again, the kingdom of God claims *all* of creation, not only in all its departments, but also in all its stages of development.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 70-1.

<sup>120</sup> Randy Alcorn. 2012. *Eternal Perspectives: A Collection of Quotations on Heaven, the New Earth, and Life after Death*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 485.

<sup>121</sup> Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 77-8.

Both Wright and Wolters attempt to break down the tendency among Christians to restrict the scope of the kingdom. When believers divide the world into sacred and secular realms, they are restricting the kingdom of God. Furthermore, in distinguishing between sacred and secular realms, Christians tend to place a higher value on those things which are considered spiritual. Consequently, the physical world is devalued. When this happens, issues such as caring for the planet become inconsequential. Instead of viewing the environment through the corrective lens of Scripture, Christians adopt a Platonic view of the material world.

## Conclusion

This study clearly demonstrates the tragic impact of Greek philosophical thought on Christian thought; mixing these two very different modes of thought undermines a biblical approach to Christianity. Furthermore, creating a synthesis between Greek philosophy and Christianity taints both modes of thought. Remember the analogy about the glass of milk and the vomit from the introduction? Neither one is left in its pure form when you mix them together.

Greek dualism adulterates genuine Christian faith. In Platonic Christianity, believers place their spiritual life in a private sphere, separate from public life, rather than integrating their faith with all aspects of life. In this dualistic mindset, biblical faith is understood to be private; we divide God's universe into two kingdoms; we devalue the physical world – ordinary life, the earth, and humanity; and we reduce the doctrine of salvation to a ticket out of hell and an escape from this evil world. Is this the point of Christ's teachings in the New Testament – to devalue life on earth? Perhaps a more biblical view of salvation means that humans begin living, truly living in the sense that God meant, once they become believers. Why? Because the point of salvation is realizing the saving grace of Christ and once this happens we ought to begin viewing the world through the lens of Scripture, allowing Scripture to shape us and our worldviews.

As my study shows, the physical dichotomy in Greek dualism is not consistent with the teachings of Scripture. God created humans to live in the context of His creation. Christians need not seek to escape this world, but rather look forward to the renewal of all of creation. Furthermore, God desires for us to be part of his redemptive work on earth, to engage in life on earth, and to allow Him to transform our hearts and minds, to view our faith as something that penetrates every aspect of our lives.

Against Greek dualism, Scripture teaches that the physical world is not inherently evil, nor is it without value. To be sure, there is bad in the world, which stems from our rebellious hearts, but the world in and of itself is not bad. The account of creation in the Book of Genesis and God assuming human life affirms the goodness of the physical world and humanity. From this assessment, we find that the Greek worldview and the biblical worldview stand in antithesis to one another. Underlying Greek philosophical thought is dualism, a physical dichotomy; underlying Christian thought is the grand narrative of Scripture –Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation.

Given the drastically different foundations of these two modes of thought, should believers, then, avoid studying classic Greek philosophy? Have we nothing to learn from philosophers such as Plato? On the contrary, escapism is only one aspect of Plato's legacy, albeit the more influential part as far as the Church is concerned, but nevertheless it is only part. The other part of Plato's legacy is scholarship. Now, lacking the light of Scripture, Plato's purpose for constantly grappling and seeking to understand things more deeply was *not* to wrestle with troubling issues such as genocide, hunger, and environmental degradation. Cultivating the mind and controlling the body, according to Plato, attuned the soul to the Forms – the invisible realm. Herein lies his error; Plato lacked the corrective lens of Scripture in which to view both the mind and the body and, ultimately, the world as a whole.

I am suggesting that Christians allow Scripture to shape their minds and their hearts, their worldviews and their perspectives. Many believers, whether consciously or unconsciously, view Christianity through Greek eyes. For example, the vertical view of salvation which aims to escape this world is of Plato, not Scripture. The devaluation of physical things – the body, earth, etc. – stems from Platonism, not Scripture. Platonic Christianity distinguishes between sacred

and secular realms of the cosmos. The authority behind Greek philosophy is knowledge (i.e. the mind, the intellect). The authority behind Christianity is Christ. Mixing Greek philosophy with Christianity distorts Christian faith.

My hope is that this study contributes to the conversation surrounding this topic. Christian theology is often incorrectly interpreted through Platonic metaphysics. I hope this thesis prompts readers to reflect upon their approach to Christianity. The way in which we view the world and faith shapes the way we live, the way we interact with God, man, and nature. My aim throughout this study has been to encourage readers to approach Christianity biblically, seeking to live in the world but under the Word.

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