

Chapter Six

GREEK PHILOSOPHY IN THE CHURCH

How Did Plato Displace God?

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

We in the United States may speak English, but we think “Greek.” Competition, “personal best,” mind over matter, rationalism and reasoning rather than a trusting faith, the “higher ground” of the spiritual—these ideas came from the Greek/Hellenistic civilization. This influence has permeated western culture for so long that it is like our breath: because of our lifelong familiarity with it, we don’t smell it. The Bible, however, was written to reflect Hebraic thought. Loss of the Hebraic understanding of the Scriptures has significantly diminished our ability to understand God and relate to Him.

The basis for humanism, which is increasingly influencing the church today, is found in the Greek philosophical spirit. The common thread for both belief systems requires man, not God, to be the measure of all things. Greek philosophy and humanism place man as the ultimate evaluator of everything. The outgrowth of this view is that there are no God-given standards. Everything changes and evolves. Ethics and morality are based upon the whims of man, not on the holy will of God.

Western societies have been inundated by the philosophies and culture of the ancient Greeks, particularly by that of Plato. The Greek influence has severely limited the scope of believers with respect to God as revealed in His Word and has diminished our capacity to apply biblical truths to our vital relationships: God, marriage, family, friendships.

As the ranks of the early Church swelled in number, the impact of its Hebraic roots shriveled. Believers became increasingly vulnerable to a wide array of destructive influences and philosophies. Roman military might had brought with it an admirable road system and a relatively speedy communications network. The Gospel message that had permeated Jerusalem could easily and safely flow outward to the Gentile nations of the world. Unfortunately, the purity and power of that message were altered by the dominant cultural influence of the time, Greek philosophy. The early centuries following the two Jewish revolts of AD 70 and AD 135 saw a Greek, man-centered worldview begin to reshape the church. Let’s examine how the various aspects of Greek religious thought came about and how they have affected the church.

Many centuries before Christ's advent, the Greeks had been known for their wide array of mythological deities who seemed beset by the same personality quirks and behavioral foibles as mankind. Followers of these gods feared their superhuman capabilities and presented offerings and worship to avoid personal calamity and retribution. By the seventh century BC, philosopher-mathematician Thales tried to dissuade the educated populace from such fables. Guided by the natural senses and by reason, Thales argued, all of nature could be understood through scientific observation and measurement. Nature was the life source of energy that controlled all of earth's activities. Nature alone was responsible for what could be experienced and examined. Supernatural deities had nothing to do with it. (The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century followed the same line of reasoning. Scholars at that time denied any divine intervention into life. Rather, they elevated rationalism and science as man's guiding power. The Humanist Manifesto that so controls American education today reflects this ancient Thalian fallacy.)

The difficulty in Thales's approach was this: If reason were the determinant for truth, *whose* reason was to be followed? The philosophical chaos that ensued led to the Sophist rationale of the fifth century BC. Since the Greeks had no sacred texts from which to derive absolute standards, truth was therefore relative. Thus, maintained the Sophists, people should seek to be all they could be in the here and now. (Isn't this the goal of contemporary culture in the United States?) Knowledge was beneficial only insofar as it benefited the individual, *i.e.*, "What will I get out of this?"

Needless to say, the civic authorities were not thrilled with this thinking. What would happen to the collective society if everyone did his own thing? Out of this argument emerged Socrates. There must be absolutes of good, of justice, of virtue, he insisted. Once the mind is trained to seek these standards, then man can, through rationalization, develop his own reasons and means to attain these ideals. (Keep in mind the foundation for this reasoning, that man is basically good. The Bible teaches that man, with his sin nature, is bent on evil when left to his own devices.)¹

Socrates's disciple Plato recognized the limitations of each man's ability to discern what goodness and justice really were. Turning instead to the concept of *dualism*, he postulated that life was divided into two components, the transcendent arena of eternal truths and the temporal realm of the physical.² The former was an ideal, higher than could be realistically achieved, but a worthy goal to aim for. The earthly concerns of the temporal, such as food, shelter, and vocation, were vulgar and common but unfortunately necessary for existence. This viewpoint was in juxtaposition to the Hebraic view of man created in God's image for relationship with Him both on earth and in eternity.³ God had called the physical body "good"; joined with the spirit, it defined "man". God placed such great value on His physical creation because it testified to His greatness: "*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse*" (Romans 1:20).

