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THE INFLUENCE of Greece and the power of Greek thought is generally passed over in any account of the beginning of the Christian Church for the reason that it was powerful only at the beginning and came to an end quickly. In those first years two roads lay open before the Church, the Greek way and the Roman way. They were distinct from each other; they had few points of contact. Inevitably the way of the Church would incline to one or the other because they were the two great powers in the world she faced, each a great power, but not in the same sense. Rome was the ruler of the world, Greece a small country she had conquered, an insignificant bit of the immense empire. That was one point of view, but there was another. Spiritually, in the world of thought and art, Greece was the ruler. The Romans acknowledged it. "Captive Greece has taken captive her conqueror," a Latin poet wrote. Nothing

shows the Romans in a better light than that they recognized their own intellectual and spiritual inferiority and were able to learn from a helpless, subject nation. Greece in her fashion was as powerful as Rome in the world where the Christian Church began.

Just at first the Church took the Greek way. The New Testament is written in Greek. The leaders of the little Christian centers — there was not yet one Church — were Greeks or educated by Greeks. But that was a condition which did not last long. The Roman way quickly proved to be more attractive and it is easy to see why. In the world the Church faced, the forces of evil were so overwhelmingly powerful it was most difficult to hold fast to the Christian faith that the only power which mattered, the only power which endured, was spiritual power. In face of the Roman Empire it seemed to the world at large a feeble thing. But the Greeks had been learning for generations that the things that are seen are temporal. They had had to give them up, one after another. They were a poverty-stricken, conquered country; their freedom was lost, their independence gone, but the things that are not seen were still theirs; their rule over men's spirits and minds still remained. They had seen for themselves that no dependence could be placed on any material good. The welfare that prosperity brings was never to be counted on. Only the things not seen

were sure. How well they had learned that lesson their later writers show, especially the greatest, Plutarch.

The suffering which had taught it to them had impressed it ineffaceably upon their minds and for them it was easy to understand Christ's rejection in the desert of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. If the Church had chosen the Greek way she would have found Christ's way far easier and she might with Him have disdained temporal power. But she chose the Roman way.

The times were dark and perilous and it was almost inevitable that the little scattered centers of Christian living should turn for leadership to the strongest and most authoritative. That was the church in Rome, an admirably disciplined and notably effective body. In comparison what were the Greeks? Thinkers and artists, the world called them then as now. Thought and art are the products not of a powerful working force, a mass of men acting together, but of separate individuals going their own different ways. People like that will never be dependably efficient. Even in their very best days the Greeks could never make a Greek Empire. They did not really like working together; they wanted freedom to do as each one pleased. But to the Romans union was strength, and that was what mattered. Mind and spirit — they were fairly negligible. What was important was the

will. When Christ said, "Seek and ye shall find," and "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free," He said what was easy for a Greek to understand, but very hard for a Roman. The Romans were wonderful organizers, and an organization is not a place where people are encouraged to seek or to be free.

To the Romans the first essentials were obedience to authority and disciplined control, as was natural to a nation which Livy said had been at war for eight hundred years. "Like a mighty army moves the Church of God." That is a Roman, not a Greek idea. There is no praise in Greek literature for unquestioning obedience or for doing and saying and thinking what everyone else does. The Greeks wanted independent citizens who thought for themselves; the Romans distrusted anyone who was different and wanted citizens who were not given to thinking, but to doing what they were told.

So the young Christian Church turned from the Greek way and chose the Roman way. No more little communities of Christians each led by the Spirit of Truth which Christ had promised them. The Romans with their genius for organization took them over and built up one great institution so superbly planned and developed that it finally was able to step into the place of the Roman Empire. Never could that magnificent position have been reached by following the Greek way.

The Roman way led the Church to supreme power, power over heaven and hell as well as the earth.

All power tends to corrupt, Lord Acton said as Plato had said before him. Thucydides had said that all power thirsts for more power. The more authoritative the Church grew, the more authority she claimed over more and more people. Underlying her whole conception of dealing with mankind was an idea congenial and familiar to Romans and foreign to Greeks. The Romans thought poorly of human nature. It was tolerable only when under strong control. Humanity was evil throughout. This was far from the Greek way. From the beginning the Greeks had had a vision of what St. John, the Greek thinker among the Evangelists, called "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" — "the divine," the *Odyssey* says, "for which all men long." Socrates' fundamental conviction was that there was in everyone a spark of the divine light which could be kindled into a flame. In his speech to his judges just before they condemned him to death he said: "I will obey God rather than you, and as long as I have breath I will not cease from exhorting you: 'My friend, are you not ashamed of caring so much about making money and about reputation and honors? Will you not think or care about wisdom and truth and how to make your soul better? I shall reproach you for in-

difference to what is most valuable and prizes what is unimportant. I shall do this to everyone I meet, young and old, for this is God's command to me.' " He never told them what wisdom and truth were. All he did was to ask them questions, but his questions led them into the depths of themselves where he knew the spark could be found and kindled.

Plato repeated over and over again that the knowledge of God, the source of all good to men, could be reached only because there was "a kindred power in the soul." He writes, "A gentle and noble nature who desires all truth and who seeks to be like God as far as that is possible for man . . . is the happiest man. He is a royal man, king over himself. Even when he is in poverty or sickness or any other seeming misfortune, all things will in the end work together for good to him in life and in death.

"Wherefore my counsel is that we hold fast ever to the heavenly way and follow after justice and excellence always, considering that the soul is immortal. Thus shall we live dear to one another and to the gods, both here and when, like conquerors in the games, we receive our reward."

