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EMBRACING GREEK PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING IN THE FATHERS OF THE 2ND - 5TH CENTURIES

Hellenistic philosophy is the root of Christian theology. Christian theology could not exist without the intellectual curiosity that was unique to ancient Greece¹. Early Christian Fathers were slow to develop a distinctly Christian philosophy. When they did, their philosophical environment was mainly Stoic, Epicurean, Platonic, Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic. This mind-set directly influenced the historic development of Christian philosophy and theology. In the beginning of Christianity, there was a absolute hostility towards Greek Philosophy. The conflict between the two modes of thought, Greek philosophy and Christianity, is recorded in Paul's encounters with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Acts (Acts 17: 18), his diatribe against Greek philosophy in 1 Corinthians (1Cor 1: 18-31) and his warning against philosophy in Colossians (Col 2: 8). However, as Christianity spread throughout the Hellenic world, increasingly church leaders were educated in Greek philosophy. The dominant philosophical traditions of the Greco-Roman world at the time were Stoicism, Platonism, Aristotelism, Epicureanism and later Neoplatonism. These were readily incorporated into Christian ethics and Christian theology².

To many of the early Church Fathers, classical philosophy was erroneous for the simple reason that it did not emanate from divine revelation. It was secular and pagan. Also, the first Christian apologists, who defended against Greek pagan theology and Greek philosophy in many forms over the centuries, starting with Paul the Apostle in the early church and Patristic writers such as Origen, Justin Martyr, Tertullian and later Cappadocian Fathers, confidently used philosophical reasoning, and though they attacked philosophers they used their language whenever they could. They thus created the basic method of traditional Christian theology³.

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¹ Cf. D. Allen – E.O. Springsted, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, Louisville 2007, 17.

² Cf. D.W. Graham – J.L. Siebach, *Philosophy and Early Christianity*, "FARMS. Review of Books" 11 (1999) fasc. 2, 212.

³ Cf. G. Patronos, *Hellenism and Christianity*, Athens 2003, 17.

Generally, the early Church Fathers complained that whereas Greek philosophers may have argued over words, Christianity possessed the Word, true wisdom as revealed by God. So, the early Church Fathers believed that studying Greek thought would contaminate Christian morality and promote heresy. For the early Church Fathers, there would be no compromise between Greek philosophy and Christian revelation. However, there were other Church Fathers who defended the value of studying classical literature and philosophy⁴. The classical Greeks could aid in the moral development of children because the Greeks, though pagan, still embraced a virtuous life. Knowledge of Greek thought helped Christians to explain their beliefs logically and enabled them to argue intelligently with critics of Christianity. It was Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) who engaged reason to support faith by trying to make Christianity more intellectually respectable⁵. As Clement once wrote in his *Stromata*: “thus philosophy acted as a schoolmaster to the Greek, preparing them for Christ, as the laws of the Jews prepared them for Christ”⁶. Using the language and techniques of Greek philosophy, Christian intellectuals changed Christianity from a simple ethical creed into a theoretical system. From this “Hellenization of Christianity” Christian theology was born in a linguistic form. Christ was depicted as the divine Logos in human form. Stoicism was incorporated into the belief that all are equal and united in Christ⁷.

1. The adaptation of Greek philosophical thought in the data of the Triune God’s Revelation. At first, when the early Christians began to explain the distinctive concept of God that had been revealed in the historic Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, they do not seem to have been concerned about the methodological issues of human thinking that had been developed in Greek philosophy⁸. Later, as the Christian Fathers pulled together the implications of the self-revelation of Triune God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – a new realization of the essence and nature of God came into view. Two terms, οὐσία and ὑπόστασις, were adopted by the Christian Church from Greek philosophy. They were terms based on the language and culture of a given society with an academic discipline⁹.

Generally, the two major intellectual configurations of history, Hellenism and Christianity are usually treated by most scholars as very important features of the fourth and the fifth centuries. The conditions and processes which

⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 25-43.

⁵ Cf. E. Artemi, *Clement’s of Alexandria teaching about the cryptic philosophical tradition*, VoxP 34 (2014) t. 62, 61-71.

⁶ Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* I 5, 28, PG 8, 717D, transl. E. Artemi.

⁷ Cf. J. Zizioulas, *Hellenism and Christianity: The Meeting of Two Worlds*, Athens 2003, 103.

⁸ Cf. J.A. Fowler, *The Triune God in Christian Thought and Experience*, Fallbrook 2013, 17.

⁹ Cf. E.G. Flett, *Persons, Powers and Pluralities. Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Culture*, Cambridge 2011, 224. See Th.F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, Colorado 1992, 48.

occurred during the three centuries before that and which lead to this dynamic synthesis of Hellenism and Christianity are still difficult to trace.

In Orthodox Patristic Theology, the use of Greek philosophy was concerned mainly with terminology and schemes and less about the acceptance or rejection of Greek religious thinking. Certain Greek Fathers affirmed until the 14th century that Patristic Hellenism was focused on the notion of self-transcendence rather than its earlier focus during the pre-Christian era. So the Fathers wanted to have a smooth path that neither rejected secular wisdom nor elevated it to something to be venerated. The official position of the Church repelled both fanatic monks' contempt for "secular" wisdom, and the excessive admiration by certain scholarly circles, which had upset the established equilibrium and composure of the great Greek Christian Fathers¹⁰.