Plato's dualism entered the church through the writings of the Church Fathers, a number of whom were Greek philosophers who had converted to Christianity. They attempted through their writings to reconcile Platonic thought with Christianity. The dual-

ist concept brought about the myriad of church rituals wherein one had to sanctify, or make holy by prayer, that which God had already created and declared to be good. For instance, no longer could a group of believers simply share in the breaking of bread and passing of the wine cup as the early Church had enjoyed. Dualism viewed bread and wine as too “earthly” to be the body and blood of Jesus; the physical elements had to be spiritualized.

As noted earlier, at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 bread and wine were declared to become the body and blood of Christ through transubstantiation in order to represent the “sanctity” of God. Only the priests, those who had separated themselves from the world’s defilement, could carry out this consecration. Transubstantiation added to the host of sacramental controls that only the clergy could conduct on behalf of the congregants. The system of clergy control through sacraments would keep worshipers enslaved for centuries.

Hebraic people would never have considered what dualistically influenced Christians regularly do: Ask a blessing on their food, or “on the hands that made it.” If God has made what is to be eaten and has provided it for our benefit, it must be good! Hebraic prayer focused only on blessing God, the Creator and Provider of all our needs: *“Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth and fruit from the vine.”* He alone is worthy of thanksgiving and praise.

By relying unquestioningly on centuries of revisionist writings and by failing to appreciate the Scriptures, today’s Christian colleges and seminaries have remained gripped by the Greek influence. The result has perpetuated a Platonic philosophical approach to the Scriptures. Plato’s dualism can be seen in the seminarian pursuit of a “spiritual calling”. Seminaries infer or teach that those who choose to engage in a full-time ministry as an occupation are somehow more worthy than those in secular vocations.

Because of Plato’s influence, the Greek culture viewed manual labor as degrading. The Hebraic culture, conversely, recognized the worth of a manual trade, remembering that before the Fall, Adam and Eve had been given a vocation in the Garden.⁴ Even rabbis were expected to participate in a trade: Jesus was carpenter; Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla were tentmakers; noted Jewish teachers Hillel and Shammai were woodcutter and carpenter, respectively. Heed the Hebraic encouragement of A.W. Tozer in his classic, *The Pursuit of God*:

The ‘layman’ need never think of his humbler task as being inferior to that of his minister. Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called and his work will be as sacred as the work of the ministry. It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is why he does it. The motive is everything. Let a man sanctify the Lord God in his heart and he can thereafter do no common act. All he does is good and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For such a man, living itself will be sacramental and the whole world a sanctuary. His entire life will be a priestly ministration.⁵

Greek philosophical thought has impacted those seminary teachers who depend on Greek reasoning skills rather than on faith and divine revelation. Ed Silvano, one of the leaders of the current revival in Argentina, states in his videotape series, *“How To Reach*

Our Cities for Christ,” that the introduction of the G.I. Bill following World War II has significantly reduced the power of God in the church in the United States today. As seminaries scrambled for federal money, they introduced to their curricula Greek-inspired courses of study: psychology, sociology, and philosophy.⁶ Many seminaries have replaced God’s power with man’s wisdom, disregarding Paul’s warning to the Greek Corinthians: “Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks that he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a ‘fool’ so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight” (1 Corinthians 3:18,19).

Silvoso bemoans the problem many new believers encounter when they read about the miracles of God in the Bible and wonder why they don’t see them now. For instance, a young believer rushes into the church office: “Pastor! See what the disciples were doing in Jesus’s time? It says here that He gave us the power to do these things too!” “Just a minute,” patronizingly intones the pastor. “Let me explain a few things.” And by the time he explains the Scriptures, they don’t say anything like what they were written to say!⁷

The Greek reasoning in our seminaries has produced patented answers for why God has changed and isn’t in the business of doing miracles through His people any longer. Because of this incongruity, we in the churches often find ourselves in the confusing situation of trying to comprehend a Jewish Book taught by teachers who rely on Plato and other Greek philosophers—ideologies that nullify faith in the miraculous. The resultant pattern of teaching deals with biblical truth as *theoretical* and *conceptual* rather than as realistic and applicable.

