riarch"). Peeling away the myths and legends that collected around this character ater generations, we encounter a member of the patriarchal family, perhaps the est clan in Palestine, who found his way to Rabbinic circles, first as a student and r as an esteemed teacher. I have already argued that the production of the hnah supplied the impetus for the amalgamation of the class of sages, rather ı vice versa. The Mishnah wove the fabric that brought together individual llectuals who had previously been linked, if at all, only loosely and informally, turned them into a group founded on recognition of the importance of the text it created.

he third century opened a new stage in the history of the sages. First, they rted their intellectual focus from the scriptures to the Mishnah itself. Some of rabbis, apparently displeased with the final product, launched a supplementary k, the *Tosefta*. But this new composition assumed the Mishnah's internal organ- ion – six "orders," each covering a large category of subjects, and further divided ı subsections called tractates – so acknowledging its appreciation of the older k. In the third century we also hear, for the first time, of organized centers of ning – the yeshiva – some with dozens of students, who arrived from distant ımunities, like Persia, to hear the teachings of the sages and study the Mishnah (L. evine 1989: 25–9; cf. Hezser 1997: 195–214). Some of them even transported Mishnah outside the borders of the Roman Empire and founded centers of study asanid Persia. Other works amassing the sages' commentaries on the Bible – called *idrash*" – began to appear at this time as well. It is in the third century that we can really talk about a movement led by the sages, even if they still had a long way to until they were accepted by all strata of the Jewish public and the legal products of r scholarship – the *halakha* – became the obligatory infrastructure of Jewish life. ıt happened only after the rise of Islam, outside the traditional borders of the nan world, in Persia, and from there back to Palestine, and thence to North Africa Europe.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Christians in the Roman Empire in the First Three Centuries CE

Paula Fredriksen

1 Prelude: The Fourth-Century Watershed

Our view of Christians in the Roman Empire during their first three hundred years is profoundly affected by what happened both to Christianity and to the empire in the course of the fourth century. In 312 CE, Constantine began Christianity's conversion to a form of imperial Roman religion. Becoming the patron of one branch of the church, he used his prestige, his authority, and a good deal of publicly-funded largesse on behalf of this now-favored community. As Constantine consolidated his own power, so too did those urban bishops upon whom he increasingly relied as ad hoc administrators of welfare and justice (Drake 2000: 309–440). Throughout the course of the fourth century, interrupted dramatically but only briefly by the reign of Constantine's pagan nephew Julian (361–3), imperial and ecclesiastical politics grew increasingly entwined. The emperors were always unambiguously supreme. Their support for projects important to the bishops, however, ultimately enabled the bishops to have a profound effect not only on their own contemporaries, whether Christian, Jewish, or pagan (Fowden 1978; Bradbury 1994), but also on their distant cultural descendants, modern historians of ancient Christianity.

The long shadow cast by these bishops gives the measure of their commitment to the ideology of orthodoxy. "Orthodoxy" means "right opinion." In the period before Constantine, this term might serve as a self-designation for any Christian group: "orthodoxy" is always "*my* doxy." All the various Christian communities, in their rivalry with each other, claimed to represent the "true faith," the only way. We see this as early as the late first century, when Matthew's Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, repudiates other Christians whose views and practices are, presumably, different from those of Matthew's community (Mt 7:15–23). And we see this in the generation after Constantine, when the political split between East and West Rome corresponded to differing theological constructions of the person of Christ. Each side viewed itself as "orthodox," and accused the other of heresy (Hunt 1998: 7–43).

What changed with Constantine, however, was the nature, and thus the consequences, of the argument. Earlier, the intra-Christian polemic between different groups had fundamentally been name calling; now, the invective of one side could inform government policy. The first Romans to feel the negative effects of Constantine's new religious allegiance, in short, were other Christians. The emperor ordered them to disband, outlawing their assemblies, exiling their bishops and burning their books (Euseb. *Eccl. Hist.* 10.5.16, 6.4, 7.2; *VC* 64–6; cf. *CTh.* 16.5.1). Such legislation, difficult to enforce, clearly met with uneven success, and "heretical" (that is, non-enfranchised) churches long continued to exist (T. D. Barnes 1981: 224). But an atmosphere of intimidation could easily be conjured, and various Christian communities could be and were targeted. By the early fifth century, in North Africa, imperial legislation and even military force would impose the policies of the orthodox or "catholic" ("universal") bishops against Christians of a rival church (Frend 1952: 227–74; Brown 1967: 226–43).

The imperial bishops' battle against Christian diversity affected more than the lives of their contemporaries. It affected, as well, both the past and the future. By banning the texts of "deviant" Christians, burning their books, or simply ceasing to allow them to be copied, the bishops got to remake the past in their own image. The only documents to survive were the ones that they approved. Countless gospels, apocryphal acts, sermons, letters, commentaries, and theological treatises simply disappeared. Some lucky manuscript finds in the twentieth century – most spectacularly, the Nag Hammadi library in Egypt, on which more below – have off-set this ancient triage. But the loss has been immense, and much of the record of the Christian past was simply effaced by the church itself.

The bishops filled this void of their own making by recreating the past in their own image, the "true" history of the "true" church – that is, of their church. Through biblical exegesis and ecclesiastical histories, they constructed a genealogy of orthodoxy that stretched from the prophets of ancient Israel (in their view, witnesses to Christ) through the appearance in the flesh of God's son, through his apostles (who in their view were their early counterparts, the first bishops), and ultimately to themselves. Christians outside of their own communities they condemned as excessively influenced by Judaism, or by pagan philosophy, or by pride. "Heretics" were innovators; the orthodox, guardians of true tradition. Orthodoxy, in this view, was stable across the ages and prior to all other confessions. Discernible in the Jewish Bible (if that were interpreted "correctly"), it was revealed once for all by Christ, and preserved unchanging and uniquely, from his time to theirs, in his true church, the church of the imperial bishops. Diversity was simple – and damnable – deviance.

The language of modern scholarship witnesses to the continuing power of this ancient orthodox rhetoric. Surveys of pre-Constantinian Christianity perforce identify these other Christian communities, marginalized only in the fourth century, as "heretical" already in the late first, the second, and the third centuries (Chadwick 2001). Such an approach implicitly takes "orthodoxy" to mean "intrinsically authentic," somehow in some special way "true." What primarily distinguished the orthodox from their rivals, however, was power. After 312, one group won in the imperial patronage sweepstakes, and the others lost. To think otherwise is simply to recapitulate in academic language the claim of the orthodox bishops themselves.

Even scholars sensitive to this problem nonetheless continue to identify these communities, as did the orthodox before them, by the names of their prominent leaders – "Marcionites" (followers of Marcion), "Valentinians" (followers of Valentinus), "Montanists" (followers of Montanus), and so on. This practice has the virtue of easily distinguishing these communities from their proto-"orthodox" contemporaries. But it only reinforces the orthodox victory, for these people, in their own eyes, were simply followers of Christ, and thus, Christians. Finally, even the terms of ancient polemic have passed into modern scholarship as categories of analysis. Historians have also described various Christian sects as overly influenced by classical philosophy, or by esoteric forms of Judaism, or by oriental cults. They do so seemingly unaware of the degree to which their views and even their analytic terms derive from and recapitulate the perspective of the orthodox, whose texts often provide our only glimpse of these otherwise lost and silenced communities (K. L. King 2003).

