

Jordan, P.

119
JORDAN, P.
1961verbi
later
lette
the
alrea
the
and

Pythagoras and monachism

Traditio - Studies in ancient and
mediaeval history New York

Vol 17 1961 432-440

It
But :
to be1. T
favor
thoug
centu
portai

JORDAN P., *Pythagoras and monachism* : Traditio XVII 1961 432-441. |
L'histoire des origines du monachisme chrétien peut être utilement éclairée
par une étude du pythagorisme, les enseignements de Pythagore présentant
en grand nombre des traits communs avec les préceptes des pionniers du
monachisme.

certainly, only here in *Gemus*; in the case of *insubidis* phonetic changes
of no concern and the manuscript reading *ubi dis* remains intact.

2. The haplography that must be assumed to explain *insubidis*, together with
the attendant paleographical phenomena (viz., the use of the tilde), is fairly
common.

3. Gellius seems to have been fond, so to speak, of the word *insubidus*—to
the extent, indeed, that the greatest number of instances of the word are
found in his writings.

University of Maryland.

WILLIAM T. AVERY

PYTHAGORAS AND MONACHISM

The biography of Pythagoras of Samos¹ is embroidered with legend,² and what the Neo-Pythagoreans tell us is interwoven with Platonic and Aristotelian ideas. His very name — he whose birth was foretold by the Pythian god, Apollo, or he who utters oracles as does Apollo — gives a hint of the mystery enveloping his personality. This at least is certain, that he was born about 580 B.C. as the

¹ J. Burnet, 'Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism,' Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh and New York 1908-1927) 10.520-530; W. Schmid - O. Stählin, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* I 1 (München 1929) 732-741; the collection of relevant texts for both biography and doctrine, H. Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* I (6th ed. Berlin 1951), is almost too well known to require special citation: Pythagoras, 96-105; Old Pythagoreans, 105-113; Pythagorean School, 446-480. See also G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge 1957) 217-231, 236-262, 307-318 (special bibliography, 447-8); K. Praechter, *Die Philosophie des Altertums* (Berlin 1926) 61-73, 513-524; E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen* I 1 (7th ed. Leipzig 1923) 361-617, III 2 (5th ed.) 92-175; M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* I (München 1941) 662-670, II (*ibid.* 1950) 396-407; J. Carcopino, *La Basilique pythagoricienne de la Porte Majeure* (9th ed. Paris 1944) 161-206.

² I. Levy, *Recherches sur les sources de la légende de Pythagore* (Paris 1926).

son of a well-to-do merchant, Mnesarchus. Tradition has it that as a young man he spent a fairly long period in Egypt in order to familiarize himself with the cults of Isis and Osiris. There, too, so runs the tale, he acquired his mathematical knowledge from which he later developed his system of numbers. Upon his return to Greece, he visited first of all such religious centers as Delphi, Delos and Crete with a view to initiation in their mystic rites. In his native island, Samos, he then began to teach, but dissatisfied with the rule of Polycrates the tyrant, he soon resolved to seek out the Greek colonies of Southern Italy.

After he had settled about 530 B.C. in Croton, the modern Crotone, then a centre of Orphic mysticism, he established a family. He is said to have had two children. For many years he labored as philosopher, healer, political teacher and guide; legend made of him also a thaumaturge. His steadily growing influence and the reproach that his disciples were sectarians and eccentrics who preached a doctrine detrimental to the commonweal, produced tensions which prompted him to migrate to Metapontum where he died (497/6). Some forty-odd years later there occurred at Croton a violent anti-Pythagorean outbreak in the course of which all but two leaders are said to have lost their lives in an incendiary conflagration, and later still, about 390, occurred what has been called the 'final exodus' from Italy. About this time the *Πυθαγορίστai* begin to appear in Greece,³ where they are lampooned by the poets of the Middle Comedy.⁴

