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Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments
ed. by James Carleton Paget and Judith Lieu (review)

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interrogation would have been welcome. The second chapter deals with the New Testament and serves as “scriptural background” for patristic writers. She interprets Gal 3.28 as the proclamation of equality between slave and free in both “church and society” (103). It is a favorable interpretation of Paul. In the opinion of this reviewer, the chapter would have benefitted from a substantial criticism of Paul. The early Christians did not only take part in the slave economy, for several NT texts provided the theological rationale for slaves’ subordination. These matters deserve more scrutiny.

The book also suffers from some problems with its structure. Chapter One, which is the longest, provides an overview of pre-Christian sources on the themes “asceticism, slavery, and socio-economic injustice.” Notably, it reads as a stand-alone chapter. At times, it feels like one is reading about one philosopher after another without any structural argument chaining them together. This is a problem throughout the book. In addition, careful editing could have weeded out some repetitive sentences and phrases.

Altogether, *Social Justice* is a somewhat frustrating read—for this reviewer at least—since questions about the social and ideological positions of the Christian thinkers that Ramelli studies (and perhaps admires) are left out. Why was it so hard for many of the Christian thinkers to denounce slavery completely? What interests had they in criticizing slavery and still accepting it? And what influence did their teachings have on other Christians? There is a suspicion that more could be said about these issues, because the detachment of intellectual history from material and ideological context is too neat.

Even if not all of Ramelli’s arguments are entirely convincing and the book has some structural problems, the perspective she brings into the fray of writing the history of ancient slavery is original and welcome. It is recommended for those engaged with the topic of slavery in antiquity and late antiquity. It has important contributions to said topic, and it works as an introductory source book for anyone who wants to have an overview of a vast historical period.

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James Carleton Paget and Judith Lieu, editors
*Christianity in the Second Century:
 Themes and Developments*
 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017
 Pages xi + 354. \$120.00.

This volume of collected essays takes up the neat but arbitrary topic of the century spanning 100–200 c.e. With characteristic reserve, the Introduction (jointly written by the editors) carefully circumscribes the scope of its results: “As will have become obvious, it has not been the task either of this introduction or of the volume as a whole to provide a new and settled account of the second Christian century” (21). Nevertheless, the essays cover a broad range of topics crucial to

an understanding of areas of research and current debates frequently traced to this epoch. In what follows, I attempt to give a general sense of each essay.

Part One focuses on “Context.” (1) Greg Woolf, “Empires, Diasporas and the Emergence of Religions,” seeks to understand why some religious innovations traced to the second century flourished, while others did not. The approach is evolutionary insofar as it explains a broad range of religious changes as “adaptive response[s] to the selective pressures exerted on religious innovation by its broader environment” (32). Woolf’s conclusion is that “the broad family resemblance of these emergent groups exemplifies the principle of convergent evolution . . . the process by which quite distinctly related species come to acquire similar characteristics when subjected to similar selective pressures” (37). Woolf’s conclusion is itself a religious innovation, for his idea that religions emerged from a number of different starting points to become more similar contrasts with the widespread assumption that Judaism and Christianity are descendants of a common Abrahamic model (37).

(2) Tessa Rajak has dedicated most of her career to careful exploration of Judaism in Greece and Rome, with close attention to the destruction of Jerusalem. The interest of the present essay, “The Mediterranean Jewish Diaspora in the Second Century,” does not stray far from her oeuvre, addressing the culture of the primary diasporic areas of Jewish life in the Roman imperial domain (i.e., predominantly Greek-speaking and Greek-writing). Chronologically, her period begins with 70 C.E. (40), pressing slightly on the volume’s apparent parameters. While little can be said to distinguish one part of the “diaspora” from others at this time, Rajak finds Syria to be a special case based primarily on Antioch’s vulnerability to influences from Jerusalem.

(3) Philip Alexander’s “The Rabbis and Their Rivals in the Second Century CE” opens with a warning about the error of prioritizing rabbinic Judaism in examinations of the various expressions of Abrahamic faith in the second century (57). Alexander warns that histories of the Jews and Judaism in late antiquity are too frequently written *from the standpoint* of the rabbinic movement. In this essay he emphasizes that “there were other groups who did not accept the authority of the Rabbis, nor subscribe to their distinctive worldview, but whose Judaism had as much legitimacy in its day as had theirs” (57). Rival groups include the priests, the ‘*Ammei ha-aretz*’ (64), and the Minim (“heretics”). The essay is a synthesis of more detailed work published elsewhere.

(4) William Horbury’s essay, “Church and Synagogue vis-à-vis Roman Rule in the Second Century,” traces two themes, martyrology and apologetic, examining various period-appropriate manifestations of these phenomena. Acknowledging that some writers distinguished the church and synagogue, others, according to Horbury, did not: “Roman awareness of the Jewish connections of Christianity is indicated from Tacitus to Celsus and Galen, and has justifiably encouraged a synoptic view of Jews and Christians under second-century Roman rule” (86). Horbury commences his investigation with terms of self-definition, after which he discusses distinctive aims of each group’s apologetics: synagogues sought full protection by Rome; churches requested restraint on accusations. In terms of martyrdom, Jewish examples are the exception, primarily responding to Jewish

disturbances (i.e., relative security), whereas Christian examples are more common and express a greater degree of insecurity (87).

