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Sirens, Bees and ‘the Silver and Gold of the Egyptians’:
On Early Christian Approaches to Cross-Cultural Dialogue
早期基督教对跨文化对话的处理路径

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Abstract

Early Christians had to relate to the legacy of Greek culture, its many stories, classical texts, its philosophy and traditions; in short Greek learning (*paideia*). Christians did not hold unanimous views on the issues involved here. While some withdrew from cultural and intellectual exchange, and thus paved the way for isolationism, others advocated this exchange. They even argued on the basis of the Bible that such exchange was beneficial. The present article investigates three of the most important analogies drawn upon by these advocates, that is the story of Odysseus and the Sirens, bees collecting from various flowers and making honey thereof, and the biblical story of the “Silver and Gold of the Egyptians.”

Keywords: Greek learning (*paideia*); hermeneutical models; early Christianity.

Introduction

The first Christian generations struggled to cope with the legacy of Greek learning. This legacy contributed to both knowledge and philosophy, but it also served to introduce Greek mythology and “idolatry” to its learners. How should the Christians respond to this?

Papyrus Boriant 1 from the 4th century CE, published in 1906, a school papyrus reveals how young children, mostly boys, were taught letters and introduced to the art of reading, as a first step in the so-called encyclical studies, the first and elementary part of Greek *paideia*, which aimed at the boy’s imbibing the Greek legacy and learning.¹ The papyrus demonstrates how the student proceeded from letters to the reading of names taken from the glorious past of Greek cultural legacy, and also of maxims aimed at familiarizing the student with current values of a male Greek citizen, conveying to him the core values of Greek culture.

This papyrus is of particular interest to early Christian studies since the top of every page in this school book is found a tau-rho sign,² probably the earliest figurative presentation of the crucifixion or the crucified. The appearance of this sign makes it likely that the owner of this papyrus was a Christian. Here follows an illustration of a tau-rho sign, consisting of the two Greek letters put together to form a cross. The two small images are from the papyrus itself, and show how the

¹ The papyrus is available on internet: www.papyrologie.paris4.sorbonne.fr/menu1/collections/pgrec/1Sor0826.htm

² Larry Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artefacts. Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, 2006), pp. 151-153, 236-237.

top of every page is marked.



This is one example of comparative scripture, where a student probably seeks to protect himself from the power of the legacy he is taught in school, the Greek cultural and intellectual legacy, in which Homer held pride of place. The “dialogue” between Scriptures involved here, is certainly not very intellectual; it is rather an attempt to use the cross in a magical way to avoid any bad influence from the dialogue.

Some Christians shunned any involvement with the culture surrounding them since they considered it affected by idols. The philosophical and literary legacy of pagan culture was in effect seen as idolatrous. Such attitudes were primarily found among uneducated and simple Christians who were concerned about keeping their faith undefiled.³ Some Christians, however, took other views and involved themselves in cross-cultural comparisons and comparing scriptures. Justin Martyr (c. 160 CE) introduced the idea of *Logos Spermatikos*, that there is a seed of God and Christ in any culture. This is a philosophical rewriting of the biblical concept of *imago Dei* (Gen 1:26-27), a perspective which paves the way for a more open attitude in dealing with Scriptures

³ This article draws on Karl Olav Sandnes: *The Challenge of Homer. School, Pagan Poets and Early Christianity* (London: T & T Clark, 2009) in which the author explores how the early Christian came to grips with Greek *paideia*, and particularly the schooling that was based on classical texts. This material proves helpful for a historical investigation into the encounter between Christian faith and Greek culture.

of the others, and which also served to establish some exchange. The present article aims at presenting three interpretative models that were in use among intellectual Christians from the second century CE.

Like Odysseus or like his Crew?

