



McKenzie Study Center, an Institute of Gutenberg College

Handout 6

The Bible and the History of Ideas

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Legacy of Platonism / Aristotelianism in Christianity

Some examples (that come quickly to mind) of the impact or residue of Platonism/Aristotelianism in Christianity [not an exhaustive list]:

A. Concept of God

1. **God is distant and uninterested.**
 - a. Saints, Mary, Jesus as intermediaries, intimate.
2. **Spiritual is good. / Physical is evil.**
 - a. Sexuality is bad / not spiritual > celibacy of priesthood.
 - b. Religious is good. / Secular is evil.
 - c. Missions, evangelism, is good. / Art, intellectual pursuits are evil.
3. **God is unable to interact with evil. > "God cannot look upon sin."**
 - a. If I sin, I "break fellowship" with God, for God cannot look upon sin.
4. **God is the highest being on a hierarchy of being.**
 - a. Plausible to think that we will one day go and "be with" God. / No unbridgeable gap between God, the transcendent, and us created beings.
5. **Ultimate goal is to "be united with God" or to "be one with God."**
 - a. For Neo-Platonism, union with God was the goal of the philosopher.
6. **God is "brimming" with being / reality / beauty / etc. > He cannot "help" himself; he must create, love, etc.**
7. **God is simple, unchanging, static.**
 - a. "The same yesterday, today, and forever."
8. **God is infinite.**
 - a. Common element of most systematic theology.
9. **God is three hypostases in one ousia, or three persona in one essentia, etc.**
 - a. Whatever the formulation, it employed strictly Aristotelian / Platonic categories.

B. Concept of human fulfillment

- 1. Heaven, as the place that exists up above, beyond the corruption of this world.**
 - a. There is a notion that eternal life on the earth would be an inferior reward.
- 2. Beatific vision > heavenly bliss in ongoing, continuing praise of God.**
- 3. Spirituality as contemplation; and contemplation as a state of consciousness.**
- 4. Spiritual growth as “ridding oneself of the corruption of one’s physical existence.”**
 - a. Using spiritual disciplines/practices to divest oneself of physical desires as preparatory to ultimate “union” with God, true spirituality [to take one’s focus off of “the below” is to be focused on “the above”].

C. Other

- 1. Faith is absolute certainty, not ordinary intellectual confidence.**
- 2. There is one true church! / There is one ideal “form” of churchness.**
- 3. Transubstantiation: essence = body of Christ; attribute = bread.**
- 4. Original sin makes sense because there is one man (ideal form=Adam, human essence) within which every particular individual participates.**