**“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!
You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces.
You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.
‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!
You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and
when he becomes one, you make him twice as much
a son of hell as you are’” (Matthew 23:13,14).**

Church Fathers such as Origen, Justin, and Clement had been powerfully swayed by Hellenistic thought. Converts to Christianity, their combined influence fashioned a new theology based on the philosophy of Plato. Their emphasis on *pietism*, withdrawing from worldly concerns in order to focus on spiritual matters, was passed along for centuries within the church. Personal withdrawal contradicted community participation that exemplified the Hebraic outworking of faith.

Justin Martyr, mentioned earlier concerning his anti-Semitic writings, reflected a dualistic worldview of the body imprisoning the soul. This approach enjoyed wide appeal among second century Greeks. The great learning center of Alexandria, Egypt drew many, including Clement, who did not hesitate to draw upon unbiblical sources to formulate his own mix of Christian and Hellenistic thought.

Origen, Clement’s best-known pupil, was called “the father of Christian theology.” Origen had been enveloped by Hellenistic teaching that regarded the flesh as evil and

the spirit as good. Note a key Hellenistic tenet recorded by theologian Kenneth Scott Latourette: “The goal of every man’s striving must be salvation by the emancipation of the spirit from the contamination of the flesh.”⁸

As Origen studied the New Testament, he found that he could allegorize the Old Testament away from its historical, “earthy” perspective. The truths that God had revealed to His people Israel could instead become a *type* of the truths that would be shared in the New Testament with those not exposed to the Law. The promises made by God to Israel could then be transferred to the Church as Christ was “read” into each text. The biblical curses became the due legacy of the Jews. Such interpretation nullified God’s focus on the Jewish people as His precious and chosen people. Only that which could be carried forward into the “Christian” realm of New Testament thought would have validity. Eager theological students from all over flocked to Alexandria to be impregnated with these teachings, which they then propagated throughout the known world.

***“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will
abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits
and things taught by demons”*** (1 Timothy 4:1).

Because of God’s words at creation, “*It is good,*” the Hebraic people viewed the world as a desirable entity. Even though sin had come into the world, the universe had been created by a God who had humanity’s best interests at heart. The Hebraic people followed no dualistic dichotomy. Many of the extremes of self-denial and discipline that later entered the church were based upon the Greek polarity of the physical and the spiritual. Ascetics hoped that by vigorously subduing the flesh, they could free themselves from the evil they perceived in the physical realm and draw closer to spiritual perfection.

Paul rejected the ascetic attitude of his day: “*Do not handle, do not taste! Do not touch! These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence*” (Colossians 2:21-23). Nevertheless this attitude became deeply embedded in the history of the church. The observance of Lent became a period of denying oneself earthly pleasures in order to identify with the suffering of Christ. The love that had motivated Christ to sacrifice Himself for mankind was lost, however, on those who displayed great pietistic zeal outwardly but failed to demonstrate love for their neighbor.

How could believers so willingly stray from the truth as it had been presented in the Word? Initially, the majority of Christians opposed Origen’s teachings. The Alexandrian system of allegory that explained away the context and content of the Word arose out of the need to integrate Greek philosophy with the biblical text. These writings were venerated as highly as the Scriptures; therefore no pressure was exerted to stay true to the meaning intended by the scripture writers. As students from the Alexandria schools spread and established their own arenas of instruction, these interpretations gained ground steadily, ultimately achieving near-universal acceptance.

By the early fifth century the use of allegory had become engrained in ecclesiastical thought. This was due particularly because of the influence of Augustine. This late fourth century theologian also promulgated the idea that church authority superseded that of the Scriptures. Therefore the educated clergy class were endowed with even greater power over the common man. Christian doctrine was no longer spiritual wisdom imparted to each believer by the Holy Spirit through the apostolic founders of the Church. The increasing reliance on Greek thought removed the Holy Spirit from His true place as the Life within and the power for ministry.⁹

Biblical Christian faith and practice were meant to reflect the work of the Spirit in the inner man, not to propagate mere dogma to which intellectual assent was given. When the philosopher-theologians sought to make spiritual life intelligible to the natural mind through reason, they removed trusting faith as a scriptural mandate for the Christian life. For the church, power from on high was replaced by doctrine, a code to adhere to, an empty shell by which one could only hope to achieve salvation. How unfortunate for us all that Paul's words have gone largely unheeded: *"For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"* (1 Corinthians 1:19,20).