Greek thinking passed through a creative encounter with Christianity and suffered major transformations, whilst for Christianity, its Hellenization was not eliminated. It was made to change orientation, to obtain information that it had not previously had. For example, in the area of Christology, the purpose of these transformations was to preserve the heritage of Jewish monotheism from misconceptions and polytheism, Neoplatonism etc. In the history of the Church, the spirit of the Greek Fathers, built on the New Testament, offered solutions how to avoid these risks¹¹.

According to George Martzelos: "the use of contextual representations and images in order that the doctrinal truths to be understood by people with different cultural backgrounds, is often not only legitimate but also necessary. This is a fundamental missionary and educational authority, which is deeply rooted in the history and the life of the Church. But the use of these contextual representations and images [was] limited only to the morphology of the doctrine and leaves intact and unformed its essence"¹². Mainly, the early Christian Fathers of the 4th and 5th centuries saw in ancient Greek thought elements or germs of divine revelation. But also before them, Origen, Justin Martyr, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria adopted some terms from Greek philosophy. They viewed Greek philosophy as a useful means for interpreting and sharing their faith. The Cappadocian fathers in particular, and the Alexandrian and several Antiochian theologians formulated the attitude of Orthodox Christianity toward ancient Greek heritage¹³. Early Church Fathers like Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom added that the purpose of education should be to develop the human being into a person possessing

¹⁰ Cf. Zizoulas, *Hellenism and Christianity*, p. 99.

¹¹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 111-112.

¹² Cf. G.D. Martzelos, *Theologikos animismos and orthodoxy pneumatology*, "Kath odon" 4 (1993) 105.

¹³ Cf. D.J. Constantelos, *Hellenic Paideia and Church Fathers – Educational Principles and Cultural Heritage*, <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith8143> [access: 18.12.2015].

faith in a core of values and persistent motivation to apply them in everyday life until the icon of Christ is formed in him or her.

Early Christians came to the conclusion that they too should strive to likewise keep before their eyes those things of beauty, goodness and excellence, such as will inspire them to truth, wisdom, and love of God. Also, they concluded that they should educate their children in that same tradition of the Orthodox Christian Faith and Hellenic (Classical) wisdom. Further, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, the Theologian, and John Chrysostom became successful men of letters, great theologians and Church leaders. They had studied in Athens, Constantinople, and Antioch – called Athens of East. They had the best education available and became effective social reformers, defenders of Orthodox Christianity, and supporters of Greek learning¹⁴.

2. The friendly and hostile attitude of Church Fathers to Greek philosophy in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The development of Christian philosophy and apologetics was due on one hand to the hostile attacks of detractors against the apologists and, on the other hand, to the desire for understanding the meanings revealed by this teaching and for reaching a more comprehensive vision of the world and human life. On the other side, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, were in favor of the Greek philosophy and distinguished it from the Greek pagan theology. Generally, the apologists and mainly Justin Martyr had as their object the defence of Christianity against the objections raised by intellectual contemporaries in the Greco-Roman world, especially the charge that Christians were atheists and to show that seeds of the divine truth existed in the texts of ancient Greek philosophers. He tended like Clement to associate God's Fatherhood with creativity in a way that is foreign to the New Testament books but had important precedents in Plato. So, Flavius Justinus Martyr (ca. 100-164) admired Plato's philosophy and used some Platonic terms, but not necessarily with Platonic meaning¹⁵.

He underlined that every person as a rational being shares in the "Logos", carrying within himself a "seed", and can perceive glimmers of the truth. Thus, the same Logos who revealed himself as a prophetic figure to the Hebrews of the ancient Law also manifested himself partially, in "seeds of truth", in Greek philosophy. He analyzed Christian teaching as real philosophy. He believed that all truth was God's truth. Borrowing from John's treatment of the Word, Logos in Greek, in his gospel, Justin explained that any truth in Greek or pagan philosophies was the Word or Logos reaching out to sinful humanity¹⁶. He insisted that Plato's God was the God of the Bible and Socrates was a Christian before Christ, just as Abraham was. He argued that as Moses and

¹⁴ Cf. *ibidem*.

¹⁵ Cf. V. Adrian, *The Christian Apologist attitude towards philosophy of their time*, DOI: 10.5593/sgemsocial2014/B31/S11.109 [access: 19.01.2016].

¹⁶ Cf. Iustinus Martyr, *Apologia II* 13, 4, PG 6, 465D.

the Old Testament writings were older than the Greek philosophies, any truth the Greeks had was borrowed from the Jewish prophets¹⁷.

Justin, especially in his first Apology, mercilessly criticized pagan religion and its myths, which he considered to be diabolically misleading from the path of truth¹⁸. So, for him Greek philosophy represented the privileged area of the encounter between paganism, Judaism and Christianity, precisely at the level of the criticism of pagan religion and its false myths¹⁹.

