

# **The spiritual stronghold of Greek intellectualism in Europe and the Christian church**

*by Jan Willem Bakker*

## ***Table of Contents***

*Introduction*

*Territorial powers and world rulers*

*The redemptive relation between the cultures of Jews and Greeks*

*Theocracy and democracy*

*Athena and the gods of Greece*

*Athena, the prince of Greece and world rulers*

*Lessons from Paul's encounter with Athena on Mars hill*

*The legacy of Paul's sermon on Mars hill*

*The diverse and lasting influence of Greek culture on Europe and its church*

*Greek intellectualism is a spiritual system, not merely an intellectual one*

*Athena and Apollo: the left and the right fists of the prince of Greece*

*Notes*

## ***Introduction***

A well-known stronghold blocking the progress of revival in Europe is the pervasive impact of rationalism and other expressions of Greek intellectualism on its people, Christians included. Many evangelical and charismatic Christians have already commented on the pervasive impact of Greek intellectualism on western culture and the church. Since the impact of the Greek mindset on western Christianity has been so pervasive, and is still quite destructive in many ways, I think it is important to further elaborate on its spiritual origin and nature.

The influence of Greek intellectualism is related to a demonic principality: the prince of Greece. This demonic principality has manifested itself in a number of different gods and goddesses. Of these manifestations the goddess of Athens, Pallas Athena, has exercised the strongest and most pervasive influence on Europe and its church. What this goddess represents, intellectual wisdom and scientific knowledge are the dominant and most lasting contribution of ancient Greece to Europe, and through Europe, to the world. The spiritual influence of ancient Greece, as personified by Pallas Athena, still has an important hold on the minds of Europeans,

particularly of Bible believing Christians. This influence appears to be even stronger in continental western and northern Europe than in the Anglo-Saxon world. This influence has created a deeply rooted stronghold of unbelief that strongly inhibits Christians from rising and standing in their God given spiritual authority.

### ***Territorial powers and world rulers***

Rationalism and other forms of Greek thinking are related to a power that is primarily territorial: the prince of Greece. The apostle Paul describes in Ephesus 6 that there is an elaborate rank of demonic forces. In the community of prophetic intercessors and spiritual warfare specialists in the church these days, there is much consensus on major difference between two types of high level demonic principalities. One such type is not restricted to a particular region, but exercises its influence all over the globe. It is what is called 'world rulers'. The other type is territorial in scope and orientation. It exercises dominion in a particular region. They are called 'territorial spirits'. Such spirits are also divided according to rank. There are spirits who exercise dominion over a city, over a region or a nation. The Bible mentions two major territorial spirits explicitly, in the book of Daniel: the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece. Both are high ranking powers who have dominion in a large region.

The distinction between territorial powers and world rulers, however, is not absolute. The influence of world rulers can be stronger in some areas than in others. World rulers often have territorially based demonic 'henchmen' who ensure that the power of a particular world ruler is strong in a certain area. An example is the well-known queen of heaven, a high ranking world ruler. Its influence is global. Nevertheless, there are various places on the globe where its influence is particularly strong because of local cults that are linked to the queen of heaven. Examples are the cult of Diana of Ephesus, as described in Acts 19, and the many shrines and pilgrimage centres to the virgin Mary, which are basically queen of heaven centres cunningly concealed as tributes to the mother of Jesus. On the other hand, territorial powers may enlarge their territorial powers through a process of spiritual expansionism. The prince of Greece is a paramount example. Through the spread of humanism, agnosticism and intellectualism it now affects many people all over the globe, including Christians. On the other hand the influence of such territorial powers may also decline in some areas. For instance, history shows that the influence of the prince of Greece has declined in some areas in spite of its steady global expansionism. North Africa used to have major centres of Greek thought and culture before the rise of Islam in that region.

The prince of Greece has used various mechanisms of spiritual expansionism, either simultaneously or alternately. The first mechanism is territorial expansion through either peaceful migration of Greek settlers to other regions or through old-fashioned military conquest. The main examples are the conquests of Alexander the Great, and the expansion of the Roman empire, which was pervaded by the spirit of Greece. A second mechanism is modelling through science and technology, which gave the world views inspired by the prince of Greece an image of high effectiveness, and therefore credibility. A third mechanism is through subtle propaganda. Greek culture was able to convey the bewitching suggestion that its world view of Greece, particularly the humanistic and rationalistic one, is the culmination point of human cultural and spiritual history. A sad thing is that the Christian church has also contributed to the expansion of the empire of the prince of Greece. Because Christianity became influenced by the demonic principality, its influence was also spread where the gospel was preached by European or other western Christians.