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 C.E.) is one of the church fathers who committed himself to working out the relationship between Christian faith and the intellectual traditions preserved in encyclical studies and Greek philosophy, in short the legacy of Greek *paideia*. From Clement's writing *Stromateis* one easily observes that his defence of Greek philosophy and encyclical studies was provoked by a polemical situation. He frequently refers to "some" or even to "a majority" of believers who reasoned differently. He calls them "untrained or unlearned," and says that they urged the believers to restrict themselves to questions of relevance for faith only. Clement holds against them that they will not even "touch" philosophy and the arts associated with encyclical studies: "All they ask for is simply and solely faith" (*Stromateis* 1.9/43.1).⁴ "Faith alone" sounds like a slogan questioning any source of authority besides the Bible. Clement himself holds the view that knowledge acquired through Greek education and philosophy is still useful since it contributes to a fuller understanding of God's revelation. Clement considers his Christian adversaries to be fearful. Their opposition to Greek education stems from anxiety, he

⁴ Quoted from John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria. Stromateis Book One to Three* (The Catholic University of America Press, 1991).

says (*Stromateis* 6.10/80.5-81.1). As for himself, he picks from Greek education everything which contributes to the truth:

But, as seems, the most of those who are inscribed with the Name (i.e. of Christ), like the companions of Odysseus, handle the word unskilfully, passing by not the Sirens, but the rhythm and the melody, stopping their ears with ignorance; since they know that, after lending their ears to Hellenic studies, they will never subsequently be able to retrace their steps. But he who culls what is useful for the advantage of the catechumens, and especially when they are Greeks (and the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof), must not abstain from erudition, like irrational animals; but he must collect as many aids as possible for his hearers. But he must by no means linger over these studies, except solely for the advantage accruing from them; so that, on grasping and obtaining this, he may be able to take his departure home to the true philosophy, which is a strong cable for the soul, providing security from everything (*Stromateis* 6.11/89.1-3).⁵

The key to interpret this passage, which so clearly addresses the division found among the Christians in Alexandria over Greek *paideia*, is Homer's famous story about Odysseus and his shipmates who were tempted by the song of the Sirens (*Odyssey* 12.37-73). The Sirens enticed seafarers with their seductive songs, but on the meadow from where they sung they laid the dead bones of those who had been seduced and made their final port on that island. Homer tells that Odysseus' crew, out of fear, stopped their ears to keep them from hearing the beautiful but dangerous

⁵ Quoted from *Ante Nicene Fathers* Vol. 2

song of the Sirens. Thus they passed the island safely.

Odysseus himself, however, had himself bound to the mast of his ship. This enabled him to enjoy the beautiful song without being seduced. Clement reads the story as an allegory, claiming that it illustrates how fearful Christians cope with the intellectual tradition of Greek culture. They survived by bypassing it, but they also missed all its beauty. The fearful believers, his adversaries, act like Odysseus' crew. They passed the island of the Sirens safely, but they missed their beautiful song. Odysseus, however, was able to enjoy their singing while he was safely bound to the mast (cf. *Od.* 12.155-164).⁶ According to *Protrepticus* 12/118.4, the mast is a symbol for the cross; being bound to the cross saves from destruction, even the destruction found in encyclical studies,⁷ and also makes it possible to enjoy the legacy of Greek culture. It is worth noticing that Clement cites from Paul's 1 Corinthians 10:26, which again is a quotation of Psalm 24:1 claiming that the earth belongs to God.



This illustration is taken from www.google.com pictures, but does not include the crew's stopping of their ears, as the story goes. But it shows them quite unaffected by the song of the Sirens.

⁶ Hugo Rahner gives a survey of Early Christian interpretation of Odysseus and the Sirens in *Griechischen Mythen in christlicher Deutung* (Basel: Herder, 1984), pp. 281-328

⁷ Rahner explains how Christians came to think of the mast as the cross. See *Griechischen Mythen*, pp. 315-328. He demonstrates that this is not without a point of departure in the Greek text of *The Odyssey* itself.

In *Stromateis* 6.11, Clement distinguishes between the action of Odysseus and that of his crew; surely he thinks that Odysseus chose the right way. In early Christian tradition, the Sirens were associated with demonic powers dangerous to faith.⁸ Clement's interpretation appears as daring in the light of what, for instance, Methodius (died c. 311) says on this Homeric passage. Methodius does not distinguish, as does Clement, between Odysseus and his crew. On the contrary he says that Odysseus was responsible for stopping their ears. He did not take any pleasure in the song of the Sirens; his being fastened to the mast was only to escape death. Methodius comments:

But I will not become someone who listens to this song; I do not wish to hear the songs of the Sirens, a tomb for human beings. I wish to enjoy some divine voice, and the more I will hear, I am eager to hear again; not to be conquered by licentious desire for the voice (of the Sirens), but to receive instruction in divine mysteries, thus reaching my goal, which is not death but eternal salvation (*De Autexusio* 1.1-3)⁹

Odysseus' action receives no special attention in Methodius' comments. The songs of the Sirens have nothing enticing in them; they are only to be avoided. Contrariwise, Clement "defends the 'attractive danger' for

⁸ In some instances the LXX renders Hebrew words denoting evil powers with "Sirens"; Job 30:29; Isa 13:21-22; 34:13; Jer 27:39 (TM 50:39); Micah 1:8. This LXX tradition was certainly well known to Clement in Alexandria.