Pythagoras was first of all a religious reformer. "Ἐπον Θεῷ, seque Deum" — complete absorption in God, to be consumed by Him, to be filled with Him — was for him the meaning of life and its goal, for he took man to be, as a disciple of a later age was to express it, an 'incarnate mind, a spiritual vessel.'⁵ His wish was to see his disciples initiated into mystic experiences, to teach them the way to the contemplation of divine mysteries. For ethical reasons he wished to establish the Greek city-state on a new basis, to bring about a religious rebirth in public life. Since he himself has left no writings of any kind, we are entirely dependent for an account of his teaching upon the works of his disciples and successors. On the basis of these it is possible to reconstruct with a fair degree of accuracy and completeness the mode of life which the Pythagoreans considered ideal. Certain parallels between this ideal and the Christian monastic life of a later period are the concern of the present study.

In spite of the divergences of such authors as Aristoxenus, Dicaearchus, Timaeus, Hermippus, Apollonius of Tyana, Nicomachus, and others, our reconstruction need not be based on conjecture, the doctrine of the Master being deeply imbedded in the thought and manner of life of the Neo-Pythagoreans who gained influence in the first century before Christ with the efflorescence due to the efforts of Posidonius of Apamea and Nigidius Figulus.⁶ The latter

³ Kurt von Fritz, *Pythagorean Politics in Southern Italy* (New York 1940) 92.

⁴ The fragments are assembled by Diels, *op. cit.* 1.478-480, and are discussed at length by Georges Méautis, *Recherches sur le Pythagorisme* (Recueil de Travaux publiés par la Faculté des Lettres 9; Neuchâtel 1922) 10-18.

⁵ Secundus Atheniensis, *Sententiae*, ed. F. G. A. Mullach, *Fragmenta Philosophorum Graecorum* I (Paris 1883) 513.

⁶ Méautis, *op. cit.* 9-10, following A. Delatte, *Études sur la littérature pythagoricienne* (Paris 1915), asserts — with good reason — the continuity of the religious and ascetical

* was a friend of Cicero, by whom he was at one time praised as 'acer investigator et diligens earum rerum quae a natura involutae videntur' and expressly declared to have renewed the Pythagorean discipline.⁷

This movement, however, since it functioned as a secret society, was in its official teaching and in its practice, to a considerable extent, shrouded in mystery. From the *Convivial Questions* of Plutarch we learn that the Pythagoreans considered essential portions of their teaching as secret (*arcana*), communicable to the initiate only.⁸ In the same author's dialogue, *On the Sign of Socrates*, Galixodorus, having severely criticized the conduct of Theanor the Pythagorean, who had spent the night at the grave of Lysis in order to obtain a message from the deceased, denounced those who indulge in such practices in order to appear beloved of the gods and superior to others (579 F). Almost immediately afterward he says that Socrates had received from Pythagoras a philosophy 'steeped in dreams, myths, and superstitions' (580 C).

The interpretation of dreams appears to have had a bearing upon certain dietary regulations of the Pythagoreans. As a matter of fact, the neo-Platonist Iamblichus tells us that they were anxious not to overburden the body with food as otherwise the soul could not rise to the regions of pure being while the body was wrapped in sleep. To promote easy sleep the Pythagoreans also played the lyre before retiring, as attested by Plutarch in his treatise, *On Isis and Osiris*,⁹ and indeed music was a highly esteemed element in the Pythagorean life.¹⁰ Had not Pythagoras in all probability been the first in the history of music to establish scientifically, on the basis of the mathematical principles he had elaborated, the doctrine of the scale? And do we not find in both the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* of Plato more than one passage based ultimately on the musical and mathematical doctrines of Pythagoras and his school?¹¹

teachings of the 'Old' Pythagorean school; see especially Delatte's chapter, 'Le catéchisme des Acousmatiques' (*op. cit.* 271-312), a commentary on Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica*, c. 18 (sections 80-89; ed. Deubner [Teubner 1937] 46.3-52.19). — For completeness of documentation, mention may be made here of 'The Biographical Tradition — Pythagoras' (*Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 90 [1959] 185-194) by J. A. Philip, whose evaluation of the later biographies of Pythagoras is quite different from that of the present writer.