***"For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.
My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words,
but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on
men's wisdom, but on God's power"*** (1 Corinthians 2:2-5).

When Greek oratorical skills replaced Judeo-Christian role modeling, the church lost the Hebraic approach to life's difficulties: *practical application of biblical truth*. Through the influence of John Chrysostom, a fourth century theologian from Antioch, oratory (and anti-Semitism) rose to new heights. Greek rhetoric, the structure and style of what is taught, became the main teaching pattern in the church. Today, modern seminary homiletics, hermeneutics, oratory—all the related fields that today's pulpits so depend on—find their origins not in the first century Church but in the Greek teaching tradition.

At the retreat center we frequently asked people what the previous Sunday's sermon was about. Almost no one could remember, as the message did not meet them in their needs and concerns. Our biblical predecessors presented truths that changed behavior and/or attitude to conform to God's will. At the seminary attended by the authors, a poster in the hallway showed a man with a funnel going into his head: All the religious courses taught at the seminary were being dumped in for cognitive recognition.

Most seminaries also teach future pastors that the ideal sermon contains an introduction, three memorable points, and a conclusion. Does this sound familiar? If so, ask yourself: "How much of what I hear, sermon after sermon, do I retain?" And more importantly, "How much of this type of teaching has impacted my life in such a way that I am more conformed to the character of Christ?"

During his first semester at seminary in 1978 at the age of 32, Mike had a class with a godly professor who had been teaching there for decades. As the semester progressed the

man took a fatherly interest in him. In their talks together he learned about Mike's past. Two things caught his attention, prompting him to ask Mike to do a special class project for him. Mike had been a Navy helicopter instructor pilot, training others to fly operational missions. Although this required a lot of teaching and briefing before each flight, still, the essence of teaching flying is *flying*: using the "see and do" method. (The early rabbis used this same concept of training, relying on personal example as they taught their students practical skills. Paul, in the mold of the rabbis, could say, "*I urge you to imitate me*" (1 Corinthians 4:16).) In addition, following his third deployment to Vietnam Mike had been an analysis officer at Naval Air Station Pt. Mugu, California, evaluating on an ongoing basis the air station's operational capabilities.

In his office that morning the professor asked, "Mike, would you do a project analyzing the fruit of this seminary? I have been here over thirty years, and I don't know if I have wasted my time." Mike accepted his request. Through the use of surveys and interviews he studied the nearby churches to which some of the seminary's pastoral graduates had gone to minister.

When he read the results of the research, that elderly gentleman sat in front of Mike and wept. None of the surveyed graduates had demonstrated a *vision* for what God desired for each congregation. They had merely maintained the status quo, concerned about the quality of their rhetorical preaching, their own security, and making sure nothing "rocked the boat." Mike was deeply touched by the hurt and the sense of failure he saw behind those tears. The professor stared at Mike earnestly and said, "You haven't been around this institution long enough to be tainted by the system here. Would you write a paper on what you believe a Bible-based church should be doing?"

Most of the suggestions in Mike's paper regarding the biblical church called for more role modeling, mentoring, and facilitating in the body. He encouraged church leadership to provide time for discussion of truths taught during the service so that people might have a greater probability of applying the teachings to their lives. After the professor read the paper, he asked if he could give it to other faculty members. Unfamiliar with the sacred cows of academia, Mike assented. What he got himself into surfaced a short while later. As he sat in the cafeteria having a cup of coffee, a professor from the pastoral degree program came up to him. He bluntly asked, "Are you Dowgiewicz?" When Mike nodded, he went on, "I read your paper and you better not show up in any of my classes."

Over the next few days this scenario was to be repeated several times. One or two professors, though, asked if Mike could meet with them to help change their style of conducting classes. You see, for the most part, the classes had been taught in the Greek rhetorical style designed to convey content. Students were then tested on their ability to cognitively grasp the facts presented. No behavioral changes were ever called for to demonstrate application of the truth.