⁹ The translation based on the Greek text found in A. Vaillant, *Le De Autexusio De Methode d'Olympe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1974).

the Church's faith."¹⁰ This Homeric story provided Clement with an example illustrating the dangers inherent in Greek *paideia*, but also the opportunity to enjoy its advantages. Odysseus enjoying the song of the Sirens while fastened to the mast nicely expresses the ambiguity towards Greek education.

Clement does not question the experience of many, namely that faith was jeopardized by encyclical training and Greek learning. On the contrary, he concurs with this. But he argues that this happens because fellow Christians are unable to distinguish between what is useful and what is unprofitable in these studies. Encyclical studies are dangerous to Christians who enjoy the song of the Sirens ignorantly. For the Christians who know how to distinguish, who collect what is useful and profitable in these arts, it is a true help for the catechumens, particularly if they are Greeks.

Encyclical studies offer such students help, but the goal looks beyond these studies. From these studies the student gathers what is useful for true philosophy. The notion of help and usefulness are, of course, related. The decisive criterion in distinguishing between useful and unprofitable Clement thus finds in the Christian faith itself, in what is conformable to the true philosophy. The profitable is identified in terms of what confirms, prepares or strengthens Christian doctrine. The challenge to distinguish rightly is depicted in the imagery of Odysseus bound to the mast. Encyclical arts are tempting and dangerous. One should act as did Odysseus, having oneself bound

¹⁰ See Rahner, *Griechischen Mythen*, p. 307.

before facing the challenge. Thus runs Clement's logic in this text, implying that Christians should be firmly rooted in the Christian tradition when facing the challenges of Greek education. By citing from Paul's reference to Psalm 24:1 in 1 Corinthians 10:26, Clement hints at the theological premises for his thinking: God's creation has left something good and useful also among pagans.

The Silver and Gold of the Egyptians

Another theologian from Alexandria in Egypt, Origen, also engaged the question of how Christian faith might benefit from an exchange with the Greek cultural legacy. An important document is his letter to his student Gregory:¹¹

... But I always wanted you to devote your power, according to your capacity, fully to the Christian faith. Accordingly, I wanted you to accept inventively also from Greek philosophy that which, so to say, can be encyclical studies or pro-paideutic knowledge to Christian faith, and from geometry and astronomy that which will prove useful for interpreting the holy Scriptures. Then we may say – like the students of the philosophers say about geometry and music, grammar, rhetoric and astronomy namely that they are helpers for philosophy, – that philosophy itself is likewise to Christian faith (1).

Such is probably the meaning of what is written in Exodus, an

¹¹ The author's translation. Greek text in Peter Guyot & Richard Klein, *Gregor der Wundertäter* (Freiburg etc.: Herder, 1996).

Karl Olav Sandnes: On Early Christian Approaches to Cross-Cultural Dialogue

encouragement from God Himself, where He says to the children of Israel that they should ask their neighbours and house-fellows for “vessels of silver and gold and clothes”;¹² so that they, after having “plundered”¹³ the Egyptians, among the things taken should find material for their worship. From the things Israel’s children took from the Egyptians are made the holy things in the Holiest, the ark and its cover, the cherubim, the place of propitiation and the jar of gold in which Manna, the bread of the angels, was held. These things were probably made of the best gold of the Egyptians. . . .

Origen is here expressing a pro-paideutic view of encyclical studies and Greek philosophy; in other words, these studies prepare the ground for an adequate reading of biblical texts. They serve as the provisional helpers. To Origen this is an adoption of the way Greek philosophy viewed encyclical studies with its elementary teaching as useful helpers. In his own logic, philosophy occupies this preparatory function for faith. Greek *paideia* and philosophy are evaluated according to their usefulness to the study of Christian theology and writings. The letter provides examples of this usefulness in the form of a number of allegorical interpretations. Origen proceeds from the conviction that elementary Greek learning is required to interpret the Scriptures rightly.

