

# “Deliteralizing” the Bible: from Plato to Peterson

## Scripture amidst the Shadows

**“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”**

The Apostle Paul to the *Colossians* (2:8, KJV)

“Truth did not come into the world naked, but in symbols and images.”**[1]**

*The Gospel of Philip* (Gnostic)

## Introduction

Increasingly, evangelical-emergent leaders are viewing the Bible as “metaphor”—to be constituted of less than literal language from which the reader subjectively derives spiritual meanings. To fully grasp the sense of God’s Word, the reader must do so through the lens of the metaphor.**[2]** This “new hermeneutic” asserts that ignoring the nuances of metaphor makes the Bible unintelligible. For example, Eugene H. Peterson (well-known composer of *The Message*) states in *Eat This Book*, that “if we do not appreciate the way a metaphor works we will never comprehend the meaning of the text.”**[3]**

The issue confronting Bible readers is not whether the Bible contains metaphors (As any good literature, it does.), but whether the Bible is metaphor; and for students of God’s Word, there’s a world of difference between understanding that Scripture contains metaphors and assuming Scripture is metaphor.

At the outset, let it be stated that this writing does not concern itself with the art and science of biblical interpretation, a discipline known in Bible colleges and seminaries as “hermeneutics.” There already exist excellent guides addressing the discipline far better than I am capable of.**[4]** Rather, in a pastoral way, this writing will seek to explain the philosophical underpinning of why evangelicals increasingly embrace the Bible as metaphor. In my thinking, viewing that God’s Word is primarily couched in metaphors has come about for reason of philosophy’s influence upon the Christian worldview and upon the source of the Christian faith, the Bible. As it did to late Judaism and in the early church, Plato’s ancient philosophical worldview appears to again be influencing how emergent-evangelicals are viewing Scripture.

## A Warning

Paul warned the Colossians: **“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ”** (Colossians 2:8). In the historical and cultural context of his warning, the apostle understood that popular Greek philosophy, as espoused by Plato (427 - 347 BC), and perhaps Aristotle (384 – 322 BC), threatened the revealed faith of the early church. Colin Brown notes that from Alexandria, Egypt, an intellectual center in the ancient world, Plato’s philosophy

influenced both Judaism and the early Christianity; Judaism through Philo (c. 20 BC – c. AD 50), the Jew of Alexandria, Egypt, who in mingling with the intelligentsia of that culture mixed his Jewish faith with Hellenistic philosophy; and the early church through Clement (c. 150 – c. 215 AD) and his student Origen (c. 185 – 254 AD), both of whom incorporated Plato's worldview into their teaching, thereby compromising the Christian faith.[5] The resultant mixture of Platonism with late Judaism and early Christianity is called Neoplatonic philosophy.

So Christians would do well to understand Plato's presuppositions about the world in which we live and how these philosophical assumptions can impact the Christian faith, especially the way in which language communicates God's Word to man. For reason of Platonism's influence upon hermeneutics, allegory was understood to be the literary carrier of God's word to man in both late Judaism and the early church, and now, in a parallel, or perhaps even equivalent manner, metaphor is thought to be the carrier.

### Plato's Reality, Two Worlds

In his book *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, Colin Brown introduces Plato's view of the universe, a view that dichotomizes reality into two spheres; that of shadows in the temporal world *below*, and Form in the eternal world *above*. He explains:

Nearly four centuries before Christ the Athenian philosopher Plato (427-347 BC) had taught that the world which we see with our eyes and touch with our bodies was in reality only a world of shadows. It was a copy of the eternal world of spiritual Forms to which the pure soul could attain by philosophic contemplation.[6]

#### *The World Below*

The easiest way to explain how Platonism affects the Christian faith is to understand how Plato compartmentalized reality (whatever "is") into two spheres—that which is below (copy) and that above (Form). In the reality below, humans live, move and have their being (Acts 17:28). This reality is like living in a shadowy cave. As Paul put it, "**now we see through a glass, darkly**" (1 Corinthians 13:12a). In this shadowy reality, there's little if any light and according our immediate awareness-consciousness, things are observed to be in chaos and contaminated by what the philosopher called "necessary evil."

In concert with evolutionary theory, in Plato's thought the origin of this shadowy underworld and human participation in it just came to be.[7] In the world "'Participants' 'come to be,'" summarizes Julia Annas, "while Forms [just] 'are'." [8] So as might be stated about living in the shadowy cave of our reality, "It is what it is."

