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wine skins, and will return suddenly to his sanctuary.

The Rabbinic linkage to ben Perez thus expands the scope of this prophecy (which describes the first coming of Jesus, not so much in terms of his substitutionary death, but how it impacts on Jews, Gentiles and the people of God) and looks to the completion of all things. Through this linkage, Perez remains a positive figure for the Jewish nation, and the triumph of the original prophecy is not misplaced. For a hurting people who wonder how Jesus was the Messiah for them, this prophecy is a powerful word from the Lord.

In the end, what do we have? A Messiah who desires to meet with us, who bursts through our walls of separation and will not allow us to deal with him from a distance, who will not interact with us via an intermediary such as the Law, but desires to see us face to face.

*A garden locked is my sister, my  
bride, a garden locked, a fountain  
sealed...*

*I come to my garden, my sister, my  
bride; I gather my myrrh with my  
spice..*

*Make haste my beloved, and be like  
a gazelle or a young stag on the  
mountain of spices.*

# From Patristics to the Study of Early Christianity

Wendy Elgersma Helleman

**Keywords:** *Archaeology, dogma, feminism, Greco-Roman antiquity, Gnosticism, Judaism, orthodoxy, philosophy, reformers, university.*

The earliest years of Christianity have held a special interest throughout the centuries. Early Christian leaders and authors have been highly esteemed, not far below the writers of Scripture themselves. But the period of the Reformation, when the reformers accused the Roman Catholic Church of betraying its heritage, must be noted for its scholarly attention to this period.

That is also the context in which 'Patristics' or 'Patristic Studies' was first recognized as a specific academic focus and scholarly discipline. The title reflects its central focus on the *Fathers* (*patres* in Greek) of Christian thought and belief. The term 'Father' was an honorary title, given to important teachers, bishops and writers who helped guide, shape and develop Christianity in those early years.<sup>1</sup> As a

title, 'Father' may reflect a degree of affection, based on the apostle Paul calling himself a 'father' to the Corinth congregation which he brought into being.<sup>2</sup> It certainly reflects common acceptance of early leaders as 'orthodox' for teaching which was widely accepted on the principle of apostolic succession, and in agreement with authentic traditions handed down from the apostles. It also reflects commendation for holiness of life.<sup>3</sup>

The list of such leaders in the west includes figures like Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, and in the east: Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius and the Cappadocians. As such *Patristics* represents an abbreviation for *Theologia Patristica*, further abbreviated to *Patrologia* or *Patrology*, as the study of writings of the early Christian Fathers which have had a significant impact on the early Chris-

<sup>2</sup> Frances Young, 'The Greek Fathers', 135-47 in Ian Hazlett ed., *Early Christianity. Origins and Evolution to AD 600* (London: SPCK, 1991), 135-6.

<sup>3</sup> Drobner, *The Fathers*, 3-4.

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 3.

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tian church, and on the decisions made in general assemblies, whether at localised synods or ecumenical councils.

When we turn to contemporary academic institutions, it is clear that the term 'Patristics' is no longer commonly applied to the study of early Christianity, its leaders or even the relevant texts. The term is still current at highly traditional universities like Oxford in the UK; it is probably no accident that the large international conferences on Patristic Studies held every four years are hosted by Oxford University. We still find the term, or its near equivalent, 'Patrology', also in reference books which cover the traditional canon of writings of early Christian leaders, as in Johannes Quasten's multi-volume *Patrology* (1950-). But when we turn to contemporary academic study of this material in faculties of theology, seminaries or universities, we are more likely to discover the venue for such study as part of 'Church History', or the 'History of the Early Church'. At most universities such material will be covered by the study of 'Early Christianity', and in the context of a department of Religious Studies.

The present article hopes to make a contribution by tracking these important changes, the thought-patterns which determined the direction of change, and the factors which motivated them. It will also explore the impact of these transitions on contemporary scholarship on early Christianity. Scholars who seek to provide a constructive contribution in this field of studies would do well to recognize the changes for what they are. Understanding these transitions is the first step toward addressing the numerous issues which are raised by current ap-

proaches and methodologies.<sup>4</sup>

## I Renaissance and Reformation

The various textual sources of Christianity began to be studied more critically at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation. In this context *Patristics* as we know it today came into its own, particularly with the need to prepare the respective texts for printed editions (after 1450). Also important was the demise of the eastern Roman empire with the fall of Constantinople (1453), giving impetus for an exodus of scholars into Italy, bringing along with them a treasury of ancient Greek literature, Christian and pagan. These scholars could now pass on the knowledge of the Greek language to the Europeans for whom Greek had become a dead language, teaching them to read the texts for themselves.<sup>5</sup> New study of ancient pagan authors accompanied renewed interest in early Christian authors. Before that time, only the most important works of the Fathers had been available in Latin, particularly as *Florilegia*, or collections of favourite passages and excerpts from church councils, papal decrees, or commentaries on the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

With Martin Luther's (1483-1546)

4 I have greatly appreciated access to the libraries of the University of Toronto in the preparation of this article for publication, and express my thanks to colleagues at the Department of Classics for facilitating use of these excellent resources.

5 Irena Backus, 'The Early Church in the Renaissance and Reformation', 291-303 in Hazlett, *Early Christianity*, 289-90.

6 Backus, 'The Early Church', 300.

publication of theses in Wittenberg (1517), and eventual separation of Protestant Churches from the Catholic Church of Rome, the Reformation had a significant impact on patristic scholarship. Luther and the reformers regarded the contemporary Catholic expression of the faith as a corruption of the purity of early conditions. They placed the blame on syncretism, or adaptation to pagan Greco-Roman culture of late antiquity. The reformers demanded a return to the roots of Christianity (*ad fontes*), back to the Scriptures, and back to the simplicity of worship and practice from the time of the apostles and the early church.<sup>7</sup> Appeal to the authority of Scripture challenged the dominant argument from 'tradition'. The Catholic historian, Caesar Baronius (1538-1607), responded to the challenge by publishing the 14-volume *Ecclesiastical Annals*, arguing for the Roman church as true recipient of the Christian tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Roman Catholic scholars were also engaged in the publication of works of the Fathers; we have only to think of the significant critical work of Erasmus (1469-1536), in preparing the printed New Testament, the *Textus Receptus* (1516), as the text on which the reformers would base their translations into the vernacular.<sup>9</sup> Study of patristic

writings was positively encouraged in the territories of the reformers where early Christian practice was regarded as a model for church liturgy, government and discipline. In the debate on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, both Zwingli (1484-1531) and Calvin (1509-1564) cited the Fathers in support of their own teaching and practice. Zwingli appealed to Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) on the symbolic presence, and Luther responded by challenging his interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Calvin acknowledged that not all the Fathers would agree on issues like the sacraments, but his prefatory appeal to the king of France in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), does use patristic witness to argue that the teachings of the reformers is the same as that of the Fathers.<sup>11</sup>