Origen evaluates Greek intellectual traditions in a critical light, with a view to what they can bring to true worship. His critical perspective is culled from the Bible and the Christian faith itself, and is defined in terms of compatibility. He finds this view justified in the

¹² Exod 11:2; 12:35.

¹³ Exod 12:36.

Bible itself, for example in Exodus 12:35-36: "...they asked the Egyptians for jewellery of silver and gold, and for clothing...And so they plundered the Egyptians."¹⁴ At the centre of Origen's interpretation is, in the first place, that the silver and gold of the Egyptians figuratively represent encyclical studies, and in the second place, that it was precisely *this* silver and gold that was used in the building of the temple and the holy vessels found there (Exod 25-26). God commanded Israel to bring with them silver and gold from the Egyptians. From this Origen draws the lesson that pagan education is given divine approval, if applied in a critical way.¹⁵ Greek *paideia* is not only approved of; it even serves to build the Church, in analogy with the holy vessels made out of the silver and gold of the Egyptians.

Origen is well aware that some of the silver and gold taken from the Egyptians were used to make the Golden Calf (Exod 32), which in Biblical tradition is reckoned as a primary sin. From this fact, Origen draws a lesson with reference to Greek learning. To some, encyclical studies brought disaster. He then applies his pro-paideutic perspective

¹⁴ Cf. Exodus 3:21-22: "...you will not go empty-handed; each woman shall ask her neighbour and any woman living in the neighbour's house for jewellery of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; and so you shall plunder the Egyptians." For a presentation of this motif, see Joel S. Allen, *The Despoliation of Egypt in Pre-Rabbinic, Rabbinic and Patristic Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

¹⁵ This allegorical interpretation is not found in Philo's writings. He denies that these texts prove Israel to be greedy, since the silver and gold they brought with them were payment for many years of service and slavery, to be compared with a war indemnity; see Allen, *The Despoliation of Egypt*, pp. 96-99. Even Clement refers to the spoil of the Egyptians in a literal way, saying that they did not do so out of avarice; it rightly belonged to them as kind of compensation (*Strom.* 1.23/157.2-4). Origen is probably responsible for introducing an allegorical reading of these passages.

on these arts in a fascinating way; he says that Greek learning may prepare, help, equip and pave the way for serving God. With the help of God's wisdom, the silver and the clothing of the Egyptians can be turned into the tabernacle of God.¹⁶ Origen's argument implies that familiarity with Christian doctrine and faith is important before embarking upon liberal studies. At the centre of his argument is the question of "making properly use of."

The famous philosopher and theologian from Northern Africa (present-day Tunisia), Augustine, called upon the same Biblical tradition in his presentation of a Christian hermeneutics, also vis-à-vis the Greek culture, in his book *Christian Doctrine (De Doctrina Christiana)*. In this writing he introduces a fundamental distinction between *uti* and *frui*, i.e. to make use of and to enjoy respectively:

There are some things which are to be enjoyed (*fruentum est*), some which are to be used (*utendum est*), and some whose function is both to enjoy and use. Those which are to be enjoyed make us happy (*beati*); those which are to be used assist us and give us a boost, so to speak, as we press on towards our happiness, so that we may reach and hold fast to the things which make us happy. And we, placed as we are among things of both kinds, both enjoy and use them; but if we choose to enjoy things that are to be used, our advance is impeded and sometimes even diverted, and we are held back, or even put off, from attaining things which are to be enjoyed, because we are hamstrung by our love of lower things (*Doctr.* 1.7)

¹⁶ Allen, *The Despoliation of Egypt*, pp. 214-220.

Uti and *frui* are related as means to goal. *Uti* is everything that contributes to true enjoyment; everything created used in a way which serves a good end. In making the distinction between *uti* and *frui*, Augustine draws on the philosophical debate in Antiquity over the highest good (*summum bonum*), which in his view was to love the triune God. This is his Christian definition of *frui*, while *uti* is all things that conduce to enjoying the triune God. Augustine has thus formulated a norm against which human culture is to be measured and evaluated. The debate on encyclical studies has now generated a hermeneutical approach to pagan culture in general. To make his point, Augustine provides an analogy (*Doct.chr.* 1.8-10). Greek culture is like a vessel taking the passengers home. The voyage may be pleasant, of course, but it is primarily a means of reaching their home or destiny. There is a constant danger of being led astray and being alienated during the journey, by many things which do not bring true enjoyment. The believer makes use of the culture, an injunction which implies both a positive and a critical perspective. Augustine here develops a theory which is a reaping of centuries of discourse on encyclical studies, among Greeks and Christians as well; they are provisional and preliminary and simultaneously useful and profitable, in relationship to philosophy or to Christian faith respectively.

