

The Influence of Paganism on Post-Apostolic Christianity*

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Every reader of early Christian literature, unless wholly prejudiced by his dogmatic views of Christianity, must recognize the inferiority, as exponents of Christian thought, of the literary productions known to have come from the post-apostolic age, to those which form our New Testament. This inferiority is not merely of literary power but of grasp on Christian ideas. When we turn from the New Testament to Clement of Rome or Ignatius, to the unknown author of the so-called Epistle of Barnabas or to Justin Martyr, we pass manifestly from the teaching of masters whose hold on Christian truth is firm and whose view of it is pure and clear to the teaching of disciples whose hold trembles and whose view is partial and dim. In post-apostolic literature the New Testament doctrines are often reproduced in a fragmentary way. They are mixed with other ideas foreign to apostolic Christianity. The latter is unintentionally distorted and misrepresented. The points of view from which the New Testament authors presented their religion had been, it would appear, frequently lost by their successors, so that apostolic phrases were not seldom repeated with changed meanings.

This is quite a different phenomenon from that of the various types of doctrine found in the New Testament itself. It is true that Paul's conception of faith was not identical with that of James nor his presentation of it with that of the Epistle to the Hebrews. We would have had a very incomplete idea of Christ's ministry if the fourth Gospel had not supplemented the synoptic narrative. The New Testament writers had, in short, their individual points of

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view and doctrinal characteristics. Their mental peculiarities and their historical circumstances are evident in their productions. But while they wrote with freedom, they harmonized with each other in the declaration of their common Christianity. Their differences were due to the very clearness with which each perceived the truth; and just because it was the truth which they perceived, however variously, did their freedom in expressing it prevent their contradicting one another.

But the writers of the post-apostolic age were not merely one-sided, but were imperfect in the apprehension even of the doctrines which they did accept and teach. Two men may behold the same object at different angles, and in consequence may describe it differently, yet the descriptions of both may be perfectly accurate and, taken together, may give us the whole truth. This is the phenomenon found in the New Testament. By their side may be two other writers whose vision is dim and whose descriptions do not harmonize even with those who look from the same angle with themselves. This is the phenomenon found in post-apostolic literature. We find in it, for example, a strong Pauline rejection of Judaism, but without Paul's clear view of the reasons why the Hebrew system had preceded the Christian and why it had been abolished. We find stress laid on obedience and good works, but often stated so as positively to conflict with the doctrine of salvation by faith. We find the Old Testament accepted as the word of God, but interpreted in a mystical, unnatural manner, as no apostle interpreted it. We find the doctrine of the Logos, yet not the doctrine as taught in the fourth Gospel, but tinctured with philosophical speculations. The essential facts of Christianity were, indeed, as clearly confessed in the second century as in the first. The same Christian life was enjoyed and propagated. But the apprehension of Christian doctrine was often not the same as that of the New Testament writers. The language of the latter reappears but frequently misunderstood or else slightly changed so as to indicate a new conception of the truth. The ideas of the apostles are repeated in parts, and in union with phrases and principles of which the apostles show no knowledge. It is difficult to resist the conviction, even from the mere perusal of the literatures commonly assigned to the two periods, that the New Testament books were the work of masters and the other writings the work of learners; that the former created ideas which the latter, with more or less success, tried to understand and reproduce.

This literary fact is of itself a refutation of those theories of the origin of Christianity and the New Testament which would extend the period of its formation over at least the first fifty years of the second century. It is

possible to show in the post-apostolic literature, scanty though it is, acquaintance with most of the New Testament books, even when their ideas were not fairly reproduced nor their language exactly quoted. But, besides this, it is utterly unreasonable to suppose that the mental forces revealed by post-apostolic literature could have produced the books included in the New Testament. It is fair to judge the capacity of an age from the writings which are certainly known to have been produced in it. It is fair to judge the capacity of a definite intellectual and moral movement by the same method. Judging by such a test, we must conclude, from the very fragmentariness of the teaching of post-apostolic literature in comparison with that of the New Testament and still more from the presence in the former of intellectual elements and historical conditions not found in the latter, that the age and Church which produced the former could not have produced the latter. It is safe to say, for example, that the movement of thought which Justin represents, while it made the doctrine of the Logos its central idea, could not have produced the fourth Gospel, for the reason that it was a movement thoroughly infected with Alexandrian philosophy, while the fourth Gospel contains no such element. That which distinguishes the Logos doctrine of Justin from the Logos doctrine of the Gospel is the philosophy of the former; and if Justin represents the thoughts and tendencies which were operating in the Church of his age, it is incredible that the Gospel's doctrine should have been then elaborated. In the same way, as is admitted by all, the clearly cut Pauline doctrine of justification would never have been formulated by the Church of the second century, which very imperfectly apprehended it. It is the natural inference from all this that the New Testament doctrines were first taught and the New Testament books written in the apostolic age, and that the age which followed did not fully grasp the apostolic teaching but only apprehended it in parts and under modifying influences which had meanwhile arisen.

Some such inferiority of post-apostolic to apostolic literature believers in the inspiration of the New Testament would expect to find; but the historical student will not be content to allege the want of inspiration as the only cause of the inferiority. He will perceive that influences to which the New Testament writers were either not exposed or from which they purposely kept themselves aloof must have acted upon their successors. He will judge that the later generation brought into the Church different habits of thought from those in which the founders of their religion had been educated. He will inquire whether new circumstances did not call out new statements of doctrine and duty, so as to change the point of view of the one and the

emphasis of the other. It will be his object, in order to gain a complete idea of the actual course of early Christian history, to point out the influences which modified the original apostolic teaching, as well as the degree in which that teaching was faithfully followed and applied.

In seeking, then, to identify the new influences by which, as we have seen, post-apostolic Christianity was certainly affected, we shall be most safely guided by the general fact that the Church of the second century was overwhelmingly and in its own estimate a Gentile society. This fact, natural as it appears after the narrative of the previous age as given by the New Testament, has had in recent times to be re-established in the face of acute and prolonged opposition. The Tübingen school of critics maintained that the Catholic Christianity of the second half of the second century was the result of a fusion of Gentile or Pauline believers with the previously hostile body of Jewish Christians. Hence the Church was supposed to have been divided during both the apostolic and post-apostolic periods, and Jewish Christianity, though inferior in numbers to the followers of Paul, was said to have not ceased to be a weighty portion of the Church until it had imposed its legalistic and hierarchical spirit and even its antipathy to Paul upon the mass of Gentile believers. The Tübingen theory has now lost much of the respect which was formerly accorded to it and its own disciples have variously modified its positions; but it is still important to observe, in opposition to its main principle, that the Church of the second century represents itself as overwhelmingly Gentile in point of race and sympathies and moulding influences. That there were Jewish Christians both in and out of Palestine who still observed the Mosaic ceremonial as far as they could is, of course, certain.¹ That there were proselytizing Judaizers who sought, like the antagonists of Paul, to compel Gentiles to observe the law, and who retained the prejudice of their fathers against that apostle, is also certain.² But the moderate Jewish Christian element in the Church was fast dwindling away, while the Judaizers were stoutly opposed by the great body of believers. Whatever influence Judaism exerted on post-apostolic Christianity does not appear to have arisen through Gentile concessions to or compromises with the Jewish Christian minority but indirectly through the use of the Old Testament and the philosophic Judaism of Alexandria. Neither of these, however, imply the influence of a body of Jewish Christians in the Church. The Old Testament was accepted by the most thoroughly anti-Jewish

¹ Barn. 2-16; Justin Dial. 47.

