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Early Christianity out of, and in, Context

JÖRG RÜPKE

M. M. MITCHELL and F. M. YOUNG (EDS), *THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY. VOL. 1: ORIGINS TO CONSTANTINE*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. xviii + 740, 13 illus. ISBN 0-5218-1239-9. £110.00.

A. CASIDAY and F. W. NORRIS (EDS), *THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY. VOL. 2: CONSTANTINE TO c. 600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xx + 758, maps. ISBN 9780-5218-1244-3. £105.00.

The author of this review is an historian of religion. He has studied ancient Christianity (and has a degree in theology), but has always done so within the context of the ancient Mediterranean world. Contextualizing ‘religions’ in their political, social, cultural, and ethnic settings — in all their diversity and their dynamics and their homogeneities — is an approach that has proved to be not merely fruitful, but in fact essential. Intensive interaction across ethnic and religious divides is evident everywhere. It is manifested in social contacts and élite formation, in philosophical thinking and in juridical procedure, in architectural style and in economic exchanges. Consider for a moment the many examples provided by ancient Palestine.¹ The same is true for many other cities, regions, and provinces of the Roman Empire.² From a different perspective, this emphasis on context and cultural exchange represents a return to directions taken by the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* at the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, however, our interest is no longer concentrated on genetic explanations, nor on Hellenistic philosophy and Iranian dualism.

Writing histories of early Christianity that pay proper attention to context has not proved easy. Ten years ago, the titles of a Franco-German co-operative multi-volume *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours* and the German version’s subtitle *Religion, Politik, Kultur* indicated an interest in going beyond accounts of Christianity that treat it in isolation.³ But the results remained limited. More than 2,000 pages in two volumes were dedicated to the period up to A.D. 450. The second volume (dealing with the period from A.D. 250 onwards) concentrated on the organization and spread of Christianity and its development of a new social ethos, while the first dedicated one chapter to the ‘separation’ of Jews and Christians between A.D. 30 and 135 and another long one to ‘Early Christians and Greek culture’. However, the perspective was always from the (often very diverse) Christian groups onto the surrounding religious and intellectual cultures, and the analysis employed metaphors of adaptation, conquest, and integration of elements of pagan culture. Of course (and rightly), Hellenistic Judaism was taken as a starting point: but it was treated too much as a world apart.

¹ See e.g. N. Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina: the Pagan Cults in Roman Palestine (Second to Fourth Century)* (2001); J. L. Lightfoot, *Lucian, On the Syrian Goddess* (2004); M. Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome* (2005); W. Eck, *Rom und Judaea* (2007).

² e.g. W. Spickermann, *Germania Superior*, *Religionsgeschichte des römischen Germanien 1* (2003); *Germania Inferior*, *Religionsgeschichte des römischen Germanien 2* (2008); J. Rüpke (ed.), *A Companion to Roman Religion* (2007); H. Cancik and J. Rüpke, *Die Religion des Imperium Romanum. Koine und Konfrontationen* (2009).

³ L. Pietri and A. LeBoulluec et al., *Le nouveau peuple (des origines à 250)* (2000); C. Pietri and J. Bيارne et al., *Naissance d’une chrétienté. (250–430)* (1995) and C. Piétri and L. Piétri et al., *Das Entstehen der einen Christenheit. (250–430)* (1996) for the period up to A.D. 450.

Ten years on from that publication, the situation has not changed significantly. The cultural setting is treated as *Umwelt*, ‘environment’, which allows authors to select certain basic facts about antiquity and treat them separately.⁴ The main form of social interaction under consideration is the spread of Christianity — thematized from Ancient History⁵ as well as being a permanent interest of History of Christianity — while conflict, persecution and martyrdom are the usual preoccupations before Constantine, with Christian violence afterwards.⁶ The Christian reception of pagan models is generally considered in relation to literary forms,⁷ to the social form of associations,⁸ and to philosophy (‘Hellenization’). The concept of ‘mentalité’ has been invoked only infrequently since the ground-breaking works of Peter Brown. It is naturally legitimate for any intellectual project to concentrate on one particular topic. Nevertheless, in the case of a comprehensive history of early Christianity, a key criterion of success must be the extent to which authors and editors show an awareness of the historical setting that goes beyond the experience and views of the tiny numbers of the baptized.

The creation of a fundamental work of reference of this kind is an opportunity that comes no more than once a generation — an opportunity to take stock of the state of a discipline, of where the consensus has shifted, where new fields have emerged and others disappeared or become marginalized. Publishers have their own reasons for promoting works of this kind, and each author in a collaborative venture of this kind also follows his or her own intellectual agenda. I shall return below to a few instances where there seems to be a discrepancy between chapters in these volumes, and earlier contributions by the same authors. But a key role in a project of this kind is the overall concept and organization generated by the editors. For that reason, I will begin by examining at some length the pre-agreed framework within which this history of early Christianity has been designed. For reasons that will become apparent, the two volumes need to be treated independently even if some matters, such as the consequences of the initial decision to divide the story at the conversion of Constantine, involve a degree of comparison.

