

Jesus of Alexandria

In terms of initial impact and lasting influence, the two greatest figures of the ancient world were both from what is now called Greece. The first subdued Athens and conquered the Persian Empire (which included Asia Minor, Egypt, Babylon, and Persia itself). He did this in just 13 years. He was Alexander the Great.

The second brought to an end the severe persecution of Christians throughout the Roman Empire, and unified the Church by influencing it to accept the doctrine of an eternal God the Son. He did this in just 13 years. He was Constantine the Great.

One man conquered the East, the other the West. One founded a city in Egypt and named it after himself. That city remains to this day. The other enlarged a city and renamed it after himself. That city (renamed again) also remains to this day. They were both noble and ignoble of character, and could strike out at those close to them ruthlessly and mercilessly. One is remembered as the greatest commander of all time; the other as the unifier of Church and State in the cause of empire.

Had there been no Alexander, there would have been no Alexandria; and without that city's multiculturalism it is doubtful that any other city could have hosted the diversity of doctrines, ideas and philosophies that ultimately recast the Christian faith into its own image.

Halving the time from the year Alexander began to reign as King of Macedon (336 BC) until the year Constantine became sole ruler of the Roman Empire (323 AD) brings us to the time of Christ's birth. How Alexander influenced the ancient world prior to the time of Christ, and how Constantine did so beyond it, is the subject of this chapter.

Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), King of Macedon, is most remembered for conquering the ancient world from Athens to India. His name is memorialized in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, which he founded, and where, after his death in Babylon, he was entombed.

According to Plutarch (who served as a priest at the Temple of Delphi) Alexander was born to Philip of Macedon II and Olympias, a sorceress. Plutarch writes, "*The night before the consummation of their marriage, she dreamed that a thunderbolt fell upon her body, which kindled a great fire, whose divided flames dispersed themselves all about, and then were extinguished*".

(Unless otherwise attributed, the following quotes are from Plutarch's "*Life of Alexander*", translated into English by Dryden.)

From birth Alexander was associated by mystics with the figure of a fierce lion, and diviners soon saw in his signs the characteristics of a conqueror. Philip drew apart from Olympias, wary of her bizarre enchantments: she slept with pythons, participated in pagan rites, and wildly worshipped the god Bacchus. Plutarch writes: "*Olympias, zealously affected these fanatical and enthusiastic inspirations, to perform them with more barbaric dread, and was wont in the dances proper to these*

ceremonies to have great tame serpents about her, which...made a spectacle that men could not look upon without terror."

The oracle of Apollo at Delphi commanded Philip "to perform sacrifice, and henceforth pay particular honour, above all other gods, to [the Egyptian god] Ammon". On the day that Alexander was born, the temple of Diana at Ephesus was destroyed. It was said that it took fire and was burnt while the priestess, its mistress, was absent, assisting at the birth of Alexander.

"All the Eastern soothsayers who happened to be then at Ephesus, looking upon the ruin of this temple to be the forerunner of some other calamity, ran about the town, beating their faces, and crying that this day had brought forth something that would prove fatal and destructive to all Asia.

"While (Alexander) was yet very young, he entertained the ambassadors from the King of Persia, in the absence of his father, and entering much into conversation with them, gained so much upon them by his affability, and the questions he asked them, which were far from being childish or trifling (for he inquired of them the length of the ways, the nature of the road into inner Asia, the character of their king, how he carried himself to his enemies, and what forces he was able to bring into the field), that they were struck with admiration of him, and looked upon the ability so much famed of Philip to be nothing in comparison with the forwardness and high purpose that appeared thus early in his son.

"Whenever [Alexander] heard Philip had taken any town of importance, or won any signal victory, instead of rejoicing at it altogether, he would tell his companions that his father would anticipate everything, and leave him and them no opportunities of performing great and illustrious actions. For being more bent upon action and glory than either upon pleasure or riches, he esteemed all that he should receive from his father as a diminution and prevention of his own future achievements; and would have chosen rather to succeed to a kingdom involved in troubles and wars, which would have afforded him frequent exercise of his courage, and a large field of honour, than to one already flourishing and settled, where his inheritance would be an inactive life, and the mere enjoyment of wealth and luxury."

Alexander's instruction by the philosopher Aristotle began at the age of 13. Aristotle had been a student of Plato, who had been taught by Socrates. "Alexander received from him not only his doctrines of Morals and of Politics, but also something of those more abstruse and profound theories which these philosophers, by the very names they gave them, professed to reserve for oral communication to the initiated, and did not allow many to become acquainted with.

"While Philip went on his expedition against the Byzantines, he left Alexander, then sixteen years old, his lieutenant in Macedonia, committing the charge of his seal to him; who, not to sit idle, reduced the rebellious Maedi, and having taken their chief town by storm, drove out the barbarous inhabitants, and planting a colony of several nations in their room, called the place after his own name, Alexandropolis. At the battle of Chaeronea, which his father fought against the Grecians, he is said to have been the first man that charged the Thebans' sacred band."