The same thing was supported by Tertullian, some years later. This Latin father defined the same option of Christians with a dignified and elegant sentence that still applies: “Christ, our Lord, has said that he is the truth not a cultural fashion”²⁰. The opposition of Tertullian to philosophy was indisputable. For him philosophy was the mother of heresy²¹ and the philosophers were the patriarchs of heresy²². He deeply opposed Greek philosophy, because Valentinus, one of the Gnostics, belonged to Plato’s school²³; Marcion, another heretic, learned from the Stoics²⁴; the idea that the soul dies came from the Epicureans²⁵; also the refusal of the resurrection of the body is traced to all the schools of philosophers in general²⁶; and the notion of the equality of matter with God springs from the teaching of Zeno²⁷. The same subject-matter and the same arguments were used by philosophers and heretics, and for Tertullian heresy was the arch-enemy²⁸. Even with this hostile attitude to Greek philosophy, he did not hesitate to claim the support of the philosophers when it suited his purpose. He underlined the point that Zeno agreed with Christian teaching about the Logos. The latter was the Creator of the universe²⁹. Also, the Greek philosophers believed that the Spirit was the Creator of the universe³⁰. Christians’ belief about demons and angels was similar to Socrates’ and Plato’s

¹⁷ Cf. D. Severance, *Justin Martyr: First Christian Philosopher*, <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1-300/justin-martyr-1st-christian-philosopher-11629596.html> [access: 22.02.2016].

¹⁸ Cf. Iustinus Martyr, *Apologia I* 7-10, PG 6, 337A-341B.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibidem*.

²⁰ Tertullianus, *De virginibus velandis* I 1-5, PL 2, 889A: “Dominus noster Christus veritatem se, non consuetudinem, cognominavit”, transl. E. Artemi.

²¹ Cf. *idem*, *De praescriptione haereticorum* VII 1-7, PL 2, 19A.

²² Cf. *idem*, *De anima* 3, 1-4, PL 2, 651A-B: “Atque utinam nullas haereses oportuisset existere, ut probabiles quique emicerent, nihil omnino cum philosophis super anima quoque experiremur, patriarchis, ut ita dixerim, haereticorum”. See 1Cor 2: 19.

²³ Cf. Tertullianus, *De anima* XVIII 20-30, PL 2, 678A; *idem*, *De praescriptione haereticorum* VII 9-10, PL 2, 19AB.

²⁴ Cf. *idem*, *De praescriptione haereticorum* VII 10-11, PL 2, 19B.

²⁵ Cf. *ibidem* VII 12, PL 2, 20A.

²⁶ Cf. *ibidem* VII 13-14, PL 2, 20A.

²⁷ Cf. *ibidem* VII 14-15, PL 2, 20A.

²⁸ Cf. R.E. Roberts, *The theology of Tertullian*, London 1924, 63-64.

²⁹ Cf. Tertullianus, *Apologeticus* XVII 1-5, PL 1, 375A-B.

³⁰ Cf. *ibidem* XXI-XXII, PL 1, 391B - 408A; *idem*, *De anima* V 18-21, PL 2, 653B.

teaching about them³¹. In *De anima*³², he underlined that Stoics declared almost in Christian terms that the soul was a spiritual essence and at the same time the soul was a corporeal substance. Moreover, the frequency with which Tertullian quoted the philosophers was itself an indication that the subjects with which they dealt were far from being uninteresting or unimportant to him. He even admitted that the Greek philosophers had sometimes thought the same things as Christians³³. At the same time in *Adversus Praxean* he accepted the “prolations” of the Gnostics for the purpose of his own explanation of the “economy” of the divine nature³⁴.

Another Christian writer of the 2nd century, who had a positive attitude towards Greek philosophy, was Clement of Alexandria. For him the Scriptures were also amenable to figurative expression, which Gnostics advanced in faith, were capable of understanding³⁵. Clement emphasized the permanent importance of philosophy for the fullness of Christian knowledge, explained with special predilection the relation between knowledge and faith, and sharply criticized those who were unwilling to make any use of philosophy³⁶. He pronounced definitely against the sophists and against the hedonism of the school of Epicurus. For Clement educated and mature Christians inevitably sought an understanding of God that went beyond a literal reading of the scriptures, catechism and faith and that this development required the application of philosophy³⁷. Hence he perceived that the Old Testament and Greek philosophy were two great tributaries of the same stream that led to closeness with God. The aim was to know God as fully as possible.

Clement wrote *the Stromateis* which,

“contain the truth mixed up with the opinions of philosophy, or rather covered over and hidden, as the edible part of the nut in the shell. For, in my opinion, it is proper that the seeds of truth be kept for the husbandmen of faith”³⁸.

Clement’s work, synthesized Greek philosophical traditions with Christian doctrine and valued gnosis that with communion for all people could be held

³¹ Cf. idem, *Apologeticus* XXI-XXII, PL 1, 391B - 408A.

