



Saint Gregory Palamas on Philosophy and Science

The following quotations are from *The Triads in Defense of Holy Hesychasm*, by Saint Gregory Palamas:

"The mind of demons, created by God, possesses by nature its faculty of reason. But we do not hold that its activity comes from Him. . . . The intellect of [non Christian] philosophers is likewise a divine gift, insofar as it naturally possesses a wisdom endowed with reason. But it has been perverted by the wiles of the devil, who has transformed it into a foolish wisdom, wicked and senseless, since it puts forward such doctrines."

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"Is there then anything of use to us in this philosophy? Certainly. For just as there is much therapeutic value even in substances obtained from the flesh of serpents. . . , so there is something of benefit to be had even from the profane philosophers--but somewhat as in a mixture of honey and hemlock. So it is most needful that those who wish to separate out the honey from the mixture should beware that they do not take the deadly residue by mistake."

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"In the case of secular wisdom, you must first kill the serpent, in other words, overcome the pride that arises from this philosophy. How difficult that is! The arrogance of philosophy has nothing in common with humility, as the saying goes. Having overcome it, then, you must separate and cast away the head and tail, for these things are evil in the highest degree. By the head, I mean the manifestly wrong opinions concerning things intelligible and divine and primordial; and by the tail, the fabulous stories concerning created things."

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"Nonetheless, if you put to good use that part of the profane wisdom which has been well excised, no harm can result, for it will naturally have become an instrument for good. But even so, it cannot in the strict sense be called a gift of God and a spiritual thing, for it pertains to the order of nature and is not sent from on high. This is why Paul, who is so wise in divine matters, calls it "carnal;" for, as he says, Consider that among us who have been chosen, there are not many wise according to the flesh."

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"Why did we need, not someone to teach us philosophy, but One who takes away the sin of the world, and who grants us a true and eternal wisdom--even though this appears as "foolishness" to the ephemeral and corrupt wise men of this world, whereas in reality its absence makes truly foolish those not spiritually attached to it? Do you not clearly see that it is not the study of profane sciences which brings salvation, which purifies the cognitive faculty of the soul, and conforms it to the divine Archetype?"

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"If a man who seeks to be purified by fulfilling the prescriptions of the Law gains no benefit from Christ. . . , then neither will the profane sciences avail. For how much more will Christ be of no benefit to one who turns to the discredited alien philosophy to gain purification for his soul? It is Paul, the mouthpiece of Christ, who tells us this and gives us his testimony."