⁷ Cicero, *Timaeus* 1.1: 'sic iudico, post nobiles Pythagoreos, quorum disciplina exstincta est quodammodo, cum aliquot saecula in Italia Siciliaque viguisset, hunc exstitisse qui illam renovaret' (M. Tulli Ciceronis *Scripta quae manserunt omnia*, ed. C. F. W. Müller [Lipsiae 1898] 4.3.214).

⁸ 8.8.1 (Plutarchi Chaeronensis *Moralia* recognovit G. N. Bernardakis 4 [Lipsiae 1892] 336-7).

⁹ 384A; cf. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 9.4.12.

¹⁰ Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* (n. 6 above) 25.110-115.

¹¹ The indices to J. Adam's edition of the *Republic* (Cambridge University Press 1920-21) and A. E. Taylor's *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Oxford 1928) are a convenient help to finding the passages in question, to say nothing of the value of the notes on the respective passages. On Pythagoreanism as the background of much of Plato's teaching, see J. Burnet's article cited in note 1 above, 528-530. (Alistar Cameron's dissertation, *The Pythagorean Background for the Theory of Recollection* [Menasha, Wis. 1938] has been inaccessible to the writer.)

Fundamental in Pythagorean community-life was the concept of *κοινωνία* or *συγγένεια*, that is, of 'community-spirit,' of friendship in the sense of brotherly love, since all living beings were for them related to one another, inasmuch as they were united to one another as sons of God in the strict sense of the term. So close a relationship was for them the mark of all human, and indeed of all animal existence, for they saw in it an expression of the origin of all creation in God. In a lengthy passage preserved for us by Diogenes Laertius, in which Alexander Polyhistor (80-40 B.C.) is quoting or summarizing from an earlier work, the *Pythagorean Memoirs*, we read as follows: 'The sun and moon and the other stars are gods, for heat, which is the cause of life, preponderates in them. And the moon is illumined by the sun. And there is a kinship between gods and men, *συγγένεια πρὸς θεούς*, inasmuch as man has a share in this heat.'¹² Seneca most probably had this *συγγένεια* and *κοινωνία* in mind when he wrote: 'Pythagoras omnium inter omnia cognationem esse ducebat.'¹³

Because this *κοινωνία* united not only all mankind but all living beings with the gods, the Pythagoreans abstained from flesh meat.¹⁴ Hence their objection to animal sacrifice, and hence, too, their exemplary mutual affection and esteem, the gentleness which, as Plutarch rather emphatically says, distinguished them and contrasted sharply with the warlike life of that time. 'The love of all for all,' says Iamblichus, was the basic law of the Pythagorean mode of life.

That the Pythagorean belief in the transmigration of souls was intimately linked with these views, scarcely requires any proof. A parallel has been drawn between Pythagoras and St. Francis of Assisi. Porphyry and Iamblichus both recount, for example, the legend of the wild bear in Apulia which Pythagoras caught, fondled and fed, and from which he then received a promise to desist from his previous murderous conduct. Who would not here recall the story of the wolf of Gubbio known to us from the *Fioretti* of St. Francis, and the parallel narratives in the *Vita Antonii*, and those of the abbot Macarius?

Admission into the *κοινωνία* of the Pythagoreans,¹⁵ depended upon an examination, a scrutiny which concerned itself not only with the parents and ancestors of the candidate, with his social contacts and his manners, but also

¹² 8.27. W. Wiersma, 'Das Referat des Alexandros Polyhistor über die pythagoreische Philosophie,' *Mnemosyne*, 3.S. 10 (1941) 97-112, concludes that sections 26-30 of Alexander's statement may safely be used as an 'altpythagoreische Urkunde.' However, if Festugière is correct ('Les "Mémoires Pythagoriques" cités par Alexandre Polyhistor,' *Revue des Études grecques* 58 [1945] 1-59), these *Ἐπομνήματα* 'ne peuvent aucunement servir de source pour la connaissance du pythagorisme originel. Et il faut donc les retirer de la place indue qu'ils occupent dans la dernière édition des *Vorsokratiker*' (p. 59) ('Neue Diskussion notwendig,' says Kranz in the 'Nachtrag zum ersten Band' of the sixth edition, 503.29-30).