Please note: What was understood by the early rabbis and has been substantiated by educational research is that people tend to connect content with the context in which it has been learned. In other words, if you learn something in a formal structured environment such as a classroom or sanctuary, your likelihood of using that information in a different setting or context is close to zero. The *content* and the *methodology* by which it is learned are *inseparably linked*.

Most seminary instruction is presented in a formal classroom setting, often taught from behind a podium. This impersonal, non-participatory classroom context is the environment in which pastors have been trained to convey biblical truths. Others who have studied educational methods in depth would say that seminaries use the Greek academic model, i.e., *content/data to be tested*. What is needed today is the Hebraic synagogue/church model, *lifestyle training by example*. Many seminary-trained pastors have been taught to assume that the essence of biblical teaching is content conveyance. Conversely, the biblically Hebraic essence of teaching is personal training through discipleship, appropriating both the content and the method under the caring nurture of role models and mentors. Examine the spectrum of differences between the biblically Hebraic and the Greek philosophical approaches to instruction.

HEBRAIC

(Direct Experience
from Most to Least)

Direct Participation

Student learns by *doing*.
Responsible for the outcome of his practice.

Dramatized Experiences

Student directly involved through *participation*: role-play, discussion, skits, simulations.

Demonstrations

Student learns by *watching* someone show 'how to do it.' Observation rather than participation.

GREEK

(Increasingly
Indirect Experiences)

Audio-Visual Combination

Student learns through combination of *audio and visual* elements: TV, movies, explained exhibit.

Audio or Visual Presentation

Student learns by *seeing or hearing*: CD, radio, tape, internet; display or bulletin board.

Verbal Portrayal

Abstract learning through diagrams, reading a book, hearing a lecture or sermon.

Educational studies indicate that a person will retain:

90% of what he sees, hears, and demonstrates.

70% of what he sees, hears, and discusses.

50% of what he sees and hears concurrently.

30% of what he sees.

10-20% of what he hears.

Mike's analysis paper confirmed that the seminary was using the most abstract approach, Verbal-Portrayal, to *teach at* pastoral candidates. In reality, however, a pastoral vocation requires concrete methods in order to disciple and train others. The results of Greek influence can be seen in the *program orientation* prevalent in the church today. Compare this with the *process orientation* of the Hebraic synagogue/early Church.

HEBRAIC

Active—appeals to the heart

Process Oriented

- Emphasizes direct participation
- Emphasizes age and wisdom
- Role modeling, mentoring, discipleship indispensable
- Leadership by personal example
- Character of leader essential
- Personal relationships essential

Biblical Application

- Doers of the Word
- Bible—reality that must be confronted
- Goal—to develop Christlikeness

Ministry Activity

- Small intimate groups
- Leader as a facilitator
- Cooperative, participatory planning
- Spiritual gifts shared
- Frequent scheduled and unscheduled gatherings

Fruit

- Love, acceptance, forgiveness
- Transparency encouraged
- Active participation
- "How you serve" vital
- Each believer trained to serve
- Produces mature believers

GREEK

Cognitive—appeals to the intellect

Program Oriented

- Heavy program emphasis
- Emphasizes education
- Relies on speaking skills, oratory, programmed materials, information conveyance
- Leader's personal life immaterial
- Personal relationships optional

Biblical Application

- Belief without cost to self
- Bible—data that must be taught
- Focus on rules—do's and don'ts
- Emphasizes distinct denominations

Ministry Activity

- Large impersonal groups
- Leader-directed and controlled
- Organizational roles important
- Acquisition of knowledge emphasized
- Reliance on scheduled gatherings

Fruit

- Mutual toleration
- Transparency discouraged
- Passivity and lethargy
- "What you know" vital
- Trained professionals utilized
- Produces spectators

It is evident from the Gospels that Jesus, Who was fully aware of man's need for visual images and living example, used the Hebraic form of teaching. Look closely at His use of parables, His role modeling, His informal style, His in-depth discussions with the disciples. Jesus understood the manner by which people learn. He was the model teacher for all who would follow Him. Fruit was developed in His disciples as they continued what He began. Jesus confronted His disciples with thoughts such as: "*I have **set you an example** that you should do as I have done for you*" (John 13:15, emphasis added); "*A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be **like his teacher***" (Luke 6:40, emphasis added). Paul could likewise say, "*Join with others in **following my example**, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you*" (Philippians 3:17; emphasis added).