As a discipline, Patristics was established when the Protestant Johannes Gerhard (d. 1673) published the *Patrologia*, subtitled 'On the Life and Work of early Christian Church Teachers'.<sup>12</sup> Ongoing interest for early Christianity in subsequent years is evident from publication of critical editions of the works of the Fathers. At the time, the preoccupation of patristic scholarship was closely intertwined with that of biblical studies, particularly the study of the New Testament, and study of pagan classical Greco-Roman authors like Virgil, or Cicero.

Press, 1964), 64.

10 Backus, 'The Early Church', 294.

11 See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), 20-40, especially 28-36. See also Backus, 'The Early Church', 293, 301-302.

12 Drobner, *The Fathers*, 5.

7 On this theme, see W. E. Helleman, 'Epilogue', 429-511, in W. E. Helleman, ed., *Hellenization Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1994), 429-30.

8 Josef Lössl, *The Early Church: History and Memory* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 34-5.

9 See Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament* (London: Oxford University

Interest in early Christianity was sparked also by new manuscripts of the Bible as these became available. Particularly important was the Codex Alexandrinus in 1628, a gift to the king of England from the patriarch of Constantinople. This famous manuscript included an early letter of the Roman bishop Clement. Equally significant was the 1646 publication of the genuine letters of Ignatius by the Dutch scholar Isaac Voss.<sup>13</sup>

## II Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Developments

During these years the heirs of the reformers continued to look to the Fathers for an authentic interpretation of Scripture, but even the nonconformist John Wesley (1703-1791) can be cited for such appreciation.<sup>14</sup> In the seventeenth century the key English universities, Oxford and Cambridge, became important centres of patristic scholarship and critical emendation of the text of the New Testament. Richard Bentley (1662-1742) of Cambridge used his expertise in emendation of classical texts, together with his knowledge of the Fathers, to establish principles for reconstructing the New Testament text.<sup>15</sup> The works of J.J. Griesbach (1745-1812), Karl Lachmann (1793-1851) and Count Tischendorf (1815-1874) were also important on these issues.

During these centuries the centre of scholarly study began to move back

to Europe, particularly to Germany, where Enlightenment studies demonstrated a new critical approach to historical evidence.<sup>16</sup> Substantive advancement in philosophy from Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Georg W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) would also make its own significant impact on theology, and influence understanding of early Christianity.<sup>17</sup> The Enlightenment spirit certainly pervaded the influential work of Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) and his conclusion that Christianity in late antiquity shows the triumph of barbarism, error and corruption. His massive history of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was based on the reliable 16-volume work of L.S. le Nain de Tillemont (1637-1698); but he also used the *Ecclesiastical History* of the eighteenth century rationalist historian J.L. Mosheim, who regarded transcendent factors as irrelevant for church history before Constantine.<sup>18</sup>

From this period, the works of the Fathers would be read with more attention to the historical aspect, and for their witness to the understanding of the church in a particular era. At newly founded universities such study would also be supported by a more profes-

sionalized context of scholarship with the development of scholarly tools like critical texts, and journals.<sup>19</sup> This all came at a time of rising interest in the sciences, as the companion of industrialisation, with a trend which would eventually express itself in antagonism to theology itself.<sup>20</sup>

## III The Nineteenth Century: Historical Criticism

The impact of historical criticism addressed to the Scriptures can be seen in the revolutionary work of D.F. Strauss (1808-1874), *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1835). Almost any event deemed 'supernatural' was interpreted as 'mythical'; early Christian devotion to Jesus was included in this category. Indeed, the life of Jesus could not be reduced to known categories of history.<sup>21</sup> Equally influential was F.C. Baur (1792-1860), professor at Tübingen. As a disciple of Strauss, Baur agreed with him on the supernatural and miraculous as essentially unknowable because it is beyond historical evidence. His purely historical interpretation of the Scriptures rejected any human knowledge of a transcendent, personal God who might intervene in this world.

On early Christianity, Baur's approach is noted for applying an Hegelian dialectic of three stages: thesis (Judaic/Petrine Christianity); antithesis (Pauline/Hellenic Christianity); and synthesis (Catholic Christianity, in its response to Gnosticism). The approach is responsible for some ab-

surd conclusions on the classification of New Testament documents, and the late dating of these to the end of the second century.<sup>22</sup> Such a dialectical understanding would continue to impact study of early Christianity through its use by Harnack.<sup>23</sup>

More constructively, the nineteenth century witnessed the massive collection by Jean-Paul Migne of patristic textual sources in Greek and Latin, the *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, a valuable resource running to hundreds of volumes, even though many of these texts would still need considerable attention in critical editing of the manuscripts. The series gave an important stimulus to translation of the Fathers into modern languages.<sup>24</sup>

Equally important was 19th century editing of patristic texts gathered by Benedictine Maurist fathers, who had begun to publish the works of Augustine in 1679. In the eighteenth century they continued to provide editions of John Chrysostom, Basil, Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyprian, Origen, and Gregory of Nazianzus. Many of these works would be reprinted by Migne; the *Patrologia Latina* came in 218 volumes during the period 1844-1864, and *Patrologia Graeca* in 166 volumes during 1857-1866.<sup>25</sup>

In the UK, the response to Baur and

<sup>13</sup> Robert M. Grant, *After the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 4-6.

<sup>14</sup> Young, 'The Greek Fathers', 485.

<sup>15</sup> Neill, *The Interpretation*, 65.

<sup>16</sup> Neill, *The Interpretation*, 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> See Neill, *The Interpretation*, 2-5.

<sup>18</sup> See Lössl, *The Early Church*, 37. Elizabeth Clark notes Mosheim's contribution of incorporating primary sources which were difficult to access at the time, a practice also characterizing Gieseler's *Text-Book of Church History* (1824), and the massive *General History of the Christian Religion and Church* by Berlin professor A. Neander. See Clark's 'From Patristics to Early Christian Studies', 7-41 in Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>19</sup> Clark, 'From Patristics', 8.