If the fourth century so obscures our view of earlier intra-Christian diversity, it obscures no less our view of how these ancient Christians interacted with their Jewish and pagan neighbors. Orthodoxy presents a story of almost universal hostility directed against the true church, stretching from the murder of Christ through the persecution of his saints until, miraculously, history reached a moment of dramatic reversal with Constantine's conversion. It foregrounds an image of heroic resistance to relentless attacks from furious Jews and murderous pagans, while belittling non-orthodox Christians and denying that they showed such resolve. It presents orthodox identity as distinct, unambiguous, and unchanging, preserved through a principled separation from the world, with "true" Christians assiduously avoiding synagogue and civic rituals, and any sort of friendly – or even normal – contact with pagans and Jews.

The messiness of real life rarely obliges the clarity of ideology. Embedded in the very texts that promulgate the orthodox view lies the evidence of a more complicated – and more interesting – story. To understand and appreciate the diverse practices, experiences, and commitments of these many different sorts of ancient Christians in the period before any one group could impose its own views is the goal of this chapter. To re-imagine them, we have to place ourselves back in their world: a world thick with gods and different ethnic (thus, religious) groups; a world where communal eating and public celebration were the measure of piety, which was a concern of the state. Further, and despite its roots in the farming villages of the Galilee, Christianity as soon as we meet it in its earliest texts – the letters of Paul (c.50 CE) and the writings of the canonical evangelists (c.70–100) – was essentially and already an urban phenomenon. And for its first three centuries, Christianity in all its varieties remained an urban phenomenon. To re-imagine these ancient Christians, then, we also have to place ourselves in a world where life and time were measured by the rhythms of the Greco-Roman city.

2 Gods and Humans in Mediterranean Antiquity

People in the modern West tend to think of religion as a detachable aspect of personal (and even of national) identity. We also tend to think of religion as something largely personal or private, a question first of all of beliefs. And "God" in modern monotheisms functions as a unique, transcendent, somewhat isolated metaphysical point.

What of "religion" in Mediterranean antiquity? The word, first of all, scarcely translates at all. Its closest functional equivalent would be "cult," those rituals and offerings whereby ancients enacted their respect for and devotion to the deity, and thereby solicited heaven's good will. While individual households and, indeed, persons might have their own particular protocols of piety, much of ancient worship was public, communal, and (at the civic and imperial levels) what we would call "political." Modern religion emphasizes psychological states: sincerity or authenticity of belief, the inner disposition of the believer. Ancient "religion" emphasized acts: how one lived, what one did, according to both inherited and local custom. Ancient religion was thus intrinsically communal and public: performance-indexed piety.

In this world filled with gods, some ancient communities – Jewish; eventually, Christian; also pagan (Athanassiadi and Frede 1999) – worshiped a single god as the highest one, the one to whom they particularly owed allegiance and respect. But ancient monotheists did not doubt that other gods also existed. In antiquity, divinity expressed itself along a gradient, and the Highest God (be he or it pagan, Jewish, or Christian) hardly stood alone. Many lesser divine personalities, cosmic and terrestrial, filled in the gap between the High God and humanity. The question for the ancient monotheist was how to deal with all these other gods. Different groups – and different individuals within the same group – had, as we shall see, different answers to this question. But as we imagine both Judaism and, later, Christianity within ancient Mediterranean culture, we should not conceive them as "monotheism" standing against "polytheism." By modern measure, all ancient monotheists were polytheists. It was their behavior, not their beliefs, that distinguished these groups from others.

A useful way to contrast ancient and modern conceptualizations of "religion" is to consider, in antiquity, the embeddedness of divinity. Ancient gods were local in a dual sense. First, they attached to particular places, whether natural or man-made. Groves, grottos, mountains; cities, temples and, especially, altars: all these might be visited or inhabited by the god to whom they were sacred (Lane Fox 1986: 11–261). Gods tended to be emotionally invested in the precincts of their habitation. Humans, in consequence, took care to safeguard the purity, sanctity, sacrifices, and financial security of such holy sites, because, in a simple way, the god was there. We catch a nice statement of this common ancient idea in the Gospel of Matthew, wherein Jesus observes that "he who swears by the Temple [in Jerusalem], swears by it and by *him who dwells in it*" – that is, the god of Israel, who abides in his temple (Mt 23:21; cf. similarly Paul, Rom 9:4).

Second, gods also attached to particular peoples: "religion" ran in the blood. Put differently: cult was a type of ethnic designation, something that identified one's people or kinship group, the *genos*. Herodotus, in his *Histories*, gives a clear example of this way of thinking, when he defines "Greekness" in terms of shared blood, gods, cults, and customs (Hdt. 8.144.2–3; Malkin 2001); centuries later, the apostle Paul likewise described Jewishness in strikingly similar terms (Rom 9:4–5; see below). More commonly, deities were identified through reference to the peoples who worshiped them: the god of Israel, the gods of Rome, the god at Delos, and so on (cf. Acts 19:28: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!").

This family connection between gods and their humans could be expressed or imagined in terms of descent. Rulers – kings of Israel, or Alexander the Great, or Julius Caesar, for example – were deemed the "son" of their particular god. Alexander was descended from Heracles; the Julian house, through Aeneas, from Venus. Jewish scriptures used similar language, designating Israelite kings the sons of Israel's god (e.g., 2 Sm 7:14; Ps 2:7, and frequently elsewhere. Later Christian exegesis referred such passages to Jesus.) Divine connections were politically useful.

Whole peoples, also, saw themselves in family relationships with their gods. Hellenistic and later Roman diplomats wove intricate webs of inter-city diplomacy through appeals to consanguinity inaugurated, in the distant past, by prolific deities (C. P. Jones 1999). Jewish scriptures frequently referred to Israelites as the sons of their god. The apostle Paul, repeating this biblical commonplace of Israel's sonship, distinguished his *genos* in terms reminiscent of Herodotus. To them, he said, through the gracious gift of their god, belong the presence of the deity (*doxa*, a reference to the divine presence at the altar in the Jerusalem temple), customs ("covenant" and "law," that is, Torah), and cult (*latreia*, a reference as well to the Temple, where the cult was performed: Rom 9:4). Later in the second and third centuries, when non-Jewish Christian communities sought to formulate their identity, they too would fall back on this native Mediterranean language of divinity and blood-kinship or ethnicity (Buell 2002).

What did these ideas about gods and humans mean practically for the way in which ancient people lived? They meant that, first, in an age of empire, gods bumped up against each other with some frequency, even as their humans did. The larger the political unit, the greater the number of different peoples, and thus the greater the plurality of gods. And the greater the number of gods and peoples, the greater the plurality of cultic practices, since different peoples had their own ancestral customs. Ancient empires, in other words, accommodated as a matter of course a wide range of religious practices. To see this accommodation as "religious tolerance" is to misunderstand it. Ancient society simply presupposed religious difference, since many subject peoples *eo ipso* meant many customs and many gods.