## *The redemptive relation between the cultures of Jews and Greeks*

Greek culture is not merely negative but had a redemptive purpose. The Bible states that Jesus was revealed in the fullness of time. This means that the conditions of the world at that time were specifically chosen by the Lord to reveal his Son. This world of Jesus had known a significant degree of globalisation due to the Greek and Roman world. Alexander, the great Greek king had laid an important foundation of the integration of a large part of the world in South-eastern Europe, the Middle East and parts of Asia, both economically and politically. But perhaps most important was the cosmopolitan character of Greek culture. The Greek language provided a widely understood medium of communication in the world of Jesus. Cosmopolitan centres, of which Alexandria was the most outstanding one, provided platforms in which new ideas were widely exchanged and distributed, which broke down the rigged autarky and provincialism of local traditions in the ancient world. Greek culture had a comparatively high appreciation of cultural diversity, and stimulated the articulations and diffusion of new ideas and worldviews. The cosmopolitan outlook of Greek culture, and its appreciation of diversity made this culture close to synonymous with the highly diverse world of different people groups. The Roman Empire not only left the major cosmopolitan impact of Greek culture intact, but in fact facilitated its further dispersion and development. Rome was ruled by a spiritual principality of its own, which was imperialistic in nature and also left its lasting imprint on the modern world. Nevertheless, as is demonstrated in the fact that it adopted the Greek gods and goddesses, the Roman world was deeply pervaded by the spirit of Greece. It further developed the Greek heritage, particularly in terms of applied science, administration and law.

The influence of Greek culture was God's deliberate design. God chose the Jewish people and culture to reveal its specific purposes for mankind and as the cradle of the saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, God incarnate. However, in order to protect Gods purposes for the world through the Jewish people and culture, a high degree of provincialism was indispensable. It is important to emphasise that Jesus could never have born in any other culture than the Jewish one. The redemption of mankind cannot be isolated from a proper understanding of God's diagnosis of the human predicament, which in its turn requires a proper world-view and way of life reflecting God's interpretation of the world and of mankind. For instance, the acceptance of Jesus as the saviour cannot be separated from notions such as, one personal God, sin, righteousness, and so on. God elected the Jews to develop a sound worldview and way of life reflecting God's interpretation of the world and of mankind. In order to achieve and maintain this purpose the Jews had to keep themselves pure from the outside world and its spiritual influences as much as possible. Israel was like a beautiful but tender plant that could only grow in a context of spiritual isolation. Even the struggles and failures of Israel served a redemptive purpose. It provided a paradigm for the ultimate spiritual predicament of all of mankind. It demonstrated that 'all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and holiness'. In this way Israel's history further revealed God's holiness as well as His love and faithfulness for all mankind.

When the time came to preach the gospel of salvation to the whole world the comparative isolation and the inward orientation of the Jewish culture was no longer merely an advantage. In fact it was a serious disadvantage in terms of the diffusion of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Greek culture, in combination with some characteristics of the Roman Empire, filled the gap. Its global scope, both in terms of language, degree of literacy and of infrastructure, and its cosmopolitan outlook facilitated the spread of the gospel beyond Israel to other areas, and beyond

the Jews to different people groups.

### ***Theocracy and democracy***

Looking it from the perspectives of cultures and people groups, the execution of the great commission was to a large extent a partnership between two cultures. God used the Jewish culture to provide salvation as well as the conceptual means to properly understand and manage the message of salvation. Greek culture provided the means to make this Jewish message of salvation accessible to the rest of the world. Greek culture, has another redemptive purpose in relation to the gospel. It filled gaps in gentile societies that Jewish tradition could not fill. In biblical times the form of government of the nation of Israel was always theocratic in nature, notwithstanding the many times of apostasy. Theocracy implies a wide consensus among the people believing that God is the ultimate ruler of the nation, and that its administrative and political system directly reflects God's commandments. But the Bible never states or suggests that gentile theocracies will flourish. On the contrary, it clearly shows that more often than not gentile Christians will find themselves a persecuted minority. Furthermore, history shows that very close relations between church and state in gentile nations tend to be strongly impacted by counterfeit spirits of religion and of politics, rather than by genuine faith in the living God. Since a genuine theocracy is a rather rare historic option, this politico-administrative model of Israel cannot apply to gentile Christians. Therefore the Lord has allowed another option to at least a segment of gentile Christianity: the democratic state with the rule of law. In such a democratic 'a quiet and peaceable life' which the apostle Paul prays for can be realised to a significant extent, comparatively speaking. Though Christianity, and certainly the reformation have greatly contributed to the development of democracy and justice, democracy and the rule of law have their roots in pagan Greece and pagan Rome, Greece's spiritual ally. Democracy, including its various pitfalls, has its roots in Athens, whereas modern legal systems are unthinkable without the inspiration and examples of Roman law.

Democracy is ultimately the product of pagan Greece. Therefore it has certainly major dangers and drawbacks. It is humanistic in both origin and orientation and makes people rather than God the ultimate authority. The motto of the French revolution "neither God nor master" is the ultimate expression of this humanistic orientation. The erosion of biblical norms in many European countries further bears witness to this drawback. Nevertheless, in spite its pagan origin and orientation, democracy still serves a purpose in God's higher overall plan with mankind. Since Israel's theocratic system is not universally applicable, the Lord used Greek Roman heritage of politics, law and administration to provide a politico-administrative system in which the gospel could be preached and practiced relatively unhindered, notwithstanding the fact that the relative ease and comfort of such a system has often lured Christians into compromise and complacency.

