

ПЛЕНАРНОЕ ЗАСЕДАНИЕ

C. Moreschini
(University of Pisa)

ANCIENT CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY: THE FIRST ENCOUNTER BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the relationship between Early Christianity and Greek philosophy was considered part of the influence, which Greco-Roman culture exerted on the new religion. Such an influence, as a whole, had been much wider. This relationship had been thus explained, according to the interpretation suggested by philology, liberal and positivistic in its origins, as a more or less stressed Hellenisation of the new religion by the culture of the society over which it spread. Through the increasing evangelisation of Greco-Roman society, Greek culture transformed Christian religion; therefore Christianity seized not only the forms or pagan literature (the so-called *chresis*), but also the toils of philosophy. Soon – or indeed already as a consequence of the original contiguity between both cultures and civilisations, Judaism and Christianity, on one hand, and Greco-Roman world, on the other – a kind of Christian philosophy aroused, first in simpler forms, then in more and more deepened ways. This was, to explain it shortly, the interpretative criterion suggested by philology in the nineteenth century.

Scholarship, then, underlined some historical facts which surely are true, but, as we shall see, have to be interpreted in a proper way. Scattered doctrines, whose origin was in Greek philosophy, were employed in the polemics between pagans and Christians, as they went more and more refined. Controversial discussion against paganism tried to reflect, in a new way, but by means of the categories given by Greek culture, over the *kerygma*, though Christian religion, as such, had no need (so it was openly said) either of logic or of philosophy: *quid Athenis et Hierosolymis?* Nonetheless soon arose the idea that faith had not to be blind (a current pagan reproach to Christians), and the evangelisation of a highly learned world made more and more pressing the necessity of a Christian culture, even though in theory Christians continued to avoid familiarity with Hellenism.

Since Greek had become in early times the language of the Church, Greek culture granted more easily an aid towards a definition of the dogma and of the Christian catechesis; some New Testament writers, for instance Luke, who was the author of the third Gospel and of the Acts, wrote good Greek prose. The prologue to the Acts of the Apostles is conceived to be an introduction to both these books, one of which (i.e. the Acts) is considered the continuation of the other; it is modelled on Greek historiography, particularly when it hints at the documents the author gathered about his subject. Furthermore, Christian evangelisation required for its *kerygma* a literary form, which had to be not too different from the one that a learned pagan could accept.

A sentence of the Greek comic Menander is quoted in 1Cor 1. 53 («good morals are corrupted by bad speeches»); a line of the Hellenistic poet Aratus, who was inspired by Stoic philosophy (*Phaenomena* 5) is quoted by St. Paul in his speech to the Athenians on the Areopagus (Act 17. 28): «for we are also his offspring». Now, Paul's speech, as a whole, seems to be organised by Stoic tenets, and aims at displaying Christian *kerygma* in order it can be accepted by all philosophers, with the exception of the Epicureans, censured for their materialism. Therefore it can be considered as representing not, perhaps, his *ipsissima verba*, but as establishing the form of the Christian missionary propaganda among a pagan audience. It opposes to pagan polytheism the faith in the transcendent God (a doctrine which could not be easily accepted by Hellenic philosophers), who was also, as Stoics, however, thought, creator of the world and provident for humans. Also St. Paul's Epistles, in their form, are modelled on didascalical and philosophical epistles, a genre well-known among pagans: for instance, Seneca's *Epistles to Lucilius*. St Paul's imagery and argumentation seem to be influenced by Cynico-Stoic diatribes. The allegoric interpretation of deeds and persons of the Old Testament (Gal 4. 22 ff.; 1 Cor 10. 1 ff.), obviously not unknown to Judaism, was, however, typical also of contemporary Stoic philosophy, when it interpreted Homeric poems. In the so-called sub-apostolic age, that is, posterior to the Apostles' preaching, when those who had been in contact with them still lived, Clement of Rome's epistle to the Christian community in Corinth, shows interest-

ing examples of Stoic and Cynic philosophy, even if such examples are of a popular fashion: but it was just that fashion which was fit for the purpose, rather than the theory and the rigour of thought, employed by philosophic schools. So, Clement too mentions in his epistles (ch. 20) the Stoic doctrine concerning the harmony of the universe and some metaphors which were common to Cynic moral preaching. Also the catalogue of vices and virtues is of Stoic origin.