Two years after conquering the combined armies of Greece,, Philip of Macedon was assassinated, The 20-year-old Alexander's first major accomplishment was as his father's successor was to subdue rebellious Athens, The enmity between Greece and Macedonia was due to Greece being a democracy and Macedonia a monarchy. After being requested by the impressed Greeks to conduct war against Persia, the young king crossed the Hellespont (Dardanelles) to face an army of Persians led by Memnon and his Greek mercenaries.

What had begun as the liberation of the eastern half of the Greek Empire (occupied by Xerxes of Persia 140 years earlier) soon took on the nature of a war of conquest. In her book, *"The Nature of Alexander the Great"* – Penguin Books, Mary Renault writes: *"He marched north, then east along the coast of the Dardanelles, where the Persian force awaited him."* After his stunning victory at the river Granicus , Alexander *"marched south to Sardis, a formidable fortress on high rock, which surrendered without a fight."* He built there a temple to Zeus (the Roman Jupiter), the patron god of his homeland, Macedon.

Next came the Greek city of Ephesus, *"which opened its gates to him"*. He sacrificed to Artemis ("Diana of the Ephesians"). The cities of Miletus, Halicarnassus and Tarsus fell quickly in turn. Having secured the entire coastline, In 333 Alexander then met and conquered the army of King Darius at Issus, north of Syria. (The formidable Memnon had died of illness before the battle.) The Persian king fled the battlefield in his chariot, leaving behind his queen, his throne, and his treasure. As Renault puts it, *"[Darius] himself scarcely drew rein till he was across the Euphrates."* Having retaken the land Xerxes had conquered years before, Alexander was now Emperor of Greece.

The realisation of this seems to have quickened Alexander's already strong sense of destiny. According to Renault, *"There is no moment in Alexander's career of which it can be said with certainty that this was when he decided he need not stop short with his father's aim of freeing the Greek cities; that he could and would, be Great King of Persia. But the likeliest time is surely after Issus, when he saw what imperial splendours had enshrined a man of straw. Alexander, his road swept clear before him, marched due south towards Judea and the coastal cities of the Phoenicians. His Greek obligations were all fulfilled; he was now embarked on a war of conquest."*

Parmenion, his general, accepted the surrender of Damascus. The Phoenician city of Sidon welcomed Alexander, but the island fortress city of Tyre refused to surrender. Renault writes that the walls of the city were, *"made of dressed and mortared stone, were 150 feet high on the landward side."* Alexander, little knowing that he was fulfilling prophecies by Ezekiel (chapters 28 &29), built a causeway to the city with rocks and used siege engines to attack the walls, while his ships assaulted its seaward side. After taking Tyre (which Nebuchadnezzar had captured 241 years earlier after a thirteen-year siege), and killing or enslaving 40 000 of its inhabitants, Alexander marched his army south and besieged Gaza, where he was wounded in the shoulder by an arrow, not long before the fall of the city. The Gaza victory opened the way to Egypt, and on his arrival in Cairo Alexander was received as a god and dubbed Pharaoh by its people, who had despised the occupying Persians.

After journeying up the Nile and visiting the pyramids, Alexander surveyed the Nile Delta and saw an ideal site for a city on its western edge. After laying out the city

personally, he put his engineers to work, *"At some time in his eager progress," Renault reflects, "he must have crossed the site of his own tomb."*

He also made a dangerous journey through a waterless desert to an oasis on the border of Libya, where stood the temple of the Ram-god Ammon (which was identified with Jupiter). According to Plutarch, the Oracle of Apollo-Jupiter at Delphi had commanded Alexander's father "to perform sacrifice, and henceforth pay particular honour, above all other gods, to Ammon". Renault writes, *"From this time [Alexander's] sense of destiny acquired a demonic force."* She adds that *"from then on it was commonly known that he regarded himself as Ammon's son."*

"In July 331, about the time of his twenty-fifth birthday, Alexander marched east to Mesopotamia, where beyond the Tigris, Darius was awaiting him." At that time, an eclipse of the moon occurred. Alexander believed the heavenly bodies to be gods, and that this event signed the eclipse of the Persian Empire, Darius again fled the scene of battle, to be killed by one of his own commanders. The great city of Babylon capitulated without resistance. Entering Persia itself, Alexander took in succession the cities of Susa, Persepolis, Samarkand, and Bactra. Marching his army over the icy Hindu Kush and down through the Khyber Pass, Alexander crossed the Indus River and entered India's Punjab.