² Justin Dial. 47; Ign. ad Mag. 10; ad Philad. 6; Clem. Homm. (passim).

orthodox Christians, while Alexandrianism is to be regarded as a philosophical rather than as a national influence. The Church as a body had fully accepted the liberty from the Jewish yoke for which Paul had contended and stood practically on the ground which he had won. Judaism was considered unchristian, though charity might allow Jewish converts to continue, if they so chose, their traditional rites. Even Clement of Rome, though saturated with the Old Testament, and himself probably a Hellenistic Jew,³ betrays no consciousness of any division in the Church between Jew and Gentile, and considers all believers as the true Israel.⁴ Ignatius (about AD 107) in a more polemic spirit denounces Judaizing and forbids the Asian Christians, evidently because they were nearly all Gentiles, to live according to the law.⁵ He regards Judaism as a thing of the past, displaced by the universal religion. "Christianity," he writes, "did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, in which every tongue having believed was gathered together unto God."⁶ According also to the Epistle of Barnabas, Jewish observances had been abolished and had been replaced by spiritual worship and obedience. When, however, we reach Justin Martyr, about 150 AD, the Church is represented as so thoroughly Gentile as to be spoken of as essentially a Gentile society. It was, says Justin, by the Gentiles that Christ had been accepted.⁷ Christ is the priest of the uncircumcision.⁸ Justin uses the expression "Christ and his proselytes — namely, us Gentiles."⁹ He regards the rejection of the Jews and the conversion of the Gentiles as the specially predicted mark of the Messiah's advent,¹⁰ and states explicitly that "the Christians from among the Gentiles are both more numerous and more true than those from among the Jews and Samaritans."¹¹

Thus in the second century Christianity stood forth as a universal and Gentile religion. Its members, with the exception of a small minority, rejected all Jewish ceremonies and regarded their faith as the supplanter of all previous religions alike. The Pauline liberation was in point of fact completely successful, and the development of the Church cannot be explained by the conflicts and reconciliation of Gentile and Jewish

³ See Lightfoot, *Clem. of Rome*, 264.

⁴ Ad Cor. 29. 59.

⁵ Ad Mag. 8, 9, 10; ad Phil. 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10, ὁ γὰρ χριστιανισμὸς οὐκ εἰς Ἰουδαϊσμὸν ἐπίστευσεν κ.τ.λ.

⁷ Ap. i. 31, 40.

⁸ Dial. 33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁰ Ap. i. 31, 49; Dial. 13, 28, 69, 109, 117, 122.

¹¹ Ap. i. 53.

Christianity. The latter was an inconsiderable or local element. The former constituted the actual Church of the age. The modifications of Christianity which took place after the death of the apostles may be, therefore, most probably explained by the Gentile origin of the Christians and the pagan influences to which as such they were naturally exposed.

I propose to notice in this article the principal indications of the influence of paganism on post-apostolic Christianity as these are revealed in the admitted literature of the period itself.

I. Pagan education and habits of mind show themselves, affecting fundamentally Christian thought, in what may be described as the inability of the post-apostolic writers to understand the Hebrew premises of Christianity.

Every student of the Bible must see that the New Testament is the culmination of the whole volume and that it cannot be understood without previous knowledge of the Old. In the same way is Christianity itself the mature development of the truths taught by Moses and the prophets. The old dispensation was God's education of the Hebrews in the fundamental principles upon which Christianity was to be established. The doctrinal ideas in which the law and the prophets trained Israel provided the forms of thought which were to be filled with Christian truth. It is safe to say that the apostles could not have taught Christianity as they did but for their education in the Hebrew religion.

The apostles, however, did not make the mistake of supposing that the Hebrew ritual was to be continued under Christianity. Whether they themselves observed it or not, they did not regard it as binding upon Gentiles. Under the leadership of Paul, they perceived that it was but a shadow of better things to come, and that it could be retained even by Jews only as a national duty or a matter of personal preference. But some of the Jewish Christians did not follow the apostles in this fair and moderate position. They could not break the shell in which the truth had been placed by God for preservation. They not only held on to the outward form of Judaism, but insisted on the obligation of Gentiles to observe it with them. These were the Judaizers of whose opposition to Paul we read in the New Testament and who were succeeded by the Ebionites of a later age. The post-apostolic Christians, on the other hand, failed, it would appear, in precisely the opposite direction. They had cast off the shell of Judaism. They rejected the Hebrew forms. But they failed to perceive the good use to which the latter had been put by Providence or to understand by means of them the Christian revelation. They thus stood on the opposite extreme from the Judaizers and indicate that they

lacked the training by which the apostles had themselves been prepared to set forth the Christian doctrines.

This inability of the post-apostolic writers to realize the Hebrew premises of Christianity appears in their use of the Old Testament itself. They universally held it to be inspired and therefore an authoritative book for the Christian as well as for the Jew. The most cogent argument in favor of Christianity was, to their minds, its fulfillment of prophecy, and hence the inspiration of the prophets was undoubted by all the Church. But two peculiarities are to be noticed in their use of the Old Testament. On the one hand, it was regarded as so emphatically a Christian book that the prophets were supposed to have meant to teach precisely and in detail the beliefs and duties taught by the apostles. Thus when Isaiah wrote, "Wash you, make you clean," he was understood to refer to baptism,¹² and Malachi's prediction of "the pure offering" to be offered in every place among the Gentiles was interpreted of the Eucharist.¹³ There seems to have been little or no idea of the progress of revelation. The whole of Christianity was assumed to have been in the minds or words of the prophets, and the influence of Alexandrian methods of interpretation confirmed the Gentile Christians in the effort to discover the details of later teaching in the ancient Scriptures. On the other hand, the prophetic rebukes of the Jews were interpreted as rebukes of Judaism itself. In the Epistle of Barnabas we read:

For He hath revealed to us by all the prophets that He needs neither sacrifices nor burnt offerings nor oblations, saying thus: "What is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me, saith the Lord? . . . Incense is a vain abomination unto Me, and your new moons and Sabbaths I cannot endure." He has therefore abolished these things, that the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is without the yoke of necessity, might have a human oblation.¹⁴

All this bespeaks a state of mind which did not appreciate God's education of the Hebrew Church by the ritual. These early Christians, to whom the full revelation of God in Christ had come, saw in Judaism only opposition to the Gospel and in the prophets evangelical teachers who had proclaimed in their day, though more obscurely, just what the apostles had afterward proclaimed in unmistakable terms.

