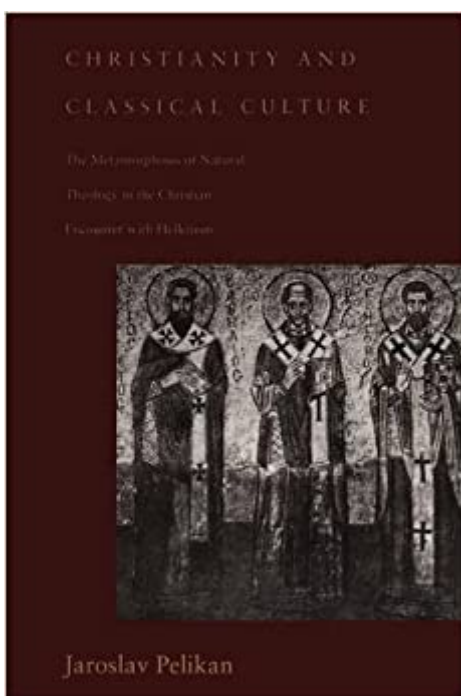


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# Christianity And Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis Of Natural Theology In The Christian Encounter With Hellenism (Gifford Lectures Series)



## Synopsis

The momentous encounter between Christian thought and Greek philosophy reached a high point in fourth-century Byzantium, and the principal actors were four Greek-speaking Christian thinkers whose collective influence on the Eastern Church was comparable to that of Augustine on Western Latin Christendom. In this erudite and informative book, a distinguished scholar provides the first coherent account of the lives and writings of these so-called Cappadocians (named for a region in what is now eastern Turkey), showing how they managed to be Greek and Christian at the same time. Jaroslav Pelikan describes the four Cappadocians—Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Macrina, sister and teacher of the last two—who were trained in Classical culture, philosophy, and rhetoric but who were also defenders and expositors of Christian orthodoxy. On one issue of faith and life after another—the nature of religious language, the ways of knowing, the existence of God, the universe as cosmos, time, and space, free will and immortality, the nature of the good life, the purpose of the universe—they challenged and debated the validity of the Greek philosophical tradition in interpreting Scripture. Because the way they resolved these issues became the very definition of normative Christian belief, says Pelikan, their system is still a key to our understanding not only of Christianity's diverse religious traditions but also of its intellectual and philosophical traditions. This book is based on the prestigious Gifford Lectures, presented by Jaroslav Pelikan at the University of Aberdeen in 1992 and 1993.

## Book Information

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Pelikan seeks to show, with great erudition, that the Cappadocians were able to synthesize Hellenic concepts, not all theological in origin, to meet the needs of their baptism of Greek thought into that of a more or less unified Christian vision. Emphasis is placed upon their use of apophatic theology (talking of God by saying what God is not- negation). Really a useful book to dispel the myths that the theology of the Church, especially the Greek tradition, is, a al Harnak, a big squabble over an iota or a bunch of clap trap that disguises the gospel. Each culture appropriates the Gospel in a manner that makes it intelligible. Of course there will be some loose ends and need of trimming, but Pelikan expertly demonstrates the genius of these theologians in their synthetic abilities. My other reviews of theological books may be of interest to you in this regard. See ["The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church"](#) for another refutation of the "Hellenization of Christianity" thesis. Moreover, see ["Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition"](#) for more on how the Christian tradition asked new questions apart from the Hellenistic context, and used some Hellenic concepts in a modified form to answer and articulate a new worldview. Enjoy!

as a person who in his heart of hearts hopes to one day be a Byzantine Catholic monk, i found this book to be both rich in information, and inspiring. pelikan has long been my favorite historian of Christian theology. one of the great things about his work is his familiarity with the original texts: he is absolutely saturated in the writings of the fathers, and he can weave citations from their various works into his study in a manner similar to the way the old school fathers weave Scripture into their arguments. i never new what the cappadocians were as far as natural theologians. before i read this book, they were my heroes as Christians; now they are my heroes as intellectuals as well. he compares the effect that the cappadocians had on the east with the effect that augustine had on the west; as a Catholic, i'm half jealous :-). to me, the cappadocians serve as a model for just how good Christian theology can get. their writings are saturated in beauty; their theology is absolutely Trinitarian. they met their world head on and analyzed it in light of what Christianity could give. they combined an uncommon ability to both stand for the Orthodox and Catholic faith and to be vibrant and bold in their theology. a bonus is pelikan's portraying macrina, the sister of basil and gregory of nyssa, as 'the fourth cappadocian' and a source of much that was great in her brothers. i highly recommend this book. often, Christianity is accused of being 'paganized' from its encounter with hellenism. pelikan's study shows perhaps quite a different picture: the Christianization of hellenism. at any rate, this wonderful book shows Christian theology at its best. i highly recommend it.

This is truly a gem in the field of Cappadocian studies. Contents include: PART ONE: Natural Theology as Apologetics 1) Classical Culture and Christian Theology 2) Natural Theology as Apologetics 3) The Language of Negation 4) God and the Ways of Knowing 5) The Many and the One 6) The Universe as Cosmos 7) Space, Time, and Deity 8) The Image of God 9) The Source of All Good 10) From Tyche to Telos PART TWO: Natural Theology as Presupposition 11) Christian Theology and Classical Culture 12) Natural Theology as Presupposition 13) The Lexicon of Transcendence 14) Faith as the Fulfillment of Reason 15) The One and the Three 16) Cosmos as Contingent Creation 17) The Economy of Salvation 18) The Metamorphosis of Human Nature 19) The Worship Offered by Rational Creatures 20) The Life of the Aeon to Come Glossary of Greek Technical Terms From Sources Ancient and Modern Bibliography Index Other books of interest may include: The Works of Ss. Basil the Great, Gregory Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzus. These may be found in many series. "Clement's use of Aristotle" by Elizabeth Clark; "The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers" by Jaeger; Meijering's "Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?"

I know that Jaroslav Pelikan gives intellectual peak experiences to some people, but the fact is that he bores me terribly. There is no doubt in my mind that the man is a first-rate erudite who has read thousands of books, but he is a very bad writer, with no style at all. His prose is impeccable but the way he tells you things is dry, dry, dry. Never a note of playfulness, never an interesting anecdote. It's simply unbearable, or only bearable for monks who want to do penance. Although I was deeply interested in the subject and am accustomed to reading big books (I have read Robert Eisenman's huge volume on James, the Brother of Jesus), I couldn't go beyond the third chapter... Note that the scope of this book is very limited: pagan natural theology and Christian Cappadocian natural theology. This is NOT a book on the encounter of Paganism and Christianity in general. This renders the whole discussion terribly technical, and for me, terribly boring. Conclusion: for very patient specialists only.

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