By then, however, his men were exhausted from a decade of fighting all the way from the Hellespont to the Indus, and after hearing that an army of 800,000 soldiers and 600 elephants of war awaited them across the great River Ganges, refused to go on. Alexander turned back toward Babylon. During the return to Susa in Persia, a large number of his soldiers died from fever, hunger and exhaustion. A dejected Alexander, never the same after turning back for the first time ever, ignored the warnings of his diviners and entered the city of Babylon, (323) where soon after he caught a fever and died,

There is no truth to the saying that he had wept because he had no worlds left to conquer, since he had intended to conquer the whole subcontinent but was forced to turn back after breaching its western defenses.

After Alexander's death his empire was divided among four of his generals, and soon fell apart, as Daniel had prophesied (Daniel 7:6 & 8:8). Yet Alexandria continued to prosper, and when in time Rome replaced Athens as the seat of world power, the city grew to become the Roman Empire's second-largest city. Home to more than 200,000 Hellenized Jews, it was the Empire's most multicultural city, and its Great Library held scrolls that had been gathered from countries located far beyond its borders.

Alexander the Great had opened the East to Greek customs, ideas, and philosophy. The King of tiny Macedon had become the conqueror of a vast empire that stretched from Athens to the Indus. Moreover, Greek would never have been commonly spoken in the wider world of the East. In Alexandria, the city he founded, philosophical thought would combine with aspects of Greek and Hebrew thought to form a new religion, one that the apostles of Jesus Christ would scarcely have recognized.

The City of Alexandria

Alexandria would seem to have absorbed the questing spirit of its founder, since it boasted the presence of some of the world's greatest intellectuals. On his comprehensive website, Apollonius Theocritus records the names and accomplishments of some of its famous residents:

"Greek was the official language of Ptolemaic Egypt and though Egyptians continued to form the overwhelming majority of the population of the countryside, Alexandria was different. Peoples from many lands settled there and most newcomers eventually adopted Greek, the lingua franca of the whole eastern Mediterranean, and beyond. Even those groups known for the conservative retention of other aspects of their culture, notably the Jews, forgot their native tongues and learned Greek.

"At the Great Library Greek translations were commissioned as a matter of course. Aristeeas, writing one hundred years after the Library's inception, records that Ptolemy I Soter handed over to Demetrius of Phaleron, a former pupil of Aristotle, the job of gathering books and scrolls, as well as letting him supervise a massive effort to translate the most important works of other cultures into Greek. This process began with the translation of what we know as the Old Testament, for which project the library hired and housed seventy-two rabbis to produce its famous namesake, the Septuagint [known as LXX].

"The incredible confluence of two of the greatest civilizations of all times produced the sort of stimulating environment for science and culture that was not to be matched for more than a thousand years.

"The Great Library contained more than the sum of its two most outstanding literary traditions, Greek and Egyptian, because it included Jewish, Babylonian, Zoroastrian and many other writings, including manuscripts from as far away as India. Buddhist monks were part of a special envoy sent by the emperor Asoka to Alexandria during the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus.

"Cross-fertilization (of the two cultures) resulted in such anomalies as Roman mummies, as citizens living in Alexandria and other Egyptian centres eagerly adopted many aspects of the local religion (in fact almost all surviving Roman portraiture has been preserved only on mummy caskets, preserved in the dry air of Egypt). Meanwhile all Egyptians of standing learned Greek, so much so that hieroglyphics eventually fell into complete disuse. Ultimately the Copts developed a script based on the Greek alphabet which became the basis of a resurgent native Egyptian literary tradition in the late Roman period.

"One of the great librarians, Eratosthenes (275-194 B.C.E), calculated the circumference of the earth to within one percent of its true value, based on the measured distance from Aswan to Alexandria and the fraction of the whole arc determined by differing shadow-lengths at noon in those two locations. He further suggested that the seas were connected, that Africa might be circumnavigated. Probably drawing on Egyptian and Near Eastern observations, he deduced the length of the year to 365 1/4 days and first suggested the idea of adding a "leap day" every four years. Aristarchus, last of the famous librarians of Ptolemaic times, claimed that the earth revolved around the sun and not the other way around.

*"Alexandria boasted the most famous mathematicians of all times starting with the father of mathematics, Euclid of Alexandria (c. 325 - c.265 B.C.E.) best known for his treatise *Elementa* and the monumental *Mathematica*, but who also wrote the prescient and precocious *Optics*, and the long lasting nature of his work gives him preeminence in this science.*

*"Apollonius of Perga (262 - c.190 B.C.E.) was known as 'The Great Geometer'. Little is known of his life but his works have had a very great influence on the development of mathematics, in particular his book *Conics*, which introduced terms familiar to us today such as parabola, ellipse, and hyperbola. Diophantus, often known as the father of algebra, is best known for his *Arithmetica*, a work on the solution of algebraic equations and on the theory of numbers. Pappus of Alexandria, who lived around the time of Roman emperor Theodosius, was the last of the great Greek geometers and one of his theorems is cited as the basis of modern projective geometry."* (Copyright © Apollonius Theocritos. Used by permission.) (http://www.geocities.com/apollonius_theocritos.html)