I ORIGINS TO CONSTANTINE

What model of what is to come is offered by Mitchell and Young, the editors of the first volume? It is clear from the outset that the editors have presupposed clear limits to their subject, rather than attempting to define or challenge conventional disciplinary and chronological divides. Christianity is equated with church history (xiii), later addressed as ‘religion’ (34). No definitions are provided. Should we see Christianity as a ‘counter-cultural movement’ the enculturation of which has to be analysed (xiv)? Do (Christian) aliens become (Roman) citizens, as the headline to Part Six suggests? Or should we think in terms of a history of how practices become institutionalized, or else of how a developing

⁴ e.g. K. Scherberich and K. Erlemann, *Die Umwelt des Neuen Testaments 4: Familie — Gesellschaft — Wirtschaft* (2005); A.-J. Levine et al., *The Historical Jesus in Context* (2006); rather additive e.g. D. L. Balch and C. Osiek, *Early Christian Families in Context. An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (2003); M. Carroll-Spillecke, *Spirits of the Dead. Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe* (2006).

⁵ W. V. Harris (ed.), *The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries: Essays in Explanation* (2005).

⁶ For the latter e.g. J. Hahn, *From Temple to Church. Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity* (2008); M. Ghilardi, *Les cités de l'Italie tardo-antique. (IVe–VIe siècle); institutions, économie, société, culture et religion* (2006).

⁷ e.g. T. Hägg and P. Rousseau et al., *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (2001); C. Marksches, ‘Schreiben Christen andere Briefe als Heiden? Zur brieflichen Kommunikation in der kaiserzeitlichen Antike’, in U. Peter (ed.), *Mediengesellschaft Antike? Information und Kommunikation vom Alten Ägypten bis Byzanz* (2006), 113–30; J. Fotopoulos, *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context. Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* (2006).

⁸ e.g. P. A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations. Claiming a Place in the Ancient Mediterranean* (2003); ‘Familial dimensions of group identity: “Brothers” in associations of the Greek East’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005), 491–513.

and changing belief-system spread? If the followers of Christ were found among adult Jews and non-Jews, they were socialized as either Jews or as Greek or Roman (or Celtic or African) pagans, sharing, to differing degrees, the cultural knowledge and much of the world-view of their surroundings. The volume never makes an effort at clarifying the triangle of Greco-Roman (a shorthand for a multi-ethnic polity), Jewish and Christian: a triangle of positions that are partly overlapping and inclusive, partly conflicting and excluding.

Social history is rightly praised (xvi), but it is hardly ever applied. What does a phrase starting 'Jews, philosophers and Christians had ...' mean in practice (xv)? Were Judaism and Christianity primarily intellectual movements, a view already contested in Minucius Felix' dialogue *Octavius*? Were 'philosophers' separated from their culture, but Judaeo-Christian people on the other hand unified by intellectual discourse? Of course, we might easily find a way to agree on what the authors mean. But the way such insights are initially formulated shapes further perspectives. The 'parting of the ways' is thematized, thus problematizing clear-cut boundaries between 'Christianity' and 'the Jews' from early on. This, by now, is a standard view. But the social consequences remain obscure. Many chapters do not mention any Jewish setting or neighbourhood. To talk of a loose network as the 'Christian world' in the mid-first century (101) seems to beg the question of how to conceptualize the social shape of a new religious movement (as it is called elsewhere). For an ancient historian, it is irritating to see an emphasis on the early existence of Gentile groups opposed to Jewish networks, who, however, are nowhere described as integrated into Greco-Roman societies. Thus, it is all the more surprising to learn that in communicating with these Gentile — as opposed to Jewish — groups Paul could presuppose an extensive knowledge of the sacred texts of the Tenakh (ch. 8). Without any attempt at modelling these relationships, attempts at contextualization remain isolated. In reading the various chapters, we learn, for example, about Celtic druids and Roman gods, but not the slightest hypothesis is offered, whether (and how) these had shaped the new 'religion' — a term never specified or related to the terminological usage of Greco-Roman 'cult' — something into which the Jewish sect was transformed (145). Here, the editors should have directed more attention to discrepancies within or between chapters. Such discrepancies could (and in many cases fruitfully should) remain, but the reader should be made aware of them. The use of 'Gnosticism' (compare chs 12 and 24) offers a case in point.

The final general problem to be addressed concerns the time-frame. In the editors' preface, the 'origins' of the volume's title are problematized as to whether they include Jesus or not (xiv). This leads to interesting theological reflections. But one may ask oneself whether any historical (as the title of the book suggests) understanding of early Christianity could be possible without information about religious developments and even movements in first-century B.C. and first-century A.D. Judaism, or without account being taken of research into apocalypticism and the Qumran community (for the latter, the index gives eight — meagre — locations). The first chapter (called 'Prelude' instead of numbered) does offer a fresh approach towards *Leben-Jesu-Forschung* and early Christologies. But it also deprives the reader of the opportunity to learn in some detail about the biographical construction which the canonical (and many other) gospels chose for their subject and thereby popularized. Constantine as an end seems to be a plausible choice, but this too has consequences. As the chapters show, the evidence before A.D. 300 is extremely thin. This poses problems for the regional approach proclaimed in the preface. It is all very well (and quite trendy) to emphasize a shift to regional diversity (xvi), indeed the research programme co-ordinated by myself during the years 2000 to 2007 helped to promote just such an approach.⁹ But for the pre-Constantinian period the actual chapters — I should like to except the one on Egypt — suggest it was not a good choice as a central theme.