¹³ *Ep.* 108.18.

¹⁴ R. Arbesmann, 'Das Fasten bei den Griechen u. Römern,' *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* 21 (Giessen 1929) 103-107; J. Haussleiter, *Der Vegetarismus in der Antike* (same series, 24; Berlin 1935) 97-157 (Pythagoras u. die Pythagoreer), 296-314 (Die Wiederbelebung des Vegetarismus bei den Neupythagoreern), 404-409 (three exceptionally interesting bibliographical lists).

¹⁵ The brief account given in this and the following paragraph of the Pythagorean 'novitiate' is based on chapter 17 of Iamblichus' *Life* (ed. Deubner, 40-42).

with his physiognomy, since it was believed that from this factor, too, deductions could be drawn concerning a man's character. After this preliminary examination, which might vary in duration according to circumstances, there followed a 'first' novitiate or 'postulancy' of three years, during which time the 'aptitude' of the applicant was tested particularly in the matter of perseverance or stability, eagerness to learn and indifference toward honor or esteem. There followed a five-year 'novitiate,' at the beginning of which the candidates turned their possessions over to the community. They were now still 'exoterics,' *ἐξωτερικοί*, that is, they were obliged to persevere in silence, *ἔχεμυθία*; they were listeners, learning obedience and practicing it. Quite in agreement with the opening words of the Prologue of St. Benedict's *Regula Monachorum*: 'Ausculta, o fili, verba magistri et... admonitionem pii Patris libenter excipe, we read at the beginning of a *ἱερὸς λόγος*, attributed by Heraclides Lembos (2nd century B.C.) to Pythagoras and preserved for us by Diogenes Laertius, the words: 'Ὁ ρέοι, ἀλλὰ σέβασθε μεθ' ἡσυχίης τάδε πάντα.¹⁶ And in the *Convivial Questions* of Plutarch mention is made of a Pythagorean named Lucius, who remains perfectly still with his eyes cast down,¹⁷ in a manner more or less suggestive of the twelfth degree of humility in Chapter VII of St. Benedict's Rule.

During these eight years of noviceship, the candidates and novices heard the voice of the Master, but he himself remained hidden behind a curtain. Only at the end of their novitiate did they become initiates, *ἐσωτερικοί*. Only then were they allowed to see the master face to face. It is worth noting also at this point that according to Iamblichus, if a candidate was rejected, a burial mound was erected in commemoration of his 'death,' and if this happened at any time after the surrender of his goods, he received the double of what he had brought to the community.

The Pythagoreans, once initiated, wore also a distinctive dress and observed a rather sharply defined order of day.¹⁸ In the morning everyone was obliged to take a walk alone (*κατὰ μόνας*) and in a lonely spot (if possible, in a temple-grove), to reflect upon himself — in other words, to 'meditate' — for only in silence, as the Master taught, could one prepare oneself properly to meet one's fellow men. Then the members of the community assembled in a temple to study in common under the guidance of the seniors for the purpose of self-improvement (a chapter of faults!). This was followed by physical exercises. After a common meal which consisted of honey and bread, a kind of 'collation,' they devoted themselves to problems of the day — political, pedagogical, artistic, and scientific. Toward evening one set out on a walk in twos and threes to discuss 'perambulando' what one had learned in the course of the day (*colloquia*).

In accordance with the custom of their country, the Pythagoreans bathed daily, dining afterwards at tables at which no more than ten were accommodated. The meal consisted of bread, vegetables and fruit, and was preceded and followed by sacrifice and prayers. As a rule the junior member of the group read during the meal, and the senior brought the day to a close with counsels and

¹⁶ Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 8.7 (Loeb Classical Library, II [1931] 326.)

¹⁷ *Loc. cit.* (n. 8 above).