The Alexandrian Period of Hellenistic thought and literature lasted from the conqueror's death to the Roman conquest of Greece in 146 BC. But although political power moved from Athens to Rome, science and philosophy continued to increase in Alexandria. The city's diversity inevitably lent itself to religious syncretism. Greek mythology and Neo-Platonism mixed with the *Logos* to produce a blended Christianity. Although less effective with Jewish teachings, which were securely encased in the unchanging Law of Moses, this process did attract Philo, an Alexandrian recognized by historians as the first Jewish philosopher.

Philo was born in 20 BC and died around 50 AD, and would have been around 50 years of age at the time of Christ's crucifixion. He was one of 200 000 Jews who resided in Alexandria. Born into a noble family, Philo was educated in both Greek and Jewish schools of thought. He was regarded highly enough for his countrymen to appoint him leader of a group sent to Rome to make representations on their behalf to the emperor Caligula.

Philo's philosophy, strongly influenced by Plato, attempted to draw together the living God of the Hebrews and an abstract concept of esoteric Greek origin. His focal point was the divine *Logos*, personified as Wisdom in the eighth chapter of Proverbs, and in the Jewish Apocrypha. To the Greeks the *Logos* was the impersonal ideal of Wisdom.

The concept of the *Logos* led to Philo's popularity in multicultural Alexandria. It was near the end of Philo's life that the apostle Paul crossed the Aegean Sea to Neapolis and journeyed, via Philippi and Thessalonica, to Athens, home of the fabled Greek gods (worshipped by the Romans under new names).

An observant Jew, brilliant thinker, prodigious writer, and esteemed citizen of Alexandria, Philo sought to reconcile the Greek and Hebrew traditions by allegorizing (as later would Origen) scriptures that were meant to be understood as literal. Philo also sought to harmonize the laws of Nature with those of the Bible.

Wikipedia has the following entry on Philo of Alexandria:

"Philo made his philosophy the means of defending and justifying Jewish religious truths. These truths he regarded as fixed and determinate; and philosophy was used as an aid to truth, and as a means of arriving at it. With this end in view Philo chose from the philosophical tenets of the Greeks, refusing those that did not harmonize with the Jewish religion, as, e.g., the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity and indestructibility of the world.

"The aphoristic formulation of this paradox by the Norwegian scholar Peder Borgen can hardly be bettered: 'Philo is a conqueror, on the verge of being conquered.' Philo aims to conquer by showing that what is valuable in Greek thought is already present in Judaism. Yet the attraction that Greek philosophy exerts on him is so strong that he does not even realize that he is in danger of being swept off his feet. It would be going too far to assert that he is being conquered by the force majeure of Greek thought. But it is surely a near thing."

Though never widely received, Philo's prolific writings, aimed at reconciling schools of thought that were irreconcilable, were sown in the rich soil of Alexandria's diversity. They would germinate 175 years later in a syncretistic concept that would divide the church for more than a decade, before being accepted by the Nicene Council.

"Despite all the troubles during the late Roman period there seems to have been one last not broadly recognized but nonetheless significant Indian summer in the field, because this is the time of the great Theon (335-405), who worked in Alexandria as a teacher of mathematics and astronomy. We know from his own writings that he observed a solar eclipse on 16 June 364 at Alexandria and a lunar eclipse, again in Alexandria, on 25 November 364. ...His daughter Hypatia was the first woman to make a substantial contribution to the development of mathematics, and was also remarkable for becoming head of the Platonist school at Alexandria in about 400 C.E. (Copyright © Apollonius Theocritos. Used by permission.)

These brilliant scholars lived, studied and taught in the city that had been founded by Alexander, during his brief sojourn in Egypt en route to India. Alexandria became a seedbed of mixed philosophies, religions and pagan practices, in which grew the cults and doctrines that were to corrupt Christianity. The philosopher Philo sought to prove that the world's great philosophies had their origin in the Law of Moses. It could be said that in seeking to relate Greek philosophy to Jewish law and tradition, Philo produced a hybrid that flourished in Alexandria's multicultural climate.

Alexander the Great had intended to conquer Italy after returning from India, but died in Babylon, It would be Constantine the Great who would conquer the West by combining his superstitious belief in Christianity with idolatrous monotheism, In so doing, he would establish the dominant religious and political power the world would come to know as Christendom.