Second, the existence or non-existence of the gods of outsiders (those of a different *genos* or *natio*) was not at issue: people generally assumed that various gods existed, just as various humans did. The Roman practice of *evocatio* makes this point nicely. When besieging a city, Romans would call out the city's gods to come over to them, promising to continue their cult. Jewish traditions also presupposed the existence of other gods, e.g., Micah 4:5: "All the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord *our* god forever and ever." Jews living in the Hellenistic Diaspora lived with a different pantheon than the Canaanite/Philistine ones frequently reviled in their prophet texts, and the translators of the Jewish Bible, rendering their sacred Hebrew text into Greek, seem to have taken account of this shift. When they came to the Hebrew of Exodus 22:28, they altered "Do not revile God," to "Do not revile the gods (*tous theous*)." Paul too acknowledges the existence and influence of these other gods: he demands, however, that his gentiles, if they want to be included in the coming redemption, worship only the god of Israel, and no longer these lower divine powers (2 Cor 4:4; Gal 4:8–9; 1 Cor 15:24). Short of extreme situations (like siege in our first example, or apocalyptic convictions in the second), what mattered to ancient people was the practical question how to deal with these other gods, while dealing with their humans as well. In general, a sensible display of courtesy, showing and (perhaps as important) being seen to show respect,

went a long way towards establishing concord both with other gods (who, if angered, could be dangerous) and with their humans (ditto).

Third, the index of respectable cult within this culture was precisely ethnicity and antiquity. To be pious meant to honor one's own gods according to ancestral custom. People might well choose to honor gods who lay outside their inherited ones. Isis, Mithras, and Sarapis were new deities; emperors (and occasionally even governors) were themselves the object of cult (Price 1984; Gradel 2002); some pagans, continuing in their native cults, nonetheless joined with Jews both in diaspora synagogues and, until 70 CE, in the Temple in Jerusalem, to worship the Jewish god as well (Reynolds and Tannenbaum 1987; L. I. Levine 2000). Diaspora Jews also, to the degree that they engaged in athletics, higher education, the military, civic politics, drama, or music, were involved in activities entwined with the gods of majority culture (Schürer 1973–87: 3: 1–149; Gruen 2002: 105–32; Fredriksen 2003: 38–56). But this openness to other cult in principle did not loosen the ties of obligation and respect that bound people, first of all, to their own gods. Conversion to Judaism, however, and later to Christianity, demanded the convert's renouncing the worship of his native gods and pledging exclusive allegiance to the god of Israel. As we shall see, such activity did indeed lead to social disruption.

The dense religious multiplicity of the Roman world was offset by the binding power of civic organization and the imperial cult. Both were the political and religious legacy of Alexander the Great (d. 323 BCE). In the wake of his conquests, which stretched from the eastern Mediterranean and Egypt to the edges of Afghanistan, Alexander established cities settled by Greek colonists and organized along lines reminiscent of the ancient *polis*. Civic altars, the agora, city councils, schools, libraries, theaters, gymnasia – the organs of the polis, widely transplanted abroad, gave rise to the West's first experiment in cultural "globalization," namely Hellenism. At a practical level, this meant that Greek became the international language *par excellence*, whether for trade, for government, or for high cultural endeavor (*paideia*) – philosophy, poetry, music, drama. (So enduring was this linguistic accomplishment that most of the Christian documents that we shall review, even those composed in the "Latin" West, were in fact written in Greek.) Hellenism, its myriad local variations notwithstanding, facilitated communication and cultural coherence across vast distances. Adapting and adopting it, Rome extended this civilization even further. By the end of the first century CE, the expanse from Britain in the west to the edge of Persia in the east, from the Danube in the north to the African breadbasket in the south, formed an identifiable (if not uniform) cultural whole.

Through the Hellenistic city, at another equally practical level, Alexander had a lasting effect on Roman religion and politics. These cities were themselves religious institutions. Through innumerable public and communal rituals – processions, blood sacrifices, dancing, hymns, competitions both athletic and musical – citizens and residents displayed their respect to the heavenly patrons of their city, thereby ensuring continued divine favor. Further, the opening of a city council, the convening of a court of law, the enjoyment of and participation in cultural events – all these activities, which seem religiously neutral to moderns, in fact acknowledged and honored the traditional gods. (This is why later Christian moralists, such as Tertullian, inveighed against Christians' frequenting the theater, the baths, and the competitions: these were tainted with the worship of pagan deities. Diaspora Jews – and as the heat of

Tertullian's invective reveals, most gentile Christians – evidently made their peace with this level of engagement with "idolatry.") Public displays of piety measured civic responsibility. Impiety risked divine anger, which could be manifest in any number of dangerous ways: drought, flood, plague, earthquake, invading armies. Proper cult pleased gods; and when gods were happy, cities prospered.

Finally, the cult of the ruler, introduced to the West through Alexander, was adapted and adopted by Rome. The emperors, from Augustus on, ruled and protected the commonwealth as heaven's special agent on earth. After death, translated to a higher realm, they continued to serve as the empire's special agent in heaven (Gradel 2002; cf. Euseb. *LC* I.1.1: after death, Constantine too continued to exercise this protective celestial function). Such worship served to bind the empire's far-flung municipalities together both politically and religiously (again, the terms are virtually synonymous in this context). Politically, establishing an imperial cult brought honor to one's city and the potential for more direct imperial patronage. Religiously, to offer to the emperor was to offer as well for the empire.

3 The Diaspora Synagogue and the Origins of Christianity

When, where, and how, within this culture, did Christianity begin? The question is more difficult to answer than it might seem. The mission and message of Jesus of Nazareth, Christianity's retrospective founder, was addressed almost entirely to fellow Jews in the Galilee and Judaea. Jesus' message of the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God sounded themes long traditional in biblical and post-biblical Jewish prophecy: the expectation of God's radical intervention in history, the ingathering of the 12 tribes of Israel, the righting of wrongs, the consolation of the oppressed, the resurrection of the dead (Sanders 1985, 1993; Meier 1991; Fredriksen 1999). After the trauma of Jesus' execution, some 500 of his followers (so Paul) reassembled, convinced that they had seen Jesus again, raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:5–6). They saw their experience as a miracle confirming Jesus' message: the Kingdom really *was* at hand, the general resurrection of the dead was nigh, the liberation from bondage to the evil cosmic powers of the age about to begin (1 Cor 15 *passim*).

By the forties of the first century, what would become Christianity was still a form of messianic Judaism, with a necessary and idiosyncratic twist. The messiah, they held, would establish God's Kingdom (that much is traditionally messianic). But since they now identified this figure with Jesus, they believed that the establishment of God's Kingdom would actually mark their messiah's *second* coming, since his first coming had ended in the crucifixion/resurrection. His original disciples evidently expected this final event – again, on the strength of their experience of Jesus' resurrection – to occur within their own lifetimes (Fredriksen 2000: 133–42). So too did that apostle who joined the movement a few years after Jesus' death, and whose name history most associates with the mission to the gentiles: Paul.

We know more about Paul than we do about any other member of this first generation of the Christian movement. His letters – seven undisputed ones, six more attributed to him by tradition – date from the late forties–early fifties CE. They are thus a generation earlier than the earliest gospel, Mark. Paul's letters

dominate the New Testament collection, and preserve the oldest stratum of evidence available to us.

Despite his prominence in later Christian tradition, however, Paul's cultural formation differed in significant ways both from that of Jesus and from that of Jesus' earliest followers. Jesus' first language had been Aramaic. His audiences were fellow Jews in the villages of Galilee and Judaea: the only major city of his acquaintance was the capital, Jerusalem. Jesus' teachings were exclusively oral, his formal education most probably slight (Meier 1991: 253–315). The version of the Bible familiar to him would have been in Semitic languages, whether Hebrew or Aramaic. The other Jews whom he gathered as disciples from Galilee and Judaea were similar in language, culture, and experience.