An implication from the theological rationale behind Augustine's hermeneutical use of "the silver and gold of the Egyptians" is that truth may be found outside the Church and Christian faith. But wherever it is found, it belongs, properly speaking, to God:

Karl Olav Sandnes: On Early Christian Approaches to Cross-Cultural Dialogue

A person who is a good and true Christian should realize that truth belongs to his Lord, wherever it is found, gathering and acknowledging it even in pagan literature, but rejecting superstitious vanities and deploring and avoiding those who 'though they knew God did not glorify him as God or give thanks but became enfeebled in their own thoughts and plunged their senseless minds into darkness'... (*Doct. chr.* 2.71-72)

All truth, wherever found, belongs properly speaking to God, a thinking derived from creation theology. Already according to Justin Martyr, "Whatever things were rightly said among all people belong to us Christians" (2 *Apology* 13). This insight is formulated more philosophically in Augustine though. This basic conviction Augustine brings also to his *Confessions*. There he mentions that he found in the teaching of Plato things which correlated with Christian faith:¹⁷ "And I had come to you from the Gentiles and fixed my attention on the gold which you willed your people to take from Egypt, since the gold was yours, wherever it was" (*Confession* 7.9.15). This dictum echoes 1 Cor 10:26 in which Paul cites from Ps 24:1 ("the earth and its fullness are the Lord's"), a passage we also saw at work in Clement's argument. In this passage, Augustine makes explicit reference to Paul's speech at Athens (Acts 17) where Paul cites from a pagan poet. The "gold of the Egyptians" is here the Athenians' books and learning. Augustine thus acknowledges that some truth is found among pagan idolaters as well.

¹⁷ Obviously, there were also things in Christian faith which did not resonate with Greek *paideia*. Augustine mentions in particular the coming of Christ to the world, his death and exaltation.

Even though they failed to give God due honour, it is thus confirmed by the apostle that some truth is found among pagans also. It is a matter of finding the good in the books of the pagans.

Christian opponents of Greek learning, such as Clement's adversaries, appealed to God's revelation, found exclusively in Christ. Their argument paved the way for cultural isolation. In his *Christian Instruction*, Augustine joins a different *ratio* based on creation, which, of course, facilitated a dialogue with Greek heritage and *paideia*. This was certainly not an invention of Augustine; he simply joins forces with the wisdom-inspired logic of his many predecessors who had claimed that all true wisdom proceeded from God. The gold of the Egyptians was not taken from them; it was, properly speaking, the property of God's people. The things in the pagan literature which were consistent with Christian faith, the Christians should consider their own property. Augustine's thoughts are, of course, also inspired by the piece of information recalled in Acts 7:22 about Moses who received instruction into Egyptian wisdom, which is the gold and silver of the Egyptians.

Before departing from Egypt, God instructed His people to take gold, silver and costly clothes from the Egyptians (Exod 12:35-36 cf. 3:21-22). "The gold of Egypt" became a key notion in the logic of Christian advocates of Greek learning. This idea appeared with Origen, but soon it became a common argument in the debate. It rests entirely upon an allegorical reading. And the story of this gold pictures danger and blessing as being simultaneously present. Some of the gold was made into the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), but some became holy vessels in the Jerusalem temple. This story about "the gold of Egypt" thus

illustrates that Greek education could lead away from God, but also that it could serve and please Him. In other words, it was the way it was *used* that mattered.

The Bees and the Honey

Basil the Great (ca. 330-379 CE) from Cappadocia, present-day Turkey was concerned about matters pertaining to Christian faith and Greek philosophy. In his well-known *Ad Adolescentes (To the Youth)* Basil tells young men (his nephews) how they might find help from Greek classical literature. Basil introduces his *Ad Adolescentes* by citing the experience he as an old man has gained. His nephews see their teachers on a daily basis (1.4), and when with them, they enter, through the literature studied there, into a dialogue with the famous men of the past. This is Basil's respectful way of introducing the Greek classical literature. The aim of this work Basil summarizes towards the end of chap. 1. He teaches his students to accept what is useful, which also implies disregarding some other things (*Adol.* 1.5 cf. 2.2).¹⁸ The full title of this work includes the Greek term *ôpheleia* meaning to derive profit or advantage from them. This term points to Basil's primary perspective on Greek literature. This aim necessarily means learning how to distinguish between material to be accepted and material to be neglected. Basil does not discuss whether his students should read pagan texts or not; he takes it for granted that they do.