⁹ See J. Rüpke (ed.), *Antike Religionsgeschichte in räumlicher Perspektive* (2007), in particular the contributions by Christoph Marksches and Hendrik Hildebrand.

Finally, one wonders whether the *loci* of post-Constantine dogmatics offer an adequate framework to describe intellectual developments frequently conceptualized as 'Hellenization' of Christendom.

Conceptual criticism of this kind should not obscure the substance of much of what the volume has to offer. It has been written by an impressive array of scholars teaching — with two (German) exceptions — at universities in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. And yet, in the interest of criticizing not these fine scholars themselves, but rather the tendencies and problems in a field of research exemplified by this volume as a whole, I will continue to point out some corollaries of the initial editorial decisions and design.

The first part of Volume I is intended to produce 'the political, social and religious setting' (35–83). Whereas the first substantive chapter (Sean Freyne, 'Galilee and Judaea in the first century') remains strictly restricted to social history, Tessa Rajak does a fine job in describing the interweaving of traditions in the Jewish diasporas, stressing the role of the 'Judaizers' (64) and overlapping identities (65, the plural is as important to her as it is to me). H.-J. Klauck's chapter on 'The Roman Empire' is extremely broad, and correspondingly thin. Information is provided about Republican Roman religion, and even Roman epic, but its relevance is not made clear (indeed might be relatively difficult to establish). The space could have been used to expand the few lines on Roman cult associations. Contrary to the impression given by texts that happen to have survived, prosopographical evidence does not suggest that Stoicism was more congenial to the Romans than Epicureanism.¹⁰

Part Two (85–173) introduces different groups within the 'Jesus Movement' — Jewish, Gentile, and Johannine Christianities. But these chapters do not offer models with which to understand their nature and significance. Ch. 4 (Joel Marcus) is rather a catalogue of places and groups. Its claim that groups without strict norms of behaviour are more successful in a counter-cultural movement (101) is rather counter-intuitive, and not further argued for. The role of the god-fearers and Judaizers, so prominent in ch. 2, is of no concern in the chapter on Gentile Christianity (M. Mitchell). Johannine Christianity (ch. 6, Harold W. Attridge) remains an isolated group: no hypotheses are offered as to its uniqueness or representativity. Ch. 7 on the 'social and ecclesial life of the earliest Christians' (Wayne A. Meeks) offers the social without the context. 'Group' and 'church' are treated as synonyms (150f.); household groups and cultic groups of twelve (why?) emerge from tightly-knit communities: we do not learn against whom they were defined, at what time of day they met, nor on what economic basis they were organized. On such a basis, the growth and the rise of the monepiscopate comes as a surprise. Yet wherever Meeks looks beyond this model, his remarks are immediately fruitful and convincing, for example on the use of the social institutions of *clientela* and *amicitia* as strategies to solve conflicts (156).

Part Three (175–292) deals with 'Community Traditions and Self-Definition'. Chs 8 and 9 deal in a rather traditional manner with the canonical texts and — via Marcion — with canonization. This juxtaposition of a production process that ends by the early second century with a reception process that ended by the fourth century is suggestive. It does marginalize the whole range of generically similar, but extracanonical texts, the extraordinary quantity of which becomes ever more visible. It is ch. 10 that offers new perspectives in enquiring into 'self-definition vis-à-vis the Jewish matrix' (Judith Lieu). From the start, she points to the paradox, that 'a pluralistic framework may contain difference but it may also encourage a speedy sense of separation' (215). The strength of the chapter is not any abstract stress on diversity or plurality and the undermining of clear-cut

¹⁰ C. J. Castner, *Prosopography of Roman Epicureans from the Second Century B.C. to the Second Century A.D.* (1988).

divisions, but lies in its precise location of the fields and different types of interaction: the continuation of the scriptural tradition (219), the ‘numerical and, perhaps, social advantage [of the Jews] throughout our period’ (226), the role of Jewish intellectuals as teachers (227), the existence of a shared universe and — possibly — worshipping together (228). Such a social contextualization is sadly lacking in the analysis of the intellectual debate between Justin and Celsus introduced under the larger heading of ‘self-definition vis-à-vis the Graeco-Roman world’ in ch. 11 (A. J. Droge). Ch. 12 (David Brakke) narrows the term ‘gnostics’ down to Sethian Gnostics, following a recent development in the field of research on ‘Gnosticism’. His careful delineation of the various strategies of group formation on the Gnostic as well as on their opponents’ side is useful, even if it is contradicted by the following chapter’s attribution of the decisive role to Irenaeus. Ch. 14 by Carolyn Osiek takes a stance quite distinct from many of her co-authors by explicitly pointing out the identity of Christians and Greek or Roman non-Christians in everyday life: here we do not see a counter-cultural movement slowly integrating, but people slowly developing distinctive features without changing basic social structures (275). At an important point, however, the analysis loses its force. Was it really so difficult to stay away from a gladiatorial show? How did social control function in relation to the mass entertainment of imperial cities? More remains to be said about the unwillingness to leave the shows, than about the difficulties of remaining a citizen without attending (287). One need not answer these questions, but they should not be foreclosed by speaking of ideals and the gap between them and real life (292). We should like to know how the ideals were pronounced, enforced, defined in their status and consequences — and how forgotten.

