THE RELIGIONS OF THE GENTILES AS VIEWED BY FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

by Paul Hacker

In this article we will study chiefly such ideas of the Fathers on paganism as carry on reflection on the line taken by Holy Scripture *) and thus unfold implications of principles inherent in the gospel. Speculations of this kind can certainly claim a validity independent of the times in which they were first conceived.

We exclude views that are essentially non-theological. Prominent among these is the Fathers' "historical" explanation of the similarities between Greek philosophy and biblical thought. Early apologists as well as later Fathers contended that Greek philosophers knew the Old Testament and borrowed much from it. This view had been taken over from Jewish and Gnostic literature and it tallies even with a statement of the Pythagorean Noumenios (cf. Clement Al., *Stromata* 1, 150, 4; 6, 53, 3 f). Another non-theological idea is the Fathers' theory about the historical origin of polytheism, myths, and idolatry. Like the assertion of dependence on the Old Testament, this theory is not only irrelevant today but has no bearing on the essential theological reflections of the Fathers on the problem of the religions.

Neither do we intend to scrutinize here the works of all the Fathers. We confine ourselves to such writers as face the challenge of paganism in an attitude that is more than merely defensive, and from among them we select a few outstanding and representative figures, singling out some significant passages of their works.

As for editions and translations of, and studies on, the texts considered here, the reader is referred to the handbooks of Patrology. Otto Stählin's German translation of Clement's *Stromata*, along with his notes, has rendered substantial aid to the present writer. For some of the quotations from St. Augustine's *City of God* the translation by Marcus Dods, George Wilson and J. J. Smith (Edinburgh, 1872; 9th impression, 1949) has been adopted or slightly modified. Passages from other works have been translated by the present author, but some Latin, English, French and Spanish translations have been consulted.

1. Justin Martyr

St. Justin, in his two *Apologies* (155—165 A. D.), intended to defend Christianity against the accusation of atheism. He begins by stating that the Christians may indeed be called atheists if the word "god" is taken to refer to the supposed gods of the Greeks. For the Christians do not recognize these to be gods. But they do worship the most true God who is the Father of all virtues (*Apol.* I, 6, 1). Likewise, they worship and adore God's Son and "the Prophetical Spirit" as also the Angels (6, 2).

There is no indication that Justin thought that, although the Christians

* See P. Hacker, The Religions of the Nations in the Light of Holy Scripture, in: *ZMR* 1970, 161—176.

were not permitted to practise Hellenic rites or hold pagan beliefs, these might be a legitimate religion for pagans. This has to be stated expressly today because advocates of the theory of Anonymous Christians make a distinction between legitimacy for pagans and legitimacy for Christians. Neither Holy Scripture nor the Fathers of the Church recognize such relativism. St. Justin is quite explicit on this point. Referring to Hellenic beliefs and rites, he writes: "We hold that this is not only irrational but also that practising it involes an insult to God" (ὅπερ οὐ μόνον ἄλογον ἡγούμεθα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐφ' ὕβρει τοῦ Θεοῦ γίνεσθαι, *Ap.* I, 9, 3). It should be clear that the insult to which Justin refers was perpetrated by the gentiles. Justin's *Apologies* do not intend to denounce cases of apostasy which occurred in Christendom. Regarding idolatry in particular, the Saint's judgment is no less clear and strict: "All Nations, who worshiped the works of their hands, were alien (ἔρημα) to the true God. The Jews and the Samaritans, on the other hand, did possess the word of God that had been handed over to them through the prophets, and they did expect the Messiah; still, when he came, he was not recognized by them, except by those few of whom the Holy Prophetical Spirit had foretold through Isaiah that they would be saved" (I, 53, 6).

In several other places Justin rejects details of Hellenic beliefs and cults (*Ap.* I, Chapters 23. 24. 25. 54. 64). He describes all these elements of the Hellenic religion as a consequence of inveiglement by evil demons.

The gods themselves are essentially evil demons (I, 5, 2; 9, 1). They cause men to believe in myths and practise cults corresponding to the myths (25, 3). Therefore pagan cult is worship of evil demons (62, 2) who institute cults (64, 1) and demand sacrifices and worship (12, 5).

Although the Christians renounce the service of demons (I, 14, 1) there is none the less a common ground on which Justin can meet the gentile and demonstrate to him the truth of the Christian faith. In a first approximation, the Saint pleads that the Greeks should tolerate the Christians because there are a number of affinities between Hellenic beliefs and some Christian doctrines. For instance, the Greeks speak of the sons of Zeus and describe Hermes as the "Interpreting Word and Teacher of all" and as the "Word that brings messages from God" (λόγος ἑρμηνευτικὸς καὶ πάντων διδάσκαλος, I, 21, 2; λόγος ὁ παρὰ Θεοῦ ἀπαγγελτικός, I, 22, 2).

Justin's explanation of such resemblances is that the demons, who had heard that the Prophets foretold Christ's incarnation, inspired poets to invent myths depicting events of Christ's history in a distorted form. The similarity of some features of the myths with the gospel was intended to induce men, when they came to know about Christ, to attach no greater importance to him than to figures of fiction or marvelous stories. In this way the demons sought to delude men (I, 21, 6; 23, 3; 54, 1 ff).

By this drastic theologoumenon St. Justin elucidated two facts. First, the final event in God's economy is foreshadowed even in the religions of the Nations. Secondly, the truth contained in these religions is hidden and disfigured by demonic contexts.

Man, according to St. Justin, has been endowed by his Creator with the faculty to know the truth and decide for himself what is right. Therefore Justin, using the same word as Paul, says that man is "without excuse" (ἀναπολόγητος, cf. Rom 1:20) in his religious and moral aberrations (*Ap.* I, 28, 3). But how is it possible for man to find the right path if he is ignorant of the true religion? To this question the following texts suggest an answer. If we read these texts as detached from their contexts in Justin's *Apologies*, our first impression may be that they speak a different language from the passages we have considered above. The Saint writes:

"We have been taught that Christ is the Firstborn of God... He is the Logos, and all mankind has received participation in Him (οὗ πᾶν γένος ἀνθρώπων μετέσχε). And those who lived with the Logos are Christians, even though they were considered to be atheists. Such were among the Greeks Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them, and among the barbarians Abraham and Azariah and Mishael and Elijah... Thus even in former times those who lived without the Logos were depraved (ἄχρηστοι) and hostile to Christ and murderers of those who lived with the Logos. Those, on the contrary, who formerly lived and those who now live with the Logos are Christians, and they are not affected by fear or disturbance" (*Ap.* I, 46, 2—4).

The second *Apology* complements the ideas of this text as follows:

"We know that some Stoics were hated and put to death because they held sound views at least in ethics, as also did some poets on certain points, by virtue of the seed of the Logos that is engrafted in all mankind. Such were Heraclitus... and Musonius... The demons have always sought to make appear hateful those who in whatever manner strove to live according to the Logos and to avoid evil. It is therefore no wonder if the demons, being convicted, seek to make appear far more hateful those who live not according to a portion of a germinal Logos but according to the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Logos, who is Christ" (II, 7, 1—3).

"Thus our doctrine appears to be loftier than all human doctrine because [we teach that] what is logos-like, in its entirety (τὸ λογικὸν τὸ ὅλον) — namely Christ who manifested himself for us — became flesh and reason (λόγος) and soul. For all that which philosophers and lawgivers stated well and found out well, they elaborated in investigation and contemplation by virtue of a portion of the Logos. But they often contradicted themselves since they did not know all that which is of the Logos, who is Christ. And those who lived before Christ and, using their human faculties, attempted to contemplate and demonstrate things according to reason (λόγος), were brought before tribunals as being impious (ἀσεβεῖς) and temerarious (or: practising magic, περίεργοι). Socrates, who was more resolute in such research than all the others, was charged with the same crimes as ourselves. For it was alleged that he introduced novel deities and did not acknowledge the gods that the city recognized. He had indeed taught men to renounce the evil demons who did what the poets described, and he wanted to expel from the State Homer and the other poets. Instead, he had

encouraged men to engage in a search by reason (or: through the Logos) and thus to strive after the knowledge of God, who was unknown to them. Thus he had said, It is not easy to find the Father and Maker (δημιουργός) of the Universe, nor is it safe for him who has found Him to tell it to all men (Plato, *Timaeus*, 28c). This is what our Christ did by virtue of his own power. For no one trusted in Socrates so as to give away his life for his doctrine" but Christ's case is different. He was partly known even to Socrates, since he was and is the Logos who exists in all. He predicted future events through the prophets and through himself, who became equal to us in his suffering (ὁμοιοπαθής) and taught us this. In him not only philosophers and men of letters have placed their trust, but also craftsmen and men without culture, all despising fame and fear and death. For he is the Power of the ineffable Father and not a vessel of human reason" (*Ap* II, 10, 1—8).