¹⁸ Iamblichus, *op. cit.* 21 (ed. Deubner 56-58).

instructions which were always repeated in the same words (a kind of Compline), whereupon they retired to their respective homes, for the 'community-life' involved only the hours of the day.

The principle of authority was the basis of the Pythagorean community, for the teachings of the Master were binding upon all. *Ἀὐτὸς ἔφα*, 'He himself said it,' were words which recurred constantly in the conversations of the disciples. Their whole mode of life was directed toward sanctification. They considered themselves *κτῆματα τῶν θεῶν*, chattels of the gods, whose chief and only duty it was to practice, in accordance with instructions laid down by the Master, the asceticism which was more and more to free the soul from the bonds of the body, to lead it to greater personal perfection and likeness to the gods. The following dictum of Pythagoras has been handed down to us by Plutarch: 'Then we are really good when we go to the gods,'¹⁹ and Hierocles, the fifth-century Neo-Platonist of Alexandria, in his *Commentary* on the *Golden Verses* of Pythagoras, quotes a series of Pythagorean maxims which include the following: 'You will honor God best, if you make your mind like to God,' and a little farther on: 'God has no dwelling on earth more acceptable than a pure soul.'²⁰

It seemed, then, to be one's chief task in life to prepare for death. Plato had this in mind when in the *Republic* he speaks of the *Πεθαρόμενος τρόπος τοῦ βίου*, the Pythagorean mode of life,²¹ for in the *Phaedo*, which would seem to be dedicated to the Pythagoreans of Phlius, it is explicitly stated that *φιλόσοφοι* are they who 'practice' death.²²

In the Neo-Pythagorean 'Golden Verses,' a didactic poem of ethical content, composed in the second²³ or third²⁴ century of our era, but containing not a few passages of a much earlier date, all related to Pythagoras' teaching, reverence for the gods, self-control and mildness in converse with one's fellow-men, purity of life, prayer, observance of ritual, contempt of wealth and honor, systematic self-examination, respect for elders, helpfulness toward juniors, and kindness toward one's contemporaries are mentioned as the most important requirements. The recognition of a scale of moral values was thus made the

¹⁹ *Moralia* 169E (*On Superstition*); 413 B (*On the Obsolescence of Oracles*).

²⁰ Mullach, *op. cit.* (n. 5 above) 420-421.

²¹ *Republic* 600B.

²² *Phaedo* 64AB, 67D, 80E, 81A.

²³ Ernestus Diehl, *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca* 1 (Lipsiae 1922-25) 186-194 (with elaborate apparatus); P. G. Van der Horst, *Les Vers d'or pythagoriciens* (Leiden 1932) xxxiv-xxxviii (Date des *Νομῶν Ἑνν.*). — Mario Meunier, *Pythagore, Les Vers d'Or* (Paris 1931), published together with a translation of Hierocles' *Commentary*; G. Méautis, *Le livre de la sagesse pythagoricienne*, Traduction et commentaires des Vers Dorés pythagoriciens (Paris 1932). A German translation is to be found in O. Willmann, *Pythagoreische Erziehungswelt* (Freiburg i. Br. 1922) 48-51; the English translation by Nicholas Rowe appeared in London 1719 and was several times thereafter reprinted; the very free French translation by Fabre d'Olivet, first published in 1813, was reprinted with an English version of the French (N. Y. and London 1925). The older French versions (Dacler, 1706; Compée, 1790), as also the German translation by J. W. L. Gleim (Halberstadt 1786), have been inaccessible to the author of the present study.