Part Four deals with ‘regional varieties’ (293–413). It is introduced by two general chapters neither of which tackles the question of identity — there is nothing, for example, on plural identities, nor on possible discrepancies between identities inscribed on epitaphs and those thematized in situations of everyday life — nor the mechanisms that positively or negatively informed ‘regional varieties’. The stress on the minority situation (around 5 per cent at the end of the period, see p. 309) poses the problem all the more sharply: it would have been good to have more information, somewhere in this section, on the demographics of Jewish groups in the same period. One important detail. To interpret the decline in pagan inscriptions in the second half of the third century as an indication of the rise of Christianity (312, Frank Trombley) strongly conflicts with the now usual interpretation of the decline as representing a change in the ‘epigraphic habit’. The chapters vary considerably in their contribution to the aim of the volume to look for signs of regional diversity. The chapter on Asia Minor and Achaëa (ch. 17, Christine Trevett) offers a variety of perspectives without integrating them or arriving at anything like hypotheses on regional characteristics. Ch. 18 on Egypt (Birger A. Pearson) is much more successful in this respect, combining an historical outline, a local study concentrated on Alexandria with its wealth of sources, and a sketch of developments beyond. What emerges is not a picture of a specifically Egyptian variety of Christianity, but an understanding of the strong position of Egypt in the rise of monasticism and in the theological conflicts of the fourth century. These chapters are very uneven. Some are accompanied by maps, some not; some confine themselves to theology (e.g. for Syria, ch. 19), others concentrate on organizational developments. The chapter on Gaul (ch. 20, John Behr) concentrates nearly exclusively on Irenaeus and the martyrs of Lyon; the retelling of Caesar’s Gallic War could have been more fruitfully replaced by retelling the findings of Greg Woolf on the process of Romanization of this province.¹¹ As generally stressed at the beginning, the account of African religion (384f.) is — as openly admitted (386) — irrelevant. Maureen A. Tilley’s chapter dealing with the cases of martyrdom (388ff.) begs the question of local specificities. The same is true for the further characterizations, the many bishops of the province (387) are not related to patterns of urbanization nor social

¹¹ G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (1998).

or administrative characteristics.¹² Markus Vinzent's treatment of Rome manages not to deal with the strongly institutionalized Jewish communities and their legal position, and Christians seem to be rather isolated in the world (ch. 22).

It might seem a bit odd to find a chapter on 'Institutions of the pre-Constantine ecclesia' (Stuart George Hall) at the beginning of Part Five on the 'Shaping of Christian Theology' (413–500). Again, the development of a Christian 'ministry' is analysed in isolation (416–21), paying no attention to institutional processes in other cults¹³ or to more general social processes like professionalization.¹⁴ After the intense (and rather over-enthusiastic) discussion of pagan monotheism during the last decade,¹⁵ the treatment of Christian monotheism in isolation in the monotheism-and-creation chapter (Gerhard May) strikes the historian of religion as odd. The examination of contemporary philosophical discourse hardly goes beyond Philo of Alexandria, and reduces Plato and Plutarch to a few lines at most. As a remark on the importance of cosmology (453) and the many discussions of 'Gnosticism' in other passages of the book show, the 'shaping' might have been more fruitfully studied from a perspective that was not dictated by the final shape of Christian dogmatics (cf. ch. 31 on the Council of Nicaea). Ch. 27 (Frances Young) offers stimulating insights into the extraordinary role played by freelance teachers and schools, but fails to point out the close contact between or even identity of 'Christian' and 'pagan' schools, and their *paideia*. The mentioning of Origen's *Hexapla* (494) might have given rise to a discussion of translation practices in general, given that this was probably one of the most distinctive features of the Jewish and Christian dealings with sacred texts.

Part Six "'Aliens" Become Citizens: Towards Imperial Patronage' (501–89) raises expectations of an intensive treatment of the position of Christians and Christian institutions within the triangle of Jews, Christians and Romans that I addressed at the beginning of this review. Again such expectations are, to a large degree, frustrated. Ch. 28 (W. H. C. Frend) offers an account of the classical literary sources on persecutions, aimed at narrating events rather than analysing structures or narrative repercussions. Some details — consequences of treating Christians in isolation — irritate: the period of Bar Kochba, for example, is characterized as an 'interval of comparative peace' (508, even if primarily addressed to Alexandria). Again the decline in inscriptions is explained by reference to Geffcken rather than the epigraphic habit (518). 'Church and state' (ch. 29, Adolf Martin Ritter) adopts a narrow perspective from the start, neither including the legal position of the Jews nor the Sibylline oracles, nor attempts at calendrical differentiation or congruence.¹⁶ Similarly, ch. 30 on Constantine (Averil Cameron) does not attempt to understand the 'pagan' frame of reference for Constantine's individual choice of and support for the god 'Christ' (as other sun-gods had been favoured by earlier emperors) in the crucial years

¹² cf. J. B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* (1995) for a fruitful approach including pagan traditions and Christianity.

¹³ See J. Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum: A Prosopography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome, 300 BC to AD 499* (2008) for interesting parallels and interrelations.

¹⁴ See G. Schöllgen, *Die Anfänge der Professionalisierung des Klerus und das kirchliche Amt in der syrischen Didaskalie* (1998).