<sup>20</sup> Lössl, *The Early Church*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Neill, *The Interpretation*, 12-16.

<sup>22</sup> Neill, *The Interpretation*, 24-25, 27-28.

<sup>23</sup> Glenn F. Chesnut, 1988, 'A Century of Patristic Studies, 1888-1988', 36-73 in Henry W. Bowden ed., *A Century of Church History: The Legacy of Philip Schaff* (Carbondale: S. Illinois University Press, 1988), 38; and Neill, *The Interpretation*, 19-21. On Harnack, see Helleman, 'Epilogue', 437, and 444-5.

<sup>24</sup> Lössl, *The Early Church*, 38.

<sup>25</sup> Clark, 'From Patristics', 8, 10.



the Tübingen school came in the form of careful scholarship on early Christian witness for dating the books of the New Testament. J.B. Lightfoot (1828-1889), B.F. Westcott (1825-1901) and F.J.A. Hort (1828-1892) collaborated in critical investigation of the claims of the German scholars.<sup>26</sup> Their efforts to address the weaknesses of historical aspects of the Baur position took the format of commentary on the New Testament.<sup>27</sup> Because dating of New Testament books relied heavily on citation by the Fathers, Lightfoot worked on the authenticity of the seven letters of Ignatius (recognised by Voss), and the first epistle of Clement, dating these from the late first and early second century. Because both Ignatius and Clement cite many New Testament documents as already in circulation in their own time, this work was crucial for their conclusions in rejecting Baur's late dating of New Testament books, after AD 130.<sup>28</sup>

The results of Lightfoot's work were published in *The Apostolic Fathers*, which remains in print in the collaborative edition of Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer (1891).<sup>29</sup> Lightfoot also addressed questions regarding the newly discovered *Didachê*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, with its presentation

of a moral catechism and discussion of church order. Lightfoot's dating of this work to the final years of the first century AD is now widely accepted.<sup>30</sup>

Equally important in affirming the date and authenticity of NT books like Luke/Acts was the archaeological work of Sir William Ramsay (1851-1939) on Greek inscriptions of ancient Asia Minor, through which he was able to corroborate Luke's thorough acquaintance with exact titles of imperial and local officials of the time.<sup>31</sup> Ramsay's work is a small indication of the growing significance of field work and archaeology for patristic scholarship, particularly in terms of the papyrus manuscript finds in the Egyptian desert, as at the trash heap of Oxyrynchus (1897).<sup>32</sup>

Significant work on deciphering and publishing these finds must be attributed to B.P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, who paved the way for a complete re-evaluation of the common Hellenistic Greek language, the *Koinê*; the results are evident in J.H. Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek* (1908) and the grammar text of F. Blass and A. DeBrunner (1931), translated into English by R.W. Funk (1961).<sup>33</sup> While the Oxford Movement (with E. Pusey and J. Henry Newman) began publishing the *Oxford Library of the Fathers* (1835-1888), their 'high church' orientation would be balanced in Protestant Scotland by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, who published texts relevant for evangelical interests, with the *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* (1864). At this time

we also note the growing impact in the UK of German critical work through the *Journal for Theological Studies*, edited by Henry B. Swete (from 1899).<sup>34</sup>

Toward the end of the 19th century, in Germany the approach of Baur was taken up by Albert Ritschl (1822-1889) and Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930). Their efforts served to maintain Baur's influence on the study of early Christianity, particularly in terms of the historical-critical reading of the Bible, which remained dominant well into the twentieth century. Ritschl's 'Theology and Metaphysics' (1881), shows the influence of the contemporary rejection of a Platonist epistemology for patristic theology, and Bismarck's attack on Roman Catholicism within the German Empire (1871-1887).<sup>35</sup>

Harnack agreed that patristic theology had erroneously subordinated the truth to philosophical ideas of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>36</sup> But to the extent that since Aquinas, Catholic theology was based on the philosophy of Aristotle, Harnack's views also contributed to an anti-Catholic agenda, feeding Protestant suspicion of 'Catholicism' in anything beyond the New Testament itself.

Catholic scholars themselves would also use early Christianity as a weapon to encourage reform. Although Pope Leo XIII's (1878-1903) papal bull, *Aeterni Patris* (1879), called on the study of Thomas Aquinas to unify Catholic thought in the face of contemporary challenges, the *Histoire des dogmes* (1905-1912) of the Neo-Thom-

ist Joseph Tixeront agreed at least in part with Harnack on the Greek philosophical form of dogma as an inevitable development, even while appealing (against Harnack) to the doctrine of 'substantial immutability of dogma' as revealed truth.<sup>37</sup>

In his *Histoire ancienne de l'église* (1912), on the other hand, Louis Duchesne (1843-1922) used a modernist perspective and teleological approach on church development. Rejecting rigid Thomist scholasticism, he criticized Platonism as it affected early Christian teaching (in Justin, Clement of Alexandria or Origen). Although he affirmed the growing role of the bishop, Duchesne also accented the need for collegiality.<sup>38</sup>

Harnack did agree with Lightfoot on the dating of the New Testament. His impressive work on *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity* also reveals a careful approach on the historical data,<sup>39</sup> although the contrast between Gentile and Jewish Christianity would remain a significant feature of his approach.<sup>40</sup> Appreciative of the significant work of Edwin Hatch (1835-1889), *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (1881), Harnack translated the work into German. When Hatch also published *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (1889), a study of the deep influence of Greek thought and cultural patterns on early Christi-

26 Grant, *After the New Testament*, 6.

27 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 33-35.

28 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 47-50, 53, 57. The results of Lightfoot's work were published in *The Apostolic Fathers*, still in print in the collaborative edition of Lightfoot and Harmer (1891); see also Holmes, 1989, rev.2006.

29 For a recent revision and reprint, see Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006 [1989]).

30 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 60, and 92.

31 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 141-3.

32 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 146.

33 See Neill, *The Interpretation*, 149.

34 Clark, 'From Patristics', 13.

35 On Ritschl's essay, see Chesnut, 'A Century', 39-40; on anti-Catholic policies, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 9.

36 Chesnut, 'A Century', 41.

37 Chesnut, 'A Century', 51.

38 Lössl, *The Early Church*, 39; Chesnut, 'A Century', 48-50.

39 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 57-8.