²⁴ A. Delatte, *Études* (n. 6 above) 45: 'il me paraît difficile de placer la publication du poème plus tard que le milieu du III^e siècle de notre ère.'

condition for the attainment of happiness. If these values were disregarded, retribution in the next world, re-incarnation until complete cleansing of the soul was achieved, was inevitable. The spirit of these 'Golden Verses' is reflected in the following quotations: 'Let this be accounted by you as right: to check the desire for food (*ὀλιγοσυστία*), the desire for sleep (*ὀλιγοκασία*), the desires of the flesh, and anger. Cling not to material goods; be mindful of this; that death awaits us all. Bear calumny with mildness.²⁵ This was the spirit which was to be cultivated in the community; a harmonious personality was to be developed in the adjustment to one's confrères (*ἐρασμῶντος ἰσότης*). The examination of conscience was therefore an essential factor of asceticism. On this subject one reads as follows in the 'Golden Verses':

Thou shalt not allow sleep to settle upon thy tired eyes before thou hast examined thy whole day's work. Wherein have I failed? What have I achieved? What duty have I failed to perform? Go through all, beginning with the first. If thou has done aught amiss, be sorry; if thou hast done well, be happy.²⁶

This rule of the Pythagoreans was known to Cicero, who in his famous dialogue on *Old Age* has the Elder Cato say that for the sake of exercising his memory, he every evening passes in review, after the manner of the Pythagoreans, all that he has said, heard, and done in the course of the day.²⁷ Of course, Cato's motive is quite different from that of Pythagoras' disciples.

The Pythagorean community was a religious association, a school of virtue, of piety and moderation, of obedience and order, in effect and of its kind, a 'schola Dominici servitii,' somewhat as St. Benedict conceived it. In this sense, Pythagoras was the founder of an order — on Pagan ground. A more thorough investigation of the sources than has hitherto been undertaken, presumably may yet bring to light in the literature of the early Church numerous echoes of Pythagorean thought. From the passages cited above, one may conclude that the ascetic concepts which permeate both the New Testament and the Old, concepts which crystallized in the literature and practice of monachism, were vital in certain schools of Greek thought also and were hence taken over into the pattern of Roman life. Whether it be *ἀπάθεια*, which for the Neo-Pythagoreans included also celibacy, a concept shared by the Neo-Platonists, or whether it be the Pythagorean *ἐχεμυθία*, silence, or *μετάνοια*, in the sense of Plato's *περιπαγωγή*, the 'turn' or conversion of the soul in its ascent toward Being,²⁸ or *ἐγκράτεια*, self-control achieved through abstinence from flesh-meat, from intoxicating beverages and from pleasures of the senses in general, or whether it be the concept, *σῶμα-σῆμα* (the body, the tomb of the soul), or the community of goods which Iamblichus emphasizes as the distinctive mark of the school of Croton (*κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων*)—at every point we meet parallels which would suggest a certain affinity in concepts between Pythagoras and early Christian monachism.

²⁵ Vv. 9-12, 15-16, 21-23 (Van der Horst, *op. cit.* 1-2).

²⁶ Vv. 40-41. See Van der Horst's interesting comment, *op. cit.* 22-25.

²⁷ *De Senectute* 11.38. See Umberto Moricca's exceptionally valuable article, 'L'esame di coscienza e la storia di un precetto pitagorico,' *Il Mondo Classico* 10 (1910) 221-244.

²⁸ *Republic* 521C.

