



# What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?: Timaeus and Genesis in Counterpoint (Thomas Spencer Jerome Lectures)

*Jaroslav Pelikan*

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The debate about evolution and creationism is striking evidence of the tensions between biblical and philosophical-scientific explanations of the origins of the universe. For most of the past twenty centuries, important historical context for the debate has been supplied by the relation (or "counterpoint") between two monumental texts: Plato's *Timaeus* and the *Book of Genesis*.

In *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?*, Jaroslav Pelikan examines the origins of this counterpoint. He reviews the central philosophical issues of origins as posed in classical Rome by Lucretius, and he then proceeds to an examination of *Timaeus* and *Genesis*, with *Timaeus'* Plato representing Athens and *Genesis'* Moses representing Jerusalem. He then follows the three most important case studies of the counterpoint--in the Jewish philosophical theology of Alexandria, in the Christian thought of Constantinople, and in the intellectual foundations of the Western Middle Ages represented by Catholic Rome, where *Timaeus* would be the only Platonic dialogue in general circulation.

Whatever Plato may have intended originally in writing *Timaeus*, it has for most of the intervening period been read in the light of *Genesis*. Conversely, *Genesis* has been known, not in the original Hebrew, but in Greek and Latin translations that were seen to bear a distinct resemblance to one another and to the Latin version of *Timaeus*. Pelikan's study leads to original findings that deal with Christian doctrine in the period of the church fathers, including the Three Cappadocians (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa) in the East, and in the West, Ambrose, Augustine, and Boethius. All of these vitally important authors addressed the problem of the "counterpoint," and neither they nor these primary texts can become fully intelligible without attention to the central issues being explored here.

*What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?* will be of interest to historians, theologians, and philosophers and to anyone with interest in any of the religious traditions addressed herein.

Jaroslav Pelikan is Sterling Professor Emeritus of History, Yale University and President of The American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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