The partnership of the Jewish and Greek cultures has fallen in two opposite errors. One error was Judaism. Judaism applies all details of Jewish Old Testament culture, as well as many human Jewish traditions, to all believers, Jew and non-Jews alike. This put unnecessary stumbling blocks before the gentiles and thereby hindered the accessibility of the message of salvation to other people groups. On the other hand, Greek culture has fallen into the error of stealing the spiritual leadership of Jewish culture. The scope of the influence of Greek culture, its diversity and, in various areas, its apparent sophistication as well, greatly outshines those of Jewish culture. Nevertheless, God has always intended Greek culture to serve the Jewish culture. In his sovereignty the Lord has chosen the Jewish culture to articulate and release the message of salvation and redemption. By God's

choice the gospel is from the Jews. Greek culture has to make this gospel universally accessible, but in so doing the Jewish character of the gospel was still supposed to remain intact. Even the apostle of the Greeks, Paul, was and remained very, very Jewish. But Greek culture has stolen the Jewish birthright. It has done so in three different ways. Firstly, through replacement theology it has usurped all Jewish spiritual treasures and promises and applied it to itself. Secondly, together with its ally Rome, Greece has seized political and administrative control over Christianity. From the Greek power centres, such as Constantinople, it has exercised both theological and institutional dominance over the gospel and believers. But the most subtle, profound and pervasive influence is the kind of intellectualistic spirituality that Greek culture has endorsed. This influence is extremely prominent in western Christianity. It is even stronger in continental Europe than in England and in America. By suppressing the Jewish character of the gospel and turning it into a Greek one, the gentile church stepped beyond the spiritual boundaries that the Lord had set. Consequently it threw the door wide open to a spiritual invasion by the prince of Greece.

One can surely say that the spiritual influence of Greek culture has outweighed any other pagan influence on historic Christianity. This is far from surprising. Since Greek culture was the predominant partner of the Jewish message of salvation, it had more opportunity to distort this Jewish message of salvation than any other pagan spiritual influence. Its diversity, adaptability and sophistication further facilitated a compromise between Greek culture and Judaism and Christianity. Zechariah 9: 13 which states that the Lord will make the sons of Zion to rise against the sons of Greece underlines amongst other things that the Lord wants us to shake off the spiritual yoke of the Greek influence. Needless to say that this verse is particularly important for Europe which has, more than any other region in the world, been marked by a strong symbiosis between the Jewish gospel of salvation and the spirits of ancient Greece. It is also hardly surprising in this context that Europe's present name comes from Greek pagan mythology, and is named after a rape victim of Zeus, the supreme deity. By stealing the right of the first born from the Jews, and thus acting outside Gods plan, gentile Christianity threw the door wide open to further spiritual dominance by the prince of Greece.

### *Athena and the gods of Greece*

According to Greek mythology Greece was ruled from the mount Olympus by 12 main gods and goddesses. Some of the twelve gods and goddesses are very crude and barbaric, whereas others were quite restrained and civilized. For instance Zeus, the supreme deity, was a terror. He was extremely promiscuous. He did not merely seduce countless women, divine, semi-divine or merely human, but like other male gods, even resorted to rape. Even the goddesses were not safe from his rape attempts. On the other hand there were also sophisticated deities. One that really stood out is Pallas Athena. Her myth of origin reflects her special status. Her birth was quite unique. She was not conceived or created, but just jumped out of the head of Zeus as an adult, in full armour. This goddess turned out to be extremely influential. The values and activities she represented have had a tremendous impact on European culture and Christianity.

Pallas Athena had various characteristics and virtues. But the most outstanding one was her wisdom. Her animal was an owl, which is a common pagan symbol of wisdom. In the ancient Greek world various cities were consecrated to her. But the most important and sophisticated one was the city of Athens, the reputed centre of philosophers and scientists, of which she was the patroness. Pallas Athens was also a goddess of war. Therefore she is normally depicted with a helmet, spear

and shield. However, though she was skilled in war, she was not blood thirsty like most gods or goddesses of war. She actually preferred diplomacy and negotiations to bloodshed. One could safely say that she was the most civilized god or goddesses of the Greeks. More than any other god or goddess Pallas Athens could symbolize the ideals of high civilization. Even Europeans from later centuries, including many Christians, had no qualms to refer to Pallas Athena as an important metaphor for civilization and wisdom. Her reputed sophistication notwithstanding, she was a pagan goddess who operated in conjunction with a family of pagan gods and goddesses. The moral life of the cities dedicated to her was just as corrupt as those of other cities. Even in the life of the hero of secular humanism, the philosopher Socrates, who lived and died in Athens, we read that drinking orgies and homosexuality, particularly with boys, were common and even glorified.

### *Athena, the prince of Greece, and world rulers*

Though the prince of Greece is a territorial ruler manifesting itself in different gods and goddesses, it also offers a framework in which demonic world rulers can manifest itself and exercise their influence in the regions and areas affected by the prince of Greece. We might say that the prince of Greece provides a home base for these world rulers in these regions and areas. For instance, the supreme deity of the Greeks, Zeus, or its Roman version Jupiter, is not merely one specific manifestation of the prince of Greece, but a manifestation of the devil himself simultaneously. This becomes clear from the letter from Christ to the church of Pergamum in the book of Revelation. This place had a renowned altar for Zeus (which is the Berlin museum at the moment). The Bible calls this city a 'seat of satan', thus considering Zeus a manifestation of satan. Another high ranking world ruler in this context is the queen of heaven. Goddesses like Venus, the goddess of erotic love, and Diana, the goddess of hunting are manifestation of this world ruler which is universally honoured as the mother, moon and fertility goddess.