¹² Just. Ap. i. 61.

¹³ Mal. 1:11. See Justin Dial. 41, 116, 117.

¹⁴ Ch. 2. That is, an oblation of the man himself. This is the Latin text. The Greek has "might not have a man-made oblation." See also ch. 3 and Just. Dial. 15.

So also, as we would now expect, these writers evince a singular inability to estimate the positive worth of the Mosaic institutions themselves. This was, in fact, the reason for their misuse of the Old Testament. To them the Hebrew ritual was a national system of worship, which had indeed been given by God to the Israelites but solely because of “the hardness of their hearts.” In it they occasionally saw that He had introduced types of Christ, but the educational value of the system as a whole they did not see, still less its purpose to intensify conviction of sin and of the need of redemption. Of this the Epistle of Barnabas and Justin Martyr are again the most explicit representatives. The former seems even to imply that the Hebrew sacrifices and fasts had not been commanded by Jehovah.¹⁵ Probably, however, the writer did not mean that, for he saw too clearly at times¹⁶ the typical value of the ritual not to believe that it had been commanded; but he thought that much that Moses had spoken with a spiritual reference was understood in a literal and carnal sense by the Jews.¹⁷ Justin, however, is more explicit. He knew that God had given the Hebrews their national law and covenant,¹⁸ but he declares that the ritual was laid upon them solely because of their sins.¹⁹ Meats had been forbidden or allowed simply to keep God before their ever-wandering eyes.²⁰ The Sabbath had been instituted because they, more than others, were prone to forget their Maker.²¹ Sacrifices had been ordained to keep them from joining in the idolatry of their neighbors.²² Circumcision was actually intended to mark them out for punishment when they should have crucified Christ.²³ These rites would never have been commanded if the Hebrews had shown a disposition to be faithful; and while the prophets repeated the commands of Moses,²⁴ they taught that salvation was to be had by repentance and obedience to the eternal precepts of righteousness.²⁵

Thus, as has been said, the Pauline rejection of Judaism was strenuously maintained, but the positive value of Judaism, which Paul so clearly grasped and on which he based his rejection of it as having done its work, was not perceived. We hear nothing of the law as a schoolmaster to lead men to

¹⁵ See chs. 2 and 3.

¹⁶ See ch. 7.

¹⁷ See ch. 10, on the Mosaic precepts concerning food.

¹⁸ Dial. 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

Christ. We hear nothing of either its intellectual or moral training of the Church for the coming Gospel. We only hear of the abolition of Judaism as a religion and the disparagement of it, even as instituted for the ancient Hebrews themselves. What, then, is more probable than that this change from the apostolic standpoint was due to the fact that the Church had removed from her original Hebrew centre? Composed mainly of Gentiles, who brought into Christianity some of their previous contempt for the Jews, she no longer felt the real value and purpose of the Hebrew dispensation. The enmity of the Jews increased also the hatred of the Gentile converts for all remnants of Judaism. The Old Testament was valued for its moral and prophetic portions, and the Hebrew ceremonies seemed to many not one whit better than the idolatry of the heathen.²⁶

If so, however, then we can readily understand that such Christians would not be likely to grasp with firmness the Pauline doctrine of justification nor to see clearly the distinction between the work of the law and the work of grace on which it rested. The evidence upon this point will be presented in another connection, but the fact is that, as the second century advanced, the Christian writers laid more and more stress on salvation as the reward of obedience to Christ's commandments. A new legalism grew up within the Church side by side with intended fidelity to the teachings of the apostles. In books intended for the instruction of believers this might be explained as rather apparent than real; but when we find Justin, in his Dialogue with Trypho, insisting not on the need of faith in the crucified Redeemer as the condition of salvation, but on the acceptance of Jesus as Christ, on obedience to Christ's commands, and the observance of the Christian ordinances, we realize that the spirit of Paul did not purely govern the apologist. "There is no other [way of your obtaining forgiveness of sins and a hope of inheriting the promises] than this, to become acquainted with this Christ, to be washed in the fountain spoken of by Isaiah for the remission of sins, and for the rest to live sinless lives."²⁷ Now, whatever may have led to the development of this Christian legalism, it would seem evident that the manner of regarding the Old Testament and the Hebrew ritual, of which we have just spoken, reveals a state of mind quite unprepared to oppose to legalism the doctrine of Paul. His position could only be felt when his view of the law, in both its positive and negative effects, was also taken. Only when the insufficiency of man's best obedience was realized, could man's entire dependence on

²⁶ See Ep. to Diognetus, cc. 3, 4.

²⁷ Dial. 44.

Christ's atoning work be realized also. Only when the education in Judaism had been finished could the way of salvation be understood. But men who looked upon the ritual as having been given in judgment rather than in love, and who seem to have had no key but an arbitrary and fanciful exegesis with which to interpret it, who rejected Judaism as having always been an error and who consequently did not perceive its profound spiritual preparation for Christianity, were in no position intelligently to appreciate the doctrine of their own apostle nor to maintain it in its purity against the new legalism of their day. Thus the training by which a clear apprehension of the principles of evangelical religion could alone be had was wanting, and its absence points once more to the Gentile character of the post-apostolic Church. Practically, of course, she walked in the path opened by the apostles. By faith in Christ the Christians lived. Him they loved and imitated and trusted. They declared that by His cross He saved them, by His blood He bought them. They were far from consciously deviating from the doctrines which they had received. But they were not prepared to appreciate the principles on which the way of salvation had been set forth. Controversy had not yet done for them, as long afterward it did for their successors, what Hebrew training had done for the apostles. They allowed themselves expressions which Paul would not have used and which modern evangelical disciples of Paul would not use. The Tübingen critics explain these by the supposition that Jewish Christianity, rejecting the doctrine of Paul, had infected his followers. But the stout hatred of Judaism displayed by these writers and their enthusiasm for Gentile Christianity render the supposition most improbable. It is far more in accordance with the other features of the period to suppose that the modifying influence came from paganism, and that it was as influential as it was because the converts lacked the education by which alone what we have called the Hebrew premises of Christianity could be accepted and valued. Mere belief in the inspiration of the Old Testament was not enough thus to educate them. The training had to be repeated or its equivalent in some way secured before its principles could be perfectly apprehended. While, therefore, these post-apostolic writers accepted most fully the Pauline liberation of the Church from Judaism, their failure to follow closely the spirit and doctrine of the apostle shows that they did not comprehend the theological foundation of his doctrine. Their pagan origin and education thus profoundly affected their apprehension of Christianity.