¹⁵ Basic: P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (1999); cf. for criticism T. D. Barnes, 'Monotheists all?', *Phoenix* 55 (2001), 142–62; J. North, 'Pagans, polytheists and the pendulum', in W. V. Harris (ed.), *The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries: Essays in Explanation* (2005), 125–43.

¹⁶ Sibylline oracles: J. J. Collins, 'The development of the Sibylline tradition', *ANRW* II.20, 1 (1987), 421–59; D. S. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline* (1990); R. Buitenwerf, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and its Social Setting: with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (2003); J. L. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles: with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books* (2007). Calendar: J. Rüpke, *Kalender und Öffentlichkeit: Die Geschichte der Repräsentation und religiösen Qualifikation von Zeit in Rom* (1995), 427–84; S. Stern, *Calendar and Community. A History of the Jewish Calendar, Second Century BCE to Tenth Century CE* (2001).

of civil conflict.¹⁷ The last chapter (ch. 32, Robin M. Jensen) describes the development of a Christian material culture (which excludes for example Iuvenius' epic *Evangeliorum libri*, written under Constantine, and literary production in general) by drawing on the paradigm of 'enculturation'. Such a perspective is difficult to reconcile with the evidence, notably the very late appearance of a distinctively Christian iconography. In detail, Jensen draws on shared symbols with divided meanings, and tends to date visual evidence early. Four carefully selected photographs accompany the chapter.

A bibliography arranged by chapters and a very detailed index conclude the volume. It is indicative that 'religion', 'cult', and 'enculturation' are missing. 'Culture' and 'sub-culture' do have exactly one and the same reference: 'Christianity as'. The pages in question offer no further definition, but instead narrate the famous Aberkios inscriptions, accompanied by a scarcely readable photo. This is inscriptional evidence for the kind of travelling and exchange we associate with Paul and his contemporaries. But it is truly exceptional.

II FROM CONSTANTINE TO AD 600

Fortunately, the inclusion of the second volume allows me to leave the snobbish cathedra of persistent criticism and to descend to humble praise. The structural differences between Volumes I and II are immediately visible in the table of contents. There is a common interest in regional developments (Part I, chs 1–4, pp. 7–148), but despite the multiplication of the evidence available, large areas are treated: Western, Germanic and Celtic, Greek, finally Asian and African Christianities are all discussed. To identify the position of Christianity and Christian culture within a society that still is (and remains) complex — Jewish, pagan, Manichaean — is seen as the task of the central parts of the volume (149–428). Finally 'Beliefs and Practices' are treated, including discourses, social practices, liturgy, and art (429–725). Important theological themes are given due attention, but they do not dominate the structure of the approach.

Regional developments are treated in rather positivistic fashion in the first three chapters of the volume, each of which concentrates on councils, emperors, or theologians of the respective area. An attempt to capture a regional *mentalité* is not undertaken. Ch. 4 extends the coverage as far as China and Abyssinia, although it concentrates on the Near East. Here, David Bundy's approach is broader, but does not include the archaeological record. In contrast to other contributions, the role of Judaism as a vector for the spread of Christianity is clearly acknowledged (122, for Syria).

In ch. 5, opening Part Two ('Christianity Contested'), Guy G. Stroumsa deals with the 'religious dynamics between Christians and Jews' after Constantine. Here, models are explicitly offered: Constantine chose Christianity as a new civil religion, and what follows is to be seen as the interplay between the decline of empire and the growth of community religion (156). With communitarian identity ever more important and built on religious identity, religious differences increased in importance, as did the potential for conflict (cf. 157). This is a thesis that might be tested for regions of different levels of urbanization, as well as for the special cases of Constantinople/Byzantium and Rome. Stroumsa lays stress on exegesis and the problems of translation, on mysticism, on a religious *koine* (168), and he follows the vicissitudes of Jewish theology up to the advent of Islam. Regional approaches (ch. 6: Egypt, David Frankfurter; ch. 7: Asia Minor, Frank R. Trombley; ch. 8: Italy, Michele Renee Salzman; ch. 9: North Africa, Anna Leone) deal anew with paganism in changed circumstances. The first two focus on popular and local practices, and include

¹⁷ See P. Barcelò, 'Warum Christus? Überlegungen zu Constantins Entscheidung für das Christentum', in C. Batsch, U. Egelhaaf-Gaiser and R. Stepper (eds), *Zwischen Krise und Alltag: Antike Religionen im Mittelmeerraum* (1999), 255–69; cf. M. Wallraff, *Christus Verus Sol — Sonnenverehrung und Christentum in der Spätantike* (2001).

demonology and magic. Italy is analysed from an urban perspective, the African development very much from an economic one. The analysis of the intellectual debate between Christians and pagans (ch. 10, Alan Brown) is — admittedly (275) — rather reduced to a listing of positions. Here, more attention might have been paid to the dynamics, the forms and the institutional settings of such exchanges. The chapter on Manichaeism (ch. 11, Samuel N. C. Lieu) offers a condensed account of Mani's teaching. Given the pre-300 date of many of the sources quoted, this might easily have formed a part of the first volume, which dedicated a bare two pages to this important religious development. Lieu goes on to discuss intellectual reactions: a full treatment of this movement, set within the social and religious history of the Roman Empire, is still lacking. J. Rebecca Lyman's chapter, which concludes the second part, addresses heresiology (ch. 12) in an exemplary manner as a phenomenon of reception, of dealing with others. The processes of labelling are studied through exemplary cases.