We know that the Benedictine Rule was influenced — although more indirectly than directly — by Origen (and the Rule after all, is not so much a spontaneous creation as the convergence of various traditions into a unified whole of distinctive stamp). In the works of Origen traces of Neo-Pythagoreanism are not infrequent, as indeed the popular philosophy of the Hellenistic period is a syncretistic combination of Platonic, Stoic, Gnostic, and Pythagorean elements. In the last centuries of antiquity, therefore, it was inevitable that non-Christian and Christian elements should be fused — in such a way, to be sure, that the unique character of the Christian Revelation was in no way impaired. For there existed in the Pagan world vestiges of the primitive Revelation (the *Uroffenbarung*) which by their very nature could not be in contradiction with Christian truth. Tertullian's phrase, *anima naturaliter Christiana*, is a pointed expression of the fact that by the Creator's Will human nature is predisposed toward the supernatural. The moral and religious bases of humanity could, therefore, be correctly understood (at least, *in germine*) in the pre-Christian period, as is again clearly seen in the views of man and his destiny which we meet in classical Greek philosophy. It is altogether understandable that in the first four Christian centuries Pythagoreanism and Neo-Platonism, perhaps the nearest approaches of that era to the 'philosophic life' as it was cultivated in the schools of Athens in the time of Plato and Aristotle, should have found many followers, especially among members of the educated classes, who in the midst of social disintegration sought a support which no longer was to be found anywhere. Also it is significant that in this age of transition, of general and apparently inevitable decay,²⁹ such a work as the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, written about 250 by the Pythagorean Philostratus, was widely circulated: clear evidence of the influence of Pythagorean traditions upon the intellectual and religious structure of the period in which Benedict became the father of Western monasticism. In this work the *θεῖος ἀνὴρ*, the man closely related to God and replenished with the divine Spirit, is represented as he was later to be conceived by Benedict himself, that is, as *μοναχός*. This 'monk' whose entire life is directed toward God, is here portrayed in genuinely Pythagorean colors. Apollonius was for his biographer a 'Pythagorean,' because he 'despised wine, flesh-meat, and garments made of sheep's wool, wore linen and went barefoot, let his hair grow long, kept his eyes cast down and vowed perpetual chastity.'³⁰

The 'wise man' (*σοφός*, *vir sapiens*) of Matthew 7.21, who has built his house on a rock, is for Benedict the monk. For the Pythagorean and Platonist, he was the philosopher, who practiced in the school of the philosophers that which is more or less analogous to Christian *ἀγάπη*, *caritas fratrum*. Origen knows of this schooling, as it is understood by the Pythagoreans, for in an exceptionally interesting context he explicitly mentions *τὸ τῶν Πυθαγορείων σεμνὸν διδασκαλεῖον*.³¹ In fact, the Pythagorean schools, like the Neo-Platonic,

²⁹ C. N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (Oxford 1910) IV: 'Regnum Caesaris Regnum Diaboli' (especially pages 151-176).

³⁰ Cf. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 6.11 (Apollonius' reply to his Egyptian critics).

³¹ *Contra Celsum* 3.5. (PG 11.988); ed. Koetschau (Leipzig 1899) 2.217-20. In an earlier passage of this same work (2.12: PG 11.817BC; ed. Koetschau 1.111.16-17) Origen has

were *θίασοι*, religious communities whose ultimate purpose was worship.²² Plato, too, maintained, as we know, next to his Academy a Mousaion, a shrine of the Muses, and the other philosophic schools of his time also had their special quarters or temples dedicated to the service of the gods.

Pythagoreanism is of special interest for the student of the origins of Christian monachism inasmuch as no other religious movement of antiquity maintained its existence over so long a period -- from the sixth century before Christ almost to the very end of the Roman Empire, eleven centuries in all. As it profoundly influenced Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch and Philo of Alexandria, even so this system at a later date entered into the work of Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Basil. In a line parallel to the development which began in the days of primitive Christianity, Greek tradition had opened a way for the ascetic life lived in common. The ascetic tendencies within certain systems of Greek philosophy were, if one may use the word in this context, no less eschatological than those within Christianity itself. The way of these Greeks was fundamentally analogous to that of the Christians: from *σάρεξ* to *πνεῦμα*. Inasmuch as they both stressed asceticism, flight from the world was for both the logical consequence. It would be a mistake, however, to go much further in the interpretation of such parallels. Karl Heussi, for instance, has maintained that in the brief description of the community of goods among the first Christians at Jerusalem (*Acts* 4.32-33, 2.44-45) we have a fusion of Hellenistic philosophy and Christian ideals,²³ but this would seem to be a misreading of the evidence. The recent discoveries at Qumran²⁴ have extended our horizon sufficiently to temper our eagerness to formulate conclusions on the basis of external resemblances, to say nothing of identical vocabulary.