And, last, also a basic doctrine of the Gospel of John – a writer so distant from the Greek way of thinking and of writing – was soon interpreted, that is, from the tenths or twentieths of the second century, in accordance with Stoic philosophy. We mean the idea that Christ is the Word (in greek— *logos*) of the Father: this doctrine was transplanted into the meanings and the ideas of Stoic philosophy. For the Word is the Stoic *logos*, that is the highest divine reason, immanent in the world and ruler of it; when St. John called the Son of God «*logos*», this word was interpreted as the highest Wisdom of God and identified with the Wisdom of an Old Testament book, which was characterised by just the same influence of Stoicism.

What we said about Christian culture of the first centuries can be repeated for the subsequent ones, notwithstanding the changes the Christian communities had to experience later. From the second century, even though neither in that age nor later can we speak of Hellenisation *sic et simpliciter*, we meet an adjustment of the *kerygma* to the necessities of a learned and refined society. The state of things changed, obviously, after Constantine. But the basic problem didn't change: at which degree can we speak of Hellenisation? Surely adaptation to Hellenism continued to be reached through the toils given by the society in which Christianity was becoming a more and more important element, but no Christian writer, neither that one who was more open *tois exothen* (as it was usually said), that is, to pagans, ever was going to forget his duties and his convictions as a Christian: we must remember that the Greek world was, and pour cause, synonymous of heathenism.

Therefore, what did Christian theologians find in Greek philosophy which might be useful to faith? In early times they found some concepts which they considered as their own: but their presence in Greek philosophy was abusive and had to be blamed, because it was the consequence of a theft: the Greeks had stolen to Hebrews, who were older than Christians, their main doctrines about God's teaching to humans, through the sacred books of Moses and of the prophets. But Christianity wanted to be the *verus Israel*, and so the theft to Judaism was, ultimately, a theft to Christianity. This is clear in the charges of the Apologists to paganism, where we can perceive an attitude of defence and of polemic against the enemies of Christianity. But this open distrusted attitude towards Greek philosophy, in spite of a large and intelligent employ of it, was gradually replaced by reticence and clearer arrangements. Aversion to Greek philosophy is continuous throughout Christian theology, in spite of the great influence Plato and Platonism had exerted; such enmity is present also in the works of those Fathers who, like Origen, most employed it. But thereabout an inconsistency between theory and praxis is likewise continuous. An inconsistency which characterises the whole Christian literature as well. So often find we in the Fathers the condemnation or the derision of pagan literature because it lacks a true, deep morality, because it cares only form, not contents, or is interested in rhetoric more than in truth. Symbol of such perversion (and this condemnation is moral, not literary) was Athens, the *linguata civitas*, as Tertullian mocks it. But modern scholarship has long since stressed that such a polemic on the side of Christians, was ultimately only a pose, not a conviction, so frequently repeated that became a cliché. We find it everywhere, both in Latin and Greek writers, yet a real refusal of any literary interest is rare: it is manifest only in some writers and in some milieus: Commodianus, in the West, and Tatian in the East. But neither the former nor the latter influenced anyone. Raniero Cantalamessa notices, however, that their hostile attitude, even though it does not stop the dialogue between the two factions begun with Justin, is a useful correction of exaggerated enthusiasm and of the conviction that an agreement between philosophy and faith can easily be obtained.

For their condemnation of Greek philosophy, Christians had a justification which could be found in the Holy Scripture, and almost everyone, we can say, invoked a famous passage to stress how incompatible were true faith and mundane wisdom. Such an excuse (which, however, remained theoretical) was that of Col 2. 8: «Take care of false teachers, who dupe through philosophy and vane deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world and not according to Christ!» This passage was always interpreted as the condemnation of pagan philosophy, mendacious and maker of sophisms and vanities, which was contrasted by Christian truth. Modern scholarship, however, has given a quite different interpretation of this warning, restraining it to the

particular situation of Colossians, to whom the Apostle was writing. «Philosophy» is not condemned by him as such, but the word means the wrong teaching of those untruthful teachers, who infected the community of Colossi. Therefore St. Paul's words do not concern Greek philosophy, but a particular group of adepts to a syncretistic religion which had abandoned the right faith and whose attraction on the Christian was then dangerous. It has been suggested that they were proto-Gnostics (*Michel O. Filosofia // Grande Lessico del Nuovo Testamento / G. Kittel, G. Friederich, ed. Brescia, 1988*).