Paul, by contrast, was cosmopolitan. A Jew of the Diaspora, his vernacular and his scriptural tradition were Greek. Literate, well-educated in Greek rhetoric as well as in his own religious culture (the "traditions of my fathers," Gal 1:14), Paul left behind not just teachings, but writings. He traveled broadly throughout the great cities of the eastern Mediterranean. And – perhaps the most significant contrast of all – Paul's audiences, unlike those of Jesus and, initially, of his disciples, were *not* primarily fellow Jews, but rather "gentiles," the Jewish term for non-Jews. In other words, Paul's hearers were pagans.

Until Paul had brought them his message (*evangelion*), these non-Jews had, naturally, worshipped their own native gods. Paul dismisses their former practice as idolatry, the futile worship of lower powers. "When you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods," he tells his communities in Galatia (Gal 4:8; so too 1 Cor 6:10–11; 1 Thes 1:9). Through baptism into Christ, Paul tells them, they have been freed from their bondage to these lower gods in order to worship Christ's father, the God of Israel. Purged of their idol worship and its attendant sins (fornication, drunkenness, and so on: Paul takes a dim view of the morality of pagan culture, Rom 1:18–32), these formerly pagan gentiles-in-Christ can now worship "the true and living God" while awaiting his Son from heaven (1 Thes 1:9–10). Being brought into the redemption promised to Israel through their incorporation into Christ (Rom 15), these ex-pagans will be spared the "wrath of God" which will fall upon sinners in the last days. The returning Christ, whom Paul and his congregations expect to live to see (1 Thes 4:15–17), will raise the dead, transform the living, vanquish evil, and finally establish the Father's Kingdom (1 Cor 15:23–5).

Who were these people? How did Paul find them? And how did they, as pagans, make sense of, and ultimately commit themselves to, Paul's fundamentally Jewish message? To answer these questions, we have to situate ourselves within the ancient Greco-Roman city. We have to consider, in particular, one of the most well-established groups living within the ancient city: the Jews.

The Greek diaspora caused by Alexander the Great's victories had brought the Jewish one in tow. Alexander's conquests led to the wholesale resettlements of Greek veterans, merchants, and travelers in his new territories. They drew new immigrants with them, among them ancient Jews. Unlike Israel's experience of exile, when Nebuchadnezzar took ancient Judaeans as captives to Babylon, this later Diaspora was for the most part voluntary. By the dawn of the Christian era, Jews had been settled for centuries everywhere in the Mediterranean world. Strabo the geographer

and historian, and elder contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth, remarked that "this people has made its way into every city, and it is not easy to find any place in the habitable world which has not received [them]" (in Jos. *AJ* 14.115).

Establishing themselves in their new cities of residence, these Jews, over the course of four centuries, absorbed and adapted Greek language and culture. As their vernacular shifted from Aramaic to Greek, their scriptures shifted too. By about 200 BCE, Jews in Alexandria had completed the Septuagint (LXX), the translation of their sacred texts into Greek. Through this medium, Jewish ideas about divinity, worship, creation, ethics, piety, and practice came to be broadcast in the international linguistic frequency. And due to this same fact of translation, the vocabulary of *paideia* – Greek ideas about divinity, cosmology, philosophy, and government – was established in these texts. Their creative interpenetration would have enormous consequences for Western culture, as we shall see.

Living in foreign cities put Jews in a potentially awkward situation. Like everyone else, Jews had their own ancestral, thus ethnic, traditions. But unlike anyone else, because of these traditions, Jews in principle were restricted to worshiping only their own god. Some pagan observers commented irritably on this fact, complaining of Jewish civic irresponsibility, or disloyalty, or impiety, or at least discourtesy. But majority culture was extremely capacious, and respect for ancestral tradition was the bedrock of Mediterranean religious, political, and legal civilization. Thus ancient pagans by and large were prepared to respect Jewish religious difference, and even to make social allowances for it, precisely because of Judaism's ethnicity and antiquity. Where awkwardness might result – Jewish members of town councils, Jewish athletes, Jewish military men, all of whose activities necessarily involved them with cultic activities dedicated to other gods – Jews negotiated exemptions as they could, and so found ways to serve both their city and their own traditions. Eventually, once Rome ruled the entire Mediterranean, such exemptions were written into imperial law (Linder 1987; Pucci ben Zeev 1998).

The city provided one context for shared social and religious activity between pagans and Jews. Another was that singular institution common to Jewish populations wherever they were found: the synagogue.

Ancient synagogues functioned as community centers and as a type of ethnic reading-house, where Jews could gather at least once every seven days to hear instruction in their ancestral laws. Literary and epigraphical evidence – donor inscriptions in particular – afford us a glimpse of the mixed population that frequented, and supported, this Jewish institution. Pagans as well as Jews attended synagogue activities. Some, like the professional magicians whose recipes relay "magic" Hebrew words and garbled biblical images, might drop by simply to hear stories about a powerful god read aloud in the vernacular. Other pagans, called "godfearers" in inscriptions and literature, voluntarily assumed some Jewish practices: ancient witnesses most frequently mention lighting lamps on the Sabbath (Friday evening), avoiding pork, or keeping community fasts or feasts. Some wealthy pagans, prominent in their own religious communities, contributed conspicuously to Jewish ones, too: Julia Severa, a noblewoman and priestess of the imperial cult, built a synagogue; Capitolina, a wealthy woman and self-described "god-fearer" furnished an interior; nine town councilors among the godfearers of Aphrodisias contributed to the synagogue fund drive (Fredriksen 2003: 48–55).

The point, for our present purpose, is that these pagans participated *as pagans* in Jewish communal activities. The diaspora synagogue evidently welcomed the interest and beneficence of sympathetic outsiders: good will made for good neighbors. Nor did these Jews impose on sympathetic pagans a demand that they commit to the exclusive worship of the Jewish god: that was a command given to them by their god for Israel alone. Within the religious ecosystem of the ancient city, in brief, pagans and Jews mixed and mingled in the schools and in the baths, in the courts and in the curiae, and in the synagogues as well. The synagogue fit comfortably into the religiously open environment of the Greco-Roman city, welcoming outsiders while, at the same time, structuring and facilitating Jewish communal life.

Enter Paul, and other Jewish *apostoloi* of the first generation of the Christian movement. Its initial stage was radioactively apocalyptic – partly continuous with Jesus of Nazareth's own message of the coming Kingdom, partly amplified by this generation's conviction that they worked in a brief wrinkle in time, between Christ's resurrection and his imminent second coming (Fredriksen 1991a, 1999: 78–119). In the mid-30s, as the movement spread out from Judaea into Asia Minor and the cities of the western Diaspora, its apostles followed the paths laid out by the network of Diaspora synagogues. These synagogues, unlike their counterparts in Galilee and Judaea, held significant numbers of pagans familiar with the idea of Israel, and with the Jewish scriptures. These pagans responded to earliest Christianity's apocalyptic message too.

Traditions concerning gentiles are scarce in the gospels: gentiles did not figure prominently among Jesus' hearers, and accordingly occupied no major place in Jesus' teachings. But the ultimate fate of gentiles at the end of the world was a theme well-developed within other Jewish apocalyptic traditions. These traditions varied. Some prophecies predicted the final submission of the nations to Israel, others their punishment for having oppressed Israel, and still others their voluntary destruction of their idols and final acknowledgment of the God of Israel once he revealed himself in glory (Sanders 1985: 212–21). The gentiles' destruction of their idols, in these traditions, does not imply their conversion to Judaism (which would mean, for men, receiving circumcision; also, becoming responsible for maintaining Jewish customs and laws, and so on; Fredriksen 1991a: 544–8). Rather, when God established his Kingdom and redeemed Israel, according to this tradition, gentiles would be included *as gentiles*. They simply would not worship any other gods any more.