II. But the influence of paganism appears more positively and conspicuously in the mingling of Christianity and philosophy, which took place when the former began to be accepted by thoughtful Gentiles, and the presence of which soon appears in post-apostolic literature.

The absence of any elements of thought which can fairly be said to have been taken from pagan philosophy is a striking feature of the New Testament. Nothing shows more clearly that the thoughts of the apostles were confined strictly to the circle of Hebrew revelation. That this should have been the case after Gentile Christianity had begun to make progress is a surprising fact. Versed as Paul doubtless was in Gentile culture and enthusiastic as he certainly was in commending the Gospel to Gentile hearers, his theology was yet wholly Hebrew in its conception of God and of man as well as of the way of salvation. Nor do we think it necessary to call in the Alexandrian philosophy to explain the way in which the Epistle to the Hebrews exhibits the significance of the tabernacle as a copy of the things in the heavens; while John differs so essentially from Philo in his doctrine of the Logos that neither can he be supposed to have drawn his doctrine from Alexandria. The most that these authors show is that their language may have been chosen in view of the erroneous ideas which were beginning to arise in the Church from philosophic influences and which they desired to correct.

The New Testament books betray the presence of pagan philosophy in only two ways. First, the writers show themselves to have been not unfamiliar with it. Of this Paul's address at Athens is an example. He could speak intelligently to Stoics and Epicureans and present phrases of Christianity which must have appealed to much that his Athenian auditors admitted. In the same way the Epistle to the Colossians, the Gospel of John, and perhaps the epistle to the Hebrews make use of peculiar phrases, which were probably suggested by speculations which they wished to oppose and the language of which they employed in order that the real truth might be substituted for the threatening error. But, secondly, the New Testament writers maintain a position of constant hostility to all the forms of philosophical speculation current in their day. They dreaded them as rivals of the Gospel. While Paul admitted that in previous ages men had been "feeling after God, if haply they might find Him," he yet described them in the same sentence as "times of ignorance." If in Tarsus or elsewhere he had been educated in Greek culture, its prevailing ideas entered into no part of his theology. In 1 Corinthians he declares that the wisdom of the world had both proved itself impotent to provide salvation for the race and was hostile to the Gospel of the Crucified. When, a few years later, speculations, partly Jewish and partly Gentile, began

to mingle with Christianity, they took the form of heresies and were denounced as such by the apostle.²⁸ “Beware,” he wrote, “lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit” (Col. 2:8). Such was the common attitude of the apostles toward human speculations. Christianity was to them a revelation, supreme in its authority and sufficient in its contents. It was the completion of a long series of revelations, and upon a biblical basis alone did the development of apostolic thought proceed. The education and the faith of the New Testament writers alike kept them from the intellectual influences which moulded the thoughts of the pagan world around them.

It is true that Christianity contained a philosophy of its own. “We speak wisdom,” wrote the apostle, “among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world” (1 Cor. 2:6). Against the “knowledge falsely so called” there was to be placed a true knowledge obtainable by faith in Christ.²⁹ Christianity involved a philosophy of the universe, and was destined to supply the key to unlock, so far as may be, the mysteries of life and thought. But to claim this, and in consequence to philosophize in a Christian spirit, is a different thing from combining Christian doctrines with theories of the universe elaborated in non-Christian schools. This the New Testament never does. However profoundly philosophical Christianity may have been felt to be, it was not composed of nor mingled with current philosophies. Pagan speculations did not enter into the formation of apostolic teaching.

When, however, we again pass beyond the New Testament, we soon find ourselves in an atmosphere in which the currents of Christian revelation and pagan philosophy have intermingled.

This was first the case with teachers and writers who stood outside of the orthodox Church. The theosophical speculations which had previously arisen among the Alexandrian Jews, and even among certain classes of the Jews of Palestine (the Cabalists), found in the Christian proclamation of a revealed redemption a new foundation on which to build, and sought to make a place for it and the Redeemer Himself within their systems. Already in New Testament times, as we have seen, had these speculative heresies made their appearance, and while they were Jewish in many of their features, their philosophizing spirit had been derived from the Gentile world. Hence arose in the second century Gnosticism, which strove to commend Christianity to cultivated minds, but did so by surrendering the apostolic Gospel and baptizing with Christian names pagan speculations. In some of its forms it was Jewish in its sympathies and in others it was violently anti-Jewish; but

²⁸ See Col. 2:8, 18; 1 Tim. 1:4, 19; 4:7; 6:3-5, 20; 2 Tim. 2:14-18, 23; Titus 3:9-11.

²⁹ Rom. 15:14; 1 Cor. 1:5; 12:8; 2 Cor. 4:6; 8:7; 10:5; 11:6; Phil. 3:8; Col. 2:3.

in either case its philosophy was not derived from Judaism but from Oriental and Greek thought. Its rise and spread shows that the culture of the pagan world was rapidly affecting Christianity. It spread in the Church of the second century with desolating effect as the language of the early apologists proves. It testifies that a class of converts was appearing who were susceptible to the arguments of the current philosophy and who found it easier to apprehend Christianity when presented in philosophic language. In Marcionism, which represented the most anti-Jewish form of Gnosticism, it was specially successful, and in that age of eclectic thought, when speculations of diverse origins were readily combined by seekers after truth as well as by seekers after novelty, the Gentile as well as the Jewish Christians were often but too open to its pretensions. It seemed to harmonize the Gospel with culture. It strove to present Christianity in a rational way. It was itself the product of pagan speculations and its power in the post-apostolic Church indicates plainly the influences which the new generation most keenly felt.

These intellectual influences were not confined, however, to heretical teachers. They soon appeared within the orthodox Church and among writers who were the firm opponents of Gnosticism. The two earliest Christian writings known to have been produced by men of culture were the Apologies of Aristides and Quadratus; but these have unfortunately perished. Jerome, however, states³⁰ that they quoted the writings of philosophers. The Epistle to Diognetus, if we may place it so early, was evidently the work of a well-educated Gentile Christian, and its description of the benefits which Diognetus would obtain from Christianity — the knowledge and love of the divine Father and likeness of character to Him — was such as would appeal most strongly to a religiously inclined and thoughtful person of that day, as is evident from the writings of such men as Plutarch and Maximus of Tyre. In the middle of the century Justin composed his Apology and Dialogue, and in these the influence of philosophy on Christianity appears in full force. Justin was an orthodox Christian in his own estimate and in that of his contemporaries and successors. He professed to follow the apostolic teaching and the common faith of the Church, and from him it is possible to show that what is known as orthodox Christianity was substantially the faith of the primitive believers. He had already also written a book against heresies and was a leading antagonist in his day of all forms of Gnosticism. But he was at the same time deeply imbued with philosophical ideas. He set Christianity forth as the true philosophy and the perfect revelation of what reason had always

³⁰ Letter to Magnus.

dimly apprehended as well as of what prophecy had proclaimed. He apprehended his religion also under mental conditions which were manifestly moulded by philosophy and by which he was led to depart in many of his statements and modes of teaching from the doctrines of the apostles. He was undoubtedly a fair representative of the influences which were modifying Christian thought, and, since more from his pen has been preserved to us than from any other single writer before Irenaeus, his testimony is particularly valuable.