The idolatry of Athens has also evolved from the queen of heaven cult. Sources indicate that the goddess Pallas Athens was originally identified with the moon goddess and also linked to the cult of Gaia, both manifestations of the queen of heaven. Originally ritual prostitution was linked to Athens worship as well. Ritual prostitution remained part of the cult of Athens but was later expressed in a symbolic rather than a directly physical way. Athens herself was portrayed as a virgin, which is not uncommon for goddesses representing the queen of heaven. Later in history the cult of Athens developed into a different direction than other cults that originated in the cult of the queen of heaven. This becomes apparent if we compare the cult of Athens to that of Diana of Ephesus. Whereas in Ephesus the arch features of the queen of heaven such as fertility and magic stood out, Athens was primarily characterised by intellectual snobbery, pure and applied science, relativism and codes of intellectual correctness.

Nevertheless, the fact that Athena evolved from the queen of heaven cults indicate that this power still operates as a pillar of the global power structure of the queen of heaven. It is therefore not surprising that manifestations of the spirit of Athens have often gone hand in hand with classic manifestations of the queen of heaven. Constantinople, for a long time the main centre of early medieval Christianity, was strongly characterised by Greek philosophy and theology as well as Mary worship. The city displayed a paradoxical mix of asceticism and sexual decadence. It is probably safe to say that the goddess Athena, and the intellectualism and humanism it produced, are the products of a specific powerful partnership between the prince of Greece and the queen of heaven. One way or the other, in the course of history the spirit of Athena laid key obstacles in the

way of the kingdom of God. Up to this day these specific obstacles hinder Christians to enter into their full inheritance in Christ.

### ***Lessons from Paul's encounter with Athena on Mars hill***

Paul's encounter with the philosophers at Mars hill as described in Acts 17 is extremely instructive. The encounter gives many clues about the character of Greek culture, particularly of the traits expressed in the goddess of Athens. First of all, wisdom was paramount in the perspective of the Athenians and apparently equalled intellectual knowledge and understanding. The mind was the door to this understanding. On Mars hill many Athenians, as well as visitors, spent all their time pursuing knowledge. Mars hill, as the term conveys, was not primarily dedicated to Athens, but to Mars, the main god of war. Athens' main temple was the Parthenon, which was located on the Acropolis, the highest of Athens' eight hills. Nevertheless, we may regard Mars hill as a 'living altar' to Athens as well. It was a living altar in the sense that at this place people collectively engaged in activities expressing Athens' character and values – philosophising -, and consequently reinforced her influence on people and city.

Secondly, the Athenians were extremely inquisitive and open-minded and very tolerant towards religious and intellectual diversity. On Mars hill the visitors pursued and exchanged new ideas and insights continually. Generally speaking, Greek culture also gave platforms to and processed religious influences from many sources, such as Egyptian ones, as well as mystery cults from the near east. Greek culture was therefore extremely syncretistic. We read in the Bible that Athens was full of statues of idols. Obviously Pallas Athena was not a very jealous goddess. With this high diversity and tolerance it is inevitable that the Greek culture was prone to relativism. This is very clear from the communication between Jesus and Pilate as related by Luke. Pilate who is obviously deeply influenced by the Greek intellectual climate of the day, answers Jesus claim to be the truth by the relativistic question "what is truth?" Intellectual pride and arrogance was another characteristic of the spiritual climate of Athens. The Greek open mindedness nevertheless did not allow them to receive the truth of the gospel. Paul's message was rejected and even mocked by nearly all of his hearers. This strongly illustrates that open mindedness or belief in one's own open mindedness can easily go together with spiritual blindness.

Moreover, it shows Greek culture still had its dogmas, notwithstanding its self-image as open-minded. Paul's message about the resurrection of the body was inconsistent with one such dogma and therefore appeared as foolish to the Greeks. In other words, Paul's message was not 'intellectually correct'. A last but very important characteristic has to do with the driving force of seeking wisdom: *scepticism*. Scepticism does not believe in absolute knowledge or truth. It believes in approximate or partial knowledge or truth that can only be obtained through critical inquiry based on doubt. This tendency was to a greater or lesser extent explicitly or implicitly present in many Greek philosophers. Luke's description of Paul's audience on Mars hill suggests that this attitude also characterized many of his listeners.

Scepticism has not only become the dominant value in present day European universities, but has also strongly influenced reformed and evangelical Christianity. Scepticism promotes doubt, faith's mortal enemy, as the channel of knowledge. The influence of scepticism on the Christian faith has been subtle, but extremely effective. By promoting and glorifying faith's mortal enemy, doubt, it seriously breaks and undermines faith. Of all the Greek influences hindering the outbreak

of revival in Europe, scepticism may be the most lethal one. This also explains the paradox that the Lord does more miracles to people and in countries that appear to be more idolatrous and spiritually dark than christianised Europe. The idolatry in other regions may be even stronger than the one in Europe but is of a different nature and has different consequences. In India for instance, the people are bound and blinded by horrible idolatry. But unlike in the case of Europe, this kind of idolatry does not cause scepticism in the people about spiritual power. In spite of their deep involvement in idolatry therefore there are less blockades for the working of God's power in regions such as India than in sceptic Europe.