"I confess that I pray and endeavor with all my energy to be found a Christian, not because the doctrines of Plato are foreign to Christ but because they are not altogether equal, just like those of others, the Stoics and the poets and the historians. Each one has spoken well if he saw his partial affinity to the divine germinal Logos (ἕκαστος γάρ τις ἀπὸ μέρους τοῦ σπερματικοῦ θείου λόγου τὸ συγγενὲς ὁρῶν καλῶς ἐφθέγξατο) ... Whatever, then, has been uttered well among all men belongs to us Christians. For next to God we adore and love the Logos who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God since he has become man for us that he might be a partaker of our sufferings and bring us healing. For it was by virtue of the seed of the engrafted Logos in them that all writers were able dimly to see that which really is. But the seed of something and the imitation which is given according to one's power is one thing, and a different thing is that whose communion and imitation are realized by virtue of the grace proceeding from him (or: it)" (*Ap.* II, 13, 2—6).

In view of the ideologies of our time the question how men outside the Covenant could be pleasing to God is, of course, of special interest. This is not exactly the problem Justin had in mind; nevertheless, the texts we quoted do include a contribution to its elucidation.

Let us first recall that in Justin's view all elements of the religion of his environment were predominantly demonic. Even the vestiges of truth contained in them had been brought in through demonic inveiglement. Still, Justin found that even outside of the Old and the New Covenants there were men who "lived according to the Logos". This is not, however, a contradiction.

We have to make a distinction here. We have to distinguish religion as a sociological entity from religion as a matter of personal conviction. The theory of Anonymous Christians explains religion as essentially tied to a sociological setting (cf. K. RAHNER, *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. 5, p. 142).[1] The sociological structure of religion naturally includes customs and institutions (*op. cit.*, p. 154).[2] Now the customary beliefs and established practices of Hellenism were exactly the kind of religion that

[1] English translation (*Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, Baltimore and London, 1966), p. 120.

[2] *ibidem*, p. 131.

Justin described as demonic, not because this religion was social but because it was corrupt from the point of view of the truth.

Justin's reference to "the poets" must not be misunderstood. The word "poet" does not have here the connotations it has for a modern European or American. The poet whom Justin had principally in view was Homer (II, 10, 6), and Homer was regarded as a theologian, as an authority in the matter of religion. Therefore, Justin's statement that the demons had inspired the poets is only one of several expressions of his conviction that the established religion of Hellenic society was controlled by evil powers.

On the other hand, St. Justin holds up Socrates as the model of a man who "lived according to the Logos" among the Greeks. Justin emphasizes that "through Socrates the demons were convicted (ἠλέγχθη) by the Logos" (I, 5, 4). These demons were, according to Justin, the very gods recognized in the society of Athens. In exposing their demonic nature, Socrates disclosed the degradation of the religion of the Greeks. Socrates even strove to cause men to renounce the demons (I, 5, 3: ἀπάγειν; II, 10, 6: παραιτεῖσθαι), which of course involved abandoning their worship. All this inevitably entailed opposition to the society in which he lived. The demons took revenge by inducing this society to condemn the philosopher to death.

Now Socrates' attitude, as described by St. Justin, may of course also be called "religion". We must be cautious here to avoid equivocation. Socrates' religion, as seen by Justin, was at any rate radically different from the religion of his social environment.

St. Justin describes the religious character of men like Socrates by saying that they "were Christians". This seems to imply that he believed in the existence of "anonymous Christians". Yet his intention was very different from that of the advocates of the Anonymous Christians theory. For this theory includes the contention that the religions of the Nations are "legitimate" precisely in their "social institution and constitution" (*gesellschaftliche Verfaßtheit*; K. RAHNER: *Schr. z. Th.* V 142)[3]. On the other hand, what Socrates, as seen by Justin, criticized as pernicious, was religion precisely as practised in his society. What guided Socrates was not the customs of his environment but something like a private revelation, not a perfect but a dim and deflected or refracted light, yet nevertheless a light. In this respect the other gentiles whom Justin extols as having lived according to the Logos are quite similar to Socrates.

Therefore, the conclusion is inevitable that in Justin's view the social constitution of a religion has no bearing on its legitimacy. It is individuals who, in opposition to their pagan environment, allow themselves

[3] The English translation (p. 120) renders "Verfaßtheit" with the single word *constitution*, which, however, does not bring out the full meaning of the original.

to be guided by the divine Logos in whom every human being has received participation and who at a definite point of time became incarnate in Jesus. Moreover, St. Justin is silent on the possibility for pious gentiles to reach final consummation in eternity.

St. Justin intends to vindicate *Christianity*, whereas the modern theory that speaks of "anonymous Christians" pleads for "legitimacy" in the case of *paganism*. It is quite natural that these opposite movements should touch each other at one point. This accounts for the similarity of terminology. The modern theory seeks to find reasons for a resignation to the fact of religious "pluralism"; St. Justin, on the contrary, had to counter the charge of novelty that had been leveled against Christianity. This is why he points out that the Logos has been existing from eternity and that even before the Incarnation the Logos was "the light that enlightens every man", as St. John's Gospel (1:9) says.

In some places Justin doubtless overstresses the Greek meaning of λόγος (reason) and he oversimplifies the problem by identifying Christ with Reason. Nevertheless his theory is a magnificent approach to a theological evaluation of paganism. Extending the line that had been traced out in New Testament texts, he felicitously adapts an element of Stoic philosophy, in teaching that there are "germinal λόγοι" or seeds of the one divine Logos, sparks of His light, in every soul.

St. Justin's theory also includes the idea that the majority of mankind do not allow themselves to be guided by the light of the Logos. They even persecute those who follow the Logos. This is why there were martyrs of the truth even in pre-Christian religions or nations.

Again, seeds are not the tree. If they justify a legitimacy, this legitimacy cannot, of course, be credited to those who are in possession of rudiments but only to those who represent, or are in communion with, the full stature. Moreover, the point at issue is not of a juridical nature, as the term "legitimacy" intimates. Rather, today as in antiquity it is the question of *truth* that has to be faced when the problem of the religions is discussed. Now religious truth is an integral whole. As such it essentially tends to the integration of all its parts. This is why St. Justin says that all truths that have ever been uttered by mankind belong to the Christians, for those who represent the whole can claim that the scattered fragments of the same whole belong to them. Therefore the seeds of the Logos among the gentiles, far from indicating a self-sufficiency of the religions within a "pluralism", testify to an urge from the fragmentary to the whole, from the deceptive plurality of the religions to the unity in Christ and his Mystical Body.

2. *Clement of Alexandria*

a. The *Stromata* (about 200 A.D.) — Clement's method of dealing with paganism may be described as an elaboration on a large scale of

principles whose inchoate stage is discernible in Luke's account of Paul's visit to Athens. In fact, in his *Stromata* Clement refers several times to this account of Acts 17. Clement sets in relief two points. First, he says that Paul "acknowledges what has been said well among the Greeks"; secondly, he notes that the Apostle shows that this is a mere "adumbration" (περίφρασις) whereas real "knowledge" can be obtained only from the Son of God. This knowledge is mediated by the Apostle who is sent "to open the eyes" of the Gentiles "that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" (*Stromata* 1, 92, 2; cf. Acts 26:18).