The impersonal rhetoric-lecture style so common in congregations today compels you to be instructed by trained professionals who are removed from you interrelationally. You are not in a position to imitate your leaders' Christian walk because you probably don't spend much personal time with any of them. How then can you obey the biblical command to weigh the fruit of a man's life before you listen to his teaching: "*Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the **outcome of their life** and imitate their faith*" (Hebrews 13:7, emphasis added)? Jesus and the apostles were as much role models as they were teachers. God wants believers to evaluate people, especially their teachers, by their actions, not just by their talk. In other words, if you cannot imitate their faith, don't listen to their teachings.

Paul warns Timothy that in later times there will be teachers who are "*hypocritical liars*" (see 1 Timothy 4:2). Today's news certainly carries enough about the outcome of the lives of such hypocrites: "*And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve*" (2 Corinthians 11:14,15). Great responsibility comes with the role of teaching. More demands are placed on time and availability. The priority of maintaining an intimate dependency on God is tested to ensure that the counsel shared emanates from God's throne and not from man's potentially deceitful heart.

The Greek influence brought a heavy reliance on reasoning: "*All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas*" (Acts 17:21). Through Greek thought was developed the pattern of *opinions* and *theories* about profound ethical questions. As noted earlier, in their endeavor to defend the Christian faith against attacks by heathen philosophers, Greek-educated Christian converts dealt with their opponents on a philosophical basis. The result was centuries of rationalistic and syncretistic practices in the church. Biblical Christian practices began to be considered on a theoretical basis, and *theories can be changed*. Christianity embarked on becoming a religion, adopting the practices of other religions with their tangible worship symbols and rational explanations.

By the third century the church, once founded on revealed truth, fitted neatly into the mold of human thought. Christian practice was no longer dependent upon a theocracy, a people led by divine revelation. It had devolved into a pattern of human interpretation and evaluation. Gone was the power on which the early Christians had once drawn to conquer an empire. Lost was a dependency on the active presence of the Spirit of the living God. Man's "ability" to do God's work for Him took precedence. Conditions were ripe for the "visual replacements" that would come with Constantine in the fourth century. (This will be discussed more fully in the next chapter).

Note: A twentieth century example of the philosophical-rhetorical defense of the faith was the Scopes Monkey Trial (1925), in which the biblical truth of Creation was argued against the theory of evolution in a court of law. Greek rhetoric and human oration, not the Holy Spirit, were the means of determining "truth". The reality of Creation was bypassed.

***“Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all
your soul and with all your strength”*** (Deuteronomy 6:4,5).

Even as the church moved away from its Hebraic roots, the basic doctrines remained the same: God was the Creator of the universe, omnipotent and all-wise. Christ indwelt His body. But all of this was only in a *theoretical* sense. As a result of the dualistic influence of Plato (spirit is good, matter is evil), the divinity of Christ became overemphasized and His humanity understated. The stress on His divinity led to the church developing a view of the incarnate Jesus as distant and impersonal.

The Greek influence also exposed the church to a pantheon of gods depicted with personal human qualities. Thus church leadership developed an array of deceased “saints” who were “deified” and prayed to. These saints replaced Jesus as intermediary between God and man. The truth voiced by Jesus was spurned: *“No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). No longer were believers encouraged to trust in the Holy Spirit to intercede for them (see Romans 8:27). The manifestation of His gifts steadily diminished as emphasis on body life and mutual ministry disappeared. The church no longer experienced the limitless resources of Christ in their midst but restricted itself through human reasoning to the confines of man’s mind.

Since Greek thought portrayed the physical realm as evil, the human body represented a constant source of temptation and sin. Marriage, far from being the holy and honorable sacred bond of the Hebrew Bible—*“He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord”* (Proverbs 18:22)—took on a negative essence. Church history demonstrates how Greek dualism contorted the biblical Jewish concept of marriage, God’s provision for intimate companionship. The ideal became the ascetic monk, whose vow of chastity illustrated the supreme denial of worldly desire. By focusing wholly on the spiritual realm, one could “draw near to God.” It became only logical that priests, who were the example of holiness to their flocks, should also imitate the celibate Christ. Thus they vowed to deny themselves the pleasures and responsibilities of family life.