It was this last tradition, evidently, that helped the apostles to improvise in their unanticipated situation. Apostles in the Diaspora received pagans together with Jews into their new messianic movement. The non-Jews, once baptized, were "in Christ." This meant that they were in a sense already, proleptically, in the vanguard of the Kingdom. The apostles had empirical evidence of this: these gentiles were now released from bondage to their former gods and evil cosmic agents, empowered by God's spirit to prophesy and to perform "works of power," capable of discerning between good and evil spirits (e.g. 1 Cor 12:6–10). And, consistent with both the traditions of Jewish apocalyptic inclusivism and with general Jewish social practice, these sympathetic gentiles were neither asked nor encouraged to convert to Judaism as a condition for joining this new movement forming within the penumbra of the synagogue.

Their acceptance into the Christian movement was, provisional, however. The proviso was this: these pagans could not continue in their native religions. Here

this first generation of apostles, creatively applying an element of apocalyptic hope to their present situation, directly violated long-standing, and eminently pragmatic, Jewish practice regarding sympathetic gentiles. By the same measure, these apostles also threatened to undermine the centuries-long stability of Jewish-pagan relations not only within the synagogue but also within the larger urban diaspora community. By *not* converting to Judaism, these Christian gentiles maintained their public status, and in a sense their "legal" status, as pagans. But by exempting themselves from the public worship of those gods who were theirs by birth and blood, they walked into a social and religious no-man's-land. Exemption from public worship was a protected right only of Jews, and that only on account of their ancestral customs. These gentiles-in-Christ were violating their own ancestral customs. They were thus open to the charge of atheism and impiety, thus to suspicion of public endangerment: gods, deprived of the cult due them, grew angry.

The Book of Acts, written c.100 CE, offers a vivid and realistic description of early responses to the socially disruptive message of this tiny messianic Jewish sub-culture. Itinerant apostles were actively repudiated by their host synagogues, run out of town by irate gentile citizens, and occasionally punished by cautious Roman authorities attempting to keep the peace (Acts 13:50; 14:2, 4–6, 19; 16:20–4; 17:5–9; 18:12–17 before Gallio in Corinth; 19:23–41 tumult in Ephesus. Cf. Paul's description of his woes, inflicted variously by Jews, gentiles, and Romans, 2 Cor 4:8–9; 6:4–5; 11:24–6; also Mk 13:6, 11). In the thirties and forties, this unprecedented and disruptive policy of separating gentiles-in-Christ from their native cults gives the measure of the apocalyptic mind-set, and indeed of the time frame, of the earliest apostles. Christ would return soon; all would be finally resolved.

But as Christ delayed and the Kingdom tarried, improvisations and confusions mounted within the movement itself. Baptized gentiles began again to participate in pagan public cult, perhaps confused because, as godfearers, their ancestral worship had caused no problem for the synagogues (e.g., 1 Cor 5:11; 8:7–12; cf. 10:14; Fredriksen 1999: 128–37). By the late 40s some apostles suggested that Christian gentiles should convert to Judaism (Gal *passim*; cf. Phil 3:2–11: Paul did not like his colleagues' idea). Such a policy would be no less socially destabilizing to Diaspora synagogue communities, which might still bear the brunt of their neighbors' resentment. But at least in the instance of conversion to Judaism, these gentiles-in-Christ, socially and religiously, would have some place to stand: pagan culture had long acknowledged conversions to Judaism.

What happened next is difficult to say. As early as we have evidence of the Christian movement – which is to say, with Paul's letters – so too do we have evidence of loud and roiling internal debate. Vigorous variety characterized this moment of Christian history no less than it characterized the Judaism that was its matrix. This variety – and these arguments – only increased with time. We know that gentile Christians continued for centuries to frequent synagogues and to co-celebrate Jewish festivals and fasts, just as their pagan neighbors did (Fredriksen and Irshai 2004). We know that there were Christians who were traditionally religious Jews. (Justin *Trypho* 47.3 refers to Torah-observant Christian Jews in the Diaspora; for Christian Jews in the Galilee up through the Talmudic period, see Boyarin 1999.) We know that, by the early second century, purely gentile forms of Christianity were also evolving. We know that well-educated, formerly pagan intellectuals, turning to the Jewish Bible in Greek as

the textual ground for their speculations, invented many different forms of Christian *paideia*. We know that those gentile Christians who refused to worship their ancestral gods became the target of pagan anxieties and, eventually, of pagan persecutions. And we know that a vivid and energetic expectation of Christ's imminent Second Coming proved paradoxically long-lived, characterizing many different sorts of Christianity throughout this period – and, indeed, continuing into our own day.

This inner-Christian variety, and all these continuing Christian–Jewish–pagan connections, were masked by the triumph of the imperial church. To continue our investigation of Christians in the first three centuries, I would like to trace three topics in particular that convey something of the intellectual, social, and spiritual vitality of Christianity in the pre-Constantinian period. The first is birth and growth of Christian *paideia*, what we might think of as "theology." The second is that great anomaly in Mediterranean culture, religious persecution. The third is Christian millenarianism both charismatic and erudite: prophecies of the End, and learned calculations of when the End would come. Interrelated and synchronous, these three phenomena will provide us with a sense of how Christianity developed within the context of the empire.

Christian paideia

"*Theos*" is Greek for "god." "*Logos*" means "order, reason, word." Theology is ordered, rational discourse on the nature of divinity. As such, theology was not native to any ancient religion, pagan, Jewish, or Christian.

Theology began not in temples or around altars, but within the ancient academy. It was in this sense a "secular" subject, a special branch of philosophy, and philosophy was quite distinct from traditional Greek cult. The ways in which philosophers conceived the nature of divinity coordinated with their views on the nature of time, matter, cosmos, reason, and so on. "God" as a concept was a part of a larger, ideally coordinated and rational system.

Again thanks to Alexander, these Greek intellectual ways of thinking were imported on a grand scale: Hellenistic cities had gymnasia, and gymnasia had philosophy among the subjects – literature, rhetoric, mathematics, music – of their curriculum. Rome spread this culture westwards. As a result, educated urban elites from one end of the Roman world to the other shared a common literary culture mediated by this sort of education.

Philosophical thought (especially in those forms that owed most to Plato) complicated traditional religiousness in interesting ways. "God" in such systems tended to be radically stable and transcendent, immaterial, perceptible only through mind. Though the source of everything else (in the sense that all else was contingent upon him, or it), "god" was in no active sense its creator. Defined as "perfect," *theos* was also necessarily immutable, since change (within this system) implied imperfection. While lower gods with visible bodies might seem more involved with time, the highest god, their ultimate source, lay beyond both time and matter.

Revered ancient poems and dramas that conveyed the gripping stories of gods and men clashed directly with these philosophical modes of conceiving divinity. Young men of the urban elite encountered both literatures, philosophical and narrative, in the course of their higher education. Those of an intellectual bent might resolve the

tension between the two ways of conceiving divinity through *allegory*. Allegory could relate narrative to the categories of theology by reading beyond what the text merely said (say, that the god Chronos devoured his children) to divine its deeper, intellectual meaning (here, that time divides into sub-units). Traditional cult – the worship due the lower gods, for those who thought this way – in any case continued, financed precisely by these same elites.