### ***The legacy of Paul's sermon on Mars hill***

Among Christians Paul's sermon on Mars hill is both renowned and controversial. Some Christians regard this sermon as an excellent example of contextual evangelism and of truth encounter. They argue that Paul gave a biblically sound summary of God's work from Genesis to Christ's resurrection in an idiom that his listeners could relate to. Others regard Paul's sermon as a failure and as a concession to the Greek mindset. They argue that Paul was not able to build a church in Athens and deviated from his normal strategy to use signs and wonders in his evangelism. Personally I myself come from an intellectualistic protestant background that esteems Paul's sermon in Act 17 very highly. However, another interpretation profoundly challenged my position. This interpretation states that by philosophising with the Athenians on Mars hill without demonstration of power, Paul bowed to the spirit of Greece. By doing this Paul, the apostle of the gentiles, opened the door to the influence of Greek intellectualism in the foundation of the European church. In other words, through Paul's conduct in Athens the enemy was able to sow a tare between the weeds of His kingdom in Europe. Later in Corinth Paul resorted to power evangelism once again, but the damage in Athens was already done. This explains the stronghold of the Greek spirit and mindset in the European church up to this day.

I firmly believe now that this interpretation – that says that Paul made a blunder on Mars hill with long lasting effects – is indeed correct. From Luke's description we get the impression that Paul was overtaken by the events in Athens. The reason for his stay was not to plant a church, but to wait for some of his assistants. Apparently it was not God's time for the city of Athens yet. But because Paul was used to preach the gospel 'in season and out of season,' this did not stop him from sharing the gospel. However, his preaching was not as Holy Spirit led as it normally was. Already the text shows that the spirit of Athena was influencing Paul when he was still talking to the Jews. He 'reasoned', engaged in philosophical debate, with them. When he faced a crowd of philosophers publicly on the living altar of Athens, Mars hill, his approach was influenced by this spirit as well. The philosophical debate on Mars hill did not involve explicit religious ceremonies, it certainly was religious in nature. For the Athenians, the wisdom of Athena inspired this philosophical debate, and was effectively honoured through it. Paul was drawn into this debate in line with the spirit of Athena and partly succumbed to it. Even though Paul preached Jesus, the whole context in which he preached was a tribute to Pallas Athena. So Paul was trapped into a compromise with this goddess. This compromise is also expressed in the fact that he began his sermon with a reference to the altar of the unknown god in Athens, which he had seen during his exploration of the city. Paul claimed this unknown god to be the living God. However, the Greeks had erected the altar to the unknown god in Athens on the basis of their syncretistic and relativistic worldview. The Athenians endorsed

religious pluralism and relativism. They wanted to make sure they had not overlooked any of the many gods that were worshipped in the world. Therefore they put an altar to an unknown god in Athens, just in case they missed one, along with the many altars of gods they already knew. This altar certainly was no homage to the living God. To use such a polytheistic 'unknown god' as a starting point for a sermon on the living God seems to be quite unfortunate, to say the least. The fact that Paul's preaching was not accompanied with signs and wonders, which was normally always the case, underscores the fact that the spirit of Athena had effectively undermined Paul's spiritual authority.

The strength and tenacity of intellectualism and scepticism in the western church demonstrates that these forces must have extremely deep roots. We must conclude that these roots go back to the very origin of Christianity in Europe. In his early encounters with Europe, Paul, the apostle of the gentiles, to whom we Europeans owe so very much, turned a wrong and premature track in Athens. Even though the letter to Corinth demonstrates that Paul corrected his mistake, the European church is still struggling with the inroad the spirit of Athena gained into its history.

The aftermath of Paul's experience shows why it was not yet the time to plant a church in Athens. The Lord did not want a church to be founded in this intellectualistic city too quickly, lest its strong spirit would overrule the European church. The example of Rome demonstrates how quickly politically or culturally dominant cities by the standards of the world can develop a grip over the church. The Lord wanted to lay a solid foundation of the European church before raising a church in Athens. As history showed, the European church had already enough difficulty with the spirit of Athena even though a church in that city was established only later. God chose Corinth as the apostolic foundation of the church in Europe. Corinth was not the first European church that Paul founded in Europe. Philippi and Thessalonica, as well as a few other churches were founded earlier. Nevertheless, I believe that God used the church of Corinth as the foundational stone for the European church. The letters from Paul to the Corinthians, and particularly the first one, addresses many foundational issues. Moreover, Paul addresses the issue of him laying the foundation quite explicitly. Though, like Athens, Corinth was quite cosmopolitan, in terms of sophistication this rude and vulgar city was Athens' exact opposite. That was exactly why God chose Corinth and not Athens to found lay the foundation of the European church. Therefore it comes as no surprise that Paul wrote in the first letter to Corinth - the foundational document of the European church - that the Lord despises the wisdom of the world and chooses the foolishness of the church as the foundation of our faith. He also stated that our faith is not built on human wisdom and Athenian eloquence but on the manifestation of power of the Holy Spirit.