40 See Helleman, 'Epilogue', 437; also Wm. V. Rowe, 'Adolf von Harnack and the Concept of Hellenization', 69-98 in Helleman, *Hellenization Revisited*, 72-3.

anity, specifically in logic, rhetoric and metaphysics.<sup>41</sup> Harnack provided additional material for the German translation (1892).

Harnack's own approach is clear from *The History of Dogma (Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, 1886-1889; translated by N. Buchanan, 1894-1899)*; he presents dogma as the 'work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel'. According to Harnack, Christian belief was expressed in forms borrowed from non-Christian Greek philosophy, even in the first century.<sup>42</sup> A living faith, transformed into creeds and rituals, revealed the influence of pagan Greek philosophy.

This was also the underlying theme of Harnack's immensely popular lectures of 1899-1900, *What is Christianity? (Das Wesen des Christentums?)*, which sought to make Jesus relevant for contemporary Protestantism by rejecting the theological terms of (Catholic) dogma; Jesus was presented as a modern Martin Luther and advocate of spiritual freedom. In his response, *L'Evangile et l'église* (1902), the Catholic Alfred Loisy objected to Harnack's 'essentialising' of the core of early Christianity.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Harnack's anti-Catholic rhetoric takes us back to early post-Reformation controversies.<sup>44</sup>

In his eight-volume *History of the Christian Church* (1858-1890), the American scholar Philip Schaff (1819-1893) provided a dissenting voice. With a more ecumenical approach to

Protestantism and Catholicism, as two branches growing from a common trunk, Schaff was clearly ahead of his time.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the study of early Christianity throughout the twentieth century continued to witness the deep impact of Harnack's work, even while scholars refined or refuted his positions.

As late as 1965 Joh. Munck complained of positions of the Tübingen school on the Jewish/Gentile division of Christianity as these continued to play a role in hindering understanding of early Christianity in Palestine, and long after they had been roundly refuted.<sup>46</sup> In examining the 'Greek spirit' which influenced Cappadocian Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa, Werner Jaeger's *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (1962) presented patristic theology as a positive culmination of Greek thought, and paved the way for more detailed studies of key philosophical terms in Greek by G.C. Stead (*Divine Substance*, 1977) or J.M. Dillon (*The Middle Platonists*, 1977).<sup>47</sup>

The ongoing significance of Greco-Roman antiquity, as indispensable basis for patristic scholarship, was not lost on modern scholars like Peter Brown, whose study of Augustine's life and writings (1967) incorporated a broadened socio-political understanding of the ancient world.<sup>48</sup>

45 Chesnut, 'A Century', 41.

46 Johannes Munck, 'Pauline Research Since Schweitzer', 166-77 in P. Hyatt ed., *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 168-9.

47 Chesnut, 'A Century', 41-2, and 43.

48 Peter R.L. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

41 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 137-8.

42 Chesnut, 'A Century', 36-8. For recent analysis, see Rowe, 'Adolf von Harnack', 69-98.

43 Clark, 'From Patristics', 12.

44 Neill, *The Interpretation*, 131-6.

Harnack's understanding of Judaism in the New Testament and early Christianity has also received extensive attention and correction. In *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883), Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889) had concerned himself with the Jewish background of the gospels, including relevant rabbinic materials.<sup>49</sup> On this theme, the 'history of religions' school of thought is represented by W. Bousset (1865-1920), *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter (The Religion of the Jews in New Testament Times, 1903)*.<sup>50</sup>

The debt of early biblical study to Jewish exegetical work on the OT was central to the work of the Catholic scholar Jean Daniélou, who focused on the influence of Judaism, alongside that of Greco-Roman culture. Daniélou also provided a corrective approach on topics of apocalyptic eschatology, angelology and demonology; these were aspects of early Jewish Christianity which had escaped Harnack's assessment of early Christianity (as too 'supernatural' or 'mythical').<sup>51</sup> Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck provided an indispensable scholarly tool with their commentary on the New Testament (1922-1961), incorporating materials from the Jewish Talmud and Midrash.

49 On Alfred Edersheim's work, see Neill, *The Interpretation*, 294-5.

50 See also W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1948; repr. 1955, 1980, 1998).

51 On Daniélou's *Theology of Jewish Christianity* (1958), see Chesnut, 'A Century', 43-4.

## IV The Twentieth Century

The theme of Jewish Christianity and the relationship between Jews and Christians would continue to receive considerable attention, particularly after the dramatic discovery in 1947 of the Dead Sea scrolls in the caves of Qumran in Palestine. Aside from texts of the OT, these scrolls feature a 'Teacher of Righteousness', and include commentaries, a *Manual of Discipline*, and *Psalms of Thanksgiving* as well as the apocalyptic work, *The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*. As the library of an ascetic community of the first century BC, these texts added significantly to our acquaintance with Judaism beyond the information available from Philo of Alexandria and Josephus.<sup>52</sup>

Post-World War II studies of Judaism, reflecting international dismay at the Holocaust, typically approach Judaism with assumptions quite different from those of Harnack. Particularly helpful in this connection is the impressive work of E.P. Sanders on Palestinian Judaism (1977), and the ongoing reassessment of Pharisees and Rabbis by Jacob Neusner (1971, 1973, etc.).<sup>53</sup> Martin Hengel's *Judaism and Hellenism* (1974), has likewise been significant in establishing the Hellenistic character of postexilic Judaism after the death of

52 For English translation of the scrolls, see Geza Vermès, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965/1962). On the scrolls, see also Neill, *The Interpretation*, 297-312.

53 See L. Michael White, 'Adolf Harnack and the "Expansion" of Early Christianity', *Second Century* (1985/86) 5.2: 97-127, especially 107-8.