That Greek Philosophy was transformed by its Christian interpreters, becomes clear also if we check Christian theology and Platonic philosophy, which influenced it. The great thinkers of late Platonism, such as Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus, if could read the books of Origen, St. Gregory of Nyssa or Augustine, would have been shocked by the transformation the doctrine of Plato and their own had gone on, so to become «barbarous». First rank philosophers openly declared their disagreement towards a «philosophy», which wanted, like Christian theology, to «speak of God» («theologhein») through the categories of the Greek mind, but in reality was (or such it appeared to them) absolutely «barbarous» and alien to Hellenic tradition and *paideia*. Even a great philosopher like Plotinus, who had strongly fought against the Gnostics, most likely was aware of the orthodox Christianity, but surely had no sympathy for it.

In the second half of the twentieth century, and in particular in the decades after World War II, that is, when the influence of German culture and philology was vanishing, such an interpretation of the relationship between philosophy and Christianity was subject to a radical change. «There is now a widespread and manifest tendency to consider the Hellenisation of Christianity as a blot on Christian religion» wrote Raniero Cantalamessa in 1971 (*Cristianesimo primitivo e filosofia greca // Il Cristianesimo e le filosofie / R. Cantalamessa, cor. Milano, 1971. P. 26—57*). Cantalamessa wondered whether this attitude was exact and consistent. According to him, this is a chief error of perspective: «taken in itself Hellenisation is perfectly harmonic with the nature of Christianity, which is a religion of the Incarnation and a universal one – namely, a religion which is able to embody in every authentically human culture... otherwise we should, consequently, bring to trial also the Romanisation of Christianity, the Germanisation or the Africanisation of it, and so on. On this ground nothing else would remain except returning to the early phase of Judaeo-Christianity, a thesis which condemns every attempt at transplanting the evangelic announce outside the spiritual world of the Scripture».

We would like to propose to our audience an exegetical and theoretical confrontation, which seems to be of a certain interest. Patristic philosophy was, along its whole existence (and obviously also in its aftermath) strongly influenced by Platonism. Clement, Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine were influenced to the highest degree, and, indeed, they had an invaluable broad-mindedness towards the philosophy which was considered the most important and illustrious philosophical doctrine of late antiquity, Plato's own philosophy and the one of his followers. However, only in few cases their sympathetic attitude produced a conscious re-adaptation of the Greek (that is, pagan) doctrines which were most considered functional or fit to the Christian message. The aforesaid philosophers openly denounced how deeply alien they were to pagan philosophy and proclaimed their Christian specificity. Therefore it is necessary, for us as well, to realise that the presence in their works of doctrines or pagan elements, though sometimes very consistent, is not sufficient to make them mere Platonists (or, variously: Stoics, Aristotelians, Hermetists). They essentially remained what they wanted to be, Christian thinkers who wanted to meditate on and elucidate the doctrines derived from the tradition.

It would be very easy to speak about Christian Platonism, since this cultural phenomenon is evident at first glance. There are a lot of scholarly books or articles which emphasise the presence of Plato and Platonism in the Church Fathers, and deal with «Christian Platonism», «Platonism in the Fathers», «Plato Christianus», and so on. To sum up, once the presence of Plato and the Platonic tradition has been suggested or postulated in the perspective put forward by the Positivist thinkers (just let's recall here Harnack's famous concern about the Hellenisation of Christianity), it is far too easy to write a book on this subject. However, it stands to reason that for the present situation this is no more sufficient, and that scholarly research, to be convincing, needs to go deeper into the question.

There has been who, perhaps in order to avoid an oversimplification of the notion of «Christian Platonism», resolutely denied that the Fathers could be in any way Platonists. By 1970 an authori-

tative German scholar, Heinrich Doerrie, argued that there had never existed a Christian Platonism, nor it could be conceivable. The idea of a Christian Platonism, extraneous to the theological speculation of the past centuries, had been simply invented, for the sake of concord, during the nineteenth century, and was originated by a revival of classical studies. «It is improper to speak of Platonism, if we consider as Platonic elements in Christianity only marginal features, such as imagery, metaphors, comparisons. In case they had to adopt what was typical of Platonism, the Fathers always consciously and strictly refused». He goes further on: «where Platonic doctrines or doctrinal contents were received into Christian thinking, they were subject to radical changes, and therefore got rid of the elements which, in Platonism, were perceived as peculiar or, so to say, confessional dogmas. ... Platonism permeated Christianity only at the surface, that is in its exterior features; as far as its spiritual or philosophic essence, Platonism was defeated ... If we just put near Christian and pagan Platonism, in order to compare them, we do not do justice to the question in its crucial point: in fact we are acting as though Platonism consisted only of formal elements, easy to be transferred from paganism to Christianity, but we leave out to consider that the intimate essence of Platonism was never accepted. It is important, therefore, to investigate how Platonic features were cited and received. The changes consciously inserted in the new Christian context were of momentous importance». Consequently «Christians were always anti-Platonic».