Ascetic views, comparable to those found in the Christian tradition and elsewhere, unquestionably flourished in certain milieux of the Hellenic and Hellenistic world also. As Père Festugière has succinctly expressed it: 'la vie monastique est un fait humain, parlant universel, qui offre les mêmes traits communs sous toutes les latitudes.'²⁵ Such words as *ἀσκησις*, *ἀναχώρησις*, *κοινόβιον* leave no doubt. *Ἀναχώρησις* especially, a prerequisite for the monastic life, was familiar to the Neo-Pythagoreans even to the point of *ἐγκλεισμός*, the solitary life of the recluse.²⁶ Benedictine 'stabilitas,' too, has its counterpart in the concept,

already referred to the custom of the Pythagoreans here mentioned, namely, that of erecting a cenotaph to those who have 'apostatized.'

²² Reference may here be made to P. Boyance's stimulating volume, *Le culte des Muses chez les philosophes grecs* (Paris 1937).

²³ Karl Heussi, *Ursprung des Mönchtums* (Tübingen 1936) 20.

²⁴ The writer is aware that authorities differ concerning the 'community of goods' in Qumran; thus Chaim Rabin, *Qumran Studies* (Oxford 1957) 22-31, denies any such observance, whereas Hans Bardtke, *Die Handschriftenfunde am Roten Meer* (Berlin 1958) asserts of the incoming candidate: 'Er muss sein Vermögen zwangsweise abliefern und lebt in völliger Besitzlosigkeit ...' (207); see also W. Pesch, C.Ss.R., 'Zur Exegese von Mt 6, 19-21 und Lk 12, 33-34,' *Biblica* 41 (1960) 361f.

²⁵ A. J. Festugière, 'Sur le "De Vita Pythagorica" de Jamblique,' *Revue des Études grecques* 50 (1937) 478.

²⁶ H. Reitzenstein, *Des Athanasius Werk über das Leben des Antonius* (Sb. Heidelberg 1911, 8. Abhdt.) 39-40.

καθέζεσθαι, which signifies 'choosing a place of permanent residence.'²⁷ Iamblichus uses the phrase, *μονάζειν ἐν ταῖς ἐρημίαις*, in which *μονάζειν*, as R. Reitzenstein has explained, is probably a technical term.²⁸ In this retirement, man becomes, as did St. Antony the Hermit, *πνευματοπόρος*, even *θεογόρουμερος*.²⁹ Reitzenstein has pointed out Gnostic parallels also, for mystic silence was the highest form of *πνευματική λειτουργία*, this too a prerequisite of every form of asceticism.

In his important study of St. Antony, Basilus Steidle likewise has referred to these contingencies.³⁰ He has no doubt that St. Athanasius used a *Vita Pythagorae*, but it is none the less certain that in Athanasius' mind the 'man of God,' Antony, is the living proof of the complete superiority of the Christian ascetic over the 'divine man' of the pagans as represented by Pythagoras.

In full accord with this view one may hold that there is hardly any literary or real dependence of early Christian monachism upon Pythagoras. It will probably be impossible to prove any Pythagorean influence, in the strict sense of the word, upon Christian monachism. As Steidle has convincingly stated, 'at the beginning of monachism stands not the "divine man" of Hellenism, not the Hellenistic "philosopher," but the God-man, His counsel, His example, His divine power, and his Holy Spirit. At the beginning of monachism stands the example ... of Christ's Apostles, that of His martyrs and of the Angels. In the Christian "man of God" the Hellenistic "divine man" finds his fulfillment and redemption.'

Other perspectives however may suggest themselves, if we examine external resemblances, at times startling points of agreement, and even a certain conceptual kinship between the teachings of the sage of Samos and the pioneers of Christian monachism. Who knows but that points of contact may yet be found from which it may prove rewarding to commence anew a critical investigation of the sources?

Beuron.

PLACIDUS JORDAN, O.S.B.

SOME NOTES ON

Latin palaeography
the branch

Jordan, P.

Pythagoras and monachism
Traditio - Studies in ancient and
mediaeval history New York
Vol 17 1961 432-440

among
recent
course

8-9.

11

?

III 6414