Constantine the Great

Gnosticism – the elevation of mystical knowledge that posited an ethereal Christ – was the first thread of many to be woven into Christianity. The Gnostics despised the God of the Old Testament as a failed *Demiurge*, since he had been unable to raise humanity above its corrupt condition. In making Christ other-worldly, they proposed

a state of being that was far above the Jewish-based Messianic-related Christianity of the day. Gnosticism wove well with the ideas of Plato, which had been popular for centuries. (Later religions would incorporate the idea that purity was to be found in the escape from – or denial of – natural human appetites. Only Jewish-based Christianity would celebrate the physical body as “the temple of God” and hope for that body’s resurrection into immortality.) Other threads would be Greek philosophy, Paganism, and Roman idolatry. The Alexandrian-governed bishops of Egypt, Libya and North Africa developed a theology that was strongly Hellenistic.

In referring to the Christianity of the second century, Adolf Harnack stated (in Lecture XI at the University of Berlin): *“Even had this youthful religion not severed the tie which bound it to Judaism, it would have been inevitably affected by the spirit and the civilization of that Greco-Roman world on whose soil it was permanently settled.”* To the great German scholar the Early Church in Europe was a spirit without a body.

Harnack’s words need to be weighed carefully, since he was of the theologically liberal Tübingen School. Although arguably the greatest of German liberal theologians, he is best known for his search for the historical Jesus (as distinct from the Jesus of the New Testament). “The search for the historical Jesus” lingers to this very day among liberal theologians. Harnack saw the disconnection of Christianity from Judaism after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD as both inevitable and necessary for it to become European. We may disagree with Harnack’s liberal views on Jesus, but his understanding of the history of the Church over the first three centuries, and his research notes on this subject are priceless.

“The influx of Hellenism, of the Greek spirit, and the union of the Gospel with it, form the greatest fact of the history of the Church in the second century, and when the fact was once established as a foundation it continued through the following centuries.” Harnack stated that it was not until Alexander the Great had created “an entirely new position of affairs, and the barriers separating the nations of the East from one another and from Hellenism had been destroyed, could Judaism free itself from its limitations and start upon its development into a religion for the world.”

Harnack’s view was that in the second century *“the time was ripe when a man in the East could also breathe the air of Greece and see his spiritual horizon stretch beyond the limits of his own nation.”* Harnack was cautious, however, seeing nothing in the earliest Christian writings to suggest the presence of “a Greek element”. However that did not prevent him from assuming it had been there, because of the “possibility” that without such a presence “the new religion” – a Hellenized Christianity – would not have appeared! This was an Olympian leap for a scholar adept at side-stepping any doctrine that disproved his ideas.

“The first stage of any real influx of definitely Greek thought and Greek life is to be fixed at about the year 130. It was then that the religious philosophy of Greece began to [bring about] an entrance and it went straight to the centre of the new religion.” This philosophy sought “to get into inner touch with Christianity, and, conversely, Christianity itself held out a hand to this ally.”

The historian stated that philosophy had amassed “great capital” since the time of Socrates. *“A century or so later, about the year 220 or 230, the second stage begins: Greek mysteries, and Greek civilization in the whole range of its*

development, exercise their influence on the Church, but not mythology... Another century, however, had in its turn to elapse before Hellenism as a whole and in every phase of its development was established in the Church."

For the most part, he stated, guarantees of continuity as to the integrity of church doctrine merely consisted of a change of label – *"the thing itself is taken over without alteration, and in the worship of the saints we see a regular Christian religion of a lower order arising."*

"So much depth and delicacy of feeling, so much earnestness and dignity [did Greek religion and philosophy have with Christianity], and – above all – so strong a monotheistic piety were displayed in the religious ethics of the Greeks, acquired as it had been by hard toil on a basis of inner experience and metaphysical speculation, that the Christian religion could not pass this treasure by with indifference. There was much in it, indeed, that was defective and repellent; there was no personality visibly embodying its ethics as a living power; it still kept up a strange connection with 'demon-worship' and polytheism; but both as a whole and in its individual parts it was felt to contain a kindred element, and it was absorbed."

Harnack saw the Church as having taken over *"a cosmological conception"* [the *Logos*] that was destined decades later to attain *"a commanding position in its doctrinal system Starting from an examination of the world and the life within, Greek thought had arrived at the conception of an active central idea [that] represented the unity of the supreme principle of the world, of thought, and of ethics."* This also represented the divinity itself as being a creative and active power rather than a passive and indifferent one. This switch to a heavenly *Logos* did away *"at a stroke"* with the purely Jewish expectation of an earthly Messiah.

At that time the step from an incarnate *Logos* to an incarnate 'God the Son' was still a hundred years away, but when taken it would be seen by the Church as both logical and inevitable. The elevation of the scriptural Son of God to an unscriptural God the Son – inconceivable to the Apostles – would then be accepted as a natural development in the evolving theology of the Church.