Justin, then, shows us how easily the current philosophy of the day could combine on at least some sides with the new religion.

For one thing, philosophy was already eclectic in spirit, and therefore ready for further combinations. The well-known passage in the Dialogue³¹ in which Justin describes his early efforts to learn the truth from various philosophic teachers exhibits the way in which the culture of that day willingly drew from the tenets of all the older systems. Justin's writings also exhibit his eclecticism. While he mainly sympathized with the Platonic school, he admired the ethics of the Stoics, and one of his most characteristic ideas was expressed by a phrase of Stoical origin.³² In this, however, he only shows us the mixed currents of his time. The older schools of philosophy had long since ceased to be distinct and had merged into one another. Platonism in particular had combined with all schools that were at all spiritual in their tendencies and its influence was felt by nearly all thinkers. Scarcely any philosopher followed exclusively any one of the historic systems and the general culture of the day felt itself at liberty to accept from all systems those principles and precepts which might commend themselves to each inquirer.³³ In such a period of nearly universal eclecticism, combination with even a new religion was comparatively easy.

But besides this, much of the current philosophic culture was already suffused with a religious spirit, which certainly aided in its combination with Christianity. Philosophers, indeed, either ignored the new religion or violently opposed it. Nevertheless, philosophy was widely pervaded by a spirit which favored its union with Christianity when cultivated pagans came under the power of the Gospel. For Justin was again a fair representative of the best culture of his day, when he declared the end of philosophy to be the knowledge of God.³⁴ Such was the conviction of all the more spiritual forms

³¹ Dial. 2.

³² ὁ λόγος σπερματικὸς.

³³ See Zeller's *History of Eclecticism*.

³⁴ Dial. 1, 2, 3.

of eclecticism. Belief in the divine unity was general among the cultured classes and, though God was conceived of in an abstract and negative way, He yet constituted the goal of thought and inquiry. At the same time, the increasing sense of man's dependence and of his abject need of divine help, the prevalent scepticism as to former types of teaching, and the general rejection by thoughtful minds of the popular worship united to produce a deeply religious tone in the best writers of the period. The philosophy of the age was thus theological in spirit. In fact, the need of a revelation was so strongly felt that philosophy was tending even to theosophy. It united mysticism with rationalism in a movement of which Neo-Platonism was the final result. The necessity of finding God, together with the inability of the reason clearly to discover Him, had thus been demonstrated, and philosophy was prepared to find in Christianity, despite the protests of philosophers, the satisfaction of both its intellectual and moral needs.

Justin, however, still further throws light on the influences which affected Christianity, by revealing the actual channel along which the philosophic culture of paganism passed over into union with the Gospel. For though he was a Gentile, he was evidently well-acquainted with the writings of Philo, or at least with the Alexandrian philosophy. He had read Plato also and was familiar with Stoicism, but in his presentation of Christian truth he appears much influenced by that complex system which was itself a combination of Platonic and Stoic elements with the teaching of the Old Testament. He thus discloses the nexus between pagan culture and original Christianity, the bridge by which the former passed over into the latter's territory. Christianity, it would appear, did not first mingle with the avowedly pagan forms of philosophy. It found in the Hellenic Judaism of Alexandria the means by which, while preserving its hold on Christian and Hebrew revelation, it could yet adopt the philosophical thoughts and retain the underlying philosophical conceptions of the day. The positive influence of Alexandrianism first appears in the so-called Epistle of Barnabas, in which we recognize the Alexandrian method of interpreting Scripture applied in the interest of a kindred spiritualizing of the Old Testament. Gnosticism also in some of its forms was allied to the philosophy of Philo and the very effort to combat the heresy may have fostered the influence of the ideas and principles which made the heresy powerful. At any rate, post-apostolic Christianity, while it had broken completely with historical Judaism and numbered among its followers an ever-increasing majority of Gentiles, found in the Alexandrian philosophy, with which it was made familiar by the

Hellenistic Jews, a medium by which the spirit and ruling ideas of pagan culture united with the doctrines received from the apostles.

But if the means for the combination of philosophy and Christianity had thus been prepared, the comparison of Justin's writings with those of the New Testament reveals also the effects of the combination on Christian thought.

Its first effect was to impair the Christian doctrine of God's nearness and personal relationship to believers in this world, and to remove Him in thought to a great distance, as merely the First Cause of all existence. In other words, the immanence of God was forgotten in the emphasis laid on His transcendence. Such was the aspect in which the current philosophy, especially in its Platonic forms, regarded Him. It made Him the abstract Existence, who could only affect the material world through the agency of intermediate beings. The unity of God had been established on the ruins of the popular mythologies; but the Divine Being had been reduced in thought to an unknowable Abyss from which energy proceeds. Now, the very doctrine of Christ as Mediator between God and man provided a point of connection by which this abstract conception of God was likely, if not prevented by careful attention to New Testament teaching, to enter the theology of the Church. The effect, at any rate, was to destroy the fine sense of the Father's nearness, which Christ had taught, and to break the delicately adjusted balance between divine immanence and transcendence which is found throughout the New Testament. Justin, for example, speaks of God in terms of philosophy rather than of Christianity. He declares that the terms Father, God, Creator, Lord, and Master tell nothing about God's nature, but are mere appellations to describe His manifested activities.³⁵ God "remains ever in the supercelestial places, visible to none and never holding intercourse directly with any."³⁶ The apologist was manifestly still under the influence of that conception of Deity, which in the account of his conversion he gives as the view of his youth, as "that Being who is the cause of all discerned by the mind, having no color, nor form, nor magnitude, nor anything visible to the eye; but it is something of this sort that is beyond all essence, unutterable and inexplicable, but alone beautiful and good, coming suddenly to souls that are naturally well disposed on account of their affinity with and desire to see Him."³⁷ At the same time, he uses expressions which evince belief in God's personality and active providential government. He

³⁵ Ap. i. 61; ii. 6.