### ***The diverse and lasting influence of Greek culture on Europe and its church***

With the demise of the Jewish presence in the Christian church the influence of Greek culture on its spiritual character multiplied. The first major influence was the fact that Greek ideas increasingly distorted the interpretation of the gospel. Initially Gnostic philosophies, already influential amongst Judaists, arose as an archenemy of the true gospel. Later neo-platonic philosophies, Aristotelian logic, and so on, became tenacious influences, even in the churches of the reformation. Secondly, the syncretistic spirits of Greece gave rise to the phenomenon of folk Christianity. Like ancient Greece, Christianity became extremely tolerant to other spiritual influences. With the spread of Christianity many pagan ideas, practices and idols, from various European pagan religious traditions, became integrated into the 'Christian' way of life. Often these ideas, practices and idols

became some sort of Christianised reinterpretation without removing the pagan spiritual realities behind these ideas, practices and idols. A third Greek spiritual influence is the proliferation of doctrines and heresies. Greek religion and philosophy had produced a great diversity of ideas and philosophies. Likewise the Christian church gave rise to a great variety of theological creeds, doctrines and practices, which were extremely weird and bizarre at times. The various councils of the early church restrained some of these theological stray weeds, but could not actually stop their continual development and diffusion.

The fourth and most devastating influence was the idealization of the mind as the sole channel of knowledge and truth. Though speculative philosophy and theology were highly valued, the worldview of the average medieval folk catholic was magical rather than rationalistic. Medieval Catholicism had some characteristics and representatives that showed a degree of true Christianity, but it also presented a remarkable blend of the speculative thought of ancient Athens and the magic of biblical Ephesus. The rise and diffusion of the Protestantism partly followed, and partly coincided with a new rediscovery by the European of his Greek roots, as expressed in the Renaissance and the enlightenment. Rationalism and scientific inquiry, together with methodological scepticism were increasingly considered as the prime vehicles of knowledge and truth. In the course of time deism and liberal theology, and secular humanism and atheism in later stages, became increasingly prominent. At the surface level these movements appeared to imply a major spiritual change in Europe. But on a deeper level this change was not quite that revolutionary at all. These movements further strengthened the influences of Greece that were represented by Pallas Athena: intellectualism, intellectual pride and arrogance, scepticism and doubt.

On the surface level orthodox Protestantism appeared to be the enemy of the various versions of this Greek revival. The sad thing is however, that on a deeper level it was strongly influenced by the Greek spirit as well. Unfortunately, by embracing Paul's theological legacy European Protestantism unwillingly also opened itself afresh to the Greek intellectualistic tare that the devil had sown through Paul's error on Mars Hill. For European Protestants faith became a matter of the mind rather than of the heart and the spirit. Faith equalled the intellectual assertion of the correct doctrine rather than the exercise of spiritual authority by appropriating God's promises. Unlike liberal Christianity, orthodox Christianity asserted the reliability of the biblical miracles. But like the liberal Christians it became increasingly sceptical about the occurrence of miracles and supernatural guidance *today*, as well as about intercession, prayer, and other phenomena that were an *affront* to the enlightened mind. Understanding the scriptures were primarily a matter of study, learning and active reflection. Even the use of the powers of imagination and association, which were common vehicles in the Jewish traditions of interpretation became suspect. Nevertheless, orthodox Christianity became certainly a powerful force in Europe. But much of its influence was spread through human activities, such as debate and argument (polemics and apologetics were very popular among orthodox Christians), political action and economic activities, as well as works of mercy. All too often the Christians attempted to exorcise the spirit of Greece with the same spirit. Though we can and should thank the Lord for the impact of the reformation and for various developments in the Catholic church, we have to admit that European Christianity has fallen short of appropriating its full biblical inheritance.

Just as there were anti-rationalistic counterpoints in the European culture as large, such as Romanticism, there were counterpoints to intellectualistic Christianity as well. Some were heretic,

such as some Anabaptist fringe groups. Other movements were quite positive, such as pietism, the Moravian movement and the Great Awakenings in England and America. But even these movements have fallen short of biblical power. Without downplaying the importance of the many dramatic conversions, healings, deliverances and other signs and miracles as promised in the Bible, were by and large missing. Apart from that, some of these movements have met much opposition. The Moravians for instance, were allowed to take residence in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, they were dispelled from Amsterdam and some other places for alleged heresy. Given its track record of rejecting prophetic movements, it comes as no surprise to me that Holland and the Dutch church, of which I am also a representative, has remained dominated by a Greek mindset to a very considerable extent.

Since the late nineteenth century the Lord has shaken the European Christians through various waves of the Spirit. Consequently, in parts of the church an awareness of the possibility of true intimacy with God, direct guidance, and direct divine intervention in our circumstances have grown. The understanding that God communicates primarily through the spirit and the heart has increased as well. Nevertheless, even most charismatic Christians, with or without much education, are, to a greater or lesser degree, held back in their faith by the historical weight of scepticism, doubt and an intellectual orientation of faith. In fact, the Christian church may be one of the major strongholds of Greek intellectualism in western societies. Though this intellectualism is still very much alive in our society, it appears to be loosing some of its grip on non-Christians, to new and revived forms of religious paganism. The spiritual power of Greek intellectualism in our western world, however, is still a stumbling block for revival that has to be dealt with. Just as important, and probably even more so, we European Christians have to definitively shake off all traces of Greek intellectualism and scepticism in order to rise and shine in our redemptive calling in these last days, both individually and collectively.

