

d. Matter

As an entity in itself, matter is last in the power structure and it is evil...contrary to the essence of all other forms of real being which are non-material. Matter tends to bring out the worst in you

This sort of organization is known as an hierarchical (hierarchial) world scheme as the universe is ordered by various hierarchies. As devised by Plotinus the reach of the soul must be upward...to get to the upper levels...and upper hierarchies. To achieve this it must be divested from material occupations and put its emphasis on "mind concepts." If this is done to a sufficient degree it is possible for the soul to reach such ecstatic heights as to entertain the person (the being--as God is impersonal) or God...a state of supreme ecstasy to which Plotinus occasionally succeeded in liberating himself. The philosophy has no need of atonement, redemption, or sacrifice. It is somewhat upgrading to man, however, if not pushed to extremes as it tends to evoke in him a desire to rise above his world on the ability of enjoying the eternal mind beyond him. The teacher in this class hopes you can see how this sort of thinking was on a collision course with Christianity.

Porphyry, chief disciple of Plotinus, was more than adequate to expand his master's teaching. In church history he is more important for 'his vigorous attacks on Christinaity. He was an early Bible critic and most of his suggestions are still repeated by those hunting for contradictions, etc., 'in the Bible. As did the teacher, so Propyry taught an on-going asceticism and detachment from worldly things. This influence would affect Christianity in that non-sequetor sort of device used when someone says..."Even though their doctrine is wrong, why do they live better than we do?" In a note of mild sarcasm, I suggest that neither doctrine nor practice are well learned from those who have no room or grip for absolute Truth.

Kelly, (Early Christian Doctrines, p. 9) makes an interesting note: "Philosophy--its concepts provided thinkers, Christian and non-Christian alike, with an intellectual framework for expressing their ideas." And that is why the coming of Christianity in this time is sometimes referred to as the "Christian revolt against classical thinking."

3. Gnosticism

Gnosticism was the most persistent pagan philosophical trial endured by the church in the early centuries. The name comes from the Greek root "to know" (noun: knowledge) and gnosticism is a philosophy of "higher" knowledge. It is more an ideology than either a religion or a philosophy. It existed in several varied expressions with a wide divergency of expression among its teachers. Pelikan has called it "the foremost of the systems of cosmic redemption." The concept is that deliverance is by knowledge.. a special cosmic knowledge into which only a few are privileged.