The period commonly known as "the Early Church" spans the almost three centuries from the Resurrection of Jesus Christ' to the Council of Nicaea. Centuries before Christ, Socrates had tutored Plato and Plato Aristotle. Similarly in the Early Church there arose in Alexandria three great theologians: Clement, Origen and Athanasius, each one succeeding the other in what one might call The School of Theological Development.

Christian Church historian Philip Schaff writes: "Alexandria becomes the brain of Christendom; its heart was yet beating at Antioch, but the West was still receptive...its hands and arms stretched forth towards the sunrise for further enlightenment. From the East it had obtained the Scriptures and their authentication, and from the same source was deriving the canons, the liturgies, and the creed of Christendom. The universal language of Christians is Greek. To a pagan emperor who had outgrown the ideas of Nero's time, it was no longer Judaism, but it was not less an Oriental superstition, essentially Greek in its features and its dress...Their language was Greek, their organization Greek, their writers Greek, their Scriptures and their ritual were Greek. Through Greek the communications of the churches of the West were constantly kept up with the East. ...Thus the church at Rome was but

one of a confederation of greek religious republics founded by Christianity. Now this confederation was the Holy Catholic Church.

Every Christian must recognize the career of Alexander, and the history of his empire as an immediate precursor of the Gospel. The patronage of letters by the Ptolemies at Alexandria, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the dialect of the hellenes, the creation of a new terminology of the greeks by which ideas of faith and of truth might find access to the mind of a heathen world –these were preliminaries to the preaching of the gospel to mankind, and to the composition of the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour. He himself had prophetically visited Egypt, and the idols were now to be removed before his presence. There a powerful Christian school was to make itself felt in the definitions of orthodoxy; and in a new sense was that prophecy to be understood, 'Out of Egypt have I called my Son.'
http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02/Page_166.html

Clement, who before converting to Christ had been a pagan philosopher, united Greek philosophy and Christian doctrine to produce a Christianized form of Platonism. In *Stromata*, his greatest work, he describes philosophy as "a divinely ordered preparation of the Greeks for faith in Christ, as the law was for the Hebrews [which] shows the necessity and value of literature and philosophic culture for the attainment of true Christian knowledge, in opposition to [those] among Christians who regarded learning as useless and dangerous."

Clement proclaims himself "an eclectic, believing in the existence of fragments of truth in all systems, which may be separated from error..., declaring that the truth can be found in unity and completeness only in Christ, as it was from Him that all its scattered germs originally proceeded."

In short: Clement was syncretistic. Although he was a devout believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who not only taught but practiced his faith, he nevertheless saw Greek philosophy as equivalent to Jewish Law. Plato (428 – 347 BC) had reconciled religion to science by making reason paramount. According to the Platonic view, as man discovers the laws of nature he gropes toward the gods, who are superior in their ability to reason...all honest intellectual effort is therefore an act of piety." Evidently Clement saw Plato and Moses as equals.

Origen (*circa* 185 –254) became principal of the school Clement had founded in Alexandria. An Egyptian who read Hebrew, he was the first to expound Christian doctrine from a philosophical viewpoint, using allegory to spiritualize the Scriptures. His views were not only Platonic but also Gnostic, and he wrote that the soul "passes through successive stages before incarnation as a human and after death, eventually reaching God." He imagined even demons being reunited with God. For Origen, God was not Yahweh but the First Principle, and Christ, the Logos, was subordinate to him." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_Fathers#Origen)

Centuries later his views were declared anathema, but by that time the concept that the fountainhead of theology was philosophy was not just acceptable but irresistible.

Athanasius I of Alexandria (*circa* 293 – 373), theologian, Pope of Alexandria, Church Father, and noted Egyptian leader, is best remembered for his leading role in the conflict with Arius and Arianism [a doctrine taught by today's Jehovah's Witnesses]. At the first Council of Nicaea (325), Athanasius argued against Arius and his doctrine

that Christ is of a distinct substance from the Father [that is, that the *Logos* had been created, and therefore was a lesser god]. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_Fathers#Athanasius_of_Alexandria)

Historic church Confessions affirm the Doctrine of the Trinity, established at the Council of Nicaea. At least one of them brands all dissenters "cults and heretics."

According to Abbot Guiseppe Ricciotti, Constantine the Great (274-337 AD) is "a person of the highest importance in the history of the Roman Empire, and in the story of the Christian Church," (*"The Age of Martyrs - Christianity From Diocletian (284) To Constantine (337)"*) (Tan Books And Publishers, Inc - 1999). Ricciotti writes that Constantine "really changed the natural course of events".