³⁶ Dial. 56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

writes like a man under the influence of conflicting ideas. He had learned to call God his Father and to believe in His love to man. But it is easy to see that the philosophical, abstract conception of Deity was the intellectual mould into which his Christian faith in God was run, and that he could not realize, as the apostle had done, the presence of Him in whom "we live and move and have our being." It was a tremendous peril to which Christianity was thus exposed of losing its sense of the divine immanence.

Furthermore, the influence of philosophy led to the representation of Christ as the incarnate Reason of God. The Johannean doctrine of the Logos was thus rationalized, and the consequences were many and injurious. It was this, in fact, which led to the undue emphasis on the divine transcendence to which we have just referred. Christ the Mediator, being the incarnate Reason, filled the space between the creature and the Creator, and removed the latter to an unapproachable distance. But the Logos, while in a sense divine, appeared inferior to the Supreme Father, a sort of intermediate Being between God and man. Hence, Justin represented Him as the product of the Father's will and, while of His essence, subordinate to Him in both person and dignity. The same conception of the Logos led also to the conclusion that the great object of the incarnation was the complete revelation of truth, so that redemption was understood to consist in teaching. Consequently, the view of sin as guilt was often supplanted by the view of it as ignorance, and salvation was represented as to be obtained rather by acceptance of Christ's teaching and obedience thereto than by faith in His atoning work. It is easy for any one acquainted with the logical relationships of doctrine with doctrine to anticipate the results of such Christian rationalism. The change was not due in the post-apostolic Church to any conscious desire to innovate. Justin, for example, believed himself to be truly following in the faith of the apostles. He uses expressions which imply belief in the atonement of Christ and in salvation by His blood, just as he uses expressions which must have arisen from the Christian revelation of God's nearness and personal relation to the believer. But he had been educated under other intellectual influences than those by which the apostles had been moulded. He naturally set Christianity forth in accordance with the philosophical ideas which were bred into his own mental life. In so doing he thought that he was fairly representing it and that his representation would commend it to cultured men. In him, therefore, philosophy and Christianity joined hands, not as with the Gnostics, by the former's being substituted for the latter, but by the latter's being interpreted and presented in sympathy with the former.

In view of these facts, we cannot but discern the direction from which the modifications of early Christianity arose. So fundamental was the influence of philosophy, that it may be considered one of the principal agencies in producing the change. No doubt, most of the Christians were from the uncultured classes. But others were not, and the cultivated minority must have exerted then, as they do always, a great influence upon the rest. It should be remembered also that the ideas of even uneducated people are largely moulded by the philosophy of the day. Philosophical influences are always radical and far-reaching, and those which affected Christianity were particularly so. They affected the Christian idea of God, of Christ, of sin, and of redemption, and men in whose minds these philosophical modes of thought were embedded could not have been able, without a great intellectual as well as moral change, to apprehend and repeat the New Testament teaching in its purity. The presence, therefore, in early post-apostolic literature of precisely those philosophical notions which were common in the pagan world shows that paganism had subtly united with the Gospel. It indicates likewise that the comparative failure of the post-apostolic age to take up and carry on the complete apostolic teaching is to be explained by the Gentile origin of the Christians and the mental habits and intellectual conceptions which they brought into the Church. Such a spectacle ought not to cause surprise. It would be more surprising if Gentiles had been able fully to grasp, at conversion, those views of God and the universe in which the Hebrews had had to be trained through many centuries.

III. A third feature of post-apostolic literature shows, if not the direct influence of paganism, at least the pagan surroundings and temptations of the Christians of the second century. This is the stress laid by them on Christian morals. No longer was it a question between law and faith, but between immorality and morality, between pagan and Christian life; and the practical question of how to live was more pressing than doctrinal questions as to the method of salvation. It is, of course, true that the New Testament writers declare most plainly the moral side of Christianity. None did so more forcibly than the "apostle of faith." He lays down the obligation to good works as vigorously as he could have done if he had made them the condition of salvation. He was keenly aware also of the peculiar temptations to which his Gentile converts were exposed, and we can see the vices of heathen society reflected in the flame of his indignation against them. But in the subsequent age the balance which Paul so finely maintained between faith and works was lost, so that while the Pauline foundation remained and

Pauline phrases were repeated, the paramount matter was evidently felt to be the realization of the high moral ideal of life which Christianity had introduced. Christianity presented itself as a holy life amid the rotten society of the Roman Empire. It was a new moral law which the Christians had undertaken to obey. The emphasis was accordingly laid on the outward manifestation of the Christian principle rather than on the principle itself. The earliest post-apostolic writings, like the Epistle of Clement, were occupied with exhortations to practical duties. Even the "Didache," though doubtless a Jewish-Christian work, shows the Church's sense of the need of living a pure life in the face of pagan vices,³⁸ while the Epistle of Barnabas repeats the same injunctions for Gentile as well as Jewish readers. Justin Martyr likewise appeals to the moral teaching of Christ and to the virtues of the Christians as evidences of the divine origin of Christianity. Such stress on morals was obviously natural in the circumstances. No more effective argument could be made by an apologist than to draw a simple contrast between the vices of even the noblest pagans, still more those of the gods and of common society, and the pure lives which the followers of Christ were leading. No more important exhortations could be addressed to churches mainly composed of converted pagans than to urge them to shun the vices of the world from which they had come.

But it is also clear, we think, that this stress on morals led to a forgetfulness of the basis of Christian morality, and resulted in a legalistic mode of representing the Gospel which Paul would not have approved.

This Christian legalism appears to have become more pronounced as the years went by. Clement of Rome clearly echoed the Pauline Gospel which he had received when he wrote, "We, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own righteousness, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart, but by that faith by which from the beginning Almighty God has justified all men."³⁹ Nevertheless, the practical character of Clement's letter shows, even apart from the immediate occasion which called it out, which way the needs of the hour were turning the attention of the Church. Ignatius likewise was evidently Pauline in his theology;⁴⁰ but he was chiefly concerned to

³⁸ See ch. 2, οὐ παιδοφθορήσειτε and other commands against impurity.

³⁹ Ad Cor. 32.