Paul's speech on the Areopagus includes two citations from pre-Christian Greek writers and one reference to an element of Greek cult. In Clement's *Stromata* alone there are more than 2000 passages where research has detected quotations of or allusions to non-Christian authors and doctrines. Most of these references are cases of "acknowledgment of what has been said well by the Greeks". To be sure, in a good many of his quotations Clement simply intends to display his erudition — which was quite necessary as an evidence that Christian faith can coexist with humanistic culture. Still, even if such cases are left out of account, there remain a vast number of citations and references to pagan authors which are an integral part of Clement's argumentation. The manner in which Clement has woven quotations and allusions into his presentation of Christian doctrine very often reminds one of St. Paul's speech on the Areopagus. Especially Clement's treatment of Christian ethics is full of quotations from Greek authors. Occasionally he can refer even to details of pagan religious practices with approval. For example, he appreciates the practice of bathing and adorning oneself before prayer (*Strom.* 4, 141, 4—142, 2). He is inclined to interpret this pagan custom as a prefiguration of Baptism, somehow under Moses' influence.

Clement concedes that "at all times all persons of sound thinking have had an innate awareness of the one and almighty God, and most men — those who have not entirely lost their sensitivity to the truth — have acknowledged the eternal boons bestowed on them through divine Providence" (*Str.* 5, 87, 2). Pagans have had an indistinct knowledge of God (εἴδησίς τις ἀμαυρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, *Str.* 6, 64, 6). Quoting the apocryphal *Kerygma Petri*, Clement states that "the most distinguished among the Greeks worship the same God as we, though not with perfect knowledge, since they have not learnt the tradition taught through the Son" (*Str.* 6, 39, 4).

While thus acknowledging that there has always been a true, if imperfect, knowledge of God among the Nations, Clement is no less severe than Holy Scripture in his attitude toward the views and practices of the religions. Mythology and polytheism are criticized especially in his *Protreptikos*; idolatry and pagan sacrificial cult are rejected without compromise also in his *Stromata*. Idolatrous rites are

forbidden (*Str.* 6, 40, 1—2). Idolaters who do not repent will be judged. Clement even quotes pagan authors — Zeno, Plato, and Euripides, "the philosopher on the stage" — to support his view that temples and sacrificial cult are futile or even sinful and that the only legitimate offering is "the sacrifice without fire" of which Euripides speaks and which Clement interprets to be Christ (*Str.* 5, 70, 2—6; 75—76).

Nevertheless, Clement was not an extremist even on this point. Alluding to Deut 4:19, he said that God gave to the gentiles the sun and the moon and the stars as objects for worship through which they were to work their way up to the knowledge of God. In accordance with the Book of Wisdom (13 : 8 f), however, Clement taught that judgment was decreed on those who failed to find, beyond the stars, Him who created them. But the position of the idolaters is lower still than that of the worshipers of stars. They are outside the number of those who are saved (περισσοὶ εἰς σωτηρίαν). In this context Clement penned the sweeping statement, "Every action of the heathen is sinful" (πᾶσα [πρᾶξις] τοῦ ἐθνικοῦ ἁμαρτητική) (*Str.* 6, 110, 3—111, 3).

Adapting his terminology to that of non-Christians, Clement even called "philosophy" the salvific doctrine of Christ, much as he assimilated the language of the most powerful heretical movement of his time in describing the perfect Christian as the "gnostic". In both cases, however, his adaptation does not imply a subsumption of Christian and pagan or heretical concepts under one and the same notion of a higher order. On the contrary, Clement claimed that the Christian revelation alone was the perfect philosophy and the perfect Catholic alone was the true gnostic. Elements of pre-Christian philosophy are true in so far as they coincide or tally with revealed truth (*Str.* 6, 54, 1). Accordingly, Clement sketched out a theory to explain, first, the cause of such cases of coincidence or harmony, secondly, the way philosophy can lead a man to salvation. For he admitted that there is a possibility for the gentiles to be saved, though not within the domain of what we would call religion proper.

Clement was convinced that philosophy was a gift that God had bestowed on the Greeks. He hesitated, however, to attribute to philosophy the same dignity of a primary utterance of God that belongs to the Old and New Testaments; he seemed more inclined to see in it only a secondary effect of God (*Str.* 1, 99, 2 f). But at any rate philosophy is a good thing and must therefore be from God who is the author of all that is good (*Str.* 1, 37, 1; 6, 58, 1—3; 156, 4; 159, 1. 5—8; 7, 6, 6; 7, 7, 6; 11, 2). Perhaps God has given it through angels of a lower order (7, 6, 4).

"Before the advent of Our Lord, philosophy was necessary for the Greeks to attain righteousness" (πρὸ τῆς τοῦ Κυρίου παρουσίας εἰς δικαιοσύνην Ἕλλησιν ἀναγκαία φιλοσοφία, *Str.* 1, 28, 1). It had a function similar to that of the Law among the Jews (6, 159, 9). But just as the Law was merely a prelude, so was philosophy. Philosophers could only

"imitate the truth" (ἀπομιμοῦνται, 6, 56, 1). They saw the truth like something that appears in a mirror or shines through a transparent substance (1, 94, 7). "Even though they use the word 'God', they do not know God, because they do not worship God in a way that befits Him" (ἐπεὶ μὴ σέβουσι κατὰ Θεὸν τὸν Θεόν, 6, 149, 1). Moreover, they have divided the truth, with each sect regarding the portion it has obtained as the whole truth (1, 57, 1).

"The rise of the light" of Christ, however, both detects parts of truth in philosophy, and integrates them all in the one truth (1, 57, 1—6). "The road of the truth is one, but into it as into an ever-flowing river all streamlets flow, each from a different direction" (1, 29, 1). Similarly, "there are many and various roads to righteousness; for God is good and he saves men in different manners (πολυτρόπως σῴζοντος τοῦ Θεοῦ). But all of them lead to the principal road and the main gate". This "royal and authentic entrance" is offered "in Christ" (1, 38, 6 f).

The similes of the road and the streams bring out graphically the idea of a vigorous movement or current. The impelling force of this movement is the divine economy itself. What matters is not the fact that there is truth and righteousness even among the gentiles, but that the parts point to the whole into which they require to be integrated.

Accordingly, the relation of philosophy to Revelation is described by the concept of preparation. Time and again this idea recurs in the *Stromata* (e. g. προπαιδεία, προπαρασκευάζει, προοδοποιοῦσα in 1, 28, 1—3). The philosophers are "not yet come of age" (νήπιοι), "unless they are made men by Christ" (ἀπανδρωθῶσιν, 1, 53, 2). Philosophy is not indispensable but helpful to find the one truth "in which we are instructed by the Son of God" (1, 97, 4). If God gave philosophy as his bequest or covenant (διαθήκη), he did so because pre-Christian philosophy was to become a basis or starting-point (ὑποβάθρα) for the "philosophy agreeing with Christ" (κατὰ Χριστὸν φιλοσοφία) — or a ladder (ἐπιβάθρα) for Christianity, if a plausible textual conjecture is right (6, 67, 1). Clement urges that one must go beyond philosophy. It must progress to faith, which is its perfection (6, 118, 1; 119, 2; 154, 1—3). "Philosophy also was given through divine Providence as propaedeutics for the perfection through Christ provided that philosophy be not ashamed to learn from barbarian knowledge and thus progress to the truth" (6, 153, 1).

Clement deems it possible that there is a kind of justification through philosophy (1, 27, 3; 28, 1; 99, 3; cf. 6, 159, 9 and other passages). But this justification is only relative and is not yet "total righteousness" (καθόλου δικαιοσύνη). Philosophy is not a substitute for faith, which alone leads to eternal life. Nor does philosophy cleanse a man from his sins. After all, those who were "righteous through philosophy" were still addicted to idolatry (6, 44, 4). But there were men who in their lifetime had no occasion to know the gospel and yet strove after perfection under the guidance of philosophy. According to Clement, such men obtain a chance

for conversion in the Hades where Christ and the Apostles preach the gospel to them. To attain final salvation, it is indispensable that the souls of the righteous gentiles in the Hades should do penance and accept faith in Christ (2, 43, 5; 44; 6, 44 ff; 48 ff).

b. The *Protreptikos* (about 190—200 A. D.) — In his *Protreptikos*, Clement addressed the Greeks, urging them to become Christians. He did not defend his religion, as the early apologists had done, against accusations which pagans were leveling at the Christians. He wrote as a messenger of the sole true religion, and only with a view to his positive aim did he expose the delusions and absurdities of Hellenism. The pagans had accused the Christians of atheism; Clement, however, did not deem it necessary to refute this charge. Instead, he showed that it was Hellenic religious practices that were virtually atheistic. He expressed this view in a startling juxtaposition of the words "sanctuary" and "godless", in saying: "Do not make a fuss about godless sanctuaries" (ἄδυτα τοίνυν ἄθεα μὴ πολυπραγμονεῖτε, 2, 11, 1), or in the sentence, which must have jarred scarcely less on the ears of devotees of mystery cults: "These are the mysteries of the atheists" (2, 23, 1). He even dared to write: "Zeus has died — don't take it amiss" (2, 37, 4). The bold confidence of such words becomes the more manifest when one considers that they were written at a time when all odds seemed to be against a final victory of Christianity.