Part Three on 'Christian Culture and Society' (315–428) studies processes of institutionalization (used as a broad concept), from councils (ch. 15) and their roles, to power structure and church law. Bronwen Neil (ch. 13) perhaps concentrates her analysis of the transformation of classical literature too much on theological genres and theologians: there is little on epic and more 'secular' poetry or epistolography; neither Sidonius nor Prudentius (both of whom figure elsewhere as 'sources') are mentioned in this chapter. Any transformation of the generic spectre of 'late ancient literature' remains beyond the scope of this volume.¹⁸ I would myself hesitate to make generalizing claims formulated in terms such as 'the Alexandrian school was taken over by Christian thinkers' (318, n. 4).¹⁹ Ch. 14 by Raymond van Dam makes clear the broad range of approaches that has proved fruitful for research into 'bishops and society': his account covers political analyses, the study of liturgy in the space of the city, and considerations of personal holiness. Some cross-references to the discussion in ch. 23 might have indicated possibilities for developing certain aspects. Ch. 16 (Kenneth Pennington) convincingly argues for a late development of canon law, with impulses coming from the East that had to be translated into Latin. This coheres well with the observation that the Latin West, Rome in particular, did not have a pagan 'Sacred Law', regulating everything from worship to religious roles, but rather applied concepts of civil law to some discrete religious problems, divine property for example.²⁰ H. A. Drake concludes this part of the book with a chapter on 'Church, society and political power' (ch. 17) that delineates the complexities of the processes involved in the blunt statement: 'the ancient state always was a religious institution' (407). This conceptual reality formed the background to a specific constellation within the new movement. Because of the rapid rates of growth, in particular after A.D. 312, most Christians would have joined as adults and so perhaps have less ideological resilience.²¹ This circumstance gave plausibility to fears of 'militants', thus forcing and enabling them to turn more violently against outsiders (423–5). Once again, this explicit formulation of models, models designed to reduce the complexity of phenomena and thereby make them more comprehensible, is very helpful, making each hypothesis open to criticism and improvement.

Following two chapters which describe the developments in Trinitarian and Christological thought in some detail, ch. 20 by Augustine Casiday offers a thoughtful treatment of 'Sin and salvation', integrating liturgy, popular piety, and theological thinking. Georgia Frank follows with the encroachment of church norms and practices on domestic piety ('Lay devotion', ch. 21). Claudia Rapp analyses three examples of the cult of the saints and of relics from the fourth and fifth centuries, fitting these into different Christian and

¹⁸ Here L. J. Engels and H. Hofmann (eds), *Spätantike* (1997) remains indispensable.

¹⁹ See B. Stefaniw, *Mind, Text and Commentary: The Interpretative Assumptions of Origen of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, and Evagrius Ponticus* (forthcoming).

²⁰ See J. Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans* (2007), 131.

²¹ See K. Hopkins, 'Christian number and its implications', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998), 185–226.

cultural frameworks (ch. 22). Complexity is accounted for not only by the different forms and functions exemplified in the case studies, but also by pointing to opposite positions, to ‘criticism and doubts among contemporaries’ (562). In ch. 23 Rowan A. Greer deals with a specific problem, ‘Pastoral care and discipline’. The idea of ‘pastoral care’ was not alien to antiquity, but today it evokes associations of parish work that tries to reach every single member of the community, a concept that became institutionalized only in post-enlightenment Protestantism (and Catholicism) during the nineteenth century.²² This chapter is perhaps not as conscious of the risk of anachronistic understandings as is the following chapter in relation to the notions of ‘sexuality’ and ‘family’.

Given the fact that ancient religiosity has frequently been described as religious practice rather than religious discourse, just sixteen pages on ‘the growth of liturgy and the church year’ (ch. 25, Bryan D. Spinks) seem hardly sufficient, even for Christianity. Here, recent advances in historical research, now painstakingly documented each year in the *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft*, have not been integrated. Nor has Christian liturgy been contextualized in relation to pagan ritual, recently summarized in the five volumes of the *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum* (which itself fails to look outside the realm of Greek, Etruscan, and Roman religion). Much more stimulating is the chapter on ‘Interpreting scripture’ (ch. 26, Paul M. Blowers), that not only describes hermeneutical positions, but points to the generation of a vast array of cultural practice stimulated by a ‘religion of a book’ (my expression). Unfortunately, just as in Volume I, this excludes hexametric bible poetry. Iuvenius, Proba, Arator, and Sedulius are absent from the indices of both volumes, thus neglecting a cultural phenomenon with wide repercussions amongst the élite.²³

After two chapters on Eastern and Western monasticism and asceticism, that to my impression concisely convey the state of the art, a chapter on art and architecture (ch. 29, Beat Brenk) concludes this volume. A mass of information is clearly presented, but the focus of this chapter is much narrower than in its counterpart in Volume I. ‘Art and propaganda fide’, as the title runs, produces the consequence that ‘the church’ is the subject (and hence the limit) of all activities to be documented (691). Even if we disregard all the schisms and manifest conflicts over buildings that ensued, the singular ‘Church’ is rather inappropriate for the city of Rome in the late fourth century.²⁴ Moreover, a great deal of private production has to be neglected (cf. 697). *Propaganda fide* does not offer an adequate framework to analyse the role of imperial patronage — not restricted to Constantine.²⁵