¹⁸ Cf. *Adol.* 2.3; 4.1.3. This implies that Basil is not urging a selective reading, but rather selective attention.

In order to explain the need to distinguish rightly, Basil makes an analogy of the bees to help the young addressees to understand. From the flowers the bees collect some and leave some behind, and from this they produce honey:

It is, therefore, in accordance with the whole similitude of the bees, that we should participate in pagan literature. For these neither approach all flowers equally, nor in truth do they attempt to carry off entire those upon which they alight, but taking only so much of them as suitable for their work, they suffer the rest to go untouched. We ourselves too, if we are wise, having appropriated from this literature what is suitable to us and akin to the truth, will pass over the remainder. And just as in plucking the blooms from a rose-bed we avoid the thorns, so also in garnering from such writings whatever is useful, let us guard ourselves against what is harmful (*Adol.* 4.8-9)

Bees know the difference between poison and honey, and they act accordingly (*Adol.* 4.3). Basil describes the work of the bees in a double way, as taking some and leaving some aside or appropriating what is suitable *versus* passing over the remainder; in short, garnering what is useful and guarding oneself against what is harmful. It is a matter of finding among the many “flowers” that which is akin to truth. Thus Basil measures Greek literature and learning according to what is compatible with Christian doctrine.¹⁹ The bees provide a helpful illustration for how Christians should relate to Homer and Greek

¹⁹ Thus also Christian Gnlika, *CHRÉISIS. Die Methode der Kirchenväter im Umgang mit der Antiken Kultur. Der Begriff des 'rechten Gebrauchs'* (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1984), pp. 113-114.

literature used in the training of children and youngsters, even to the Greek legacy generally.

The analogy of the bees is not a Christian invention. In fact, it is taken from Greek philosophical tradition critical of Homer and the classical poets. The work of the bees was a commonplace, describing the critical sifting process vis-à-vis Greek classical literature.²⁰ The Athenian rhetorician Isocrates, Plato's contemporary, says that students should:

... acquire yourself with the best things in the poets as well, and learn from other wise men also any useful lessons they have taught. For just as we see the bee settling on all the flowers, and sipping the best from each, so also those who aspire to culture ought not to leave anything untested, but should gather useful knowledge from every source (*To Demonicus* 51-52)

The criterion of “usefulness” brings Isocrates to speak of the bees. In his text on how to study the poets, Ps.Plutarch says that bees find the sweetest honey among thorny flowers. When children have learnt to make right use of the poets, they act like bees; they separate what is useful and beneficial from what is evil and out of place (*Mor.* 32E-F).²¹

²⁰ Gnilka, *CHRÉISIS*, pp. 102-109.

²¹ Plutarch applies this analogy to how a husband from his studies brings to the spouse what is useful and beneficial (*Moralia* 14B). Lucretius in his *De Rerum Natura* 3.11-12 praises Epicurus for having sipped the golden honey from the flowers, and having passed it on to his students. In both instances the analogy of the bees presupposes that a process of critical sifting has preceded the passing on of knowledge. On Seneca and the bees, see Karl Olav Sandnes, “Imitatio Homeri: An Appraisal of Dennis R. MacDonald’s ‘Mimesis Criticism’,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 725-726.

In his critical approach to classical Greek literature, Basil depends on this philosophical tradition, and considers a Christian reading of Greek classical literature as following in the wake of this ancient tradition.