³² Cf. idem, *De anima* V 11-13, PL 2, 653A: “sed etiam Stoicos allego, qui spiritum praedicantes animam, pene nobiscum, qua proxima inter se flatus et spiritus, tamen corpus animam facile persuadebunt”. See Roberts, *The theology of Tertullian*, p. 65.

³³ Cf. Roberts, *The theology of Tertullian*, p. 66. See Tertullianus, *De anima* II 39-62, PL 2, 650A-B.

³⁴ Cf. Tertullianus, *Adversus Praxean* VIII, PL 2, 163A - 164A.

³⁵ Cf. Artemi, *Clement’s of Alexandria teaching*, p. 63; A. Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria*, Leiden 2009, 29.

³⁶ Cf. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* VII 16, 96.

³⁷ Cf. ibidem I 3, 5.

³⁸ J. Kayne, *Some Account of the Writings and Opinions of Clement of Alexandria*, London 1835, 115.

by common Christians specially chosen by God³⁹. He did not reject gnosticism as such, but was railed against false gnostics and their pernicious apocryphal writings⁴⁰. His writings can be thought as systematic treatises. They consist of introductions to Christian faith and life, and miscellaneous reflections on these subjects, leading up to his conception of the ideal advanced believer – the Gnostic. His writings disclose the amazingly broad scope of his knowledge of both classical and Biblical literature.

Generally, these fathers and writers of the Church lived as Christians. Although some their ideas were influenced by Greek philosophers' teaching, they remained faithful members of the Church. They knew that the only way to union with God – *θέωσις* – is the Church's way. The simple faith of the baptized Christian contained all the essentials of the highest knowledge; *γνώσις* gives to Christian the perfection and the latter became the beloved of Christ.

3. The friendly and hostile attitude of Church Fathers (Cappadocians and Chrysostom) to Greek philosophy in the 4th to 5th centuries. Even though vehemence and debate between Greek thought and Christian faith has never been missing from the stage of history and the experience of Hellenism, a mixture and an equilibrium were achieved during the fourth and fifth centuries because of the intellect of people like Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the theologian and others who were trained in the Greek classics and the Holy Scriptures⁴¹. These champions of the Catholic Faith endeavored to effect reconciliation in their work, while delineating differences.

The 4th century Cappadocian fathers Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and also John Chrysostom drew a sharp line of demarcation between Greek religion and Greek culture⁴². They were careful with the use of Greek philosophy and they didn't permit the corruption of Christian theology by it⁴³. So Gregory the Theologian underlined:

“Attack the silence of Pythagoras and the Orphic beans, and the novel brag about, the Master said. Attack the ideas of Plato, and the transmigrations and courses of our souls, and the reminiscences, and the unlovely loves of the soul for lovely bodies. Attack the atheism of Epicurus, and his atoms, and his unphilosophic pleasure; or Aristotle's petty Providence, and his artificial system, and his discourses about the mortality of the soul, and the humanitarianism of his doctrine. Attack the superciliousness of the Stoa, or the greed and

³⁹ Cf. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* VI 10, 6; Artemi, *Clement's of Alexandria teaching*, p. 64.

⁴⁰ Cf. C.W. Griggs, *The Origin and Formation of the Corpus of Apocryphal Literature*, in: *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C.W. Griggs, Salt Lake City 1986, 35; idem, *Early Egyptian Christianity from its origins to 451 CE*, Leiden 1998, 59.

⁴¹ Cf. Constantelos, *Hellenic Paideia and Church Fathers*, <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith8143> [access: 18.12.2015].

⁴² Cf. W. Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, Washington 1985, 74.

⁴³ Cf. A. Theodorou, *History of Dogma*, I/2, Athens 1978, 519.

vulgarity of the Cynic. Attack the Void and Full (what nonsense), and all the details about the gods and the sacrifices and the idols and demons, whether beneficent or malignant, and all the tricks that people play with divination, evoking of gods, or of souls, and the power of the stars”⁴⁴.

Although, Gregory of Nazianzus was usually disrespectful of pagan Greek philosophy or rather theology, many times he expressed his admiration for Greek authors of classical literature:

“Let us leave such jesting to the legends and the Greeks, who think little of the truth, but they will enchant ear and mind by the charm of their fictions and the daintiness of their style”⁴⁵.

And yet he thought that Greek philosophy or works of literature didn’t do any harm to man. It depended on the way that they were used by men: “We know that neither fire nor food nor iron nor any other of the elements is of itself most useful or most harmful except according to the will of those who use it”⁴⁶, “so from secular literature we have received principles of inquiry and speculation while we have rejected their idolatry”⁴⁷.

In his praise of Basil, Nazianzen challenged those who disparaged learning, and one had the sense that many Christians of his day thought secular learning was not appropriate for them⁴⁸. Gregory underlined that Christians should not condemn the heavens, the earth, the air, just as some have wrongly interpreted them and venerate the creatures of God in place of God. They should select from them what would be useful both for life and enjoyment and avoid whatever is dangerous, not opposing creation to the Creator, as the foolish do, but acknowledging the Maker of the world from His works, and as the holy Apostle says, bringing every mind into captivity to Christ⁴⁹.