⁴⁰ See e.g., Tral. 2, "Christ died for us that, believing on His death, we might escape death." Phil. 8, "My charter is Jesus Christ: the inviolable charter is His cross, and death, and resurrection, and faith through Him, wherein I desire by your prayers to be justified." Smyr. 6, "Christ's flesh suffered ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν.

uphold, against docetism, the *reality* of Christ's humanity, death, and resurrection. His desire also to "imitate the passion of his Lord" led him into expressions which savor of self-righteousness, just as his desire to cement the unity and maintain the purity of the Church led him into expressions which savor of ecclesiasticism. Polycarp, too, echoes the Pauline epistles, but, like Clement, was chiefly concerned with exhortations to practical obedience. But when we advance farther into the century, we find the Pauline doctrine more and more obscured in the representation of Christianity as a "new law," and in the enforcement of moral and churchly duties. The Epistle of Barnabas first speaks of "the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is without the yoke of necessity."⁴¹ It represents Christians as the true Israel, and urges them to practice the, so to speak, true ritual by being patient and continent, honest and benevolent, observant of the commandments of God.⁴² This is declared to have been the message of the prophets and of Christ. Such exhortations were not meant to be anti-Pauline. But the edge of the Pauline doctrine was dulled. The important thing was felt to be obedience to the Christian rule of life, for "he who keepeth the judgments of the Lord shall be glorified in the kingdom of God."⁴³ In Justin legalism is expressed still more strongly. He prevailingly represents Christianity as the new law or covenant,⁴⁴ and calls Christ the lawgiver.⁴⁵ He declares that Christians receive forgiveness of past sins in baptism,⁴⁶ and then pray that by their works they may be found keepers of the commandments, and so be finally saved.⁴⁷ They who can prove to God by their works that they followed Him will obtain the reward.⁴⁸ Christ will clothe us at last with prepared garments, if we do His commandments.⁴⁹ Repentance, baptism, belief in the revelation made through Christ, and obedience to His teaching are the commonly named conditions of salvation. It is possible, indeed, to quote from Justin expressions of a positively evangelical character, and it is clear, as already observed, that he was not conscious of departing from the apostolic faith. Nevertheless, he did depart from it in that his view was so dominated both by philosophical ideas and by the practical facts of a new law and life revealed in Christ, that he failed

⁴¹ Ch. 2.

⁴² Chs. 2, 3, 19, 20.

⁴³ Ch. 21.

⁴⁴ Dial. 11, 24, 67, 110, 122.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11, 12, 14, 18.

⁴⁶ Ap. i. 61.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁹ Dial. 116.

adequately to express the evangelical principles on which Gentile Christianity had itself been founded. So throughout the second century the representation of Christianity as the "new law" had a marked prominence.⁵⁰ It was a representation which can certainly be justified from the New Testament (James 1:25; Heb. 8:7-13; Gal. 6:2). But its prominence in the post-apostolic age, and the failure to relate it formally to the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, is a fact of much significance. It is not to be explained, as the Tübingen school insists, on the theory that Pauline Christianity had merged with Jewish. The most pronounced opponents of Jewish Christianity betray the same legalistic tendency. It is far more naturally explained by the pagan surroundings of the Gentile Christians. The practical morality of Christianity was necessarily emphasized in the growing battle with paganism. With this demand united, as we have already seen, the tendency of philosophy in the Church and the inability of the Gentiles to understand the Hebrew premises or foundation of the Gospel. All these considerations point to the conclusion that the legalism disclosed by the Christian writers of the second century was not due to an approach to each other of Gentile and Jewish elements in the Church, but was the natural, though injurious, effect of the progress of Gentile Christianity itself and another symptom of the influence of paganism on the original apostolic doctrine.

A similar explanation is probably to be given of the universal abhorrence with which the eating of meat which had been sacrificed to idols was held in the second century. No true Christian would be guilty of such an act.⁵¹ In this there was obviously a recession from the claim of liberty in the matter which Paul had made (1 Cor. 8; 10:23-26; Rom. 14:1-6), and many critics have seen in it another sign of the supposed fusion of Pauline and Jewish Christianity. But the abhorrence of such conduct may be equally explained by the necessity, which had become more pressing, of distinguishing the Christian from his pagan neighbors. The universal test of civil loyalty was the offering of sacrifice to the gods and the universal test of Christianity came to be the refusal of such recognition. The liberty which Paul had asserted they did not discuss. Circumstances made it incumbent on them to profess their faith in the most practical ways. No way was more practical than abstinence from sacrificial food, and the duty of confession outweighed the need of asserting individual liberty. This was the more felt from the fact that some of the Gnostics boasted of their freedom in the

⁵⁰ See e.g., Athenag. Supplic. 32; Clem. Rom. ii. 2, 4, 11, etc.; Iren. adv. Her. iii. 10, 5; iv. 9, 2; iv. 34, 11. Tert. de prescr. Her. 13; Adv. Jud. 3, 6, 9.

⁵¹ See Just. Dial. 34, 35.

matter,⁵² and turned liberty into license by proclaiming the moral indifference of outward conduct. No doubt, too, the account in the Acts of the Apostles (15) of the letter sent from the council in Jerusalem to the first Gentile converts, whether that "decree" was considered in the apostolic age binding or not, confirmed the post-apostolic Church in abstinence. But against paganism in or out of the Church was their abstinence from sacrificial meat a protest; and while a stumbling block was thus undoubtedly removed from before the Jewish believers,⁵³ the prejudices of the latter need not be assigned as the motive of the protest. In fact, this form of abstinence was too universal a habit in the second century to have been caused by Jewish influence. It was more probably the consequence, like legalism, of the conflict with pagan society. The heathen surroundings, temptations, and persecutions of the Church, the importance of witnessing a good confession before the world, alike in daily life and in formal service, caused a stress to be laid on Christian morality and religious duties which, under the circumstances, cannot occasion surprise, but which obscured, if we may judge from the literature of the period, the principle of justification by faith alone which the apostles had laid down.

IV. Only a brief reference can be made to the question, much mooted of late, of the influence of pagan society and ideas upon the development of Church organization. There can be little doubt that a considerable change gradually occurred in the organization of the churches during the latter part of the first and the beginning of the second centuries. The letters of Ignatius confirm the inference which we should draw from other evidence, that the elevation of a single presbyter to the permanent presidency of each society, and the application to him exclusively of the title of bishop, became an established fact, at first in the churches of Asia Minor and afterward in all the churches of the Empire. The presbyters of each congregation became the bishop's council and especially his assistants in teaching. The deacons became his helpers in the financial and executive work which was concentrated in his hands and which occupied more and more of his attention. His position, indeed, was no more than that of a modern pastor, if presiding over the single church of a large city, and must not be identified with diocesan episcopacy. But that the mode of organization was changing and that the change was toward the centralization of power in the hands of

⁵² Just. Dial. 35; Iren. adv. Her. i. 6, 3.

⁵³ See Clem. Hom. vii. 8; Recog. iv. 36.

the local presidents appears certain. The churches were, so far as organization went, independent of each other, and there was but one church in each city or locality. But the bishop was becoming the bond of local unity and of communication and cooperation with other churches, and the rise of this civic or local episcopacy marks a distinct change in the organization of the Gentile Christian societies.