Hellenistic Jews, themselves educated in these literatures, applied the principles of *paideia* to their own ancient epic of divine/human interaction, the Bible. They were obliged in their efforts by having their text available to them in Greek. Thus, when God created with a "word" (Ps 32[33]:6: Hebrew *davar*), he made the heavens with his *logos*. When God announced his name to Moses (Ex 3:14), the Hebrew *ehyeh* ("I am") became, in Greek, *ho ón*, "the being" – a sound philosophical response. Diaspora Jews produced a tremendous out-pouring of literary and philosophical creations, based on their readings of the Bible. Biblical theology properly so-called commenced with their work.

The LXX or Septuagint was the Bible for Christians as well as for Jews in the Western Diaspora. For the first century of the movement, Christians whether Jewish or gentile had no other texts that they considered sacred scripture. By the turn of the late first/early second century CE, we begin to find Christian authors who define their views of God, of Christ, and of their own communities through allegorical readings of select biblical texts (*Epistle of Barnabas*). The social provenance of these biblical texts – a bulky collection of scrolls, not an individual "book" – was the synagogue, and we do not know how copies of these books came to travel into non-Jewish communities. The intense interest in biblical hermeneutics on the part of outsiders, however, gives us an intriguing measure of the availability of the LXX by the early second century CE: in the Hellenistic period, Jewish texts did not command gentile interest in nearly the same way (Momigliano 1971: 74–96). What we do know is that, by the mid-second century, forms of Christianity had captured the allegiance of members of that tiny articulate minority, the erudite pagan urban elite. These formerly pagan intellectuals applied their commitment to systematic rational thought and their individual convictions about the Christian message to the Greek text of the Jewish Bible. An eruption of intra-Christian theological dispute ensued.

The key point of debate among all these contesting Christian theologians – as, indeed, among pagan and among Jewish theologians – was the relation of the High God to matter. As these Christian thinkers defined that relationship, so too did they define the figure of Christ, the revelatory status of the LXX, and the relationship of Jews and Judaism to their own movement (Fredriksen and Lieu 2004). Three prominent second-century Christian theologians, considered together, can give us a sense of the scope of these issues. All three defined the High God, or "the Father," according to the criteria of *paideia*. Accordingly, all three agreed that only a lower god, and certainly not the High God himself, could be the immediate author of material creation. All three identified the High God as the father of Jesus Christ. All three held that the LXX, interpreted correctly, with spiritual understanding, could provide knowledge of revelation. And all three agreed that Jewish religious practice, which enacted the precepts of these scriptures – keeping the Sabbath, the food laws, circumcision, the holy days, and so on – exposed the

Jews as fundamentally unenlightened readers. In the view of these gentile Christian theologians, this intrinsic Jewish inability to read "spiritually" explained why the Jewish people had failed to grasp the essentially Christian, gentile significance of their own text.

The earliest commentaries both on Genesis and on the Gospel of John came from the church of the first theologian, Valentinus (fl. 130). The second, Marcion (fl. 140), first conceived the idea of a "new testament" as an authoritative collection of specifically Christian texts comprising a gospel and the letters of Paul. But only the third, Justin Martyr (fl. 150), was deemed "orthodox" in the perspective of the church that won Constantine's support in the fourth century. In consequence, only Justin's writings have survived. Thanks to the manuscript find at Nag Hammadi, fourth-century Coptic translations of some of Valentinus' originally Greek texts have been recovered. *The Antitheses*, Marcion's great work contrasting Jewish scriptures ("Law") with Christian, especially Pauline writings, has been utterly lost. Marcion's other great idea, however, though repudiated in his own lifetime, eventually "won." Christians did develop a "new testament," a separate canon of specifically Christian writings. But even here, Marcion lost, because his opponents' New Testament was linked to and combined with the Jewish Bible or LXX (which Marcion had rejected: see Edwards, this volume), in its turn conceived as superseded and "old."

Sharing a common cosmology from *paideia*, these three gentile Christian theologians differed in their assignment of moral value both to the lower god who made matter and, accordingly, to matter itself. For Valentinus as for Marcion, this lower god was the chief character in Genesis and, accordingly, the god of the Jews. Both saw him as the cosmic opponent of the High God, Christ's father, and thus of Christ. Thus matter itself, the chief medium of this lower god, was morally derelict. Justin also saw this lower god as the deity described in Genesis (*Trypho* 56). And this *heteros theos*, as Justin calls him, is thus properly the god of the Jews. But Justin also identifies this same lower deity with the pre-Incarnate Christ, the framer of material creation. For Justin, then, the moral valence of matter shifts from negative to positive, because Christ is its author. Consequently, Justin's Christ truly does take on flesh; the Christ of Valentinus and Marcion, matter's opponent, only "seems" to (cf. Phil 2:5–11). Justin also takes the redemption of the flesh, the resurrection of the believer in the last days, as the measure of salvation, whereas Valentinus and Marcion see salvation in terms of the soul's escape from the material cosmos. Their theological differences are all variations on a theme. That theme, however, is set not by the Bible or by the Christian message (howsoever construed), but by the philosophical problem of relating the changeless and perfect High God to cosmos, thus to time and matter.

Much more bound these thinkers together than drove them apart. But they did not see things this way. Trained in philosophy, dedicated to intellectual rigor and systematic reflection, they concentrated, with precision, on their differences. As a result of their debate, characteristic of this stratum of learned Christian writers, the old word for "philosophical school," *haeresis*, took on new meaning: heresy. What had once implied "choice" now meant "error." Diversity was lamented and delegitimated. Eventually, once one group finally had legal power, in the fourth century, such diversity would be outlawed.

The persecution of religious minorities

As soon as we have Christian writings, we have evocations of Christian suffering. Paul's version of "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" – imprisonments, beatings, Jewish juridical lashing, Roman beating with rods, a stoning (2 Cor 11:23–7) – coheres well with the picture presented later in Acts: early Christian apostles (who were themselves Jews) often met with hostility and energetic rejection both in synagogues and in the larger urban context of their mission. In the Gospel of Mark (written sometime after 70 CE), Jesus "prophesies" that his followers will experience similar harsh receptions: "They will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake" (Mk 13:9; Mark's reference to "beating in synagogues" attests to his envisioning a predominantly Jewish movement: synagogues had no jurisdiction over gentiles). Such measures can be viewed as improvised and ad hoc attempts on the part of urban communities, both Jewish and gentile, to contain and control the potential disruptiveness of the early Christian mission.

By the turn of the first century, however, we already find a startling change: evidence of coercion, now directed specifically against *gentile* Christians, and exercised by government agents, civic and imperial. Throughout the second century and into the third, this pattern sporadically continues, rising to a crescendo with anti-Christian persecutions under Diocletian in 303. After 312, with the progressive Christianization of the government – and "governmentalization" of the church – religious persecutions continue, for much the same reasons as during their pagan phase. In its post-Constantinian Christian phase, however, religious coercion targeted a more diverse population. Gentile Christians (now identified as "heretics") continue to be harassed, but pagan public worship, and pagan worshipers, also joined the roll (MacMullen 1997). Whether under pagan or, later, Christian persecutors, however, Jews and the practice of Judaism for the most part remained free from government harassment, and continued to be protected by imperial law (Fredriksen and Irshai 2004).

