

## Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Church

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I venture to claim to have shown that a large part of what are sometimes called Christian doctrines, and many usages which have prevailed and continue to prevail in the Christian Church, are in reality Greek theories and Greek usages changed in form and color by the influence of primitive Christianity, but in their essence Greek still. Greece lives; not only its dying life in the lecture-rooms of Universities, but also with a more vigorous growth in the Christian Churches. It lives there, not by virtue of the survival within them of this or that fragment of ancient teaching, and this or that fragment of an ancient usage, but by the continuance in them of great modes and phases of thought, of great drifts and tendencies, of large assumptions. Its ethics of right and duty, rather than of love and self-sacrifice; its theology, whose God is more metaphysical than spiritual—whose essence it is important to define; its creation of a class of men whose main duty in life is that of moral exhortation, and whose utterances are not the spontaneous outflow of a prophet's soul, but the artistic periods of a rhetorician; its religious ceremonial, with the darkness and the light, the initiation and the solemn enactment of a symbolic drama; its conception of intellectual assent rather than of moral earnestness as the basis of religious society—in all these, and the ideas that underlie them, Greece lives.

It is an argument for the divine life of Christianity that it has been able to assimilate so much that was at first alien to it. It is an argument for the truth of much of that which has been assimilated, that it has been strong enough to oust many of the earlier elements. But the question which forces itself upon our attention as the phenomena pass before us in review, is the question of the relation of these Greek elements in Christianity to the nature of Christianity itself. The question is vital. Its importance can hardly be over-estimated. It claims a foremost place in the consideration of earnest men. The theories which rise out of it are two in number.

- It is possible to urge, on the one hand, that Christianity, which began without them—which grew on a soil whereon metaphysics never throve—which won its first victories over the world by the simple moral force of the Sermon on the Mount, and

by the sublime influence of the life and death of Jesus Christ, may throw off Hellenism and be none the loser, but rather stand out again before the world in the uncolored majesty of the Gospels.

- It is possible to urge that what was absent from the early form cannot be essential, and that the Sermon on the Mount is not an outlying part of the Gospel, but its sum.
- It is possible to urge, on the other hand, that the tree of life, which was planted by the hand of God Himself in the soil of human society, was intended from the first to grow by assimilating to itself whatever elements it found there.
- It is possible to maintain that Christianity was intended to be a development, and that its successive growths are for the time at which they exist integral and essential.
- It is possible to hold that it is the duty of each succeeding age at once to accept the developments of the past, and to do its part in bringing on the developments of the future.