Alexander the Great (323 BC).<sup>54</sup>

Patristics studies in the twentieth century have also been deeply influenced by the discovery (1945-1946) of the Nag Hammadi library in the upper Nile region of Egypt, not far from the location of the ancient Pachomian monastery. As with the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, the story of the thirteen leather-bound volumes and forty-nine Gnostic documents has been recounted many times. The treatises were eventually made available for study in facsimile format, and in translation (1977).<sup>55</sup> Their presence stimulated new discussion of older gnostic documents like *The Gospel of Thomas*. It was now possible to cross-examine Harnack's assessment of gnostic views as an 'acute secularising, or Hellenising' of Christianity, which rejected the Old Testament, while the more gradual 'gnosticizing' process of Catholic theology retained the OT.<sup>56</sup>

From his earliest scholarly career Harnack had considered Gnosticism a product of Greek philosophical thought. But there were other approaches. The school of comparative religion, or the history of religion, associated with Richard Reitzenstein (1861-1931) and Wilhelm Bousset (1865-1920), turned

to Near Eastern thought and belief to explain Gnosticism. These scholars regarded Gnosticism as much older than second century Christianity.<sup>57</sup> They looked for gnostic origins in Persian (Iranian/Zoroastrian) religious dualism of light and darkness, with a pessimist outlook on our world, and a myth of redemption (to be supported from Mandaean beliefs). A combination of this approach with Martin Heidegger's existentialist view on human alienation in our world and the need for freedom from forces that would enslave, marks the interpretation of ancient Gnosticism in the work of Hans Jonas.<sup>58</sup>

While German scholars focused on gnostic origins in non-Jewish and pre-Christian *gnôsis*,<sup>59</sup> English scholarship on the Nag Hammadi documents continued to examine gnostic origins in heterodox Judaism.<sup>60</sup> The Dutch scholar, G. Quispel, also questioned pre-Christian Gnosticism in his work, *Gnosis als Weltreligion* (1951). He recognised that Gnostics behaved like Christian heretics, even if Gnostic views show little inner connection with events pivotal for historically-based Christianity: the life, death and resur-

<sup>57</sup> Neill, *The Interpretation*, 160-4, and 177-8.

<sup>58</sup> Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (1954/1934), appeared in English translation as *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (1963/1958); see also Neill, *The Interpretation*, 175-6.

<sup>59</sup> See Chesnut, 'A Century', 62; and Neill, *The Interpretation*, 179.

<sup>60</sup> Neill (*The Interpretation*, 180) also cites R.McL. Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem* (1958) among scholars looking to Judaism, and particularly with the development of eschatological thought after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

<sup>54</sup> See also Larry W. Hurtado, 'Martin Hengel's Impact on English-speaking Scholarship', *Expository Times* 120.2 (2008), 70-6. Elizabeth Clark ('From Patristics', 21) alerts us to important recent work on Judaism by Wayne Meeks and Robert L. Wilken (1978, 1992), Ross Kraemer (1992), Miriam S. Taylor (1995), and Paula Fredriksen (1999, 2006).

<sup>55</sup> J.M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden: Brill; New York: Harper & Row, 1996/1977).

<sup>56</sup> See Chesnut, 'A Century', 62, on Harnack's *History of Dogma* (1971) 1.227-8.

rection of Jesus.<sup>61</sup>

Recognition of an underlying current of anti-Judaism in many gnostic documents also led to a search for origins at the outer fringes of Christianity. The American (Episcopalian) scholar Robert M. Grant, noted for his *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (1959), and *Gnosticism: A Source Book of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period* (1961), pointed to the absence of a redeemer figure in pre-Christian or Greco-Roman religion, and realised that the relevant model is to be found in Jesus. But the question of origins cannot be solved without clarity on the distinctive features of Gnosticism itself.<sup>62</sup>

On these issues too, outstanding work was done by R.M. Grant (1959, 1961).<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, study of Platonism and Pythagoreanism in late antiquity led scholars like John Dillon to a new appreciation of Harnack's approach; his work, *The Middle Platonists* (1977), depicts Gnosticism in terms of a 'Platonic underworld'.<sup>64</sup>

## 1 Archaeological work

Developments in archaeology have made a significant impact on the direction of patristic studies in the twentieth century, taking the discipline well beyond a focus on literary documents. Indeed, recent work in archaeology has uncovered a wealth of materials: papyri, inscriptions, church building architecture, and wall or mosaic decoration. These have certainly helped to illus-

trate the nature and spread of early Christianity throughout the Mediterranean world. After the challenges posed by writings of D.F. Strauss (1808-1874) and Ernest Renan (1823-1892) on the life of Jesus, scholars also turned to archaeology in a desire to prove (or disprove) the biblical records. With a similar concern to confirm Luke's account of the travels of Paul, W.M. Ramsay followed contemporary interest in Turkey (as the ancient Asia Minor) after the treaty of Berlin (1878); these explorations led to the significant discovery of Jewish inscriptions, as mentioned above.<sup>65</sup>

For twentieth century English scholarship, the outstanding contribution is that of W.H.C. Frend, working in the ancient villages of Numidia (present-day Algeria), in North Africa. Frend recognizes that modern archaeology as it pertains to early Christianity can be dated back to Renaissance archaeological exploration of the catacombs in Rome by members of the Roman Academy.<sup>66</sup>

As a serious discipline, archaeological excavation began in the mid-nineteenth century in the Mediterranean area, in countries like Algeria, where such work was made possible through the French colonial regime. Here archaeologists had amazing success in uncovering temples, triumphal arches, baths, colonnades, houses and churches, all intact. The work was particularly significant in uncovering evidence

<sup>65</sup> W.H.C. Frend, 'Archeology and Patristic Studies', 9-21 in E.A. Livingstone ed. *Studia Patristica* 18 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications: 1985), 12.

<sup>66</sup> Frend, 'Archeology', 10-11; and Elizabeth Clark, 'From Patristics', 8.

<sup>61</sup> Neill, *The Interpretation*, 180.

<sup>62</sup> See Neill, *The Interpretation*, 175.

<sup>63</sup> Chesnut, 'A Century', 55.

<sup>64</sup> Chesnut, 'A Century', 62-3.



of groups on the fringes of Christianity, like the Donatists, excluded from the orthodox communities and recognised through inscriptions from their watchword, *Deo Laudes*.

Archaeological evidence on these schismatic groups revealed socio-economic conditions which reinforced martyr cults, in defiance of Roman authorities (pagan or Christian); the archaeological remains provide significant clues to the tenacity of Donatist resistance in late antiquity.<sup>67</sup>

## 2 Studies in the modern university context

Archaeological discoveries multiplied throughout the twentieth century, with increasingly careful methods of excavation; but finds could also be haphazard or incidental, like the postwar discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls or the Nag Hammadi documents. While archaeology has contributed substantially to new understanding of early Christianity in North Africa, evidence on relevant socio-economic conditions also helped to link the study of early Christianity with the broader themes of Greco-Roman history.<sup>68</sup>

For Patristics this meant study of early Christianity as another (if important) contribution to the historical beginnings of European medieval culture.<sup>69</sup> And it also meant that early Christianity would be studied as just one more component in the emerging history of Europe.<sup>70</sup> This is clear

from studies of Greco-Roman antiquity which noted the impact of pagan culture on Christianity, like C.N. Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture*, or W.H.C. Frend's *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (1952).