The second volume, the contributors to which work in many parts of Europe, North America, and Australia, is concluded by an index as detailed as in the first volume (and including ‘religion’, civic and popular). The bibliographies directly follow the respective chapters. Research literature is present up to 2005 and 2006 (usually up to 2002 in the first volume). From the point of view of a historian of religion, I cannot recommend the first volume of the *Cambridge History of Christianity*, either for students or for researchers. The limitations of the initial design and the failure to set religious developments in an appropriate social and cultural context are major flaws. But I do recommend the second volume, with its more coherent structure and above all its central concern to explore post-Constantinian Christianity as part of a wider religious world. And I hope that the approach taken in it will increasingly inform research in the field covered by the first volume.

²² L. Hölscher, *Geschichte der protestantischen Frömmigkeit in Deutschland* (2005), 181ff.

²³ See recently R. P. H. Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament. Juvenius, Sedulius, Arator* (2006) for Latin and H.-G. Nesselrath, ‘Das Evangelium nach Homer: Bemerkungen zu Sprache, Metrik und Lexik in einer Langfassung der christlichen griechischen Homer-Centonen’, *JbAC* 48/49 (2006), 43–53 for Greek bible epic.

²⁴ See the documentation in J. Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum: A Propagography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome, 300 BC to AD 499* (2008).

²⁵ See J. R. Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital: Rome in the Fourth Century* (2000).

III FUTURE DIRECTIONS

How, then, could future research proceed more effectively? In a more generalized manner, I should like to suggest four lines of inquiry.

The first is a reflection on the historiographic tradition and on the early rise of the dominant interpretive models. The ‘founder’ of Christian universal history, Iulius Africanus, has only recently been made the object of intensive research, as has Eusebius, father of ‘church history’.²⁶

Secondly, a critical review of terms like ‘group’ and ‘religion’ is necessary. Without a concept of religion that allowed the drawing of unsurpassable boundaries between ‘imagined communities’, ‘religions’ could not be thought of in the plural in the modern sense. Neither *secta* and *disciplina* nor *religiones* fully arrived at fulfilling this function in antiquity. The problem of a plurality that went beyond the dual of ‘we’ and ‘the others’ was, however, present. It was a multi-dimensional plural, including a plural of religious signs and beliefs as well as of times and places. ‘Cults and religions’, as modern research has come to say, similarly fails to capture these dimensions. The most important change between the century preceding the birth of Christianity and the late fourth and fifth centuries’ fully institutionalized Christianity was not a change in numbers. Religion changed its place in society. Only as a consequence of this radical shift in the social role of religion did the problem of diversity, differences and separate groups occur.²⁷ Thus, the historiography of religion in the imperial period should no longer indulge in explanations based on the idea of ‘syncretism’ and ‘transgression of boundaries’ between Jews and Hellenists, Christians and astrologers, or pagans and Manicheans, but rather look at the strategies for the creation of boundaries that support cohesion and coherence of one’s own identity and ward off others.²⁸ ‘Translation’, here, is a fruitful concept for crossing such borderlines again.²⁹

Thirdly, much more attention should be directed to the study of everyday religion, for example the quotidian media in popular religion such as gems, lamps, pilgrim tokens, extending to social practices, feasting and ritual. The late fourth-century silver plate (lanx) found at Risley Park, Derbyshire, with its hunting scenes and temple idyll, was dedicated by a bishop to a church.³⁰ Here, local studies, starting from the dense interaction within a place, could have an important role in correcting the image of the clash of densely organized transregional traditions and organizations, pointing to the sharing of habits, places, and times.³¹

Finally, literature. The sociology of literature and the cultural turn have taught us to ask about the locality as well as the potential universality of texts, about their participation in

²⁶ Africanus: (M. Wallraff); Eusebius: e.g. T. Morgan, ‘Eusebius of Caesarea and Christian historiography’, *Athenaeum* 93 (2005), 193–208; A. Grafton and M. H. Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book. Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (2006); M. Willing, *Eusebius von Cäsarea als Häreseograph* (2008); see G. Gardner, *Antiquity in Antiquity. Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World* (2008) for ancient historiography on a broader scale.

²⁷ J. Rüpke, ‘Religiöser Pluralismus und das römische Reich’, in H. Cancik and J. Rüpke (eds), *Die Religion des Imperium Romanum: Konfrontationen und Koine* (2009), 331–54, at 164.

²⁸ See e.g. M. Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation between Judaism and Christianity* (2003); N. Belayche, ‘Des lieux pour le “profane” dans l’empire tardo-antique? Les fêtes entre Koninônia sociale et espaces de revalorités religieuses’, *Antiquité tardive* 15 (2007), 35–46; E. Iricinschi and H. M. Zellentin, *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity* (2008).

²⁹ See e.g. M. S. Smith, *God in Translation. Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (2008) for the period of the Tenakh.

³⁰ Description and photo: E. Hartley, J. Hawkes *et al.*, *Constantine the Great. York’s Roman Emperor* (2006), 223f.