Judicious use of pagan literature, according to Basil, does not imply an eclectic reading. Basil basically accepts the traditional education passed on through generations. His instructions speak in terms of ignoring and stopping the ears like Odysseus. Basil uses the example of Odysseus in an imprecise way, compared to Clement. We saw above that Clement carefully distinguished between Odysseus and his crew, while Basil ignores this difference that mattered so much to Clement. This way of speaking indicates difference in focus and attention, a selective emphasis so to say. Basil guides his students to “pay attention to those passages which will be of value to them in a way which far transcends any immediate purpose the teachers may have had in assigning them.”²²

The principle of “right or proper use” of Greek literature involved discernment between good and bad, useful and unprofitable, God’s creation and idolatry, etc. To explain this process of discernment, some of the advocates of Greek learning made reference to the bees and the honey they produced. From flowers and plants the bees collect pollen. Bees are looking for what is good and sweet in the flowers; they collect it and make honey out of what they collect from various flowers. This illustration was presented as a paradigm for Christian participation

²² Wendy E. Helleman, *Christianity and the Classics. The Acceptance of a Heritage* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), p. 42.

in Greek education. The illustration taken from the life of the bees is adopted from the Greek philosophical critique of Homer and the classical poets. Some philosophers had for generations been using the bees as a helpful illustration to explain the discernment required from students of Homer's epics.

Although the illustration of the bees and honey was inspired by Greek philosophers, the advocates could also claim biblical support. They probably turned, once again, to the wisdom literature in the Old Testament. The text about the hard-working ants (Proverbs 6:6-8) is of interest here. The busy work of the ant is there mentioned as an example to be followed by the lazy. The bees work hard, preparing and gathering honey. In the Septuagint this verse is longer than in the Hebrew on which modern Bible translations are based. The addition is obviously modelled as an analogy with the words about the ant in verse 6, and goes like this:

Go to the bee, and learn what a worker she is; what dignified work she performs. Kings and common people use her work for their health. She is desired and liked by all. Although weak in body, she is advanced in honouring wisdom (Proverbs 6:8 LXX)²³

The addition is probably due to the role played by the bees in a Hellenistic philosophical context. The Septuagint translators, therefore, considered this a suitable addition. The bees are paradigms like the ants,

²³ The author's translation.

but their wisdom is emphasized. What this means is not stated directly, but it is probably due to their ability to pick from the flowers what was useful for making honey. Their wisdom is thus their skills in making use of the best in the plants. The focus is therefore on the honey made out of pollen from different flowers, receptive and critical at the same time. Due to this addition in the Septuagint, it was easy to adopt this illustration from Greek philosophers, and still consider it biblical.

Summary

Coping with the intellectual legacy of the Greek world, and Greek learning in particular, was a challenge of immense importance for the first Christian generations. This challenge created a prototypic debate of much hermeneutical significance for how Christians were to view other philosophical, religious and intellectual traditions. The Christians did not hold unanimous views on this; on the contrary, they disagreed rather strongly. Common people, or simple Christians, as Clemens of Alexandria somewhat arrogantly named them, reasoned in ways which inevitably furthered isolationism. This article has concentrated on the other position, the open-minded attitude taken by some Christian intellectuals, and looked at their arguments in particular.

They argued in accordance with the different attitudes taken by Odysseus and his crew to the beautiful song of the Sirens; they argued with how bees collect the best from every flower and make something else out of it, namely honey; they argued with the silver and gold of the Egyptians, which could be used both rightly and wrongly. In various

ways these analogies convey a common picture: good and truth may be found even in paganism. Finding it depends, however, on a critical sifting aimed at distinguishing between what is conformable and not with Christian faith. Key concepts are what is “useful” and “profitable;” i.e. conducive and preparatory for Christian faith. This they often labelled “pro-paideutic,” a key notion in ancient education discourse. The elementary teaching with letters, reading and writing was pro-paideutic to philosophy and the real knowledge which followed upon it. Likewise, these Christians argued, Greek learning is pro-paideutic, preparatory, subordinated as well as temporary, to Christian faith. The discernment implied has to be according to Christian faith.

These arguments are all based on creation theology, i.e. the belief that God’s presence in the world is not limited by the Church or the believers. Hence, everything good and truth, belongs to him, and is therefore also not something foreign to Christians.

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摘 要

早期基督徒必须将基督教与希腊文化的遗产联系在一起，包括希腊故事、经典文本、哲学与传统，可以将这些希腊传统总称为“智慧之学”。在这些问题上，基督教并不持有完全一致的看法。一些人反对文化和智识的交换，为文化孤立主义铺平了道路，另一些人则倡导进行文化和智识的交换。他们甚至以圣经为依据，认为那样的交换是有益的。本文将探讨这些倡导者们最常提到的三个比附，即奥德修斯与塞壬、用百花酿蜜的蜜蜂、圣经故事中的“埃及的金器与银器”。

关键词：希腊学术、早期基督教、诠释学模型