### ***Greek intellectualism is a spiritual system, not merely an intellectual one***

The fact that the present day fruits of the spirit of Athena tend to deny or downplay supernatural reality makes people believe that this intellectualism is not a spiritual reality but a collection of thought patterns. However, the fact that followers of atheism, humanism, rationalism, empiricism, etc. do not recognise that they are inspired by spiritual forces is not really relevant. The devil does not mind whether we believe in his existence or not as long as we remain effectively bound by him. Deception and camouflage are favourite demonic tactics. From history we can clearly see that humanism, rationalism, etc. have their roots in explicit idolatry. The origin myth of the goddess Athena gives the first clue. She was really a daughter of Zeus, the supreme deity, and formed an important goddess in ancient Greece who was explicitly worshiped by many. Moreover, Athens, the city in which all these forms of humanism and intellectualism was born, was a major city of idolatry in the ancient world. Now if the tree that bore the fruits of humanism and intellectualism was grossly idolatrous, then it seems at least highly likely that these fruits themselves are also idolatrous in nature.

The spiritual nature of Greek humanism, intellectualism, etc. can also be seen in the fact that the major historical upsurges of Greek cultural influence in the history of Europe have displayed a close link with explicitly spiritual paganism. These major upsurges are the *renaissance* and the *enlightenment*. The role of pagan Egypt is quite interesting in this context. Egypt has always been a kind of spiritual mentor to Greece. Greek philosophers regarded Egypt as a wise old man, and

esteemed its philosophy and magic highly. Architecture and mathematic, which was the supreme intellectual discipline for the Greeks, were mainly adopted from Egypt. Both architecture and mathematics were strongly intertwined with magic in ancient Egypt. In the Greek Roman world there has further been several waves of Egyptian spiritual and cultural influence. It is striking that the European *renaissance*, in which the Greek and Roman culture was explicitly revived, started with the rediscovery of the writing of Hermes, the Egyptian occult philosopher and prophet of the Egyptian sun god. The ideas of Hermes, including its magical components, strongly influenced the ideas of philosophy and theology in Europe. This influence also resulted in an influence of Egyptian symbols. Even the graves of devout Calvinists were dominated by one or more obelisks, which is the ultimate symbol of the Egyptian sun god.

The *enlightenment*, the next major wave of Greek influence in Europe, and perhaps even its apogee, removed most of the magical ideas and interests from European intellectual thought. An exclusively naturalistic and rationalistic worldview started to develop which speedily became the leading one. However, a striking paradox occurred. Hand in hand with the rise and diffusion of the *enlightenment* a secret society rose to prominence: freemasonry. Though it did not present itself as a religion, at least not to outsiders, it has elaborate rituals and creeds and statements, which are inspired by various religious traditions. However, the dominant symbolism is Egyptian. The ultimate being that is honoured is the master builder of the universe, who, considering the symbolism involved, basically is another term for the Egyptian sun god. Other Egyptian gods and religious symbols, such as Isis and Osiris, also play an important role. Moreover, their neoclassical or neo-renaissance architecture and city planning, which dominate the urban landscapes of much of the western world, is based, or at least strongly inspired, by Egyptian magical architecture, and symbolism. Whether individual freemasons interpret these creeds, practices and symbols literally or metaphorically, or play down their importance or not, in actual practice freemasonry presents a continuation of the impact of Egyptian idolatry on European culture. Freemasonry was an important pillar for the development and spread of the *enlightenment*. Many proponents and representatives, including philosophers, kings and statesmen, like Voltaire and Frederick the Great, of the *enlightenment* were also freemasons and encouraged the development of *enlightenment* thought and culture as well as the freemason network simultaneously.

Biblical Christians are increasingly aware of the influences of Greek intellectualism on their faith. However, they often fight this intellectualism in the wrong fashion. In my country, the Netherlands for instance, there has been an increasing call for a replacement of the influence of Greek ‘thought’ on Christianity by Jewish ‘thought’. This approach may have a degree of validity. However, such an approach is still confined by the constraints of intellectualistic spirit of Athena, since it defines the Greek and Jewish heritages primarily as ‘thought’ systems, rather than as spiritual traditions. The struggle against the pervasive influence of the prince of Greece therefore needs to be fought with spiritual strategies and spiritual weapons, revealed by the Holy Spirit, rather than with tools of the human mind.