We find this also in the study of ancient rhetoric as it influenced the progress of Christianity, detailed by G. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (1983), or the *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (1984). Also significant in this genre are: A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (1963); F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy* (1966); F.E. Peters, *Harvest of Hellenism: A History of the Near East from Alexander the Great to the Triumph of Christianity* (1970); and A.E. Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (1976).<sup>71</sup>

These publications reflect an approach to early Christianity fostered in North American universities where early Christianity is taught within the context of a 'religious studies' or 'classical studies' program; here Christianity loses the privileged status it enjoys in other contexts, the seminary or theological faculty.<sup>72</sup>

At the same time it is clear that significant scholarship on early Christianity is now based on other academic disciplines: history, sociology, or literary criticism. Because of its support for

the relevant languages (Greek, Latin), departments of classical studies could make a significant contribution. But we must recognize that, aside from an older tradition still alive at universities like Oxford, the 'Classics' have been marked by a fairly sharp divide between pagan and Christian authors; early Christian writers have not usually been included.<sup>73</sup>

In recent decades it is interesting to note some reversal of that trend, with the disappearance of older divisions between classical studies and the study of theology or religion, psychology, and sociology.<sup>74</sup> The institutional connections of many current leading scholars in 'Patristics': Timothy Barnes, Peter Brown, Averil Cameron, Robin Lane Fox, Ramsay MacMullen, Robert Markus and Mark Vessey, are with more specialised disciplines, like late ancient history, literary theory or anthropology.<sup>75</sup>

Patristic studies had already shifted its focus from the written texts of the Fathers to study of the 'early church' as such in the context of nineteenth century Protestant European universities; study of the early church, with significant attention to social realities, could easily be subsumed in the study of 'Church History' as an academic dis-

cipline.<sup>76</sup> The appearance of significant 'material' evidence from archaeological discoveries, introduced by scholars like Frend, motivated new directions in the study of Christianity, particularly in the direction of concern for the social environment, the actual lives and careers of Christians, thereby fostering an interweaving of literary and archaeological evidence.<sup>77</sup> And Frend capitalised on the attraction of archaeology at a time when Harnack's influence meant far less scholarly enthusiasm for edicts of the church councils or teachings of the Fathers.<sup>78</sup>

This was also an important factor in a further transition in the discipline, from being subsumed under 'Church History' to a broader study of 'Early Christianity'. Especially in departments of religious studies specific use of the term 'Patristics' would be abandoned, as a reflection of goals relevant for ecclesiastical 'orthodoxy', if not 'male' concerns, but irrelevant for scholars pursuing work at secular universities.<sup>79</sup> Archaeology made a significant contribution in establishing such studies on a non-dogmatic basis: questions of orthodoxy or heresy were far less relevant in assessing archaeological discoveries.<sup>80</sup>

Discoveries like those of Qumran or Nag Hammadi, alongside the accumulation of the archaeological witness,

<sup>73</sup> W. E. Helleman, ed., *Christianity and the Classics: the Acceptance of a Heritage* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1990), 13-30.

<sup>74</sup> Chesnut, 'A Century', 61.

<sup>75</sup> David Brakke, 'The Early Church in North America: Late Antiquity, Theory, and the History of Christianity', *Church History* 71.3 (2002), 473-91, especially 475-6; also Clark, 'From Patristics', 16.

<sup>76</sup> Clark, 'From Patristics', 9; Lössl, *The Early Church*, 13-14.

<sup>77</sup> W.H.C. Frend, *Saints and Sinners in the Early Church: Differing and Conflicting Traditions in the First Six Centuries* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 18.

<sup>78</sup> Frend, 'Archeology', 9-10.

<sup>79</sup> Clark, 'From Patristics', 14.

<sup>80</sup> Frend, *Saints and Sinners*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Frend, 'Archeology', 14.

<sup>68</sup> Frend, 'Archeology', 14-15.

<sup>69</sup> Frend, 'Archeology', 9-10; and Clark, 'From Patristics', 16.

<sup>70</sup> For some of the implications of this move,

see Lössl, *The Early Church*, 2-4.

<sup>71</sup> Chesnut, 'A Century', 60-1.

<sup>72</sup> On the implications, see Chesnut, 'A Century', 61; and Lössl, *The Early Church*, 12-13.



have served to change the nature of the study of early Christianity dramatically in the course of the twentieth century. In response to sectarian evidence of the Dead Sea scrolls, scholars began speaking of *Judaisms*; the response to closer acquaintance with Nag Hammadi gnostic documents was to speak of *Christianities*.

For Christianity such an approach can be found in Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (1934; translated 1971). While Bauer professed impartiality and scholarly objectivity, he clearly emphasized a diversity within early Christianity, as the matrix from which an 'orthodox' understanding developed. According to Bauer, 'orthodox' Christianity was initially in a minority, and able to impose itself only with later developments.<sup>81</sup>

In the last few decades, the work of Bauer has been critiqued, with evidence that these heretical movements were neither as early, nor as strong as Bauer alleged.<sup>82</sup> Although Bauer was certainly not the first to devote 'non-partisan' attention to 'heretics', his work was significant for a shift in patristic studies to 'apology' on behalf of early *haireisis*.<sup>83</sup>

Bauer's approach owed its success to support from major liberal theologians like Rudolf Bultmann and Helmut Koester. Widespread attention to the 1971 English translation of his work can be attributed to a factor of timing—it occurred when scholars were also focused on the Nag Hammadi documents for acquaintance with early 'heretics'. Bauer's argument for priority of heretical positions may well have reflected a desire to give legitimacy to 'unorthodox' forms of Christianity of his own time, a factor compounded by modern contempt for power strategies used by 'winners'.<sup>84</sup> Among more recent scholarly work on Gnosticism, Elaine Pagels' *Gnostic Paul* (1975) and *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979) should be noted for building on the approach of Koester and Bauer.<sup>85</sup>

### 3 New directions: women in early Christianity

It is clear that during the last decades of the twentieth century the development of patristic studies has been characterised by a diversity of emphasis in scholarly principles borrowed from other disciplines (literary criticism, psychology, sociology or anthropology), or in area studies, like Syriac and Coptic Christianity.<sup>86</sup> Particularly significant in that regard are studies on the social and ecclesiastical role of women in early Christianity.

<sup>81</sup> Henry, 'Why', 125-6.