But while Plato's explanation of the universe exempts God from being the author of evil because our underworld "just came to be" (In part, this explains why many scholars call Plato's philosophy pre-Christian.[9]), his explanation (as did that of other ancient philosophers) denies *creation ex nihilo*, denies the once pristine condition of nature ("**And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.**"), and denies the subsequent divine curse upon creation for reason of the Fall "**cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.**" (Genesis 1:31; 3:17)

#### *A World Above*

The important distinction to take out of this discussion is how Plato dichotomizes the

shadowy reality below—one contaminated by evil—from the sunny reality above—the world of pure Form.[10] Annas addresses the distinction:

Forms [the designs by which the cosmos exists] function as patterns for the Craftsman as he makes our world. Things in our world . . . are embodied in matter and spatially situated . . . and, crucially, they 'come to be', whereas Forms 'are without coming to be'. This is the important metaphysical difference between Forms on the one hand and on the other, the items around us which are said to 'participate in' Forms, or to be 'likenesses' or 'images' of them.[11]

In *The God Who Is There*, Francis A. Schaeffer designated the two realities as *nature* below and *grace* above.[12]

So there you have it—two realities, that of transcendent and immutable Form above, and that of immanent and mutable 'likenesses' or 'images' below. The distinction may be compared to Heaven on the one hand, and earth on the other. This difference Jesus acknowledged to be the case when He told the Pharisees, "**Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world**" (John 8:23). Plato's assertion of two realities bears similarity, though not sameness, to the realities revealed by Jesus and in Scripture. On this point, the philosophical difference between the dualism of Plato (Reality is divided.) and the monism of Hermes Trismegistus (Reality is united—"As above, so below".) should be noted. While the former might resemble the Judeo-Christian worldview, the latter characterizes a pagan worldview. As one Gnostic source advises, "Understand the inner meaning, for you are children of inner meaning." [13]

However, concerning human language below, the question must be asked whether or not it can communicate the truth of "Form" from above, or for reason of inhabiting the shadowy world below, whether it (language) is too contaminated by necessary evil to carry "Form-Truth"?

#### *Language below—Philo and Allegory in Late Judaism*

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., noted the influence of Platonic philosophy influence upon interpreting Scripture during the few centuries before and after Christ; namely, in the introduction of the allegorical method interpretation. This way of interpreting the Bible resulted from the influence of Greek Hellenistic culture upon both latter Judaism and early Christianity. Kaiser explains that, "The Alexandrian [school] specialized in the allegorical system of interpretation built on a doctrine of correspondence between earthly and heavenly realities." [14] One of the main players in the Alexandrian school of interpretation was Philo (20 BC - 50 AD), the eclectic Jewish scholar who as he embraced the speculations of Greek philosophy, sought "to exhibit the mystic depths of significance which lie concealed beneath the sacred words." [15] Illustrating his Platonic assumption that God's Word dwells in a symbolic world of "shadows," we note Philo's allegorizing comments on the "the tree of life" (Genesis 2:9):

These statements appear to me to be dictated by a philosophy [Platonism?] which is symbolical rather than strictly accurate. . . . And by the tree of life he was **shadowing out** the greatest of the virtues—namely, piety toward the gods, by means of which the soul is made immortal . . . [16]

**Note:** “by the tree of life he was *shadowing out* the greatest of the virtues.” Describing this school’s assumption about interpreting Scripture, Kaiser remarks:

Simply stated, it claimed that for every natural or earthly object or event, there was a corresponding spiritual or heavenly analogue that went with it. The idea was derived from Plato, who divided the world into two: one world was invisible and the other emblematic; one actual and the other invisible.[17]

The reason for asserting allegory as a dominant method of interpreting Scripture was the Platonic assumption that human language was an inadequate carrier for God’s Word (Plato would say Form.). As to human language’s ability to communicate “Form-Truth” from above, one scholar assesses that Plato viewed that “our use of *language* embodies convention and prejudice and on its own *is no good guide to philosophical truth* (*Cratylus, Statesman* 262-3).”[18] This assumption explains why the philosopher turned to contemplation as a means to seek out and experience the eternal verities of the universe. In his dark cave, and beyond his immediate senses, he could only discover Form via mystic meditation.

To this point, and distinguishing grace (the spiritual and noumenal world of God above) from nature (the sensual and phenomenal world of man below), Schaeffer pointed out that when philosophy arbitrarily separates nature from grace, the bifurcation leads to understanding God as “the philosophic other, unknown and unknowable,” and correspondingly, the Word of God as “undefined.”[19] When the two realities are compartmentalized, as Schaeffer popularly explained, “nature eats up grace.” Therefore any understanding of God and His communication can only be perceived amidst the shadowy, ethereal and mystic literary world of allegory or metaphor.