As it is obvious, Gregory considered education as the highest of all human endeavours. He gave such high praise, not only to “our education”, that was Christian education, which concerned itself with salvation and spiritual contemplation; but he also praised what he called “external culture” – in other words, non-Christian Greek learning. Some Christians had thought this external culture was dangerous and led away from God. Gregory went on to show why those who thought this external learning was dangerous were in error.

⁴⁴ Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Oratio* 27, 10, PG 36, 24B - 25A, transl. Ch.G. Browne – J.E. Swallow, NPNF, Series II, vol. 7, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310227.htm> [access: 29.2.2016].

⁴⁵ Idem, *Oratio* 2, 104, PG 35, 504B-C, transl. Browne – Swallow, NPNF Series II, vol. 7, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310202.htm> [access: 29.2.2016].

⁴⁶ Idem, *Oratio* 43, 10, PG 36, 508A, transl. Browne – Swallow, NPNF, Series II, vol. 7, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310243.htm> [access: 29.2.2016].

⁴⁷ Ibidem 43, 11, PG 36, 508C - 509A, transl. Browne – Swallow, NPNF, Series II, vol. 7, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310243.htm> [access: 29.2.2016].

⁴⁸ Cf. ibidem.

⁴⁹ Cf. ibidem.

The examples he gave – fire, food, iron – were all things that can be used for good, and he placed the non-Christian learning in this same category. Gregory gave a forceful and eloquent argument for why such learning was appropriate.

Also, in the poem *Nicobuli filii ad patrem* he wrote hymns for the study of classical pagan Greek literature and philosophy for the education of Christian students. He advised Nicobulus to study rhetoric, history, grammar, logic, ethics and literature. Afterwards he should dedicate his thought, his mind and himself to the real God. Also, he should collect from the Greek texts things that were useful for his education and avoid pagan theology. Gregory paralleled the Greek text as roses with thorns. Nicobulus should embrace the roses and avoid their thorns. Gregory pointed to the risk, for Greek literature that offered more thorns than roses⁵⁰.

Despite his criticisms of Greek philosophers, on the whole he seemed to follow the policy of Origen, in whose writings he had immersed himself. In Origen's Letter to St. Gregory Thaumaturgus it was underlined that Christians should extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or a preparation for Christianity. Origen spoke of despoiling the Egyptians, carefully extracting from Hellenistic philosophy, that which is true and helpful to the service of the Gospel⁵¹.

Later Nazianzen's apophthegm "Avoid the thorns, pluck the roses"⁵² would express his stance toward Greek culture in the Gregorian urge of discrimination and caution. His attitude may be described as critically positive⁵³. Gregory had absorbed the teaching of Aristotle on logic; but he understood that the mysteries of God could not be proven by syllogistic reasoning. He was appreciative of Greek παιδεία and of the education he had received; but he firmly resisted the subjugation of Divine revelation to secular criteria⁵⁴.

On the other hand, Gregory of Nyssa supported that profane thought and education could be profitable for a Christian, although the bishop of Nyssa thought that the Church shouldn't allow a Greek way of gentile theology for a believer of Christ. This education offered much that could enhance the life and service of Christian and thus be an endowment to the Church:

"For truly barren is profane education, which is always in labor but never gives birth. For what fruit worthy of such pangs does philosophy show for being so long in labor? Do not all who are full of wind and never come to

⁵⁰ Cf. idem, *Carmen 4. Nicobuli filii ad patrem*, PG 37, 1510A - 1511A.

⁵¹ Origenes, *Epistula ad Gregorium Thaumaturgum* 1-2, PG 11, 88A-D, transl. F. Crombie, ANF, vol. 4, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0415.htm> [access: 29.2.2016].

⁵² Gregorius Nazianzenus, *Epistula* 183, PG 37, 297B. This common expression can be found in Basil's of Caesarea (*Ad adolescents quomodo ex gentilium libris possint fructum capere* III, PG 31, 569D).

⁵³ Cf. F.W. Norris, *Of Thorns and Roses*, ChH 53 (1984) 455-464.

⁵⁴ Cf. S. Papadopoulos, *Gregory the Theologian. The Wounded Eagle of the Orthodoxy*, Athens 1980, 89-98; idem, *Patrologia*, vol. 2, Athens 1990, 497.

terms miscarry before they come to the light of the knowledge of God, although they could as well become men if they were not altogether hidden in the womb of barren wisdom? [...] Indeed, moral and natural philosophy may become at certain times a comrade, friend, and companion of life to the higher way, provided that the offspring of this union introduces nothing of a foreign defilement⁵⁵.

In his work, *the Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus*, the brother of St. Basil spoke about the relation between Hellenism and Christianity. He explained that Gregory Thaumaturgus had received an excellent profane education⁵⁶ “outside wisdom”⁵⁷, “outside philosophy”⁵⁸, “outside teaching”⁵⁹. He was not seduced by pagan thoughts of God, but he desired to be a good servant of the true God⁶⁰.