Part Two focuses on “Discerning Continuity and Discontinuity.” (5) James Carleton Paget’s essay, “The Second Century from the Perspective of the New Testament,” opens this section, addressing the dating of NT texts. In a discussion of approaches, Carleton Paget acknowledges F. C. Baur and J. B. Lightfoot and how their battles repeat themselves today (92). He notes that other positions may be traced to differing views on the existence of oral sources or the integrity of a given text (92–94). A second section treats approaches basing themselves on the assumption of a decline of the first century in the second (94–96)—the “trajectory approach” reflecting this trend albeit on a larger scale (96–99). “Reception” constitutes yet another model for comprehending the developments of the second century, although many who use it simultaneously reject any separation from the originating tradition. For example, Carleton Paget mentions Francis Watson’s insistence that, while tradition is “received,” it is also “integral” and “not optional” (99–100). Watson is, of course, correct that the only question is whether “reception” is the underlying model. A final section categorizes recent approaches to Marcion in three groups, insightfully characterized as a microcosm of prevalent perspectives on NT formation *in toto*: (a) NT as reaction against Marcion; (b) Marcion as reaction against NT; and (3) Marcion as caesura in an otherwise gradual but unbroken development of the NT (102).

(6) In “Continuity and Change in Second-Century Christianity: A Narrative against the Trend,” Lewis Ayres addresses what he refers to as “discursive space” during the second century. After an initial discussion of “narrative patterns” in the “proto-orthodox” texts of Hebrews and the Fourth Gospel (with a brief interlude on interruptive “diversities”), he “leaps” (114) to the second century, where he sees the selfsame proto-orthodox positions reflected in the “rules of faith” and writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian. The conclusion rejects scholarly constructs “of a second-century Christian smorgasbord” or “set of Christianities, each of which may claim a foundation in the diverse phenomenon of earliest Christianity” (119). Noting that his view flies in the face of much “scholarly orthodoxy,” he argues that “there is one late second-century tradition that can fairly claim close family connections with themes that seem fundamental to our earliest Christian texts . . . the tradition of the proto-orthodox” (119).

(7) Karen L. King’s essay, “‘The Gnostic Myth’: How Does Its Demise Impact Twenty-First Century Historiography of Christianity’s Second Century?” opens by citing Rudolf Bultmann’s description of the Gnostic redeemer myth. It then reports how Carsten Colpe and Hans-Martin Schenke rejected and Michael A. Williams and King herself corrected the “lingering effects” (122–23) of Bultmann’s description on the basis of detailed analyses of the Coptic literature from Egypt (Berlin, Nag Hammadi, and Tchacos codices). The ensuing essay problematizes the chronological relationship of “Gnosticism” to the NT, advocating “complex mappings” (136). King claims that “emphasis on difference is inadequate to address the question of what justifies grouping all these forms under the single rubric ‘Christianity’ or even grouping them as ‘Christianities’” (127). “Neat groups” of literary works are clearly inadequate (131), as are genealogical lines

of unbroken unidirectional development (130) and assumptions of homogeneous early Christian communities, holding, for example, the same views on sexual ethics and practice (127). Needless to say, the volume's flow from Ayres to King has a jarring effect. If the value of the volume is to introduce readers to the study of the second century ("those unfamiliar with the period or with recent debate," 21) one wonders how they could interpret these positions as anything other than guided by a scholar's own twenty-first century predilections.

(8) Mark Edwards's essay, "The Gnostic Myth," begins with a discussion of polyvalent usage of expressions such as *gnostikos*, *gnosis*, Valentinian, Sethian, and Marcionite, before embarking on a somewhat unsystematic exploration of the component parts of the Gnostic myth in classical literature. The argument comes to an unexpected halt in a discussion of Numenius: "Here then is the riddle. The thought of Plotinus resembled that of Numenius so closely as to warrant an accusation of plagiarism" (144). This sets the stage for a nuanced claim involving the distinction between *allegoresis* and *allegoria* (143–44) and what Edwards refers to as the "enclitic" nature of some literature. The point is to argue that Gnosticism is less a system of doctrines than a mode of theological discourse about "the primordial documents of Christianity" (149), a practice Christians adopted from the philosophical schools and used to reflect on their texts as philosophical discourses.