How can we account for the origin and development of such persecution, given the practical and principled religious pluralism long native to Mediterranean culture? We should orient ourselves by thinking of "religion" in the terms that mattered to these ancient people: ethnicity and antiquity; standing obligations to one's own people's gods; the importance of public cult acts, showing – and being seen to show – respect; the importance for public security of maintaining the *pax deorum*, the concordat between heaven and earth that guaranteed the well-being of city and empire.

The problem, then, in the view of majority culture, was not that gentile Christians were "Christians." The problem was that, whatever religious practices these people chose to assume, they were still, nonetheless, "gentiles." That is, the Christians were still members of their own *genos* or *natio*, with the standing obligations to the gods of their *genos*, who were the gods of the majority. From roughly the end of the first century until 250 CE, these Christians could be the object of local resentments and anxieties precisely because they were not honoring the gods upon whom their city's prosperity depended. As Tertullian famously complained, "if the Tiber overflows to the walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields; if the sky does not move or the earth does; if there is famine or plague, the cry goes up at once, 'The Christians to the

lion!' " (*Apol.* 40.2). Jewish Christians were not so persecuted, because as Jews their exemption from public cult was ancient, traditional, and protected by long legal precedent. Ancestral obligation was what mattered.

Popular fear of this strange new group fed also on rumor, which attributed terrible anti-social crimes to Christians – infanticide, cannibalism, incestuous intercourse – all accusations that the different Christian sects also made against each other, and that medieval Christianity would ultimately fix upon the Jews. Such stories eventually lost their force: courts discounted and disproved them (e.g. Pliny *Ep.* 10.95–6 [112 CE]). Once a Christian was in court, before the governor, the matter turned upon showing respect both for authority and for the *mos Romanorum*. Would the accused defer to the governor's request? Would he honor the emperor's image? Would she eat meat offered to the gods? Some Christians complied; others refused. And as canons 2, 3, and 4 of the Council of Elvira (303 CE) make clear, not all gentile Christians saw the problem: this church council had to legislate against Christians who nonetheless continued to serve as *flamines*, that is, as priests of the imperial cult. The stalwart might end their days in the arena, robed as characters from classical mythology, sacrificed in spectacles recalling the stories of the same gods whom these Christians had refused more conventionally to honor (Coleman 1990; Potter 1993).

This first phase of anti-Christian persecution was random, sporadic, and local. The contributing role of social factors seems clear, though the actual legal grounds for persecution remain foggy. Evidence of significant freedom of movement – Christians freely visiting and supporting those arrested in jail, or Christians in custody (in the case of Ignatius of Antioch) visiting churches despite having been arrested – implies what the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan clearly states: simply *being* a Christian did not suffice to have action brought. The admiring many, who recorded and preserved acts of the martyrs, surely outnumbered the heroic (and perhaps voluntary) few.

With the emperor Decius, in the mid-third century, both the issues and the evidence become clearer. In response to the decades of turmoil that had gripped the empire, Decius mandated that all citizens participate in public cult. The protocols most especially emphasized blood sacrifices and honoring the emperor (Rives 1999). (Jews – and thus Jewish Christians – were once again exempt: Euseb. *Eccl. Hist.* 6.12.1.) The emperor did not forbid the practice of Christianity. Rather, he ordered that gentile Christians, whatever their peculiar practices, also observe those rites that ensured the gods' goodwill. His goal was not religious uniformity but the preservation of the commonwealth.

More Christians were caught in this imperial net than in the earlier, local, uncoordinated efforts. The chief consequence of Decius' initiative and of the other occasional imperial efforts that followed was an internal crisis of authority within the church over the question of those who had lapsed – an indirect measure, perhaps, of the relative proportion of Christian resistance to accommodation. Churches of various orientations continued, nonetheless, to settle into Roman society: on the eve of the "great persecution" of 303, a large basilica stood just across the way from Diocletian's own palace.

The persecution of its own citizens is to a society what an auto-immune disease is to an individual: it wastes resources, squanders solidarity, and ultimately leaves the whole much weakened. Within Mediterranean culture in particular, religious persecution

was an anomaly. Yet from the mid-third century on, the Roman government, whether pagan or Christian, pursued such policies. The imperial church, once the object of persecution, shifted roles with equanimity. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), directing the persecution of Donatist Christians in North Africa, even made a reasoned theological defense of coercion as a sort of muscular pastoral care. Despite its changed role – indeed, perhaps because of it – the church nevertheless clung to the idea that the true church was the church of the martyrs (though by its own definition, those contemporaries currently subject to coercion were, *ipso facto*, "false" Christians).

Religious persecution was the expression of insecurity, and a socially enacted form of theodicy: if bad things happened, it must be that the good gods (or God) were rightly angry. In their imperial phase, these persecutions were wed to a sense of declining political fortune. Christian emperors sought to preserve the *pax dei* just as purposefully as their pagan predecessors had sought to preserve the *pax deorum*. Christian emperors persecuted those whom they deemed to be dangerous outsiders – or false insiders – for the same reasons that pagan ones had: the hope of averting heaven's wrath, and of soliciting divine goodwill (Liebeschuetz 1979: 277–308, esp. 297). Thus in 430, calling for the Third Ecumenical Council, the Christian emperor Theodosius II expressed his hope that "the condition of the church might honor God and *contribute to the safety of the Empire*" (*Acts of the Ecumenical Councils* I.1.1, 114). One year later, the same emperor wrote in his constitution against pagans, Samaritans, and Jews: "Why has the spring lost its accustomed charm? Why has the summer, barren of its harvest, deprived the laboring farmer? . . . Why all these things, unless nature has transgressed the decree of its own law *to avenge such impiety*?" (*NTh.* 3.; cf. Tert. *Apol.* 40.2, quoted above, for the pagan enunciation of exactly the same sensibility).

Waiting for the End

Christianity began with the announcement that time was about to end. Paul expected to see God's Kingdom established by the Risen and Returning Christ in his own lifetime, and he proclaims this good news from his earliest surviving letter (1 Thes 1:10) to his last (Rom 13:11). Even generations after Jesus' lifetime, evangelists continued to repeat a prophecy of Jesus given to his own generation in the Gospel of Mark: "There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power" (Mk 9:1; cf. Mt 16:28, Lk 21:32). Justin in the mid-second century, Irenaeus in the early third, Lactantius in the early fourth, Hesychius in the early fifth: these writers, each situated within the orthodox stemma, all asserted their conviction that Christ would return soon to establish his father's Kingdom. Much of the social and doctrinal development of ancient Christianity can be understood as ways of coping with history's persistent failure to end on time (Fredriksen 1991b).

Whence this constant conviction in the face of such unimpeachable and repeated disconfirmation? We see here the effects of the continuing combination of post-biblical apocalyptic Jewish traditions about God's final intervention in history, of the traumatic experience of persecution (which reinforced the idea that the End was at hand), and of the appeal to both learned and unlearned methods of decoding the Bible and figuring out what time it was on God's clock.

Post-biblical Jewish apocalyptic prophecy provided the material for much of Jesus' own teachings (Sanders 1985). Jewish apocalyptic hope, amplifying themes already in biblical prophecy, affirmed *inter alia* the belief that God would redeem his people, raise the dead, vindicate the righteous, turn gentiles to himself, and gather humanity together in Jerusalem. In light of Jesus' death, and then the belief that he had been raised, the earliest community added to these themes the expectation of Jesus' imminent return or *Parousia*, which would itself accomplish the founding of the Kingdom (1 Thes; 1 Cor 15; Rom 11, 15; Mk 13). The stirrings of persecution, whether as simple rejection, social harassment, or actual executions, reinforced the new community's sense of beleaguered righteousness and certain, ultimate vindication. Towards the end of the first century, John of Patmos contributed a further refinement: that the martyrs ("those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God") would rise bodily at Christ's Second Coming to reign with him for a thousand years on earth, before a second, general resurrection to judgment (Rv 20:1–6). John concluded his vision speaking for Christ: "Surely I am coming soon" (22:20).

