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THE APOSTASY AND CONCEPTS OF PERFECTION

Confluence of Greek Philosophy and Christian Theology

Mormons believe that traditional Christianity took a wrong turn by adopting Greek philosophy as the matrix to understand God. I believe that this wrong turn consists in two aspects of early Christian thought. The first “falling away” or apostasy occurred when Christians subordinated the scriptures and revelation to the philosophical assumptions of Neoplatonism. Second, in subordinating revelation these theologians attempted to appropriate the Greek concept of absolutes as “god.” Thus, the apostasy occurs when God is conceived to have the same properties as the Platonic ideas or forms, to have properties such as metaphysical simplicity, aseity, immutability, timelessness, impassibility and incorporeality. Now I add that in many ways the use of Greek philosophy as a vehicle to make sense of the Christian revelation was inevitable.

Greek philosophy had a profound impact on Christianity beginning primarily with the Patristic writers (about 180 C.E. to roughly 325 C.E). Traditional Christians adopted the Neoplatonic notion of perfection as a static, absolute upper limit. This notion of perfection was adopted by what I shall refer to as the “absolutist tradition,” represented by thinkers such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin. There is also another trajectory of thought in conventional Christianity which