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Weekly Summary Paper: ***Religion***

In *Religion*, Moyer Hubbard analyzes the religious context of the Greco-Roman world when Christianity emerged. Hubbard describes that religion in the ancient Greco-Roman world was characterized by polytheism—the act of worshipping multiple deities for various purposes. Thus, Jews and Christians who refused to practice polytheism were regarded as peculiar. As a result, such characteristic was used to distinguished Jews from others.¹ Moreover, they were also known for their synagogues and other religious traditions and practices such as Sabbath observance, circumcision, and dietary restriction, which further separated them from society. Although Gentiles misunderstood Jewish beliefs, it remained appealing to some who were curious about Judaism and Christianity.

Furthermore, religion in the Greco-Roman world was identified by beliefs of superstition, magic, divination and astrology. In regards to superstition, Hubbard states that many believed in a densely layered enchanted universe, where spiritual beings resided above and below the physical world, and could impact it. Therefore, identifying and appeasing the appropriate divinity depending on one's location was a significant concern. Similarly, Jews also believed in such an idea, although theirs revolved around evil and good angelic forces influencing the world. For example, fallen angels were believed to be responsible for introducing all manners of evil such as disease, warfare, idolatry, slavery, and murder. Similar to the Greco-Roman world's ranking of their Gods, Jews also had a hierarchy of angelic and demonic beings and they ascribed each with specific roles, demonstrating that superstition

¹ Moyer Hubbard, *Christianity in the Greco-Roman World*. (Hendrickson, 2009), 24.

was not exclusive to the Gentiles, but a cultural practice adopted by most religions in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Such firm belief in superstition resulted in magic and divination. Hubbard describes magic as the attempt to “manipulate the Gods through correct execution of secret rites and incantations.”² Although not legal, many sought magic for three reasons— protection from evil spirits, to curse on an enemy, or to instill affection into another.³ Interestingly, magic was not limited to invoking Greek and Roman God, but also Pagan and Hebrew Gods as it was believed that calling God's name would oblige them to respond. Surprisingly, Hubbard states that there were also Jews who practiced magic through fortune telling. On the other hand, divination refers to the attempt to have supernatural guidance, discernment of the Gods' will, or predictions of future events. Hubbard clarifies that divination was more common, sought by both in authoritative figures and those in farmlands. Two common ways of deciphering a supernatural being's will were through oracles delivered by priests, or heard through a word that suited one's intention, and astrology, where one's destiny was plotted according to the zodiac or celestial phenomena. Although such practices and belief seem ridiculous, Hubbard points out how they are important to understand as they depict the environment from which new believers entered the church.

However, some were skeptical about such religious practices—they regarded them as delusions. Yet, Hubbard points out that many skeptics still acknowledged the existence of God. Such reality demonstrates how an individual's "belief" in the Greco-Roman world still included some notion of spirituality. It is different from how many skeptics in our generation, sadly, do not believe in the existence of God at all.

References

² Moyer Hubbard, *Christianity in the Greco-Roman World*. (Hendrickson, 2009), 30.

³ *Ibid.*, 30.

Hubbard, Moyer. *Christianity in the Greco-Roman World*. Hendrickson, 2009.