This last formulation touches on the formal definition of millenarianism: the belief in the terrestrial, thousand-year reign of the saints. In the course of the second century, this idea became virtually definitive of proto-orthodox eschatologies. This was so, in part, because these developed against those other forms of Christianity (such as Valentinus' and Marcion's) that asserted that Christ himself had only "appeared in the form of man" and in the "likeness" of flesh (cf. Phil 2:5) without having actually had a fleshly body. Redemption, as these other Christians conceived it, was neither terrestrial nor historical. "Time" would not end; the saved Christian would pass, as had the Risen Christ, from the lower material cosmos to the upper *plérôma*, the realm of light and spirit, to the Father. Flesh, time, the earthly Jerusalem: all these ideas, said these Christians, showed the unhappy influence of carnal, Jewish thought, and a carnal reading of Jewish texts, on Christ's message of redemption.

By contrast, millenarianism cohered effortlessly with the points of principle in proto-orthodox doctrine. Its emphasis on bodily resurrection and historical redemption, and its focus on Jerusalem in particular, resonated with these churches' affirmation of Christ's incarnation, his bodily resurrection, and the physical resurrection of believers. Millenarianism was also stimulated by the experience of persecution. The linkage between the suffering of the righteous and their impending vindication – a tradition taken directly from Judaism (e.g., Dn 7:21; 12:2–13; 2 Mc 6:12–7:38) – supported the hope that the brute fact of persecution itself signaled the imminent return of Christ, who would punish the wicked and reward the faithful. More generally, the prophetic and evangelical lists of pre-apocalyptic disasters – plagues, famine, earthquakes, flood, or drought – studied and decoded, could be and were continuously found to fit the times. Indeed, since gentile Christians were often accused of bringing on such disasters because of their refusal to honor the gods, disaster and persecution might often coincide.

This link between keen millenarian expectation and pagan persecution gave early Christian apocalyptic writings a decidedly political slant (Fredriksen 1991b: 152–7). John of Patmos, around the turn of the first century CE, unforgettably described his vision of the great Whore of Babylon who fornicated with the kings of the earth, drank the blood of the saints, and sat on seven hills – a clear reference to Rome

(Rv 17:1–6, 9). Irenaeus, a century later, decoded the Fourth Beast of Daniel 7 and the Beast from the Sea of Revelation 13 as "the empire that is currently reigning" (*imperium quod nunc regnat*). The name encoded in the apocalyptic number 666 (Rv 13:18) was LATINUS. The "lawless one" prophesied in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–7, claimed Irenaeus, was the emperor (*AH* 5.26.1, 30.3). A century later still, Victorinus of Pettau awaited "the destruction of Babylon, that is, the city of Rome" (*ruina Babylonis, id est civitatis Romanae*) (*On the Book of the Apocalypse* 8.2, 9.4).

A vivid expectation of the end tends to be enormously destabilizing. Many Christians of various denominations during the course of the second century – the period coinciding with the onset of serious persecutions – saw visions, uttered apocalyptic prophecies, and acted on their convictions by deserting their fields, and even their towns, to greet the Second Coming. With the conversion of (one denomination of) Christianity to a form of imperial religion, the anti-Roman tenor of orthodoxy's earlier apocalyptic writings relaxed. For those other Christian communities now persecuted by the imperial church, the earlier correspondence of persecution and millenarian hope remained: "beneath the purple and scarlet robes of the apocalyptic whore . . . [they] could still recognize Rome" (R. A. Markus 1970: 55).

Some learned churchmen gained some purchase on millenarian enthusiasms by devising elaborate calculations establishing the age of the world. The End could not come and Christ would not return, so went the argument, until 6,000 years of Creation were accomplished. These calculations, based on creative readings of biblical numbers and symbols, have been revised continually from antiquity on into the present (Landes 1988). But apocalyptic convictions themselves remained unchanged. Stimulated formerly by civic or imperial aggression, they could later, in the post-Constantinian period, be agitated by signs of imperial decline. Thus, after 410, when Rome fell to Gothic invaders, Augustine reported a surge in millenarian expectation: "Behold, from Adam all the years have passed," Augustine exclaimed, quoting these people, "and behold, the 6,000 years since Creation are complete, and now comes the Day of Judgment!" (*Serm.* 113.8). Christian apocalypticism, the most mythological ancient belief, and the one so readily vulnerable to unambiguous empirical disconfirmation, has paradoxically remained one of the most characteristic convictions of Western Christian culture.

4 Conclusion

Energetic variety characterized the first three centuries of the Christian movement. We might, indeed, even query the use of the singular "movement" to describe what we have just surveyed. Some forms of Christianity remained comfortably within the ambit of the synagogue; others became virulently anti-Jewish. Some Christians expressed their convictions through elaborate intellectual constructions, creatively re-conceiving the theological project of post-classical *paideia*, others did so by putting themselves forward to be martyred, and still others by distilling the age of the world from the signs in their revelatory texts. Some continued to constitute their Christianity as a studied otherworldliness and defiance of imperial authority, still others by becoming the most effective urban power-brokers of the late empire. "Christianit*ies*," or "Christian movements," might seem more adequate to the task of description.

Yet all of these highly various Christians, their behavioral and doctrinal differences notwithstanding, saw themselves as the recipients of salvation (howsoever defined) thanks to the mission and message of Jesus Christ (howsoever constructed). Our historical perspective can allow us to see beyond the narrowness of fourth-century orthodox retrospect, and to appreciate the wider Christian world of which "orthodoxy" itself was only a small part. It is precisely the heat of their internal debate, the contesting self-definitions of all these different Christian communities, that gives us the measure of their more fundamental kinship.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Christian Thought

Mark Edwards

Under the Roman Empire Christianity was but one of the religions – if ind one religion and not a family. It grew under persecution and flourish patronage; some authors wrote theology of set purpose, while others, a stumbled on their own beliefs in works of casuistry, apologetic, exhorta controversy. It often happened that one man's apology was another man's h man's philosophical speculation another man's dogma, one man's defense doxy another man's gratuitous polemic. Sometimes a Christian soverei publish his own opinion; sometimes, in trying to appease two factions, he surprised to find himself the leader of a third. There is therefore no one Christian thought in the early period, and a history of it cannot be of dogmatics. At the same time, it is a salient fact, which sets Christia from the other creeds of the Roman Empire, that it formed a church, that tl was governed by councils, and that councils made pronouncements wh dangerous for a Christian to oppose. In this chapter, therefore, I shall nc dogmatics to the margins, as some classicists do when writing about tl within the empire, but at the same time I shall try to deal an even hand and orthodoxy, while taking due account of the ambient culture and the p personal conviction under political duress.

1 The Uniqueness of Christianity

Whatever else is doubted – and most everything in the history of the early doubtful – it can hardly be denied that Christianity originates in the prea Jew to other Jews. All four of the canonical Gospels indicate that Jesus proc kingdom of God to his countrymen in Palestine, thus exciting fears – or charge – of insurrection, and that when he was crucified by Pontius Pilate, p of Judaea, a mocking rubric, "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews" was