<sup>82</sup> On Pagels, see Chesnut, 'A Century', 63.

<sup>83</sup> On the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Paris, 1903-), and important work by P. Ladeuze, L. Théophile Lefort, J. Lebon, Sebastian Brock and S.H. Griffith, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 13-14.

<sup>81</sup> P. Henry, 'Why is Contemporary Scholarship so Enamored of Ancient Heretics?' in E.A. Livingstone ed., *Studia Patristica* 17.1 (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), 123-6.

<sup>82</sup> For critique of the 'Bauer thesis' by scholars like T. Robinson (1988), see Michel Desjardins, 'Bauer and Beyond: On Recent Scholarly Discussions of Haireisis in the Early Christian Era', *The Second Century* 8 (1991), 65-82, especially 66-8.

<sup>83</sup> On decided sympathy for heretics like the Gnostics by the Pietist scholar Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), see Lössel, *The Early Church*, 36-7.

For this new initiative the work of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has been foundational. Her important book, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1983), focuses on New Testament evidence for participation of women in the circles following Jesus, and the role of women in the house churches established by Paul, as an environment which would provide significant opportunities for women in leadership.<sup>87</sup>

While Schüssler Fiorenza commented on relevant biblical texts, issues of social historical background were addressed by Ross Kraemer (*Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World*, 1992), and Luise Schotroff (*Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, 1995). Significant recent scholarship by Rosemary Ruether, Elizabeth Clark, K.J. Torjesen, Gillian Clark, Elizabeth Castelli, Gail P. Corrington, Virginia Burrus and Verna Harrison has focused on issues of gender, sexuality, asceticism and power.<sup>88</sup>

If women enjoyed a degree of prominence in the earliest years of Christianity, why were they restricted to subordinate roles by the end of the first century? This issue has received considerable attention. A. Jensen (*God's Self-Confident Daughters*, 1996) contends that women's roles as such were not diminished, but (male) writers of the second century took less interest

in these roles.<sup>89</sup> Karen King's publication of *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (1988) focused on prominence of women in gnostic circles.<sup>90</sup> Feminist authors argued that asceticism, as life on the fringes of traditional family structures, gave women considerable freedom from constraints and dangers inherent in marriage and child-bearing.<sup>91</sup>

A different approach was taken by Kate Cooper (*The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity*, 1996), arguing for the positive impact of Christianity on the lives of women through Christian prohibition of abortion and (female) infanticide. While this may have meant a rise in female fertility, Christianity would have provided a counterbalance through the ideal of virginity. Alluding to significant recurrence of a *prohibition* of female leadership in the acts of church councils, Rodney Stark (*The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, 1996) argued that opportunities for women in leadership in the first five centuries were probably more numerous than we might assume.<sup>92</sup>

Assumptions of diminished involvement of women in the church after the first two generations have also been challenged by an important recent study of inscriptions and epigraphical evidence. Ute E. Eisen's *Women Office-*

<sup>89</sup> On Jensen, see also McKechnie, *First Christian Centuries*, 195-7.

<sup>90</sup> On female imagery in the Nag Hammadi texts, see also Clark, 'From Patristics', 22.

<sup>91</sup> For significant bibliography on the theme, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 19-20, and 22.

<sup>92</sup> On this work, see McKechnie, *First Christian Centuries*, 198-201; also Chesnut, 'A Century', 59-60.

<sup>87</sup> See Paul McKechnie, *The First Christian Centuries: Perspectives on the Early Church* (Leicester UK: Apollos/ InterVarsity Press, 2001), 191-2.

<sup>88</sup> Clark, 'From Patristics', 18-19.

holders in *Early Christianity* (2000) provides considerable evidence for women in significant roles as wives of bishops, or patrons for the house church, and even as bishops themselves. Especially among Montanists, women are known to have taken on roles as deacon, presbyter, or bishop, whether they inherited that role as a 'confessor' and survivor of martyrdom, or through ordination.<sup>93</sup> Numerous inscriptions reflect the office of deacon as relatively 'normal' for women before the fourth century.<sup>94</sup>

While historians in the past have typically undervalued the role of women in the history of Christianity, there are now indications that the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. Popular novels like Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), relying in turn on Michael Baigent's *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (1982), provide what are allegedly historical and factual accounts of a matriarchal or feminine principle, suppressed with the repudiation of Gnosticism. Capitalising on public interest in the relatively strong role of women in earliest years of Christianity, such authors have resorted to conspiracy theory to criminalise the intentions of the 'majority' Christian church of the time.<sup>95</sup>

#### 4 The impact of sociology and anthropology

Together with the impact of archaeo-

logical work, study of women's roles from a feminist perspective has been instrumental in encouraging use of principles from other disciplines, like sociology and social anthropology. This approach can be noted in the work of Wayne Meeks and Robert Wilken (*Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*, 1978), emphasising diversity of social structure and status within Christian communities. Also important was the work of Meeks on urban Christianity (*The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 1983); Ramsay MacMullen on social relations (*Roman Social Relations: 50 BC to AD 284*, 1974); and H.C. Kee's *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective* (1980).<sup>96</sup>

A sociological approach was already exemplified in Arnold Toynbee's study of history (1935-1961), and in J.G. Gager's *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (1975), portraying Christianity as a sectarian movement affected by kinship ties, social status and income.<sup>97</sup> Peter Brown's *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (1967), mentioned above, appealed to sociology of religion;<sup>98</sup> his examination of religious belief and power structures in essays like the 'Holy Man in Late Antiquity' (1971), and 'Sorcery and Demons' (1972), also demonstrates the perspective of social anthropology.<sup>99</sup> R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (1987), similarly

<sup>93</sup> See McKechnie, *First Christian Centuries*, 204-6.

<sup>94</sup> McKechnie, *First Christian Centuries*, 207-8.

<sup>95</sup> Lössl, *The Early Church*, 7-8; and Bart Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 141-84.

<sup>96</sup> On seminal work on the social context of early Christianity, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 17.

<sup>97</sup> Chesnut, 'A Century', 58-9.

<sup>98</sup> Chesnut, 'A Century', 57-8.

<sup>99</sup> See Chesnut, 'A Century', 59; also Clark, 'From Patristics', 18.

demonstrates attention to the wider religious, cultural and social context. And we note study of the psychological dimension in the appeal of Christianity in A.D. Nock's widely cited work on *Conversion* (1933, 1939); also in E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (1951).