Clement displayed an abundance of details of pagan myths and cults (Chapters 1—4), thus forcing his readers to credit to him an extraordinary familiarity with the subject. He denounced all these elements of Hellenic religion, and his criticism is no less severe than Scripture's verdict on paganism and no less uncompromising than the polemics of the early apologists. His main charges against the myths and mysteries include words like delusion (γοητεία 2, 12, 1; ἀπάτη 13, 3; 14, 1; 22, 3; 26, 6; etc.), inhuman (ἀπάνθρωπα 2, 17, 2), shameful or shameless (αἰσχρός 20, 1; ἀναισχυντία 21, 1; 22, 6; 5, 66, 2; αἶσχος 2, 34, 2; etc.), false piety (εὐσέβεια νόθος 2, 22, 3). The gods "seem to be inhuman demons, hating mankind" (3, 42, 1). Clement sympathized with such Greeks as had criticized mythology or idolatry and who were, accordingly, accused of atheism. Regarding them, he wrote: "Even though they did not understand the truth itself, yet they sensed the error. This is not an insignificant germ; it grows up, stimulating the mind to search after the truth" (2, 24, 2).

The corruption of the religions of the Nations, according to Clement, originated in ignorance. He wrote: "There was an ancient, innate communion of men with Heaven, but it was obscured by ignorance (ἄγνοια). Yet at times it suddenly pierces through the darkness and shines forth anew" (2, 25, 3). It was ignorance that caused men to invent polytheism and idolatry, and "it has imprinted on those who follow it the stain (κηλίς) of a long death" (10, 99, 2). The concept of ignorance as used

here may be of Gnostic and ultimately Indian origin; in any case it forcefully unfolds an idea of St. Paul (Eph 4 : 18). The context of the passage from 2,25 does not say when and where the light of communion with God pierces through the darkness of idolatry and mythology. Probably Clement thought that the illumination occurred at a man's conversion to the Christian faith. In another place he describes conversion by saying that from the Nations who were petrified by idolatry God "raised up a seed of piety which was sensitive to virtue" (1, 4, 2).

Clement's vehement rejection of all strictly religious elements of Hellenism is counterbalanced by other features of his work. First, although there were atheists even among the philosophers (5, 64, 3), still a few of them as well as some poets, according to Clement, did perceive elements of the truth. Secondly, while Clement denounced the mystery cults in very harsh terms, he none the less profusely used the language of these cults to expound mysteries of the Christian faith.

Among the philosophers Plato is mentioned first. The passage is of prime importance. Clement quotes from Plato's *Timaeus* and from his letters two short excerpts which speak of the ineffability of God, "the Father and Maker of the Universe". Then he addresses Plato himself — that is to say, contemporary Platonists. He praises Plato for having touched upon the truth and he encourages him to search for what is good (ζήτησις τἀγαθοῦ πέρι) together with his Christian partner in the dialogue.

We may note here that Clement's style, especially in the *Protreptikos*, is eminently that of dialogue. But this dialogue is of a totally different nature from the "dialogue in a pluralistic society" which is recommended and practised today. "Dialogue in a pluralistic society" leaves each partner in his own system. It does not raise the question of truth or it understands truth as subject-related, with each partner having his own truth. It is thus essentially nothing but an exchange of monologues.

The society in which Clement lived was certainly no less "pluralistic" than the one to which we belong today. But Clement's dialogue is not determined by the society of his environment. With all his understanding openness for the partner and his adaptive readiness to accept information, his primary concern is truth — truth which is only one and which is objectively valid. His dialogue is an invitation for search after truth. It is a Christian adaptation of a great tradition of Greek Antiquity. The Christian does not in the least conceal his exultant conviction that he has found the truth — or rather, that the truth has taken possession of him. In his dialogue, he wishes to make this truth perceptible to his partner. At the same time he leaves no doubt that he acknowledges a common metaphysical ground on which he can undertake the "search for what is good" together with his partner.

This common ground is expressed by Clement in the words: "To men in general, but most of all to those engaged in studies, a divine effluence

has been instilled (ἐνέστακταί τις ἀπόρροια θεϊκή). By virtue of this they admit, even against their will, that there is one God, and that he is imperishable and uncreated, somewhere in the heights above the heavens, always the one who really Is, in his own personal observatory" (ἄνω που περὶ τὰ νῶτα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ καὶ οἰκείᾳ περιωπῇ ὄντως ὄντα ἀεί, 6, 68, 2 f). In this very statement Clement adapts himself to the way of thinking of his partner. The style and terminology of the passage include a number of agreements with works of Plato. Still, the idea expressed is Christian. Clement is unfolding what St. John meant when speaking of the light of the Logos that illuminates every man, and what St. Paul said regarding men's faculty of knowing God. Thus both the content and the formulation of Clement's statement express the fact that there is a common ground from which the Gentile may start and on which the Christian joins him in their common movement toward the truth. In other passages Clement speaks of a divine inspiration (ἐπίπνοια Θεοῦ, 6, 71, 1; 72, 5) which enables philosophers and also poets at times to see the truth. Even though the Greeks have not attained to the goal (οὐκ ἐφικόμενοι τοῦ τέλους), still they have received some light which has proceeded from the Divine Logos (ἐναύσματά τινα τοῦ λόγου τοῦ θείου λαβόντες, 7, 74, 7). This has enabled them at times to criticize even their own false gods (7, 75, 1).

Besides the language of Greek philosophy Clement also used that of the mystery cults, especially in the first and last chapters of his *Protreptikos*. But he did not justify this usage in reflections similar to those by which he vindicated philosophy. The reason for this different attitude may be that Clement acknowledged only objective truth. If there was any objective truth in the mystery cults, then it was hidden, not explicit as it was in the case of philosophy. This hidden truth was man's innate vocation to the "communion with Heaven". But this was "obscured by ignorance". Only by a reorientation could it be freed from its obscuration. Such reorientation, however, is effected not by reasoning but by practical use. This may have been the reason why Clement did use symbolical concepts of the mystery cults but refrained from reflecting on why he was justified in doing so. As a matter of fact, he regarded the conceptual symbols of the mysteries as capable of being reoriented so as to convey the truth of the gospel. Thus he could write the following sentence, which certainly describes the attitude underlying all use of pagan symbols in ancient Christianity: "I will show you the Logos and the mysteries of the Logos by explaining them according to an image that is familiar to you" (κατὰ τὴν σὴν διηγούμενος εἰκόνα, 12, 119, 1).

3. Origen

Among the debris of Origen's works that have come down to us in the original Greek there is a letter written between 238 and 243 to

Gregory, surnamed the Wonderworker. This letter includes an idea that is of prime relevance to the subject of our study from both the theological and historical points of view. Origen is not speaking here to pagans, as Justin and Clement did, but to a Christian whom he himself had introduced into the faith. Thus the problem of the relationship of Christianity to paganism or Hellenism appears now under a new aspect. After our foregoing investigations it is understandable that Origen, like Justin and Clement and all later Fathers, could appreciate only one accomplishment of Hellenism, namely philosophy. But with Origen the question became prominent whether there is a legitimate relationship between theology, which is the rational and systematic exposition of the Christian faith, and Hellenic philosophy, which includes a natural theology. It is true that this question had loomed up already in Clement's works, but Clement's main problem was the compatibility of philosophy with faith rather than the function of philosophy in theology.