"God knows," Plutarch says, "with how great a share of goodness souls come into the world, how strong is their nobility of nature which they derive from Him Himself. And if they do break out into vice, corrupted

by bad habits and bad companions, they may yet reform."

Christ's last prayer had been "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Plutarch would have understood that prayer.

In Rome the influences were not for mercy and pity. Cicero, as kind a man as could well be found there, writes a friend about some specially spectacular gladiatorial games he had been to: "They were magnificent—and yet what real pleasure can a cultivated person get from watching a puny man being mangled by a tremendously powerful beast? Still, the games *are* an incomparable training in making the spectators despise suffering and death." But Athens never admitted the gladiatorial games. There is a story that once when the Assembly was considering a proposal for gladiators to come and stage one of their contests, a man sprang to his feet and cried, "Athenians, before we invite the gladiators come with me and tear down the temple to Pity." He won the day. They voted unanimously to reject the gladiators. In all Athens' history, Socrates was the only man put to death for his opinions. His executioners killed him by giving him a poison that made him die with no pain. They were Greeks. The Romans hung Christ upon a cross.

If the Church had chosen the Greek way some of the most terrible pages in history might never have had

to be written. The Inquisition, the prisons people were flung into, the ways the condemned were killed, the massacres of nonconformists — all this was fostered and favored by the conviction that human beings generally were bad and ought to suffer. The conception of God which developed through these ruthless centuries was calculated to do away with mercy and compassion in the hearts of His worshipers. It is phrased clearly in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, a subject for reverential study in Presbyterian households for hundreds of years. In it this statement is made: In Adam's fall "mankind lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curses, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever." If God felt that way it was clearly right for men to make objectionable people suffer. Whatever they did would be less than the pains of hell forever; men need not be more merciful and pitiful than God. If the Church had taken the Greek way that weight of human agony might never have been. A cruel God would not have been possible to Greeks.

Another danger too might well have been avoided, less great but yet of major importance, the danger of formalism, of considering the outside more important than the inside, of holding up a form of words, a creed or theology, as a more basic expression of the truth than

the way people live. Christ said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

That is not the way the Church went. The Inquisition put people to death not for living wickedly, but for making what to the Inquisitors were incorrect statements. The Greeks were not interested in trying to make correct statements about the infinite and the eternal. Plato said, "To find the father and maker of all is hard and having found him it is impossible to utter him," and he speaks of truth coming to him suddenly like a flame blazing up from a spark. That flame shrivels up formalism.

Socrates had his inner certainties, but they were not expressed as clear assertions, and just because he did not try to imprison the truth in a formula his truth has lived. The Gospels will be searched in vain for a definition of God. Christ never gave any. He called Him our Father; He spoke of the love of God; He told the parable of the prodigal son; but He never put into a definite statement what God is. He said, The truth shall make you free, but He did not say, This is the truth. There is no clearly defined creed in the Gospels. Here again Christ's way was the way natural to the Greeks. It was the Roman way to make an authoritative declaration about the things unseen and have it received without question.

The Greek way was marked out also by not being ever the easy way. "Excellence much labored for by the race of men," says Aristotle. One of the earliest Greek poets says, "Before the gates of excellence the high gods have placed sweat. Long is the road thereto and rough and steep." Another poet says that a man must suffer "heart-grieving sweat" to produce anything that is of value, and Plato says, "Hard is the good."

No one ever called the way Christ himself walked the easy way. He said, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." There could hardly be a greater denial of the Christian way than to represent it as broad and smooth and leading to a happy success, but when times are very prosperous and comfortable a tendency to easy religion develops and then the Greek way can reinforce the way of Christ. It would have been inconceivable to Socrates, to Plato, to the Stoics, that a result of religion could be a prosperous life. Virtue is its own reward, the Stoics said. The only reward of serving God, Plato said, was to become able to serve Him better.

Prosperity as a reward for obeying God's command never entered Socrates' mind. He told his judges in court after the sentence of death was pronounced, "I see clearly that the time has come when it is better for me to die, and so my accusers have done me no harm.

Still — they did not mean to do me good and for this I may gently blame them. And now we go our ways, you to live and I to die. Which is better only God knows." A friend who was with him in the prison cell when he drank the poison, told another, "I could not pity him. He seemed to me beyond that. I thought of him as blessed." Socrates had his reward.

A day or two before his death when a rich man who knew he could bribe the jailers and get Socrates away, came to him begging, "Let us save you, Socrates, your friends beseech you," Socrates said, "Dear Crito, a voice within me is telling me that I must not disobey my country's laws and do what is wrong in order to save my life. It is very loud, this voice, so that I can hardly hear another's. Yet if you wish to say more, speak and I will listen." "Socrates, I have nothing more to say." "Then, leave me, Crito, to obey the will of God."

What would it not have meant to the religion of Christ if Christians had been learners as well as teachers of Greece. The basic Greek idea that nothing of value can be easily won would have found a perfect fulfillment in Christ's life. The cruelties practiced in his name might not — almost surely would not — have defaced the religion of love. There would have been, too, another criterion of the truth, not only creeds and *ipse dixit*s authoritatively promulgated and obediently accepted, but

Plutarch's criterion, If we live here as we ought, we shall see things as they are, the Greek version of, The pure in heart shall see God.

"The excellent becomes the permanent." The influence of Greece died, but the truth and the beauty the Greeks discovered finally came to life again and have never passed away. They are still our teachers.