#### *Language below—Origen and Allegory in the Early Church*

The star pupil of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215 AD) was Origen (c. 185 – 254 AD). Though he believed in the pre-existence of souls (*contra* Genesis 2:7) and a new probation after death (*contra* Hebrews 9:27), Origen was “pre-eminently the father of biblical science, and one of the greatest prodigies of learning and industry among men.”[20] Following the path of Philo the Jew and Clement the Christian, Origen was “a mystico-allegorical exegete.”[21] Assuming that many portions of Scripture were unintelligible when taken literally, Origen maintained that Scripture could only be understood by paying attention to its threefold sense: the fleshy/literal, the moral/psychical and the spiritual/allegorical.

Of these three sense combinations, Kaiser informs that, “The method Origen used for his biblical hermeneutics was that of *anagoge*, (“ascent”), the ascent of the soul upward from the level of the flesh [shadows] to the realm of the spirit [Form].”[22] Only as readers encountered the allegory of Scripture were they able to reach into the realm of pure Spirit, never mind that that level can only be accessed in, with and through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:7-16). The “allegorical method offered the inspired Christian reader a window into the heavenly Jerusalem.”[23] In other words, allegory provided the literary steps by which the mystic soul could climb a spiritual ladder to obtain the heavenly vision.

#### *Language below—Peterson and Metaphor in the Contemporary Church*

In a continuing way, Plato's assumption regarding the compartmentalized realities may explain why many evangelicals have grown skeptical of any Grand Story which claims to explain Form ("Down with metanarratives!" they protest.). For reason that it inhabits this imperfect and shadowy world, language is simply incapable of conveying metaphysical Truth. Revealing a Platonic bent of mind, Eugene Peterson confesses: "I sometimes marvel that God chose to risk his revelation in the ambiguities of language."**[24]** Likewise he says,

For one thing, God's action and presence among us is so beyond our comprehension that sober description and accurate definition are no longer functional. . . . All language, but especially language that deals with transcendence, with God, is inadequate and falls short.**[25]**

Evidencing skepticism of even the ability of metaphor to carry truth about God, he also states: "A metaphor states as true something that is not true."**[26]** Given the cleavage between the world above from the world below, Peterson offers this counsel on how to understand the Bible:

The place to begin with, though, is not, as is often supposed, with a grammar and a dictionary. The fixity of the words on paper, removed from the nuances and ambiguities of the living voice, gives an illusion of preciseness and seems to invite a matching preciseness in the reader. We do better to begin with a consideration of metaphor . . . If we don't understand how metaphor works we will misunderstand most of what we read in the Bible. No matter how carefully we parse our Hebrew and Greek sentences, no matter how precisely we use our dictionaries and trace our etymologies, no matter how exactly we define the words on the page, if we do not appreciate the way a metaphor works we will never comprehend the meaning of the text.**[27]**

Or consider a statement by Leonard Sweet. Before endorsing James O. Davis' book on communication, *Gutenberg to Google: The Twenty Indispensable Laws of Communication*, as "a guidepost to transformational preaching in the 21st century," Sweet states: "Preachers are commissioned not only to exegete the words of Scripture but to exegete the images and metaphors that God chose to reveal the divine to the human."**[28]**

As the Plato effect caused Philo, Clement and Origen to view Scripture in terms of allegory, now the same philosophical influence may explain why Peterson, Sweet and other evangelical-emergents assume that God's truth primarily, if not exclusively, must be extracted from images and metaphors. In the dark cave below, God's communication to man lays camouflaged among the literary shadows.

This assumption about the inability of human language to carry divine truth in a literal way may also explain why like Plato, emergent-evangelicals are now turning to mysticism in order to catch a glimmer of God within their souls. As a way for evangelical-emergents to orient themselves to the light above even while dwelling amidst the shadows below, in solitude and silence they contemplate. Ancient philosophy is affecting contemporary spirituality!

### **The Word in this World**

In light of the ancient philosophical influence exerting itself upon evangelicals today, the

question confronting the biblical Christian is this: Is God's Word from Heaven (from the ideal world of Form above, to use Plato's distinction), as He communicated it through the Scriptures contaminated by virtue of its being packaged in human language, by coming into contact with the necessary evil that has "come to be"? And in light of this dichotomy, does metaphor become the only language suitable to represent the "heavenly analogue"? Is metaphor the means by which the human spirit can ascend from this shadowy underworld into the world above?