Origen answered the question in the affirmative, thus giving theology a turn that has endured throughout the centuries to come. At his time, liberal arts — geometry, astronomy, music, grammar, and rhetorics — were regarded as auxiliary (συνέριθοι) to philosophy. In a similar way, Origen wrote to his former pupil, philosophy could be a useful propaedeutic (προπαίδευμα) for the study of Christian doctrine. Origen then justified and elucidated this idea by a symbolical exegesis of the Exodus story of the Israelites despoiling the Egyptians of jewelry and clothing (Ex 3 : 21 f; 11 : 2; 12 : 35 f). The Egyptians, Origen explained, had not used these things properly (οὐκ εἰς δέον ἐχρῶντο). The Israelites, however, made out of them implements to be employed in the worship of God. Similarly, Origen intimates, philosophy can be of use in the exposition of the word of God.

The symbolical interpretation of the *spolia Aegyptiorum* thus includes the idea of utilization (χρῆσις). The Nations did not use their treasures adequately; only in the worship of the true God can these serve their purpose.

This is a strictly practical doctrine. It tallies excellently with the dynamism that we find in all reflections of Christians in antiquity on the relationship between Christianity and Hellenism. This dynamism, grounded in God's economy, implies that there is for the People of God only one legitimate direction of their spiritual movement, namely the one that leads them out of the land of bondage into the land of promise. True theology cannot but participate in this movement. It is therefore quite understandable that early theology treated the problem of paganism from a predominantly practical point of view. Reflection was needful in order to find out whether a certain practical attitude was in accordance with the faith. Thus Justin and Clement had already set forth ideas that imply an answer to the question *why* the treasures of

the Nations may be used by the people of the Covenant. Later thinkers were to take up this problem again.

4. Gregory of Nyssa

In his meditation on the spiritual meaning of the life of Moses (Περὶ τοῦ βίου Μωυσέως — Θεωρία, written about 390—392 A. D.) St. Gregory presents three symbols that demonstrate the role of pagan philosophy in theology. The first is Pharao's daughter (Ex 2:1—10; Gregory's *Life of Moses,* ed. Daniélou, 2, 10—12), the second is Moses' wife (Ex 2:16—22; 4:24—26; *Life of Moses* 2,37—40), the third is the Egyptian treasures (Ex 3:21 f; 11:2; 12:35 f; *Life of Moses* 2, 112—116).

Pharao's daughter is barren. She rears the child Moses. Moses passes for her son until he has come of age. Then "he deems it shameful to be reckoned the son of her who is by nature barren" (2, 10). Gregory takes Pharao's daughter as the type of pagan philosophy (ἡ ἔξωθεν φιλοσοφία), whereas he sees in Moses the type of a Christian. Gregory explains: "In fact the culture that is extrinsic to the Church (ἡ ἔξωθεν παίδευσις) is barren. It is always in travail but never gives birth to offspring. Philosophy has indeed been in travail for a long time, but has it produced a fruit worthy of so many and great efforts? Are not all its fruits unsubstantial (wind-like) and immature? Before they attain to the light of the knowledge of God, they are miscarried. They might perhaps have become men, if they had not been enclosed in the bosom of barren wisdom alone."

Moses stays with his foster-mother only "so long as it is necessary so that it may not seem that he has not profited from the values (σεμνά) which those people possess". Then he returns to his real mother. But even while staying with the Egyptian princess he receives milk from his mother, whom the princess has engaged as a nurse. "This seems to teach us that, even though we may study extrinsic doctrines during the time of our education, we should not sever ourselves from the Church's milk which makes us gradually grow up. This milk is the practices and customs of the Church by which the soul is nourished and strengthened for its setting out from here to ascend to the height" (2, 11—12).

The imagery of this passage seems to be somewhat confused. As it may happen in contemplation, the picture shifts its content. Barrenness is transformed into miscarriage. The fruit of philosophy, at first in the singular and possibly conceived as something spiritual, then turns out to be men — who, eventually, are no longer born prematurely but reared by philosophy.

But this confusion in no way affects the idea that Gregory wishes to express. The intertwinement of the images, while combining the expressive values of them all, prevents the reader from overinterpreting one of them

or forming a too solid mental image. Gregory intends to say that philosophy, if left to itself, is essentially inefficient.

The problem of the Christian's contact with paganism appears here as a problem of education. The concrete aspects of this problem were treated by St. Gregory's elder brother, St. Basil, in his work, *To the Youths*. To evaluate the attitude of the Fathers toward such questions, we have to bear in mind that a spiritual weakness that misinterprets itself as "openness to the world" was totally alien to them. Alive to the warnings of the New Testament, the Fathers were keenly aware that profane culture — in their case, Hellenic culture — was extrinsic to the Church. It is true that they realized the theological necessity of assimilating this culture. But at the same time they knew that the assimilation required proper precautions and critical screening. Here, as already in the New Testament, the universality of the religion of the Covenant included an exclusivity. The evangelical dynamism which we find in all the Fathers of the Church includes both aspects, the universal and the exclusive.

The problem of the assimilation of pagan culture is illuminated by Gregory in the symbol of Moses' marriage. Moses' wife stems from a foreign race. Gregory interprets her figure as the type of "extrinsic culture". He writes: "Even in extrinsic culture there is something which may not be rejected. We can join it in a marriage (συζυγία) and it can give birth to offspring which is virtue. Moral as well as natural philosophy can very well become a consort and a friend to [those striving after] the higher life and a companion of one's existence, provided its progeny does not bring in defilement from the alien race." Therefore it is necessary that "all that which is noxious and impure should be removed". The story of Exodus 4:24—26 illustrates this by the circumcision of Moses' infant son. An angel threatened to kill Moses, whereupon his wife circumcised her child. Gregory interprets this as indicating that the angel of God can only be propitiated "if the characteristic mark that reveals the foreigner is removed". And he goes on to comment: "There is indeed something carnal and uncircumcised in the philosopher's products which are his teachings. When this is removed then what is left is of noble Israelitic lineage. For instance, even extrinsic philosophy says that the soul is immortal. This is a godly product of it." The doctrine of metempsychosis, on the contrary, "is carnal and alien prepuce". Another example is the doctrine that God is the Maker of the world. Philosophy combines this with the erroneous view that God requires matter for constructing the world. Thus there are "good doctrines in extrinsic philosophy", but "they are polluted by absurd additions. If these are removed, the angel of God becomes favorable to us" (2, 37—41).

In this interpretation philosophy is no longer barren. Obviously the condition for its becoming fertile is its association with the Christian faith. But even here caution is needed. The product of the alliance

between Christianity and pagan philosophy is impure and causes defilement unless it is properly cleansed.

In interpreting the symbol of the Egyptian treasures (πλοῦτος Αἰγύπτιος, 2, 112—116) St. Gregory does not essentially go beyond what Origen had said. He thinks that a literal understanding of the text would be improper because this would amount to accusing the Israelites of lie and fraud. For the same reason he rejects the explanation that by taking the treasures the Israelites obtained the pay due to them for their labor. Consequently, a higher sense or deeper meaning (ὑψηλότερος λόγος) seems to be intended in the text. A possible deeper meaning is that philosophy and other disciplines of culture are to be taken over from outside the Church "for utilization" (λόγῳ χρήσεως). These spiritual treasures are to be used "to adorn (καλλωπισθῆναι) the divine temple of the mystery". Gregory quotes Basil as the example of a man who thus consecrated to God the "Egyptian treasures" he had acquired through the profane education that he underwent in his youth.

The term "utilization" (χρῆσις and the verb derived from the same root) occurs already in relevant passages of Clement's works, and then in Origen's letter to Gregory the Wonderworker. With Gregory of Nyssa it is on the way to becoming technical. It denotes the legitimate assimilation of contents of pagan culture.

