**Module 2: Tilling the Ground for the Gospel**

Ancient Greek philosophy and religions were seen by the Church Fathers as a true preparation for the Gospel; that they were part of God’s providence, tilling the ground for the seeds of the gospel. In what follows, I will offer a survey of various philosophical schools and religions which the people held onto.

**Polytheism**

Many Greeks were polytheistic. Polytheism is the belief of many Gods. Even today, there those who believe this. As an example, Hindus believe in 36 crore gods, which equals 360 million gods.

**Socrates and Plato**

Under Greek Philosophy were two key philosophers, Socrates and Plato. Both spoke about the absurdity of polytheism and asserted the possibility of personal immortality. They established the idea of a supreme intelligence**.** Plato’s (427-347 B.C.) great contribution was his idea that the physical world was not total reality; that there is also the invisible and spiritual. In fact, Plato held a low view of sensory knowledge; for him, the realm of sense experience is always changing, to the point where it wasn’t as knowable as the unchanging and permanent realm beyond what can be seen and touched.

He taught that humans should seek, by reflection and meditation, to escape from this unreal world to the real. His teaching would eventually lead to “dualism”, the idea that evil is found in the material.

**Epicureans**

The Epicureans taught that the world was made by the chance collisions of atoms and that there is no purpose or design in the universe. Neither is there absolute Truth. Many, when they hear of the word “epicurean” tend to understand it in a hedonistic way. They would be correct in their thinking. A key thought among Epicureans was this: pleasure is the supreme good. Whatever produces pain or mental disquiet is evil. They were atheists and anti-religious.

**The Stoics**

The Stoics held that humans needed to cultivate an utter detachment (*apatheia*) from the world and being unfazed by the vicissitudes of sickness and death. **The name Stoic comes from the Greek word,** meaning ‘ porch’. The founder was Zeno who taught for about 58 years in a “stoa” or porch, in the public market place. Zeno’s basic teaching was, virtue is knowledge. This led to him teaching that personal feelings and desires are diseases of the soul and therefore needed to be suppressed and

eradicated.

**Emperor Worship**

The cult of Roman emperors, living and dead, became the State religion throughout the empire, Temples were erected in honor of them.

**Dissatisfaction**

But by the time of Christ, many people were searching for something more. Some turned to the Mystery cults which were based upon myths which looked at the annual cycle of life and death as a means of understanding human life and death and the eventual release into a better world. Their worship was highly emotional. Others delved into the occult which was based on the astrology imported from the Babylonians and reliance of magic from the East.

Around the time of Jesus Christ, the average person was getting tired of following religions that were selfish and sensual. As an example, they were weary of the gods of polytheism who they saw as being merely magnified men and women; Immoral, full of Jealous, Connivers and Deceivers

Plato, in his REPUBLIC, wanted the worship of these gods excluded since they would corrupt the youth. By the time of Jesus, the people of the land were looking for something ‘else’. They were crying for a god who would…

* Be sympathetic to their situation
  + - Answer their prayers
    - Give assurance that beyond the grave was “more”
    - Distribute blessings to them.

This opened the way for Jesus Christ and Christianity!