### ***Athena and Apollo: the left and the right fists of the prince of Greece***

The influence of Greece in Europe and the European church through Athens’ humanistic wisdom has been most pervasive and tenacious. Nevertheless, the prince of Greece has exercised

control through many other spiritual influences as well, such as manifestations of Zeus and Hermes, the intermediary of the gods and god of commerce, education and gateways, amongst other things. Other spiritual influences of Greece involve, amongst other things spirits of competition (Olympic Games) and of impression management (theatre and masks). A discussion of these influences goes beyond the scope of this article. However, one particular god I like to discuss here briefly because, like Athena, he is a source of wisdom as well and has gained a foothold in the Christian church: Apollo. However, whereas Athena mainly works through distorting and exploiting the human intellect, the source of Apollo's wisdom is explicitly occult. Apollo inspired the seers of Greece. The main centre of the cult of Apollo used to be the well known oracle of Delphi, where special priestesses, *pytheia*, made inarticulate sounds under the influence of special gases. These sounds were converted by priests into messages which had the reputation of being highly ambiguous. Nevertheless, the spirit of Apollo working through occult prophecies was very real. The spirit of Apollo is very cunning and deceptive, as the experience of Paul in Philippi shows (Acts 16, 17). A slave girl was following Paul and his companions with a spirit of divination. Literally it says: with a python spirit. In other words, this girl was controlled by a similar spirit as the priestesses of Apollo. The striking thing is that it appears that the girl is glorifying God. She was neither lambasting nor cursing Paul and Silas. On the contrary, she witnessed that they were servants from the most High God, who showed the people the road to salvation. Many present day charismatics would interpret such a testimony as evidence that the girl was inspired by God! But through spiritual discernment Paul knew that this was demonic deception, and in fact a ploy to hinder the spread of the gospel. So he threw this spirit out. The fact that this spirit was in fact an important principality in Philippi is shown in what followed. Paul and Silas were accused and thrown in jail. The earthquake that released Paul and Silas from jail, which resulted in the conversion of the jail warden and his household, showed that Paul and Silas triumphed gloriously in this power encounter.

Church history shows that the spirit of divination has taken deep roots in the church, just as the humanistic spirit of Athens. Tradition tells that Apollo had nine prophetesses. In the early church theologies arose which stated that not all elements of pagan traditions were demonic. God had inspired some of them in order to give guidance to people outside of Israel. Christ had fulfilled and redeemed these particular elements of pagan traditions used by God. One such element was the prophetesses of Apollo who were thought to have been ultimately inspired by God Himself. Consequently, they were held in high esteem in sections of the early church. Believers put these prophetesses on the same pedestal as the prophets of the Old Testament. In order to show their equal status in relation to the Old Testament prophets, the church changed the number of prophetesses of Apollo from nine into twelve, just like the 12 main Old Testament prophets. Many old folk Christian paintings show the twelve prophetesses of Apollo in one corner of the painting, and the twelve Old Testament prophets in the other corner. The famous painting of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel in Rome also depicts three of these prophetesses, which were also named sibyls.

Because of this deep deception the spirit of divination from Apollo has old and deep roots in the Christian church, just as Athena. Its cunning influence lasts up till this day as well. As the incident in Philippi shows, the spirit of divination from Apollo is extremely skilled in counterfeiting true prophecy. For these two reasons, the danger of the influence of the spirit of divination from Apollo is not restricted to the threat of new age. This influence also works through deceiving true Christians by giving them counterfeit revelation which, if not properly discerned, may pass for genuine revelation. I believe that the problems with false or flaky prophecy in the present day

charismatic world are, at least in part, consequences of the deep roots that the spirit of Apollo has gained in the history of the church.

The spirit of false prophecy and humanistic wisdom do not really contradict. Greek thinkers were often followers of Apollo as well. A good example is the renowned mathematician Pythagoras. These two sources of Greek wisdom, Athena and Apollo, are like the left and the right fist of the counterfeit wisdom of the prince of Greece. If we escape one fist we have to remain alert lest we walk into the other fist. We see in the book of Acts that the apostle Paul was able to deal with the threat of Apollo (see chapter 16) but he was hit by the spirit of Athena (see chapter 17). It is possible that the reverse will happen to us. We may deal with humanistic wisdom but fall prone to the counterfeit spirit of prophecy of Apollo. Furthermore, deliverance from and warfare against this spirit remains necessary as well.

### *Notes*

On the other hand, England and southern Europe are influenced more strongly by the imperial spirit of Rome.

A discussion of the lasting influence of the spirit of Rome, is beyond the scope of this working paper. A thorough discussion of this influence can be found in Roger and Sue Mitchell, *Target Europe*, Tonbridge, Sovereign World, 2001.

In this context it is significant that the Great Awakening was restricted to the England and America. This reflects the fact that the influence of Greek intellectualism was an even stronger obstacle to revival in the continent than in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Of course this is a matter of degree. Like any major city in the ancient world Athens also had its share of magic and sexual immorality.

I understand that we have to be very careful about assuming mistakes on part of biblical figures. But of course Paul was human too. In Acts 15 Luke describes the quarrel between Barnabas and Paul. He concludes that both had become bitter.

I mean the part of our inheritance that we may already claim on earth. The main part of our inheritance we receive of course when Christ comes back.

It is striking Paul did not evangelise the girl, nor showed pastoral concern to make sure that she would remain free. This underlines, in my opinion, that this incident was mainly a power encounter with a ruling spirit in Philippi rather than an issue of personal deliverance and conversion.

© J.W.A. Bakker, 2004. Reproduction or quotation requires permission of author and mentioning of source.