Before drawing attention to three truths about the Word in this world, we should note Kaiser's statement that, "the Bible nowhere teaches such a doctrine of shadows and images or a doctrine of correspondences. Those doctrines are drawn directly from the secular philosophy of the day."**[29]** In other words, though the Bible often employs metaphors to express truth about God and man ("**The Lord is my rock,**" "**All flesh is grass,**" "**Ye are the salt of the earth,**" "**I am that bread of life,**" etc., etc., and etc.—2 Samuel 22:2; Isaiah 40:6; Matthew 5:13; and John 6:48), the Bible is not metaphor, a linguistic playground in which readers may imagine and mystify whatever they want about what the biblical text is saying about God and themselves. We now conclude with three points about how Scripture closes the supposed linguistic gap between the world of shadows and Form, between the phenomenal and ideal worlds, between earth and Heaven, between "nature and grace" as Francis Schaeffer put it.

#### *God's Word is Light*

That we live in a shadowy—even dark—reality is not at issue. We do. Scripture assesses we live amidst "**the darkness of this world**" (Ephesians 6:12; See also John 1:5; Colossians 1:13; 1 Peter 2:9; etc.). What is at issue is whether God has penetrated the darkness of this present evil age with His revelation to humanity (Galatians 1:4). The Bible tells us He has. Amidst this present world of shadows and darkness God, who is light, has shone the way to us (1John 1:5). "**Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow**" (Emphasis added, James 1:17). In bridging the gap between the shadows below and the brightness above, God has shined His light upon mankind primarily through two revelatory means—first through His incarnated Son, and second through His inspired Scriptures which bear infallible witness to the Lord Jesus Christ (See John 5:39; Luke 24:44.). As the Psalmist exclaimed: "**Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path**" (Psalm 119:105). As Jesus declared: "**I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life**" (John 8:12).

**Note:** Jesus uttered this witness concerning His being to Jews whose spiritual worldview had been affected by the Neoplatonic influence from Alexandria, Egypt, where because of Philo and others, Judaism was being mixed with Platonism. So Jesus' statement rebukes the idea that God's communication is affected by the shadows and the darkness, a divisional template that when logically applied, could lead Platonists to deny the incarnation of Jesus as well as the Bible's inspiration.**[30]** Because of our Savior and the Scriptures, the Word of God is not so shadowy and dark after all, is it? There's Light to guide us, and where there's Light there's also Life!

#### *God's Word is Life*

The Bible is associated with the very life of God. Paul writes that, "**All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for**

**instruction in righteousness**” (Emphasis added, 2 Timothy 3:16). The Scriptures are sufficient to tell believers *what they should believe* (“**doctrine**”), *what they should not believe* (“**reproof**”), *how they should not behave* (“**correction**”), and *how they should behave* (“**instruction in righteousness**”).

In the Old Testament, a phrase recurs hundreds of times—“**the word of the Lord.**” Because it’s His word, Scripture is God breathed. As such, it’s not as if God looked at words written on papyri by the prophets and anthropologically speaking, waved His hands over them, went “Whoosh!” and the Scriptures became the Word of God for reason that He “inspired” them. No, it’s rather that the Scriptures were “out-breathed” by God. As such, the Bible derives from the very life of God Himself. The genius of the Bible is its creation by God’s “outspiration,” not inspiration.

In his classic work, *Revelation and Inspiration*, B.B. Warfield states:

And Scripture is called *theópneustos* in order to designate it as “God-breathed,” the product of Divine spiration, the creation of that Spirit who is in all spheres of the Divine activity the executive of the Godhead. . . . It [*theópneustos*] does not express a breathing into the Scriptures by God. . . . What it affirms is that the Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of God the Holy Ghost and are in the highest and truest sense His creation. It is on this foundation of Divine origin that all the high attributes of Scripture are built.[31]

The “**word of God is living**” (Hebrews 4:12). God’s words are not eking out an existence in our shadowy underworld, but are alive and powerful, full of light and life. They are God-breathed. Jesus told the disciples in the *Olivet Discourse*, His prophetic sermon: “**Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away**” (Matthew 24:35, NASB; See Luke 16:17.). Why will Jesus’ words “**not pass away**”? Because they are alive! But not only is God’s Word life and light, it’s literal.