"He had very good, but not prodigious, natural gifts. He was tall, strong, and vigorous, and had sympathetic looks and an affable manner. He had no time for abstract speculation and subtlety of thought, but had a very acute power of observation. He made his decisions with rapidity, but often on the basis of summary and approximate information. On the battlefield he was a very brave fighter and an excellent tactician; in strategy he was among the greatest of Roman emperors... Besides military affairs, he had had a novitiate in civil government with his father, Constantius, and then in the court of Diocletian. The experience he gained there accompanied him for the rest of his life."

Christians have long viewed Constantine with ambivalence. It is true that he presided benignly over the Council of Nicaea (325), which issued the famous Nicene Creed; but the common belief that he made Christianity the State Religion of the Roman Empire is false (in fact, he elevated it to the level of other accepted religions, including paganism). It is recorded that he kissed the sightless eyes of blinded believers and the stumps of arms amputated by Diocletian's willful brutality. But it is also recorded that during his own reign he executed his wife, one of his sons, his father-in-law, his brother-in-law, and a nephew. Constantine was the emperor of expedience.

Constantine claimed that before the battle of Milvian Bridge outside Rome (313) he had seen a sign in the sky and heard a voice saying, "By this sign conquer!" However it is a matter of record that he postponed his baptism for 24 years, until just before his death; and while there is little doubt that Constantine revered the Christian God as supreme, there is no doubt at all that he also erected a statue of Helios, the sun god, and that the face carved on the idol was his own. Evidence indicates that he believed the God of the Jews and the Greeks to be one and the same.

From these and other contradictions, we should perhaps view Constantine's role as not unlike that of Cyrus of Persia, who released the Jews from captivity in Babylon and decreed the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple. The Sovereign God who called the pagan Cyrus "My Anointed" may also have raised up Constantine with the spread of the Gospel worldwide in mind. In the days of the Judges, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes," and that could also be said of Constantine.

In his book, *"Constantine The Great And Christianity, Three Phases: The Historical, The Legendary And the Spurious (1914)"* Christopher Bush Coleman attributes to Constantine the calendar change of the Jewish Passover to the pagan Easter. In 321 the Emperor also changed the day of worship from the Jewish Sabbath to the

Christian Sunday (in honour of Sol Invictus, the Balkan sun god). In 328 he transferred the capitol of the Roman Empire from Rome to Byzantium, and renamed it Constantinople. Constantine brought together varied strands of religion and entwined them with what seems to have been a view to strengthening the Empire.

"At the court Easter was celebrated with gorgeous ceremonies, and martyr's days and other sacred occasions were carefully observed. In all of this Constantine did not differ greatly from the current notions of his day. Most men seem to have been seeking charms to give them success in this life and happiness thereafter. Belief in one supreme heavenly power, in the future life, and in the necessity of expiatory rites, was common to Roman paganism of the fourth century, modified as it had become by prevalent influences, and to Christianity."

Referring to Constantine's connection with the cult of the sun, Coleman quotes Cumont: *"The last formula reached by the religion of the pagan Semites and in consequence by that of the Romans, was a divinity unique, almighty, eternal, universal and ineffable that revealed itself throughout nature, but whose most splendid and most energetic manifestation was the sun. To arrive at the Christian Monotheism only one final tie had to be broken, that is to say, this Supreme Being, resident in a distant heaven, had to be removed beyond the world."*

"The principal divergence [between Christianity and the later Roman paganism] was that Christianity, by placing God in an ideal sphere beyond the confines of this world, endeavored to rid itself of every attachment to a frequently abject polytheism. ...As the religious history of the empire is studied more closely, the triumph of the church will, in our opinion, appear more and more as the culmination of a long evolution of beliefs. ...In truth the line between Christian and pagan was long wavering and uncertain. We find adherents of the opposing creeds side by side even in the same family at the end of the fourth century." The One God of the Jews would soon become the Sun god of the Romans.

Jesus of Nazareth

"I have no silver or gold," Peter said, "but what I do have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – rise up and walk!"

Seizing the cripple's right hand, Peter lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankles became firm. Finding his feet he began to walk, and entered the Temple with Peter and John – walking, and leaping, and praising God. (Acts 3:6-8)

Jesus is the Greek version of Joshua, the name of the hero general who succeeded Moses and led the people into the Promised Land,. Many males in Israel bore his name. The Hebrew attached to a person's name his or her place of origin – for example, "Saul of Tarsus."

But "Jesus Christ of Nazareth" is something of a puzzle, Why would the name of a small town in the Galilean hills be attached to Jesus Christ long after his resurrection?