(9) Winrich Löhr's "Modelling Second-Century Christian Theology: Christian Theology as *Philosophia*" treats various modes of "doing Christian theology" (151). In contrast to Rajak, who begins her second century *circa* 70 c.e., Löhr advocates for a second century that includes Origen. He begins by assessing the various implications of the word *theologia*, concluding that (barring a comprehensive analysis of the history of the Greek term) it refers to discourse about the human and divine, including ethics. For the second century, such discourse was referred to as *philosophia* (153), an expression for which we also lack comprehensive analysis. On the basis of diversity, heresiology, and doctrinal unity, Löhr argues that for the second century it makes sense to interpret Christianity on the model of the philosophical school. The second half of the essay, however, queries this argument based on Christian attitudes to "philosophy" and the revelatory nature of Christianity (as compared with philosophy's emphasis on reason). He concludes with a third and final discussion of definitions, this time addressing the expression "Christian." For the second century, he observes a spectrum of applications from orthodoxy to heresy, including Gnostic teachers and their followers.

Part Three presents essays "Interpreting Texts and Engaging in Practice." (10) Rebecca Flemming's "Galen and the Christians: Texts and Authority in the Second Century AD" attempts to situate Christians within Galen's strategy of legitimation across his oeuvre and "within patterns of text and authority" in the second century. She argues that, according to the prevailing construct, Christians qualify as "sect-maniacs"—logically inconsistent, intellectually lax, and slavish adherents to unproven doctrines (185)—and thus map poorly onto prevalent second-century constructions of legitimation. Flemming views the *methodikoi* as the Christian counterpart in the medical community, a group Galen regarded with utmost disdain (186).

(11) Joseph Verheyden's "'Authoritative Texts' and How to Handle Them: Some Reflections on an Ambiguous Concept and Its Use in Second-Century Christian Literature" discusses the pragmatic use of texts by Christians in the second century and delimits four categories: classical/Hellenistic texts, Jewish scriptures, early Christian texts, and recent Christian writings.

(12) Teresa Morgan's very lucid and insightful essay, "Belief and Practice in Graeco-Roman Religiosity: Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 379 C," argues that second-century Christian emphasis on *doxa*, as over and against *praxis*, is not *as* foreign to the context as often thought. Some Greek and Roman worshippers in the late Hellenistic world too emphasized right belief about the gods, and such right belief affected ritual practice.

(13) Laura Nasrallah's essay, "Lot Oracles and Fate: On Early Christianity among Others in the Second Century," focuses on various second-century mechanisms for discerning the future. She identifies four issues as central: (1) E. R. Dodds's characterization of 161–337 C.E. as an age of anxiety (216–17); (2) representations of Tyche (217); (3) the variety of connotations of the Greek and Latin expressions denoting providence or fortune (i.e., *moira*, *heimarmene*, *fortuna*, etc., 218–19); and, (4) the age-old question of the relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. To her conversation, Nasrallah invites various writings of Lucian, Epictetus, Justin Martyr, the Lot Oracle at Kremna, Tatian, and Seneca. She concludes that the historical context left Christians not anxious (with Dodds) but confused: "Christians among others in antiquity used divination and sortition and crafted a philosophical self inured to its answers" (230).

(14) With characteristic precision and clarity, Erich S. Gruen's essay, "Christians as a 'Third Race': Is Ethnicity at Issue?" discusses the knotty question of whether, in antiquity, Christians were considered a third "race." He lays out the evidence, emphasizing possible missteps in the interpretation of texts, including Aristides, the *Tripartite Tractate*, and Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*. He concludes that the most direct reference to *tertium genus* comes from Tertullian, who rejects the label as a derogatory expression for Christians (246–47). Gruen concludes that *genus* is sometimes employed but "without ethnic or racial significance" (248).

(15) Oskar Skarsaune's "Ethnic Discourse in Early Christianity" takes up the same question with closer attention to NT evidence. Ultimately, he draws the same conclusion as Gruen.

The final three essays are among the volume's most astute. (16) John A. North's "Pagan Attitudes" subjects Lucian of Samosata's comments on the early Christians in *Death of Peregrinus* to renewed examination, arguing that his evaluation raises previously overlooked questions about Lucian and his audience in the direction of sympathy for pagans attempting to understand Christianity. (17) In "'Away with the Atheists!' Christianity and the Militant Atheism in the Early Empire," Tim Whitmarsh maintains that Christians were unlikely to have been viewed as atheists prior to Constantine, arguing rather that at this time it was Christians who positioned—in more than one way—true faith as antithetical to atheism (282). Closing the collection, (18) Judith Lieu's "Modelling the Second Century as the Age of the Laboratory" helpfully discusses models in use for interpreting

second-century Christianity, including the Chicago School, the Parting of the Ways, the linguistic turn, and Löhr's "laboratory."

I unreservedly recommend this volume. It has many values for the field of NT Studies, even if the most pressing is negative, namely, the message that tidy delineation of a century as an object of study is anything but. Trends of second-century Christianity are as various as the random selection of a one hundred-year period would suggest. Never was this point more compelling than in the light of the present publication. The volume contains three photographic reproductions (Nasrallah, 217, 218, and 221). An unexpected scarcity of documentation in footnotes may reflect the volume's origin as a collection of conference papers.

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