#### *God’s Word is Literal*

In an earlier sermon, the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus informed His listeners: “**For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot [the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet] or one tittle [the smallest distinguishing marking of the Hebrew alphabet] shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled**” (Matthew 5:18). In the Hebrew language, the “**jot**” looks something like an upside down comma raised to the level of a letter while the “**tittle**” looks something the dot over the letter “i” or the cross through the letter “t.” In making His point, Jesus is not qualifying the letters and makings of the Law to be couched amidst metaphors, is He?

In speaking of the Law’s continuation in parallel with the created order, Charles Ryrie notes:

Observe that Christ does not start with concepts and then allow for optional words to be used to convey those concepts [metaphors] . . . He begins the other way around. The promises are based on the words as spelled, and those words can be relied on fully and in detail.[32]

In other words, the meaning of Scripture is to be derived from the markings, letters, words, sentences of language, and not imagined by way of comparison or analogy—by, what one might say, “a metaphorical leap” into the dark. One has stated that the allegorical method of interpretation “introduces . . . chaos into speech and destroys all objectivity of truth: it is ‘fantasy unlimited.’”[33]

Now-a-days, the interpretation and opinions of some Bible studies (“I think the verse means . . . I feel the verse says . . . Well, that’s just your interpretation . . .” etc.) might be compared to impressionistic or abstract art which elicits many responses from viewers who find various subjective meanings in it. In fact, the less the consensus and the more the controversy about what a painting might mean, the more successful the art is considered to be as people share their perceptions and dialogue about its meaning. Beauty’s in the eyes of the beholder. In our digitally wired world where “image” is king, discussion over meaning can become even more relativistic . . . . “Well,” the saying goes, “whatever!” In my thinking, the same can be said of a literary impressionism which approaches Scripture as image and metaphor.

But it’s difficult to see how the “thou-shalt-not(s)” of the Decalogue, as well as other didactic, parabolic and narrative portions of Scripture, can be wholly turned into metaphor. There’s a world of difference in approaching the Bible as the written and literal revelation of God to man or a book whose literary message is sequestered away somewhere amidst a matrix of metaphors. Approaching the Bible only as metaphor demands assuming something about God’s communication to man which is at odds with the plain meaning of the language and structure of Holy Scripture. As Milton S. Terry (1890) states in his classical work, *Biblical Hermeneutics*:

A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that words and sentences can have but one signification in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift out upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture.[34]

## Conclusion

We close with the oft repeated statement attributed to B.B Warfield (1851-1921) which so vitally summarizes the connection between Heaven and earth, between eternity and time, between the reality above and below, and between the next world and this one. He said: “The Bible is the Word of God in such a way that when the Bible speaks, God speaks.”

**“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science [gnosis] falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith.”**

The Apostle Paul, *1 Timothy* (6:20-21, KJV)

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## ENDNOTES



- [1] Marvin Meyer, "The Gospel of Philip," *The Gnostic Gospels of Jesus: The Definitive Collection of Mystical Gospels and Secret Books about Jesus of Nazareth* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2005): 67. Dear reader, please do not take my quotation of this Gnostic gospel, which is no Gospel, as approval of it. In an ancient way, the quotation merely illustrates the "deliteralizing" and mystification of Scripture that is going on in contemporary Christendom.
- [2] One dictionary defines metaphor: "A figure of speech in which a term is transferred from the object it ordinarily designated to an object it may designate only by implicit comparison or analogy, as in the phrase evening of life." *Webster's II: New Collegiate Dictionary* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995): 688.
- [3] Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006): 93.
- [4] Among others, see Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, a Division of Scripture Press Publications Inc., 1991). A text that more in depth addresses contemporary issues of meaning is, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in the Text?: The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1998).
- [5] "Judaism and Hellenism, so to speak, came into closest contact in this celebrated metropolis of Egypt [Alexandria], and in their spiritual and intellectual mingling produced what became known as Neo-Platonism." See Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.): 611.
- [6] Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Main Thinkers and Schools of Thought from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsityPress, 1971): 15-16.
- [7] On this point, the Platonic philosophy of origins resembles the Gnostic belief that somewhere in the chain of devolving deities one came into being, a Demiurge, that created the evil world in which we live. In the pecking order of deities, the Demiurge was not the supreme God, but a devolved lesser god. In other words, the world is the image of "a form", but not Form. As to which gave rise to which, Platonism to Gnosticism, or Gnosticism to Platonism, the explanation remains shrouded in ancient history. Because of resemblances involved, scholarship has argued both ways.
- [8] Julia Annas, *Plato: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003): 86.
- [9] Some Christian scholars view that just as the Hebrew Scriptures prepared the Jews for Messiah's coming, so Plato's writings prepared the Gentile world for his coming. In this sense, Plato is viewed as a kind of pre-Christian philosopher/prophet. I do not share this view.
- [10] A resemblance between Plato's philosophy and Quantum physics can be noted as necessary evil (chaos) can be contrasted to Form (fractal). Indeed, as the Preacher says, **"there is no new thing under the sun"** (Ecclesiastes 1:9).
- [11] Annas, *Plato*, 84.
- [12] Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy: The God Who Is There* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1090): 63-65.
- [13] Meyer, "The Gospel of Truth by Valentinus," *Gnostic Gospels*, 106.
- [14] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids, MI: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1994): 210.