5. Theodoret

Probably between 420 and 430 A. D. Theodoret wrote his work *The Cure of Hellenic Maladies or the Truth of the Gospel Proved from Greek Philosophy,* which naturally touches upon the problems we are considering. From this treatise, which is the latest and greatest of the Greek Apologies, we may infer that a far-reaching consensus on our problem had come to be prevalent among those Christian writers who did not altogether deny the value of Hellenic philosophy. The fact of this consensus is all the more important for a final theological appraisal because the situation of the Church had changed considerably between the time of Justin and that of Theodoret. Christianity had prevailed in the meantime, and Theodoret even explained the victory of his religion as a token of God's salvific economy (6, 87 f; 12, 95—97; ed. in *Sources chrétiennes*). It was no longer risky to be a Christian; on the contrary, the position of paganism was becoming more and more depressed. Yet there were still many "adherents of Hellenic mythology" (τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς μυθολογίας ἐξηρτημένοι, Preface, 1), and Theodoret wrote his book to help them find their way to the faith. It is interesting to note that the arguments against paganism in this changed situation remained essentially the same as they had been throughout two or three centuries.

Theodoret's attitude toward polytheism, mythology and pagan cults is quite as uncompromising as that of any other Father of the Church. "I will show", he says, "that the myths of the so-called gods are not only incredible but also absurd and impious" (τῶν μυθολογουμένων ... μὴ μόνον τὸ ἀπίθανον ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἀνόητον καὶ δυσαγές, 2, 96), and like other apologists he speaks of the ignominy of the myths (αἶσχος, 4, 4). The sacrificial cults are repulsive (7, 11—15) and they were rejected even by some Greek philosophers and poets (7, 36—48). The Devil inveigled men into forgetting the God of the Universe and taught them polytheism and idolatry (7,3). Originally, the knowledge of the true God had been engrafted on the nature of man (7, 3).

Even philosophy errs on many important points. Nevertheless some philosophers and poets did catch glimpses of the truth. Theodoret can therefore imitate the method of Clement and Eusebius and start his "cure" with sayings of Greek writers (1, 127). But how was it possible that philosophers could perceive elements of the truth without receiving a revelation? Theodoret's answer to this question is: The philosophers "simply resemble those songbirds which imitate the human voice without knowing the meaning of what they say. In a similar way these philosophers, when speaking of things divine, did not know that of which they were making statements. But I believe that they may be excused, since they enjoyed neither the illumination of the prophets nor the light of the apostles. [The Greek original has terms taken from the mystery cults to express the notions of illumination and light.] Their sole guide was nature. Religious aberrations, however, spoiled the characters that God had formerly imprinted on it. Nevertheless, their Creator renewed a few of them and he did not allow them to perish altogether. He showed to men through creation signs of his care and providence" (1, 120 f). Theodoret then quotes Acts 14:16 and, after pointing to the privilege of the "race of Abraham", he remarks that God "led the other Nations to religion (θεοσέβεια) through nature and through creation" (1, 123). There may even be a "gift of knowledge" (γνώσεως δῶρον) among them. Taking as a symbol the notion of "rain" occurring in Acts 14:17, Theodoret says that both untilled and cultivated areas receive one and the same rain; so the fruits grown among the Nations resemble at times those that are the result of the agriculture which is the true religion. But they have an admixture of harshness and bitterness in them. This is because they did not receive a "prophetical culture" (γεωργία προφητική, 1, 125). However, one can take of them what is good and leave aside the rest (1, 125 f).

Obviously pagans, who had been told that Christianity was the true religion, often raised the query why, then, this religion had appeared so late. Theodoret replied that God acted like physicians. "These reserve the stronger remedies to the last. At first they administer the lighter medicines, at last they bring the more efficacious ... (God) had indeed

brought various remedies, to all men through creation and through nature, and to the Hebrews through the Law and the Prophets. In the end he administered this all-powerful and salvific remedy, and he has expelled the malady" (6, 85 f). This is Theodoret's version of the movement of God's economy. The previous stages are not self-sufficient but foreshadow the Incarnation as their fulfillment.

In the main outlines, Theodoret's evaluation of paganism completely agrees with that of other Fathers, though in details his treatment looks like a pedestrian variant of the loftier thought of St. Justin, Clement, Origen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Augustine.

6. Augustine

a. *De doctrina Christiana* (first part, written in 397) — In Book II, Chapters 40—41, of his work *On Christian Doctrine* St. Augustine expounds the doctrine of the "Egyptian treasures" and of their "utilization" by Christians. The noun "utilization" (*usus*) and the corresponding verb (*uti*) occur six times in the short passage. This seems to indicate that the word, translated from Greek χρῆσις, had become something like a technical term since the time of Clement and Origen.

Like the Greeks, Augustine interprets the Egyptian treasures as symbols of philosophical doctrines. As regards the idols and myths of the pagans, he says that "everyone of us who under the guidance of Christ leaves the community of the gentiles must abominate and avoid them". These things are not the true wealth of the gentiles. The Nations also possess "liberal arts that are quite apt to be used in the service of the truth, and some most useful moral precepts... and even concerning the worship of the one true God some true statements are found among them". These things "are, as it were, their gold and silver", which the Christians are to appropriate to themselves. The pagans "did not themselves make them, but they extracted them, as it were, from certain mines of divine providence, which is infused everywhere. They misuse them perversely and illegitimately for the cult of the demons. When the Christian severs himself mentally from their miserable communion, he must take those things away from the gentiles." The gentiles are unlawful possessors of those treasures.

It may be interesting to note here in passing that this opinion was shared also by a Christian writer who made use of concepts of Greek philosophy perhaps in a greater measure than any other Father of the Church, namely by that Dionysius who identified himself with the Areopagite. Defending himself against the accusation that he was turning the doctrines of Neo-Platonists against their own authors, Dionysius pleaded that the Neo-Platonists themselves directed "the divine weapons against the divine realities when, on behalf of the same wisdom they received from God, they sought to spoil the respect due to God" (*Ep. 7;*

Migne, *Patrologia Graeca,* vol. 3, 1080 AB; quoted by H. U. v. Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit,* vol. 2, p. 153). Dionysius' statement is additional evidence that on this point there was a consensus among early Christian writers.

St. Augustine quotes a number of Latin authors of earlier generations who successfully utilized pagan wisdom: Cyprian, Lactantius, Victorinus, Optatus, and Hilary (of Poitiers). But Augustine also warns that a Christian must not allow himself to be "puffed up" by philosophical wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 8:1). What makes a person a Christian is not the Egyptian treasures but charity, humility and the inspiration he derives from the Cross of Christ. Thus, while repeating Origen's doctrine of the Egyptian treasures and of utilization, Augustine has added some accents that are unmistakably his own.

b. *Letter No. 102* (written in 408 or 409 A. D.) — A priest in Carthage had sent to Augustine a number of questions, some posed by a pagan philosopher, concerning the Christian religion. The Saint's reply includes his most important and original contribution to a theological appraisal of the problem of the religions. The opponent had challenged the Christian doctrine that salvation is only given to those who have faith in Christ, which implies the claim of universal and exclusive validity for the Christian religion. This doctrine seems to entail that all Nations that lived before Christ, except the Jews, were excluded from salvation. The Carthaginian philosopher had asked: "Why did he who is called the Savior remain absent for so many centuries?" "What happened to so many souls that are without any guilt whatever?" "What, for instance, happened to the souls of the Romans or Latins who, up to the time of Caesar, were deprived of the grace of Christ, who had not yet arrived?" (Question 2, Section 8).

This is substantially the same sort of doubts or objections that had stirred St. Justin's reflections and which were also treated by Augustine's younger contemporary Theodoret. Augustine's solution, however, is more differentiated and circumspect than that of the second century martyr, and more penetrating than Theodoret's plain comparison of God with a physician. He argues as follows (2, 10):

"Why do our opponents challenge the Christian religion with their question" about why the innovation of the Christian religion was necessary? If the same question is asked regarding their gods, it is found that there were considerable variations in the pagan religions and it may be asked why it was necessary to introduce innovations if the old rites were sufficient for cleansing a man (2, 9). If we confront our opponents with this fact, "they either prove unable to answer or, if they find a reply, this turns out to be in favor of our religion also". They will say that "the gods have always been existing and have been capable of liberating their votaries everywhere in the same way; but as temporal and earthly things vary, they wished to be worshiped in different times,

places, and modes according as they knew would correspond to the several times and places". This entails "that it does not matter if there is no uniformity [of the rites] in different times and places. There may be any degree of diversity in holy rites, if that which is worshiped is holy. Similarly, it is of no consequence if there is no uniformity among the languages and hearers. There may be any degree of diversity in the words that are used, if that which is said is true. One difference, however, is of the greatest importance. Linguistic signs, which enable men to exchange their ideas, can be instituted even by a *social convention*; in religion, however, those who have found true wisdom have followed the *will of God* to find out by which rites they could conform to the Divinity. This will has never failed to provide salvation for the righteousness and piety of the mortals (*Quae omnino nunquam defuit ad salutem justitiae pietatique mortalium*). There may be differences in rites among different peoples who are united in one and the same religion; what matters most is that those things should be done by which human weakness is exhorted or tolerated and divine authority not opposed" (2, 10).