Another well-educated father of the Church, St. Basil the Great urged that the pagan classics should be properly selected and intelligently taught and received by students; then, their influence for their formation will be beneficial. Basil’s acquaintance with pagan literature was that of an understanding friend, not blind to its worst qualities, but by no means condemning the whole on that account. However, it was clear that Basil recommended the study of pagan Greek literature on ethical and not aesthetic or scientific grounds. The chief value of this study in his mind was to stimulate the practice of virtue and to prepare the reader to understand Holy Scripture. But this emphasis on the ethical side did not exclude a genuine appreciation of the best in pagan Greek literature on Basil’s part, and the range and familiarity of his knowledge of the latter revealed in all his works showed that he had drunk deeply from its fountain⁶¹.

Another important father of the Church, John Chrysostom suggested that the secular world can be utilized to realize spiritual truths. In his work *Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life* he spoke with a pagan father whose son had adopted the monastic lifestyle. He stated that he would show the superiority of this course of action to the worldly situation the father wished for his offspring by means of only pagan arguments, not Christian⁶² John Chrysostom certainly condemned pagan religion, but not the classical cultural inheritance.

⁵⁵ Gregorius Nyssenus, *De vita Moysis* II 11-37, PG 44, 329B-D, transl. A.J. Malherbe – E. Ferguson: Gregory of Nyssa, *The life of Moses*, New York 1978, 57. Cf. J. Payton, *Toward a Russian Orthodox Worldview for Post-Soviet Society*, in: *Orthodox Christianity and contemporary Europe: selected papers of the international conference held at the University of Leeds, England, in June 2001*, ed. J. Sutton – W. van den Bercken, Leuven 2003, 311.

⁵⁶ Cf. Gregorius Nyssenus, *De vita beati Gregorii Thaumaturgi* IV, PG 46, 900A - 901A.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, PG 46, 901A, transl. E. Artemi.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, PG 46, 901A-B, transl. E. Artemi.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, PG 46, 901B, transl. E. Artemi.

⁶⁰ Cf. ibidem, PG 46, 901A.

⁶¹ Cf. Basilius Caesariensis, *Ad adolescents quomodo ex gentilium libris possint fructum capere* III, PG 31, 576C-D.

⁶² Cf. Joannes Chrysostomus, *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae* I, PG 47, 321A-D. See

He had said in his *Homily on the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*:

“Read, if you want, both our own [books], and those without [meaning pagan books] for they also abound in such examples. [...] If you admire the works of philosophers, go even to them. They will instruct thee, relating ancient calamities, as will poets, and orators, and sophists, and all historians. From every side, if you will, you may find examples”⁶³.

Also, he brought arguments that “pagan philosophers” could as well teach something positive to us, as in the case of Magi:

“For which of you, for Christ’s sake, had made so long a pilgrimage – Magi for their pilgrimage to worship baby Jesus, traveled approximately two years, – you that have received countless benefits, as these barbarians, or rather, these wiser than the wisest philosophers?”⁶⁴

John, patriarch of Constantinople, viewed Greek philosophy critically. He rejected every aspect of the ancient Greek teaching that was not conforming to the teaching of the Church, as the views of God, of the creation of the world and man. He also denied some Greek ideas of morality. He praised Socrates, Diogenes and Thivaios Krati only for their behaviour or ethics in their condemnation of material goods. He did not praise their metaphysical theories and ideas about God. He refuted Aristotelian thought on the accessibility of God, since John always taught that God is inaccessible. Generally, it is underlined that “in Chrysostom’s eyes, pagan worship went hand in hand with Greek philosophy to constitute a unified opposition to Christianity, because he considered the philosophers to have provided the logic and justification for the worship of idols”⁶⁵.

A few decades after John Chrysostom, in the fifth century, two other very special Church Fathers, Cyril of Alexandria and Isidore of Pelusium, spoke about the relation between Hellenism and Christianity. Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, was initially educated in the classical Greek fashion, but after learning how to read and interpret secular texts, he continued his education by focusing on the Bible, theology, and Christian disciplines. Although the theological education of Cyril was heavily specialized it didn’t happen the same with his

J.H. Gane, *Fourth Century Christian Education: An Analysis of Basil’s Ad Adolescentes*, PhD in the School of Historical Studies, Newcastle 2012, 61-73.

⁶³ Joannes Chrysostomus, *In epistulam II ad Thessalonicenses hom.* 2, 1, PG 62, 472A, transl. J.A. Broadus, NPNF, Series I, vol. 13, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/23052.htm> [access: 29.2.2016].

⁶⁴ Idem, *In Matthaum hom.* 7, PG 57, 79C, transl. G. Prevost, NPNF, Series I, vol. 10, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/200107.htm> [access: 29.2.2016].