Moreover: «in the history of dogma and of early Church, Platonism is an interesting phenomenon, not only because the Fathers often took up arms from the arsenal of Platonism: it is a normal feature of every controversy that adversaries should be fought with their own weapons. What's more important is the fact that Platonism had not been received in its essence. Fundamental doctrines such as the hierarchical degrees of the Godhead, the existence of the world without beginning, the immutable manifestation of the logos, the transmigration of the soul, were all, with no exception, rejected by the Church. Christology, or the doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit, accurately cut off the idea of a hierarchical inferiority of Christ or of the Holy Spirit. The Logos' effectiveness depends on his redeemer activity, not on an primary revelation. It is the believing soul, not the knowing one, which has the certitude that will return back to the Father. Rescue and salvation are possible thanks to a paradoxical act of grace, rather than by means of intellectual knowledge based on the logos. The belief in the resurrection of flesh is deeply anti-Platonic. According to Platonism, immortality has its ground in the super-individual reality, that is in the intellectual communion of all the intelligent beings, whereas the Christian dogma professes that the individual is immortal, albeit together with the body. To sum up, surely, the dogmatic philosophy of the fourth and fifth century is conceived as looking at Platonism (a philosophy which inspired also so many heretical trends), but it eventually ended in a strong contrast so that the final result was an uncompromising opposition».

After a theoretical explanation, Doerrie tries to investigate the question on the historical ground as well. Platonism is considered as a mere word among the different registers which were used by the Christians in order to spread the Gospel message; but it was, and still is, absolutely extraneous to whichever form of Platonism. Doerrie calls all this a «pseudo-morphosis».

This interpretation is much challenging and stimulating, though it provoked strong reactions. It can be regarded as erroneous insofar as it compares two different entities, Christian thought and Platonism, considering them as though they already were organically constituted; moreover, it infers their supposed irreconcilability from the established dogmas of each one. Indeed, they are partly mismatched in present times, as they were in the past, and both Christians and Platonists were aware of such an incompatibility. However, when we speak of «Christian Platonism» we have not in mind Platonic philosophy, which was deeply pagan and anti-Christian. We would rather consider how Christianity employed Platonism to elaborate its *kerygma* and to transform it in dogma, though it was all the same so neatly and consciously anti-platonic as far as some doctrines were concerned (metempsychosis, hierarchical structure of the Godhead, eternity of the cosmos). This is the more true, for example, apropos of the Trinitarian dogma, which was structured in two different ways, before and after Nicaea. Before 325, Christian writers influenced by Platonism, like Clement or Origen, postulated a hierarchical structure of the Godhead, while, after the Council of Nicaea, such an interpretation was rejected. Furthermore, Christianity employed essential Platonic canons, such as the doctrine of the Logos, the idea of an unutterable God, the hypostatic structure in the divine substance, the development of ethics, and so on. Indeed Platonism and Christianity look as organically structured nowadays, as the result of a theoretical, perhaps arbitrary, rather than historical, consideration. Nonetheless, in late antiquity they were not yet fixed, neither their features were

immutable or unchanging. Platonism was continuously changeable, as it is expected from a philosophy that is still vital; Christianity, on the other hand, took five centuries to define its dogmas. Therefore the opportunity, sometimes the necessity, to readapt Platonic tenets. Obviously these reprises were overseen by much more shrewdness and weariness than is currently supposed.

Werner Beierwaltes, introducing an Italian translation of von Ivanka's well known essay on «Plato Christianus» noted that «there is a relationship between Christian theology and philosophy, and that Christian theology finds as immanent in Greek metaphysics a tendency towards Christian revelation», a «providential role of philosophy, which seems to authorise theology at making comprehensible by means of philosophemes some authentically theological notions», even though this is a «dialectical relationship». Beierwaltes, however, rectifies some current opinions, observing that hermeneutic awareness «has to determine also the terminology and the methods of the relationship between Christian doctrine and Greek thought...». Only in this way it is possible to avoid, for example, that tenets like «creaturality», «finiteness», «participation», «assimilation to God», «fall» are employed without any distinction, as though they were identical, for Greek or Christian philosophy. Beierwaltes and von Ivanka, thus, reject Doerrie's far too extreme thesis, according to which the Christian reception of pagan philosophy was only an exterior or superficial process, independent of contents.