The Hebraic people loved to experience life, and spirituality meant passionate involvement in service to God and humanity. All that God had created was designed to be enjoyed without shame or guilt within His boundaries. Greek thought, on the other hand, focused on a metaphysical misunderstanding of spiritual devotion and piety. Believers today often think of “being spiritual” as denying themselves some pleasure in life. Those who “contemplate” the awesomeness of God’s holiness are somehow regarded as more pious. Activities, occupations, and pleasures involved in the physical world are considered suspect, “blue collar,” less important. This is why clergy are often exalted over workers in other occupations.

In later centuries another area of dualist influence arose within the church: the development of doctrines regarding Jesus’s mother, Mary. Revisionists taught that Mary, in order to bear the sinless child Jesus, must have been immaculately conceived (*i.e.*, not by human means) by her mother. They further alleged that she lived in perpetual virginity, neither having sexual relations nor bearing other children. In contradiction to this later fabrication, the Bible tells us that Joseph *“had no union with her until she gave birth to*

a son” (Matthew 1:25, emphasis added). Revisionists explained her offspring as cousins of Jesus, or children of Joseph by a previous marriage. The Scriptures themselves surely do not stretch for an explanation apart from what would have been clearly understood then: *“Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?”* (Matthew 13:55-56, emphasis added).

“He desecrated Topheth...

so no one could use it to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech” (2 Kings 23:10).

Hebraic society regarded children as *“a heritage from the Lord”* (see Psalm 127:3, KJV). This position contrasted with that of the heathen tribes all around Israel who sacrificed their children to their gods. Hellenistic Athenians also had a low view of children, judging them an intrusion into their pursuit of happiness. Most limited their families to two, one, or even no children in order to avoid overpopulation and impoverishment of the natural resources.¹⁰ Modern American society, as did the Athenians, seeks to preserve the earth *from* its inhabitants rather than tending it on behalf of God to bless its dwellers.

Yet another manifestation of Greek thought is found in the “quality of life” argument pushed today for everything from abortion to euthanasia to infanticide. If an individual, whether infant or elderly, was considered incapable of achieving a certain standard of success, it was the duty of the Athenian or Spartan parents or family to eliminate him or her. That individual should not be allowed to become a burden on society. Therefore, abortion and infanticide were rampant. There was no intrinsic worth in the individual to guarantee his right to existence. Unproductive or inconvenient lives were expendable.

If man is just a collection of evolved tissue, then his worth to society can be assessed by objective measurements and observations. The Nazis, influenced by the Greek denigration of human life, gassed people at mental institutions and homes for the aged before they began widespread extermination in concentration camps. Is the attitude of American society succumbing to this totally unbiblical approach as well?

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23,24).

At present a subtle element of Greek influence seeks to elevate mankind above their “earthly prison” through various forms of praise and worship. The authors are not taking issue with the lively and expressive praise and worship that have become so popular in recent decades. We want to address two tendencies observed in worship that are biblically unacceptable to the heavenly Father. The first is a Greek syncretistic influence that persuades worshipers to adopt secular music patterns designed to induce a soulish high, the use of music to conjure a particular mood for worship.

Closely connected to this is a disregard for the importance of personal holiness in approaching God, the folly of “worshiping” with unconfessed sin and iniquity. It is delusion for believers to trust that the “holiness” of their priest or pastor will usher them into

God's presence. Each person must examine his or her own heart. The Lord chastised the people of His day, *"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain"* (Matthew 15:8,9). Should He do any less with His people today?

"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3,4). Apperceiving what the Scriptures require in your approach to God necessitates that you put aside manmade conjuring and confess your sins in order to once again see the power of God in your congregation. Just because some form of "spiritual" expression makes you feel good doesn't necessarily make it pleasing to the Father. Remember that Eve yielded to what looked and seemed good but defied the command of God: *"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it"* (Genesis 3:6). Peter's words are true, and believers must keep them in focus as we approach God: *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9). Let us agree with Ephesians 4:24 to *"put on the **new self**, created to be like God in **true righteousness and holiness.**"*