When the guileless Nathaniel heard that Jesus was from Nazareth, he was skeptical: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Why not "Jesus of Bethlehem"? Why did the Son of David honour Nazareth rather than "the city of David" – his birthplace? (Luke 2:4,11) If he had the Pharisees would not have scorned Nicodemus with the words, "Do you also come from Galilee?" (Meaning, "Are you as stupid as the rest of this rabble?") "Search [the Scriptures] and see for yourself that no Prophet comes from Galilee!" (John 7:52)

The apostles Peter and John would not have forgotten that Jesus was first rejected in Nazareth – the town where he had grown up and learned his trade. The rejection had been severe: the townspeople had tried to kill him by throwing him off a cliff! (Luke 4:29)

"Where did he acquire all this?" they asked. "What is this 'wisdom' that has been given to him? And what are these marvellous 'miracles' that his hands perform? Is not this the carpenter, Mary's son, the brother of James and Joses, Jude and Simon? And do not his sisters live here among us?"

"Doubtless," Jesus had replied, "you will quote to me the proverb, 'Physician, cure yourself'; all that we hear that you have done at Capernaum, do here also in your own place." (Luke 4:23)

The people of Nazareth apparently felt that if Jesus was the success outsiders were saying he was, it was time he acknowledged that "Charity begins at home." But Jesus said, "No prophet is without honour except in his own country, and among his own relatives, and in his own home."

"And he could do no miracle there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them; and he marvelled at their unbelief." (Mark 6:5)

"Familiarity breeds contempt." It seems that everyone is a hero somewhere else. The root cause of unbelief is the failure to see the extra in the ordinary. If we wish to see the super in the natural, we must first see the extra in the ordinary.

Hollywood movies on the life of Jesus Christ have led most people to believe that a crack of lightning and a roll of thunder are necessary preliminaries to a miracle, but that's not so. In fact, the absence of flashing lights and drum rolls can make the person who prayed wonder if that crippled man now walking was really crippled to begin with! He was, of course, but the miracle happened without the fanfare westerners have been conditioned to expect. The same applies to the healing of deaf ears and blind eyes.

If on a mission Christians expect the same presence of God they enjoy in a church meeting at home, they can forget it. Need draws power! Desperate people draw on the anointing in much the same way as air conditioners draw on a city's power supply during a heat-wave. During the Lord's visit the people of Nazareth refused to draw on that power.

Why not "Jesus of Capernaum"? Jesus performed more miracles there than anywhere else. He made his home there after leaving Nazareth. It was to be prophetic.

"And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.'" (Matthew 4:13-16)

Miracles such as the deliverance of a demoniac, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and others, the healing and forgiveness of the paralyzed man let down through the roof, the healing of the centurion's servant, and the raising to life of Jairus' daughter. The Lord's Galilean ministry reached its peak in Capernaum, which was "exalted to heaven" by his many miracles (Matthew 11:23).

If the Jews had known that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem they could not have crucified him; public acclaim for the Son of David would have prevented it.

If Jesus had attached Capernaum to his name, he would have been remembered as the greatest-ever miracle-worker. But Jesus was more than a worker of signs and wonders: he was the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sin of the world.

"Nazareth," brings to mind every word that expressed its little value, low esteem, and rejection of Jesus. The Pharisees' assumption as to his origin made him a stumbling-block – an excuse for them to heap scorn on anyone who believed him to be he was the promised Messiah. (John 7:41,42)

Why "Jesus of Nazareth"? Firstly, its lack of association with anything of interest made Christ's power all the more remarkable! "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Oh yes, the Saviour of the world! He resided there, grew up there, worked there as a carpenter. We remember Nazareth for no other reason than its association with Jesus.

Addressing the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter began his message with "Jesus of Nazareth..." His name "through faith in his name" healed the cripple at the gate Beautiful. It's a name that reverberates throughout the following chapters!

Those who think that "Jesus of Nazareth" served only to identify Jesus to the Jews should note that Peter's statement on Christ's ministry in the house of the Roman Cornelius began with "Jesus of Nazareth..." (Acts 10:38) And when the blinded Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus asked, "Who are you, Lord?" the answer was, "I am Jesus of Nazareth..." (Acts 22:8)

We have no way of knowing how the residents of Nazareth felt when their small town – soon a synonym for unbelief – became increasingly well known throughout the world of their day. They ought to have felt honoured that they had known Jesus, even if they had not recognized him as their Messiah.

But we shouldn't be too critical of them, for many a village, town, city, state or nation has failed to see the extra in the ordinary: Jesus Christ in their midst in the

form of his church. "I am Jesus of Nazareth, and you are persecuting me" Jesus would say to those who misunderstand or mistreat Christians today.

Jesus lifted the name Nazareth from obscurity and made it known around the world. His mighty works had been limited only by the town's unbelief, so he did greatest works elsewhere. Nazareth's association with the name of Jesus Christ is an undeserved honour. The same can be said of every place, everywhere, that is unworthy (not to mention every person).

Whenever the name of any person or place is associated with the name of Jesus Christ not only is that the greatest honour that could possibly be bestowed – it is also yet another bright testimony to the one who was, and who is, and who forever will be "*The Light of the World*"!

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