Christ, the Word of God, the coeternal Son of the Father and Immutable Wisdom, governs all spiritual and corporal creatures. He determined and determines by wisdom and knowledge what in each time and each place is to happen to each creature, even before the growth of the Hebrew race, then during the time of the Israelite kingdom, and finally when He became incarnate and after His Ascension till the end of the world (2, 11). "Consequently, at all times and in all places from the origin of mankind those who believed in Him, who came to know Him in whatever manner, and who led godly and righteous lives, have doubtless become saved through Him." In former times there were men who believed in His future Incarnation much as we now believe that He has become incarnate. But this difference, as also the corresponding difference in the holy rites prevalent at different times, does not involve a difference of faith or of its object. "The liberation of the faithful and pious is of the same kind" everywhere and at all times. "*We must*, however, *leave it to God to decide* what is to happen for this end and when it is to happen; for us, we should keep obedience (*Quid autem quando fiat quod ad unam eandemque fidelium et piorum liberationem pertineat,* consilium Deo tribuamus, *nobis oboedientiam teneamus*). Thus, it is one and the same true religion which was signified earlier by names and signs other than those we use now, and which was observed in a more hidden way previously and more manifestly later, by a few previously and by a greater number later" (2, 12). It is God alone who can and does provide for each time what is suitable for it (2, 13).

Therefore, regarding any religion or philosophy it is quite irrelevant to know when it arose. "But, whether the gods of that religion are real gods, or whether they are to be worshiped, and whether that philosophy

is of use for the well-being of the soul": these are the questions we wish to discuss with our opponents (2, 13).

Augustine thinks that it may well be maintained as a hypothesis that Christ appeared in the flesh not earlier than when he foresaw there would be at least a few who would believe in Him. In spite of His miracles the number of His disciples was rather small, and even after his Ascension

"we see many... who prefer to offer resistance with their human astuteness rather than yield to... divine authority... Therefore, what wonder if Christ knew that the world was so full of unbelievers in previous epochs that He had reasons for refusing to appear and preach to those who He knew could be brought to believe neither by words nor by miracles?" (2, 14).

"Yet none the less from the beginnings of mankind He never ceased to send prophecies, at times more hiddenly, at times more conspicuously, according as it seemed to God to correspond to the times. Nor were there ever men lacking who believed in Him, from the time of Adam up till Moses, both in the people of Israel itself, which was by a special mystery a prophetical race, and in other Nations, before He appeared in the flesh." The Old Testament itself mentions cases of men "who were partakers of this mystery" even though they belonged neither to the lineage of Abraham nor to the people of Israel nor to those who were associated with Israel. Therefore, "why should we not believe that there were some here and there at different times even in other Nations?... Thus no one worthy has ever lacked the salvation of this religion which is the sole true one and through which alone true salvation is truly promised; he who lacked it was not worthy. And, from the beginning of the growth of mankind till the end, this religion is preached to some for their reward and to some for judgment. Accordingly, those to whom it was not proclaimed were foreknown as not being future believers.[4] Those to whom it was proclaimed although they were not going to believe, are held up as an example to the others. Those, however, who hear the preaching as future believers, will be prepared for the kingdom of Heaven and the community of the holy angels" (2, 15).

Augustine then turns to the problem of cult. In this context he defines what legitimate religion is. His definition, strictly following the line traced out by Holy Scripture, certainly retains its validity, especially in a time of subjectivistic and anthropocentric confusion. He begins by stating that God himself

"gives inspiration and teaches in what manner he is to be worshiped" (3, 17). "Temples, the sacerdotal office, sacrifices, and other things pertaining to these, must be dedicated only to the one true God... When these things are exhibited to God, according to His inspiration and teaching, then there is true religion (*Haec cum exhibentur Deo, secundum ejus inspirationem atque doctrinam, vera religio est*)... What those who know the Scriptures of both Testaments criticize in the sacrilegious rites of the pagans is not the fact that the pagans build temples, institute sacerdotal offices and offer sacrifices, but the fact that these things are exhibited to idols and demons" (3, 18).

[4] The idea of foreknowledge emerged already in Justin's *Apology* I, 28, 2.

The reasonings of St. Augustine's Letter No. 102, of which we have given an account, are certainly among the most important contributions to the theological problem of paganism. — In his evaluation of pagan rites, St. Augustine, like all the Fathers of the Church, keeps strict obedience to Holy Scripture. From among the vast number of Scripture passages that bear on this subject he selects four. He quotes Ps 115:5, The idols "have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see"; Ps 96:5, which in his version reads: "For all the gods of the peoples are demons"; 1 John 5:21, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols"; and 1 Cor 10:19 f, "What do I imply then? That what is offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. And I do not want you to be partners with demons" (3, 19). No "elegant interpretation" can change the fact that the pagan rites are "impious" and "sacrilegious" (3, 20).

c. *De civitate Dei* (413—426 A.D.) — The leading theme of St. Augustine's greatest work is the opposition of the City of God to the earthly city. The criterion for the discrimination between the two cities is simple enough. They represent two races of men, not ethnic but spiritual groups, "the one consisting of those who live according to man, the other of those who live according to God" (15, 1). In other terms: "The two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self" (14, 28). Although the city of God has become manifest in the Church, the "two cities are entangled together in this world, and intermixed until the last judgment effect their separation" (1, 35). As far as the order of temporal things is concerned, the heavenly city sojourning on earth readily adapts itself to the laws and ordinances of the earthly city. But there is discord and dissension between the two cities in the matter of religion (19, 17). All religions of the Nations, with their gods, myths, and cults, belong to the earthly city. The gods of polytheism are "useless images, or unclean spirits and pernicious demons, or certainly creatures, not the Creator" (Book 6, Preface). To one part of the earthly city God granted that it become a foreshadowing symbol of the heavenly city, "which served to remind men that such a city was to be, rather than make it present". This was the city or commonwealth of the Old Covenant (15, 2). "There was no other people who were specially called the people of God; but they cannot deny that there have been certain men even of other Nations who belonged, not by earthly but heavenly fellowship, to the true Israelites, the citizens of the country that is above" (18, 47). Augustine thought that Job was an example of a holy man from among the Nations. We may doubt whether he was right on this point. But what matters is not the question whether Job was or was not a Jew by birth, but the following statements:

"It is possible that even among other Nations there were persons who lived according to God and pleased Him and thus belonged to the spiritual Jerusalem.

It cannot be believed that this was granted to anyone unless the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, was divinely revealed to him. His advent in the flesh was pre-announced to the ancient saints in the same way as it is proclaimed to us as having occurred" (18, 47). Such holiness outside of Israel entails adoration of the one true God and abstention from the cult of the false gods whom the whole world worshiped. It was granted "wherever through the most secret and most just judgment of God there were men worthy of divine grace" (3, 1).

When analyzing *De doctrina christiana,* we saw that Augustine, like many other Fathers, found much to approve in the doctrines of philosophers, especially Plato and the (Neo-)Platonists. In his *De civitate Dei* he discussed the views of philosophers at great length. He did not make a distinction between the God of the philosophers and the God of Scripture (which is, after all, a somewhat subjectivistic differentiation, suggesting that God's divinity somehow depends on our behavior toward him).

The Neo-Platonist Porphyry had spoken of "the Great God", and Varro, the theologian of the Roman ethnic religion, had taught that Jove was the highest deity. St. Augustine readily admitted that both Porphyry's "Great God" and Varro's Jove were in reality the same God whom the Christians worship, even though Varro "did not know what he was saying" and Porphyry was "the bitterest enemy of the Christians" (19, 22). Evidently, what mattered to Augustine was the fact that what Varro and Porphyry had known included an objective truth, and this was quite independent of the other fact that the two thinkers had not acted up to what they had known.