⁶⁵ M.M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*, Louisville – London 2002, 274; see also Joannes Chrysostomus, *In epistulam ad Romanos hom.* 3, 3, PG 60, 414B, transl. J. Walker – J. Sheppard – H. Browne, NPNF, Series I, vol. 11, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/210204.htm> [access: 29.2.2016].

philosophical and secular education⁶⁶. If someone studies a number of works by Cyril, he will find that this bishop's knowledge of secular education is general. It is certain that his education was mainly based on philosophical texts and on anthologies of Greek philosophers and poets. He handled Greek philosophy and secular literature with full attention; he neither despised it nor was he their prisoner. Besides, the patriarch of Alexandria did not reject ancient Greek thought as philosophy, but as theology. The motive was obvious. The contrast between Christian theology and Greek philosophy was only when Greek philosophy was presented as theology and Christian teaching as a certain philosophy. The dispute between them required common space that either one was claiming for itself. His rejection of "Greek fake worship as completely useless"⁶⁷ occurs as a theological crisis. When Cyril condemned as trash "Greek and avid [...] bad thoughts" and exercised "criticism to the frauds of the Greeks"⁶⁸ it was clear from the context that he doesn't criticize Greek philosophy, but ancient Greek religiosity.

Generally, the archbishop of Alexandria praised the writings of the Greek authors in the structure and flow of speech, but stressed that their teaching differed from that of Scripture. The full Truth was revealed later. Additionally Cyril expressed his admiration of the Attic language⁶⁹, but he had realized that Divine Truth was not presented through beautiful words but by illumination of the Spirit. Only then could he be correct in his theology and not influenced by heretical teachings. He used the language of secular education as a coaching culture in the true Lord's admonition⁷⁰. Cyril of Alexandria understood perfectly the simplicity and poverty of expressive resources that characterized biblical language, but he did not esteem the Holy Bible for the beautiful way of speech, but because in its bosom there was hidden the treasure of Divine Truth⁷¹. On the other hand, as an Alexandrian theologian, he praised Christian teaching against Greek Philosophy and at the same time he showed himself influenced by Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophy.

Another Egyptian saint, Isidore of Pelusium expressed a critical acceptance of classical culture and philosophy⁷². He underlined that classical grammar, rhetoric and philosophy had fallen away from the truth. He appreciated Demosthenes and Homer. Isidore had a wide-ranging interest in everything secular and Divine, in everything that concerned the world in which we live and in everything that concerned the Church into which we are baptized. He

⁶⁶ Cf. E. Artemi, *The usage of the secular literature in the whole work of Cyril of Alexandria*, "Poreia Martyrias" 1 (2010) 114-125.

⁶⁷ Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *Commentarium in Joannem* in XII 20, PG 74, 81C-D, transl. E. Artemi.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, in VII 30, PG 73, 721C-D, transl. E. Artemi.

⁶⁹ Cf. Cyrillus Alexandrinus, *Adversus Julianum* VII, PG 76, 857C.

⁷⁰ Cf. ibidem, PG 76, 857D i 860A.

⁷¹ Cf. idem, *In epistulam I ad Corinthios* 4, 19, PG 74, 868B.

⁷² Cf. Isidorus Pelusiota, *Epistula*. 65, PG 78, 773B.

spoke about the world and the Church⁷³. From the whole work of St. Isidore it becomes obvious that the Egyptian saint had studied ancient literature and was largely influenced by it in language and style. He emulated the mode of expression of Isocrates, Aeschines, and above all, that of the orator Demosthenes⁷⁴.

The study of ancient literature by Isidore had a deep effect on him. It seems, indeed, that he had studied several ancient writers, from Homer – as mentioned before – through to the Hellenistic Jew Philo. He had such an ability to grow a subject with command, self-confidence, so as to leave no room for contesting the content of his epistles by the recipients of his letters. He believed, moreover, that the biblical texts had simple vocabulary, because the Divine wisdom was to be understood by all. The content of these texts was inspired by God. In contrast to secular wisdom, the Scriptures used varied vocabulary and complex wording and language⁷⁵. The sophisticated form of language, of secular wisdom can be accepted by the Church if only it is used as a means of expression and interpretation of celestial meaning, and not as presentation of arbitrary ideas⁷⁶.

In no way did Isidore accept that secular wisdom could be used in order to distort or to supplant Divine Truth. He didn't condemn secular literature, but he did not attribute to it a great value for Christianity. He estimated that Greek literature had not as great value in the presentation of the Truth as the patristic writings⁷⁷. He did not deny that a Christian could use the works of classical literature especially as tools for expressing his own, i.e. Christian ideas. This view was to be found in other Christian fathers that we have discussed above⁷⁸.

In conclusion the fathers' embrace of Greek thinking can be expressed by the words of Werner Jaeger: "the transformation of Hellenistic Greek Paideia into Christian Paideia is the greatest historical theme of this work. If it depended wholly on the will of the writer, his studies would end with a description of the vast historical process by which Christianity was Hellenized and Hellenic civilization became Christianized. It was Greek Paideia, which laid the groundwork for the ardent, centuries-long competition between the Greek spirit and the Christian religion, each trying to master or assimilate the other, and for their final synthesis"⁷⁹.

⁷³ Cf. G. Florovsky, *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers*, transl. R. Miller, New York 1987, 191.

