

Key Quotes for the Session on the Ecclesia

John Eidsmoe writes: *Greek legal thinking... was a mixture of noble and ignoble concepts. Some view Greece as the fountain of modern thinking and the birthplace of democracy. But the Hebrew republic flourished a thousand years before the Golden Age of Athens and evinced a stability that was forever lacking in Greece. Solon (638-558 B.C.), the great lawgiver of Athens, traveled around 590 B.C. throughout Egypt and the Middle East to gain wisdom for legislation. During his travels he may have come into contact with Hebrew thought, even though many of the Judeans were in captivity in Babylon.*” (Historical and Theological Foundations of Law, Volume I, Ancient Wisdom, p. 408)

Eidsmoe notes similarities of Hebrew customs in Greece: *“The Athenians had a prescribed bill of divorce, and so had the Jews. Among the Jews, the father gave names to the children, and such was the custom among the Greeks... Many of the Athenian laws in relation to the descent of property and the prohibited degrees of relationship in marriage, seem to have been transcribed by Solon from the laws of Moses. Sir Matthew Hale, in his history of the Common Law of England, affirms ‘that among the Grecians, the laws of descent resemble those of the Jews.’”* (Eidsmoe, page 409.)

The earliest civilizations of Greece were monarchies like all the other empires. But something changed in the mid 500’s B.C. As E. C. Wines writes: *“About the time of the Babylonian captivity, Greece began to emerge from the depths of ignorance and rudeness, in which her people had hitherto been sunk. A spirit of inquiry and research was awakened. Thales, Anaximander, Anaxagoras, Pherecydes, Pythagoras, Plato, Herodotus, and a host of other Grecian philosophers and historians, travelled into Egypt, Chaldea (Babylonia), and Phoenicia, some of them residing in those countries for a long series of years. Hence, they became acquainted with the more cultivated and learned of the Jews, saw their religion, and heard their conversations on the origin of the universe, on the power, sovereignty, spirituality and unity of their God; on the divine providence; on moral good and evil; on human duty; and on other topics, connected with religion and philosophy.... The testimonies of Jewish, pagan, and Christian writers... are sufficient of themselves to warrant the belief, that Greece, the parent of pagan letters and arts, Greece, the common mistress and teacher of Europe, owed the best part of her wisdom to Judea.”* (Wines, 1861 edition, pages 332-334)

“There was little protection for minorities when the majority chose to enact measures that violated minority rights. The Assembly was so large and unruly that it was difficult to be heard above the tumult....in practice only trained and eloquent speakers dared to do so...selecting officers by lot may have limited power-hungry men from seeking office, but it also meant men were selected for offices for which they had no experience, no aptitude, or no interest...the possibility of ostracism probably discouraged citizens from expressing unpopular positions...only about 30,000 free adult males with military training and Athenian descent – about 10% of the population – were citizens. Women, children, and slaves had no rights and were treated as property, while foreigner’s rights were large unprotected.” (Eidsmoe, pages 507-508)

“This direct democracy required the free adult male citizen to serve not only in the Assembly but also on so many juries, commissions, etc. that he had little time to manage his home, family, property, and business, and he needed slaves to do this for him.... Plato argued that slavery was necessary for freedom, because free men needed slaves to do their menial work so free men could have time to perform their civic duties. Aristotle argued that slavery is the natural condition for some people whose limited capacity for reason makes them incapable of functioning as free men. Slaves, he said, would be as miserable in freedom as free men would be miserable in slavery.” (Eidsmoe, page 508)

It was John Adams, second president of the United States that admitted *“Much as I love, esteem and admire the Greeks, I believe the Hebrews have done more to enlighten and civilize the world. Moses*

did more than all their legislators and philosophers.” (Adams handwritten comment on his copy of a book by the Marquis de Condorcet, as quoted in Eidsmoe, page 519)

Katherine Dang writes; *“It (Alexandria) became also a great intellectual centre, and its famous library was the largest ever collected in classical antiquity. This city was the home of scholars and philosophers from all parts of the world. Under the auspices of an enlightened monarch, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, the version being called the Septuagint – an immense service to sacred literature. The Jews enjoyed great prosperity under this Grecian prince, and Palestine was at peace with powerful neighbors, protected by the great king who favored the Jews as the Persian monarchs had done.”* (Dang, Katherine, *Ancient History*, Philomath Publications)

Patti Amsden writes; *“These... passages... from the Old Testament... are originally Hebrew rather than Greek. How could the word for assembly be translated into the Greek word ekklesia? The answer is found by looking at the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Whereas the Septuagint translates assembly as ekklesia, the Hebrew word for assembly is qahal. Qahal means ‘congregation, assembly, company, or multitude’ and is most frequently translated into ekklesia in the Septuagint.”* (Ekklesia, page 71)

Definition of the Greek word Ekklesia *“called out or forth, and a gathering of citizens called out of their homes into some public place; an assembly... an assembly of the people convened at the public place of council for the purposes of deliberating. In the Sept... the assembly of the Israelites, when gathered for sacred purposes.”* (Thayer, Joseph H., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Bake Book House, 1977, pages 195-196.)

Vine’s definition *“from ek, out of, and klesis, a calling, was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens gathered to discuss the affairs of State (Acts 19:39). In the Sept. it is used to designate the gathering of Israel, summoned for any definite purpose... rep. the whole nation.”* (Vine, W. E., *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Fleming H. Revell, 1966, pages 83-84.)

In 1903, the definition of ecclesia; *“in Grecian antiquity, the general assembly of Athenian citizens, who met from time to time to discuss public affairs. Ecclesia were of two kinds, ordinary and extraordinary... When any measure of unusual importance was to be publicly debated, the people were summoned from the country by special messengers. The word ecclesia came to mean any assembly regularly convened, and in New Testament Greek it is used to denote the assembly of Christians in any particular place, or the Christian Church.”* (*New Americanized Encyclopaedia Britannica*, The Saalfield publishing Company, 1903, Volume III, page 2104.)

The Revised Standard Version Greek-English Interlinear says it this way; *“whatever thou bindest on the earth shall be, having been bound in the heavens, and whatever thou loosest on the earth shall be, having been loosed in the heavens.”* Wuest’s Expanded Translation reads *“whatever you bind on earth (forbid to be done), shall have been already bound (forbidden to be done) in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth (permit to be done), shall have already been loosed in heaven (permitted to be done).”* (Marshall, Reverence Alfred, and Phillips, Reverend Prebendary, *The R.S.V. Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1958, page 71.)

“When the convocation occurred in Acts 15, the ruling or the new law was based on the scriptures... the ekklesia used the keys of the kingdom to declare heaven’s law in the earth.... The legislative declaration set a new ordinance into operation. Letters were written and distributed to all the local assemblies of the findings of the convocation.” (Ekklesia, by Patti Amsden, page 184.)