[15] Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 611.

[16] Emphasis added, Philo, *The Works of Philo*, Translated by C.D Yonge (Albany, Oregon: AGES Software, 1999): LVI (153), page 67. Zuck also notes that “Philo taught Sarah and Hagar represent virtue and education, Jacob and Esau represent prudence and folly, Jacob’s resting of the stone speaks of the self-discipline of the soul, and the seven-branched candelabrum in the tabernacle and the temple represent seven planets.” Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 32.

[17] Kaiser, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 220.

[18] Emphasis added, Annas, *Plato*, 86.

[19] Schaeffer, *Schaeffer Trilogy*, 64.

[20] Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 641.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Kaiser, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 219.

[23] *The SCM Press A-Z of Origen*, John A. McGuckin, Editor (London, England: SCM Press, 2006): 50.

[24] Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 93.

[25] Ibid. 96.

[26] Ibid. 94. Evidencing this “below” mentality in a Quantum physics way, Peterson also states on page 96: “The raw stuff of the world is not matter but energy. How do we express this interconnected vitality? We use metaphor.”

[27] Ibid. 93.

[28] James O. Davis citing, “From the Desk of Leonard Sweet,” *Billion Soul*, July 9, 2009.

[29] Kaiser, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 220.

[30] The Platonic compartmentalization of reality—shadows below, Form above; nature below, grace above—not only calls into question God’s revelation in Scripture, but also God’s revelation in the Son. To paraphrase his remark about Scripture (“I sometimes marvel that God chose to risk his revelation in the ambiguities of language.”), Peterson might also state: “I sometimes marvel that God chose to risk his incarnation in the ambiguities of human flesh.”

Yet directly refuting Platonism, the New Testament states of Jesus’ incarnation that though in His pre-incarnate state He “**existed in the form of God**” (Emphasis added, Philippians 2:6), in His incarnation He was “**the image of the invisible God**” (Emphasis added, Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:3). Because He bridged the two realities of Heaven and earth, Jesus told His disciples: “**he that hath seen me hath seen the Father**” (John 14:9). John wrote of Jesus, “**No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him**” (John 1:18). In other words, Jesus the Light came into and dwelt amidst this world of shadows.

But there were false teachers who in the early church bought into Plato’s dualistic dichotomy. To early Christians, the Apostle John wrote: “**For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.**” (2 John 7; Compare also 1 John 4:2-3.). This way of explaining Jesus was called “Docetism,” a term describing the early heresy which regarded “the human aspects of Christ as imaginary or apparent instead of being part of a real incarnation.” See Gerald L. Borchert, “Docetism,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell, Editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984): 326.

In other words, the heretics taught incarnation by imagination. To these early heretics affected by Plato’s compartmentalized realities, Jesus just “seemed” (coming from the Greek verb *dokeo*, “to suppose or to think”) to be incarnate. In my opinion, I am amazed by how many

New Testament scholars attribute the heresy of Docetism to have occurred for reason of Gnosticism's and not Platonism's influence upon Christianity (the resulting admixture being Neoplatonism). While on points Plato's philosophy may be construed to resemble a Christian worldview, at core it's anti-incarnational and therefore anti-Christian. To those under the spell of Platonism, Jesus can only be a "mystic messiah," a messiah of the mind.

**[31]** Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Revelation an Inspiration*, Volume I of Ten Volumes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1932): 280.

**[32]** Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999): 100.

**[33]** Ernest F. Kevan, "The Principles of Interpretation," *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, Carl F.H. Henry, Editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1958): 291. I thank Roy Zuck for drawing attention to this quote. See Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 37.

**[34]** Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 205.