³¹ See e.g. P. Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (2004); E. Ebel, *Die Attraktivität früher christlicher Gemeinden. Die Gemeinde von Korinth im Spiegel griechisch-römischer Vereine* (2004); M. Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation between Judaism and Christianity* (2003).

shared communication and about their role in contested 'discursive fields'. For the second to fourth centuries, Christian apologetics and the conceptualization of intellectual developments in terms of the 'Hellenization' of Christendom must be reframed in terms of communication within a common intellectual space, rather than in terms of group-specific developments. The co-existence of diversity and debate might be better explained in these terms. A common history of literature which takes account of differences in languages and readership (and frequently audiences) more than of particular religious allegiances, would give a fairer place for example, to epic narratives from Spain (the biblical poet Iuvencus!) than is the case in histories of religions concentrating on 'dogmatic' texts. A number of recent works have challenged notions of different genres for different religions, but rather stressed their participation in and (only as a second step) diversification of a common literary culture.³² To add just one further example. Notions of 'religious identity' and 'group orientations' are challenged by books such as the 'codex-calendar of 354'. A present for a Christian, it contains the first known lists of the commemoration days of Roman bishops and martyrs and a calendar including many traditional Roman festivals, but not a single 'Christian' date. Jewish dates, programmatically³³ (S. Stern) not fixed to the Roman calendar could not be included. Calendar differentiation (not very successful in the diaspora, as Roman dates show) was a powerful, but regionally restricted instrument for creating boundaries. Recent research suggests that the Christian festival of Christmas (*natalis domini*) prompted the creation of a birthday festival of the Invincible Sun (*dies natalis Solis Invicti*), rather than being a reaction to a previous pagan tradition;³⁴ a fact that not only exemplifies polemics but points to the close interaction on and around dates. The terminological differentiation of rituals ('Eucharist', 'synagogal worship', 'mysteries' instead of meal) has helped to reproduce strategies of group differentiation that are not borne out on a phenomenological level.³⁵ 'Identity' still tends to suggest ontological differences.³⁶

This brings us back to the question of co-operation and the division of labour between academic disciplines. Consideration of the recent history of scholarship makes clear how many differences are contingent rather than epistemological. To train trainers — teachers, preachers — by concentrating on their obligation to dwell on fundamentals and canonic texts perhaps does not promote innovative research. This is as true for Classical Philology as it is for New Testament Studies. Origins (as the imperial period clearly is for both Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism) resist historicizing more than do later epochs.

Clearly, scholars of various disciplines are more at ease in collaborating in research on late antiquity than on Christian origins. For the history of religion of the Mediterranean and the Euro-African-Asian world around it, the organization of research along the lines of secular and religious history, of general and church history, of Classics and ancient

³² T. Hägg and P. Rousseau *et al.*, *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (2001); A. Busine, 'Gathering sacred words: collections of oracles from pagan sanctuaries to Christian books', in R. M. Piccione and M. Perkams (eds), *Beiträge zur Technik des Sammelns und Kompilierens griechischer Texte von der Antike bis zum Humanismus* (2005), 39–55; C. Marksches, 'Schreiben Christen andere Briefe als Heiden? Zur brieflichen Kommunikation in der kaiserzeitlichen Antike', in U. Peter (ed.), *Mediengesellschaft Antike? Information und Kommunikation vom Alten Ägypten bis Byzanz* (2006), 113–30; L. Zurli and N. Scivoletto, *Anonymi in laudem solis*. (*Anthologia Latina*, c. 389 Riese-385 Shackleton Bailey) (2008).

³³ S. Stern, *Calendar and Community. A History of the Jewish Calendar, Second Century BCE to Tenth Century CE* (2001); see M. R. Salzman, *On Roman Time. The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity* (1990) on the Codex-calendar and J. Rüpke, *A History of the Roman Fasti* (forthcoming).

³⁴ H. Förster, *Die Feier der Geburt Christi in der Alten Kirche. Beiträge zur Erforschung der Anfänge des Epiphanie- und Weihnachtsfests* (2000).

³⁵ See now M. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft. Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (1996); R. Messner, 'Über einige Aufgaben bei der Erforschung der Liturgiegeschichte der Frühen Kirche', in M. Klöckener, B. Kranemann and A. A. Häussling (eds), *Liturgie verstehen: Ansatz, Ziele und Aufgaben der Liturgiewissenschaft* (2008), 207–30; J. M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (2004).

³⁶ cf. E. D. Digeres, *The Making of a Christian Empire. Lactantius & Rome* (2000).

Judaism and Early Christian Studies has become more and more of an obstacle to progress. Closer co-operation is required by the range of material that needs to be deployed and combined. The dearth of early sources on Christian origins, and the wealth of later sources need to be set alongside the knowledge about the majority-by-far culture and its political and legal framework. The lack of sources on deviation and subcultures and the early destruction of sources on alternative religious movements can only be understood in the light of current understandings of the epigraphical habits and conventions, of the shared language, learning, and communicative forms of antiquity. All of us need to take account of anti-religious sentiments and the teleological pitfalls already characteristic of earlier scholarship.³⁷ Contextualization and knowledge of specific traditions, comparison and ideography, are necessary. The history of Christianity is as much a part of the history of religion as it is of classics. Equally, classics and the history of religion are parts of the history of Christianity. Disciplinary specialization is necessary, but isolation no longer produces good scholarship.

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³⁷ See J. Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (1978).