Now, it can hardly be said that this change in itself shows the influence of pagan ideas. True, centralization of power was the ruling spirit of the Empire. But at an earlier period James appears to have occupied a somewhat similar presidency over the Jerusalem church, and the idea of a monarchy was no less Jewish than pagan. Indeed, the very doctrine of the kingdom of God may have aided to impress monarchical forms on the early churches; while the destruction of the Mother Church of Jerusalem and the death of the apostles may be fairly supposed, by removing the former centres of authority, to have operated in the same direction. It was still a long time before the period when the political divisions and government of the Empire began to be reproduced in the framework of the Church. We must, moreover, reject the theory of Dr. Edwin Hatch,⁵⁴ that the episcopate was originally a separate office from that of the presbyter, and that it arose in the Gentile churches from the example of the executive officers who presided over the numerous clubs and guilds of pagan society. This theory is in conflict with the language of the Acts⁵⁵ as well as of Paul in the Epistle to Titus (1:5, 7), and the use of the word ἐπίσκοπος is sufficiently explained by its use in the Septuagint.

Nevertheless, it is not improbable that the popular associations, which played so large a part in the society of the Roman world, exerted some influence on the Christian churches. The latter were classed with them in the eyes of the law and, because not authorized, were persecuted. The practical benevolence also of the Christian societies grew so rapidly as speedily to liken them to other beneficial associations. As the Gentile Christians increased in number, the Church lost the semblance of a synagogue and acquired that of a guild or secret fraternity.

But more particularly does the influence of pagan society appear in the gradual recognition of the special importance of the church at Rome. This was mainly due to the political power of the Capital. Certainly no ecclesiastical primacy was as yet attributed to her, but the Roman Church had already begun to be regarded as in some sense the chief church of the young

⁵⁴ *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, Bampton Lectures, 1880.

⁵⁵ See Acts 20:17 and 28, where presbyters and bishops are identified.

Christendom.⁵⁶ It would seem that with the fall of the church of Jerusalem and the increasingly Gentile character of the Christian societies, the church of the Capital naturally stepped to the front of the battle, and that under the sway of the political habits of the Roman world she more and more became the leader of the churches, until toward the close of the century she aspired to be their master.⁵⁷ Even when Clement of Rome draws one of his arguments for obedience to presbyters from the discipline of the Roman armies,⁵⁸ we cannot but feel that a new temper was beginning to diffuse itself and that the order of the State would in time impress itself upon the Church.

Such are the most notable traces of pagan influence upon the Christianity of the post-apostolic age. Others might be mentioned, but these are sufficient to show that the Church was being seriously affected by the ideas which had been previously embedded in the society about it and by conflict and contact with the pagan world. It is not to be forgotten for a moment that these influences did not affect the practical fervor of Christian life, the faith in Jesus as a Saviour, nor the love of God and striving after righteousness which that faith had brought into the world. It would be easy to reverse our sketch and show the increasing influence of Christianity on paganism up to the hour of decisive victory. The spiritual power of the Gospel was quietly spreading from heart to heart and was leavening society with a new law of living and a new hope in dying. The peculiarities of the post-apostolic age which have been described pertained to its intellectual apprehension of Christianity, as this is evidenced by the orthodox writers of the period. A very fragmentary and even partly false understanding of Christian truth is consistent with fervor of religious life and sincere faith in Christ. But these peculiarities show us forces which help to explain the historical movement of early Christianity, and as we consider them several conclusions seem to be justified.

The first is that, so far from the Catholic Christianity of the latter part of the second century having been the result of a fusion of Pauline and Jewish, it was, so far as it differed from the Christianity of the apostles, the result rather of the increasing influx of Gentile ideas into the Church. That the hierarchical spirit which in time found its way into the Church was, at least in part, derived from Judaism may be true. That Ebionism opposed the Gentile Christianity of the second century as the Judaizers had done that of

⁵⁶ See Clem.'s. Ep. to Cor. The Rom. church had been appealed to to advise concerning the difficulties at Cor. So see Ign. ad Rom. 3.

⁵⁷ When Victor tried to force the Roman observance of Easter on the Asian churches.

⁵⁸ Ad Cor. 37.

the first, that not a few Christian Jews who were not Ebionites continued to observe so much as they could of their ceremonial, that various Jewish influences were felt more or less directly by the Gentile churches, is, of course, not meant to be denied. But we contend that the forces which principally modified apostolic Christianity in the second century came from the opposite direction. The result was not only, to use Ritschl's phrase,⁵⁹ a degeneration of Paulinism, or, as we should say, of apostolic doctrine, but the positive infusion of pagan conceptions of religion into the mind of the Church. Even those features to which, like the growth of Christian legalism, appeal has been most confidently made in proof of Judaizing influences may be explained as results of just the opposite influence. The movement of the Church as a whole in the post-apostolic age seems to have been on the plane of Gentile life, and this fact is a sufficient refutation of the theory that she was occupied with and moulded by the conflicts and reconciliations of Paulinists and Jewish sympathizers.

But furthermore, and apart from the questions which have been raised by the theories of the Tübingen school, the view of post-apostolic literature which we have presented exhibits afresh the supreme value to the Church of all time of the New Testament books. Whether they were inspired or not, they at least present Christianity in its purity. From the mere standpoint of literature, they belong to and complete the symmetrical exhibition of the ideas given in germ by Moses and the prophets, fitting them to be a religion for the world. They move to the end within the circle of Hebrew thought, while they break the shell of Judaism to give the eternal truth contained therein to all mankind. Though the work of Jews, they never Judaize. Though establishing their religion among Gentiles, they are never paganized. They thus present Christianity as the mature fruit grown upon the stalk of Hebrew history. They consistently utter the last word of the God of Israel for all nations of the earth. The moment we pass to other Christian writings, we find the Christian ideas appropriated only in parts and mixed with alien elements, and then as we follow along the course of Christian history we observe the gradual appropriation of more and more of the original apostolic teaching. Christian thought begins with the close of the apostolic age, upon the foundations laid by the apostles, and finds in the New Testament its natural form. It ought not to surprise us that the transition was sharp, from the completeness of New Testament instruction to the incompleteness of the immediately succeeding literature, when the progress of all Christian

⁵⁹ *Die Entstehung der Aitkath. Kirche*, 1857.

theology has been but the slow realization and expression of what was taught at the beginning.

For finally the mingling of paganism with post-apostolic Christianity was, despite its evils, the necessary first stage in the education of the Gentile world in the doctrines of the Gospel. If paganism defiled Christianity, Christianity regenerated paganism. The world-wide significance of the Gospel grew upon the mind of the Church. The new faith was seen to be that for which even heathens had ignorantly yearned, the goal of the best aspirations and the cure of the deepest needs of the whole human race. It was inevitable that the intellectual apprehension of the Gospel by the world should at first be faulty and partial. But the teaching of the Hebrew apostles was destined to lift the whole world up to their own clear knowledge of God and His salvation.