In recent decades the study of late antiquity has itself emerged as a new focus for scholarship from a variety of perspectives; relevant topics of study include asceticism, law, slavery, literacy, the family, women, children, and heresy.<sup>100</sup> The designation of 'late ancient studies' or 'late antiquity', using no clear or special reference to Christianity, shows the impact of contemporary postmodern critical theory as it questions the 'construction of grand narratives' by 'complicating the relationship between text and context'.<sup>101</sup> New perspectives also encourage study of early Christianity itself as an *interdisciplinary* effort, involving various academic disciplines, like philosophy, classical philology, theology, history, biblical studies and literary theory.<sup>102</sup>

Even so, publications with a more traditional approach, like Henry Chadwick's work on church history or J.N.D. Kelly's work on the creeds, have not outlived their usefulness.<sup>103</sup> The same can be said for ongoing philological

work, exegetical studies, translation and editing of texts, and work in theology. We note Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (1997), or Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: from Plato to Denys* (1981); in history, H.A. Drake, *In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Oration* (1976), or T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (1981).<sup>104</sup>

The contemporary challenge in the study of early Christianity is to formulate a comprehensive view, embracing the multiple kinds of data being collected and studied. For such efforts we note the new journals, like the *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum (Journal of Ancient Christianity)*, from 1997), which seeks to incorporate 'Patristics' into scholarship on Late Antiquity, and promote new methodologies, especially the use of 'material culture', as it serves to link scholars in different fields of study and national contexts.<sup>105</sup>

#### V Conclusions for the 21st century

Patristic studies have clearly undergone substantive changes in the last five decades, greatly expanding the scope of interest and range of methodologies in the interpretation of relevant documents and other kinds of evidence. In his 1988 review of patristic studies of the past century, G.F. Chesnut affirmed patristic studies as an academic

<sup>100</sup> For important bibliography, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 17.

<sup>101</sup> See David Brakke, 'The Early Church in North America: Late Antiquity, Theory, and the History of Christianity', *Church History* 71.3 (2002), 473-91, especially 475-8, and 480-91; also Clark, 'From Patristics', 21.

<sup>102</sup> Gerard Vallée, *The Shaping of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 4-5.

<sup>103</sup> See Brakke, 'The Early Church', 474.

<sup>104</sup> Lössl, *The Early Church*, 40-1; Chesnut, 'A Century', 61; Clark, 'From Patristics', 14.

<sup>105</sup> Clark, 'From Patristics', 10.

discipline that is still alive and well.<sup>106</sup> In this positive assessment, Chesnut compared the Enlightenment-oriented perspective of Harnack with contemporary ecumenical consciousness, as in the work on Christian doctrine by J. Pelikan (1971-). He called special attention to the ongoing constructive role of the study of early Christianity in ecumenical efforts, to bridge the divide between sectors of Christianity which have long been deeply divided, and remain distant from one another.<sup>107</sup>

Such an ecumenical spirit is evident in the comment of Gerard Vallée on scholars of various confessional backgrounds overcoming division when they cooperate in looking at ancient witnesses: 'The discovery of the lush diversity that characterised the early centuries is conducive to greater tolerance and mutual understanding.'<sup>108</sup>

This impetus is also embodied in the international conferences in Patristic Studies inaugurated by F.L. Cross at Oxford in 1951, and held there at four-year intervals since that time. These conferences have done much to stimulate patristic studies across denominational and national boundaries, attracting up to a thousand international scholars for a week of animated discussion. The spirit of cooperation from different theological and denominational perspectives is a living testimony to the possibility of Christian unity, and demonstrates the end of the polemical spirit of nineteenth century scholarship.

If we examine the context in which

such studies are now hosted, we note the transfer of locale from the faculties of theology which once held the honour of being regarded as the 'queen' of the sciences within the medieval universities, to specifically-founded theological schools and seminaries of Protestant churches, and finally the modern secular universities with their departments of classical and religious study.

We know that anti-clerical motives in 19th century France removed Patristics from the university, to be incorporated in the Catholic Institute. This was not a good solution, however, because such an institution was not legally enabled to grant the degrees proper to university level work.<sup>109</sup> And the state-supported universities of 19th century Germany may have provided an excellent environment for modern scholarship, with all the necessary tools, especially in terms of library facilities; but they were not necessarily hospitable for disciplines closely associated with theological reflection or the church.<sup>110</sup>

Within the context of the public universities, it is clear that the study of early Christianity as such could not maintain the privileged status enjoyed in the seminaries or theological schools. Ideologically, departments of religious studies have to treat all religious groups, Christian or otherwise, on an equal footing. Professors also need to respect the diversity of the student population addressed in their lectures. And expectations of the university could make an enormous difference in the nature and focus of scholar-

ly work accomplished in that context.

Chesnut recognises the challenges of doing justice to the full spectrum of Christian religious belief, the specific struggles or controversies of early Christianity as such in that context.<sup>111</sup> 'Political correctness' militates against public acknowledgement of allegiance to one specific point of departure in religion. And Lössl is brutally candid in acknowledging that many of the scholars who now study early Christianity may have no more than a professional interest in the subject. They may well regard Christianity as just one of the numerous religious options in the Roman Empire, and its role for medieval Europe the outcome of a struggle for power and status.

Indeed, these scholars may even be motivated by an underlying agenda of hostility, perhaps as a reaction to negative personal experience of Christianity. Accordingly, Lössl cautions readers to be aware of unspoken motives not

immediately evident in scholarly work; contemporary analysis must be prepared to 'deconstruct' these views for a balanced understanding.<sup>112</sup>

The incredible growth in attendance at the Oxford Patristics conferences over the past decades attests to a discipline which appears to be flourishing. Scholarly questions now addressed to early Christian texts and the material evidence from early Christian communities are both increasingly diverse and interesting. There are challenging new approaches as it incorporates directions from sociological, anthropological or feminist studies.

The present essay has attempted to give an account, in broad outlines, of how we got from 'Patristics' to the modern approach on 'early Christianity'. It has sought to give the necessary background, and thereby also some useful direction for constructive engagement of contemporary Christian scholarship on early Christianity.

111 Chesnut, 'A Century', 61.

112 Lössl, *The Early Church*, 2-4.

106 Chesnut, 'A Century', 64.

107 Chesnut, 'A Century', 46.

108 Vallée, *The Shaping*, 6.

109 On the relevant law of 1880, see Clark, 'From Patristics', 11-12.

110 Clark, 'From Patristics', 8.