Therefore, it would be incorrect an hasty employment of the label of «Christian Platonism», for Platonism might be, in its essence, very little Christian. On the contrary, it is necessary to appreciate «how freely the Father bent some basic tenets of Greek thought (person, hypostasis, nature), so that they met the demands of the Christian message». Such a liberty shows how intelligently they Hellenised Christianity. «Discussion should be centred on how Hellenisation took place rather than Hellenisation in itself». Some words written by O. Michel, in his entry «Philosophy» in the Great Lexicon of the New Testament are convenient for our purpose: «taking on philosophical terms does not mean that they are accepted through and through. Early Christianity takes on intellectual categories and philosophical means of expression, only insofar as they can be useful to disclose, explain and defend the evangelic announcement. The kernel of the New Testament, that is the announcement of the divine eschatological activity which guides the history of Israel and of the whole world to the goal set by God is not linked to philosophy, nor it depends on it. Indeed it radically questions the aim of philosophy, which, by the means of human thought, intends to help humans in solving their concerns about themselves and their destiny. Through Semitic conceptual categories, which are, to a certain extent only, essential to the message, it virtually contrasts Greek philosophical tenets». Finally, we can argue, in accordance to Manlio Simonetti, that «in any case it must be observed that, wherein influence of Greek culture, and in special way, of Greek philosophy, took place, it never was passively accepted, but was modified by typically Christian experiences and problems: the Logos of John's Gospel, whose transformation in a Stoic sense we have observed before, isn't a philosophical, abstract idea, but has immediate relations with humans, because He made Himself flesh and is *the* Christ who suffered passion and died on the Cross: the death of God, scandal for the Jews and madness for the Greeks, is the heart of the Christian *kerygma* (1Cor 1. 23)».

БОГОСЛОВИЕ РАННЕГО ХРИСТИАНСТВА И ГРЕЧЕСКАЯ ФИЛОСОФИЯ: ПЕРВАЯ ВСТРЕЧА ВЕРЫ И РАЗУМА

Клаудио Морескини (Университет г. Пизы)

В докладе рассматриваются взаимоотношения христианства и эллинистического мира в эпоху поздней античности, представляемые автором как процессы «культурного оформления религии». Критическому разбору подвергаются основные исторические концепции, предложенные европейской наукой в XIX и XX вв., такие как «эллинизация христианства» или «христианский платонизм». Автор придерживается более сдержанной оценки влияния греческой культуры на христианское богословие, предпочитая говорить не столько об «эллинизации христианства», сколько об адаптации христианской проповеди к новым потребностям греко-римского общества. Приводятся также пространственные представления христианских авторов об обратном воздействии христианского богословия на греческую культуру (так называемые «теории заимствования»). В целом отношение Святых Отцов древности к греческой философии можно охарактеризовать как некоторое несоответствие враждебной теоретической позиции и широкого использования философских средств на практическом уровне теологического дискурса.

The interplay between reason and faith is an important topic in the philosophy of religion. It is closely related to, but distinct from, several other issues in the philosophy of religion: namely, the existence of God, divine attributes, the problem of evil, divine action in the world, religion and ethics, religious experience and religious language, and the problem of religious pluralism. Here he champions a natural theology against those pagans who would claim that, even on Christian grounds, their previous lack of access to the Christian God would absolve them from guilt for their nonbelief. Paul argues that in fact anyone can attain to the truth of God's existence merely from using his or her reason to reflect on the natural world. Greek philosophy provided the early Christian church with a set of discussion tools, as well as an opposing worldview with which to contrast the gospel. This makes Greek philosophy a profound influence on the words, systems, and discussions by which Christians throughout history have sought to explain their faith. This shows how the prevalence of certain philosophical methods greatly influenced how early Christians presented their faith but not what they preached. The New Testament was originally written in Greek and was targeted to an audience immersed in a Hellenized worldview. Greek philosophy has deeply, profoundly influenced the way Christianity discusses theology. Ancient Greek philosophy arose in the 6th century BC, at a time when the inhabitants of ancient Greece were struggling to repel devastating invasions from the east. Greek philosophy continued throughout the Hellenistic period and the period in which Greece and most Greek-inhabited lands were part of the Roman Empire. Philosophy was used to make sense out of the world using reason. It dealt with a wide variety of subjects, including astronomy, epistemology, mathematics, political philosophy, ethics