⁷⁴ Cf. E. Artemi, *Isidore's of Pelusium Teaching for the Triune God and its comparison to the Teaching of Cyril of Alexandria*, Athens 2012, 87.

⁷⁵ Cf. Isidorus Pelusiota, *Epistula* 67, PG 78, 1125A.

⁷⁶ Cf. idem, *Epistula* 281, PG 78, 1500D.

⁷⁷ Cf. Isidorus Pelusiota, *Epistula* 3, PG 78, 457C.

⁷⁸ Cf. Artemi, *Isidore's of Pelusium*, p. 89.

⁷⁹ W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, II: *In Search of the Divine Centre*, transl. G. Highet, New York – Oxford 1981, xi.

Greek was the language that Roman aristocrats used to show their culture. The Christians used Greek language and safeguarded a selection of philosophical and poetic texts. They distinguished Greek philosophy from Greek pagan religion. The Christian Fathers had to decide just how much Greek philosophy, they could safely incorporate into their own Christian theological and philosophical ideas⁸⁰. As a final conclusion, we can say that the Greek Church was persuaded that the study of the works of Hellenic authors was both effective and preferable.

Christianity adopted Greek language and thought it existed within a Greek cultural milieu and Hellenic historical setting. As a whole, however, the Fathers of the Greek Church did not seek to borrow either the essence or content from ancient Greek thought, for those they possessed in their sacred Scriptures. The Church Fathers put together the best parts of Greek classical antiquity with the best of the teaching of Christian theology⁸¹. Nevertheless, in this effort Christian revelation did not escape infiltration by Greek thought, and Greek cultural and intellectual influences became interwoven with Christian faith. It was Christianity's encounter with Hellenism that made the former a cosmopolitan religion. This relationship, not without periodic tensions, prevailed throughout the Byzantine millennium and centuries beyond. Long before modern anthropologists, philosophers, and theologians, these Church fathers confirmed that Greek culture is the outer garment of religion and religion is the heart of culture, and that the two are inseparable. In this manner, the Hellenic heritage of literal texts can be considered a part of our Church's heritage. Christianity embraced Greek classical heritage while rejecting pagan cults⁸².

AKCEPTACJA GRECKIEJ MYŚLI FILOZOFICZNEJ U OJCÓW KOŚCIOŁA OD II DO V WIEKU

(Streszczenie)

Ojcowie Kościoła nie byli ani nieprzejednanymi wrogami greckiej myśli ani nie odnosili się z nienawiścią do dzieł starożytnych pisarzy greckich. Bazyli Wielki nie wahał się pokazywać ludzi, o których mowa w dziełach literatury świeckiej, jako przykłady cnoty. Podkreślał on – podobnie jak inni autorzy – że nie wszystko w literaturze antycznej jest godne przejęcia, ale należy zachować to, co jest przydatne dla chrześcijaństwa, pomijając szkodliwą resztę. Cyryl Aleksandryjski nie odrzucał

⁸⁰ Cf. *Introductory Readings in Ancient Greek And Roman Philosophy*, ed. C.D.C. Reeve – P. Lee Miller, Indianapolis 2006, 6.

⁸¹ Cf. D.J. Constantelos, *Christian Hellenism. Essays and Studies in Continuity and Change*, New York – Athens 1998, 14.

⁸² Cf. A. Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, Oxford – New York 2011, 7.

starożytnej myśli greckiej jako filozofii, ale jedynie jako teologii. Kontrast pomiędzy chrześcijańską teologią i grecką filozofią istniał tylko wtedy, gdy ta ostatnia była przedstawiana jako teologia. Ojcowie greccy szanowali grecki sposób myślenia i grecki język, i używali ich w swoich pismach, ale zwalczali greckie praktyki związane z kultem. Artykuł prezentuje stosunek do filozofii pogańskiej, jej akomodację do myśli chrześcijańskiej oraz idee dotyczące edukacji świeckiej, reprezentowane przez wybranych Ojców i pisarzy wczesnochrześcijańskich z okresu od II do V wieku. Przede wszystkim omawia poglądy Bazylego Wielkiego, Grzegorza z Nyssy, Grzegorza z Nazjanzu, Jana Chryzostoma, Cyryla Aleksandryjskiego oraz Izydora z Peluzjum, gdyż im właśnie udało się zbudować most między hellenizmem i chrześcijaństwem bez ich zmieszania. Cyryl i Izydor reprezentują neutralną postawę pisarzy chrześcijańskich V wieku wobec filozofii pogańskiej.

Key words: Greek philosophy, Paideia, Justin Martyr, Clemens of Alexandria, Tertullian, Basilus of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Isidore of Pelusium, Hellenism, Christianity.

Słowa kluczowe: filozofia grecka, paideia, Justyn Męczennik, Klemens Aleksandryjski, Tertulian, Bazyli Wielki, Grzegorz z Nyssy, Grzegorz z Nazjanzu, Jan Chryzostom, Cyryl Aleksandryjski, Izydor z Peluzjum, hellenizm, chrześcijaństwo.

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