Augustine distinguished between right and wrong in knowledge as well as in behavior. He examined the doctrines of the philosophers calmly and objectively. He found that even philosophers advocated idolatry and polytheism (10, 26 and other passages). Accordingly, he could not count Plato or any other philosopher among the citizens of the city of God. Only through faith in the mystery of Christ, whether before or after the Incarnation, can man attain purification in a saintly life (10, 25).

Regarding no man did Augustine in his reflections on paganism pass a final judgment in either direction. If he did not say that philosophers were saved, he did not declare them damned either. Obviously he intended to respect the mystery of God. This he expressed clearly enough in the words which we quoted above from his Letter 102: "Let us leave the decision to God" (*consilium Deo tribuamus*). The same idea recurs in another of his inimitably pregnant statements, which he made in a different context: "Let us allow God to be capable of something which we must admit we are incapable of scrutinizing" (*Demus Deum aliquid posse quod nos fateamur investigare non posse, Ep.* 137, 2, 8).

7. *De vocatione omnium gentium* (about 450 A. D.)

This work has been attributed with some probability to St. Prosper of Aquitaine, the patron of lay theologians, defender of the Church's doctrine of grace, and secretary to St. Leo the Great. Its title seems to indicate a discussion of whether and how the Nations are, or can be, saved, but the primary themes of the treatise are the gratuitousness of grace and the universality of God's offer of grace. St. Prosper contends that there is no salvation except through God's grace alone (1, 23 f; 2, 1; and *passim*), with the very beginning of faith being effected by grace (1, 8). On this point we need not enlarge here. It is presupposed everywhere in the present study. Neither is it controversial today.

Two among the subjects discussed in *De vocatione omnium gentium* have a direct and special bearing on the theme of the present investigation. These are Prosper's defense of the thesis that God wills that all men be saved (1, 12.20; 2, 1.25; and *passim*; 1 Tim 2:4), and his emphasis on the inscrutability of God's judgments (2, 1; and *passim*).

As regards the second of these subjects, it seems in place that we duly appreciate this attitude, not only because it may need rehabilitation after it was disparaged as "fideism", "agnosticism", etc., by Father De Letter, the author of the annotated English translation of *De vocatione* (in *Ancient Christian Writers,* 1952). In fact, St. Prosper's reverence for God's mystery forms the keynote of his reflections on the problems of the universality of grace. We will select here two out of many passages where Prosper voices his awareness, and his view on the meaning, of the fact that the details and reasons of God's decrees exceed man's grasp. Prosper writes:

"It is most profitable for us to believe that all good things, especially those that are conducive to eternal life, are obtained, increased, and preserved through God's benevolence. Once this faith is firmly fixed in our hearts and unshakably grounded, then, I think, pious minds should not be worried over the question whether all or not all men will attain to conversion. This attitude is possible if we do not allow that which is clear to be obscured by that which is hidden and if we do not allow ourselves to be excluded from what is open by impertinent attempts to penetrate what is closed" (1, 9).

"What God willed to remain hidden, should not be scrutinized, and what he made manifest should not be disregarded, so that we might be preserved from both illicit inquisitiveness and condemnable ingratitude" (1, 21).

These passages reveal another aspect of the evangelical dynamism. The gospel is not a collection of riddles for irreverent researchers to exercise their conceited acumen, but its message involves an appeal *to do* something. And the very first thing to do is the acknowledgment of the incomprehensible God in the adoration of love (cf., e. g., Deut 6:4—9; Matt 22:37 f; Mark 12:29 f; Apoc 14:6 f). Prosper urges especially to heed the difference between what is clearly stated in Scripture and what is not revealed.

In perfect agreement with the New Testament (e. g. 1 Peter 2:9 f; Eph 2:12 f; 5:8; Col 1:12 ff. 26 f; Tit 3:3 ff), Prosper states that after the Incarnation grace was given or offered to more persons and more abundantly than before (1, 15; 2, 9; 2, 14 last sentence; 2, 17. 18. 19. 25). Yet even in earlier times God did not withhold his mercy from all Nations. PROSPER writes:

"It is our faith and most devout confession that the whole of mankind never lacked the care of Divine Providence. Although God chose one people to be His own and guided them to the practice of religion (*pietas*) by special institutions, yet He did not withhold the gifts of His goodness (*bonitatis suae dona*) from men of any Nation. Thus it can be made clear to them that they have received prophetical pronouncements and legal precepts in the services and testimonies rendered them by the things of nature (*in elementorum obsequiis ac testimoniis*). Therefore they are left without excuse for making into their gods the gifts of God and worshiping in religion things that had been created for being used" (1, 5).

Prosper summarizes here teachings of Rom 1:19—23, 2:14—16, and Acts 14:17. In the following, he elaborates his position further:

"It is certainly true that through God's special care and forbearance the people of Israel was chosen whereas all other Nations were allowed to take their own ways (Acts 14:16), that is, to live according to their own will. Still, the Creator in his eternal goodness did not withdraw himself from those men in such a way as to omit giving them any intimations that might lead them to know and fear him. For the sky, the earth, the sea, in fact every created thing that can be seen and known, is so disposed as to render to humankind this principal service that rational nature might be imbued with veneration and love for its Maker when contemplating so many beautiful forms, when experiencing so many good things, and when receiving so many favors. For the Spirit of God fills all things and it is He in whom we live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). Even though 'salvation is far from the wicked' (Ps 119:155), nothing is devoid of the presence of His salvation and power... And yet the greater part of mankind who were permitted to walk in the ways of their own will, did not understand or follow this law" (2, 4). Those, however, "who from among whatever Nations at whatever time were able to please God, were doubtless singled out by the Spirit of God's grace" (2, 5). "Of the whole of mankind... God's multiform and ineffable goodness has always taken care and is still taking care. Therefore no one who perishes can plead that he was denied the light of the truth, nor can anyone boast of his righteousness. The one group incur punishment for their own wickedness, while the others are led to glory by God's grace" (2, 29).

From these quotations it should be clear that Prosper is more reserved than Augustine regarding the question whether men from among the Nations can attain eternal salvation. Prosper keeps strictly to the line of the New Testament. He points out that the Nations have always enjoyed the gifts of God's goodness and this fact can open their eyes and lead them to know God, to worship Him and to observe His law. But the majority of them have failed to yield obedience. Those, however, who did fulfill God's will, were saved through His grace. Prosper's

reverential theology remains silent on the question which pagans were elected.

Thus Prosper is somewhat inarticulate or reticent as to the eternal lot of those outside the Covenant. On the other hand, however, he is quite explicit in professing that all Nations will eventually come to know the gospel and thus have the opportunity to find salvation through faith. He writes:

"We know that in former times certain peoples were not adopted among the children of God. It is quite possible that likewise even now there are in the more remote parts of the world some Nations on whom the light of the Savior's grace has not yet shone. But we have no doubt that God's hidden judgment has appointed for them also a time in which they are to be called when they will hear and accept the gospel... Even now they are not denied that amount of general help that is bestowed from on high upon all men at all times. But human nature has been wounded so severely that no one's independent speculation is fully sufficient to reach the knowledge of God unless the darkness of the heart is dispelled by the true light which God, who is just and good, in his inscrutable judgment did not shed in past ages in the same way as he has been doing in recent times" (2, 17).

Here, as elsewhere, Prosper respectfully abstains from either denying or emphasizing the possibility of a knowledge of God and, consequently, of salvation, outside the Covenant.

In a way, St. Prosper's reflections on the salvation of the Nations may be taken to be an exposition of St. Paul's words which speak of "the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints" (Col 1:26).

Corrections

for the article, *The Religions of the Nations in the Light of Holy Scripture,* in *ZMR* 1970, No. 3, pp. 161—185:

p. 166, line 8: instead of "graven" read "material";
p. 168, line 4 from the bottom: after "Micah 4:1—3" add "Zeph 3:8 f";
p. 169, line 20: instead of "deuterocanonical" read "some very late";
p. 177, line 12: instead of "ξῆλος" read "ζῆλος";
p. 181, line 9 frome the bottom: read "Athenians";
p. 182, line 3 from the bottom: instead of "1—13" read "1—3".