

DEVELOPMENT AND DIVERSITY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

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I. ROMAN HELLENISM AND CHRISTIANITY

According to Tiberius, divine justice had little to do with human religious administration. Pagan leadership had only a minor role to play in managing any disrespect shown to the gods. In the emperor's mind the maxim was clear: *deorum iniurias dis curae*, "wrongs done to the gods were the concern of the gods" (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.73.5).¹ Humans were to concern themselves with other things. Or so it has been argued.² Pagan religious syncretism was such that concepts of heresy and orthodoxy were not central to the pagan religious culture. Doctrinal formulations, such as metaphysical constructs, were not essential to true religion. Instead, religious concerns centered on much more social interests.³

Doctrinal preoccupation, then, may have been typical of early Christianity, but not of the pagan syncretism contemporary with it.⁴ The argument that Phillips makes regarding the uniqueness of the concepts of heresy and orthodoxy within early Christianity finds agreement in the position of Richard Lim.⁵ He notes the philosophers' disapproval of "authoritative 'givens,'" "dogmatic beliefs," or "blind trust in the dictates of an authority," emphasizing instead that neither Greco-Roman religion nor philosophy functioned with categories of heresy or orthodoxy. Instead, the Romans engaged in polemic, rivalry, disputation, debate, "philosophical demonstration," and "a dialectic of inquiry." Prior to a change beginning in the third century, Roman culture had been satisfied with eclecticism, disagreement, rather than consensus, concord, and uniformity.⁶

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¹ Cornelius Tacitus, *P. Cornelii Taciti Annalium ab excessu divi Augusti libri: The Annals of Tacitus*, 2d ed., vol. 1, *Books I–VI* (ed. H. Furneaux; Oxford: Clarendon, 1896) 276.

² C. R. Phillips, "The Sociology of Religious Knowledge in the Roman Empire to A.D. 284," *ANRW* 2.16.3 (1986) 2677–2773.

³ Phillips, "Sociology of Religious Knowledge" 2750.

⁴ *Ibid.* 2752.

⁵ *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995) 8, 13, 26, 31–69; "Christian Triumph and Controversy," in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World* (ed. G. W. Bowersock, P. Brown, and O. Graban; Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2001) 197.

⁶ What had characterized Greco-Roman culture was not serenity, but ideological strife, competition, and quarreling. Such philosophical wrangling and disputation was expected by the populace; it was a mark of the philosopher. Only later would philosophers move away from dialectic

This thesis regarding the toleration of Roman paganism in sharp contrast to the unique, social intolerance of Christianity finds its roots, at least in modern discussion, in David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* (1757).⁷ "So sociable is polytheism," he says, "that the utmost fierceness and antipathy, which it meets within an opposite religion, is scarcely able to disgust it, and keep it at a distance."⁸ It is not difficult to find contemporary advocates, some more nuanced than others.⁹ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz absolves the Roman gods of jealousy: "The gods of Rome insisted that they must be offered punctiliously all honours due to them but they did not worry about what honours were paid to other gods or to men."¹⁰ Ramsay MacMullen speaks of Rome as "completely tolerant," yet "not quite completely."¹¹ Romans were expected to honor the gods, to preserve and perpetuate the cult while certain groups were occasionally persecuted and certain practices forbidden.¹² On the other hand, the study of John Ferguson emphasizes Roman religious accommodation, but the exclusivity of the Jews and Christians, and ultimately the "unloving intolerance" of the Christians.¹³

Peter Garnsey, however, has argued strongly against a culture of religious toleration among pagans in antiquity.¹⁴ A plurality of gods, even those from other national religions, was incorporated in Greco-Roman paganism, but such incorporation should be understood as relatively rare. Usually it occurred as a response to crisis or the result of expansion by warfare through which other gods were made subject to the pantheon of the victor. Gods "were simply annexed," and by virtue of its power, Rome exhibited a religion "in many 'foreign' forms."¹⁵ Each state religion was exclusive, but not in the sense of being "truer" or more privileged than the religions of other communities. "Exclusiveness" had more to do with maintaining the social order which was itself linked to a web of relationships involving the emperor, the gods, and civic elites.¹⁶

Romans perceived, in measure, their own superiority to other cults.¹⁷ Since religion contributed to Roman unity and identity in significant measure, the

and toward traditionalism. The same diversity was true religiously. Pluralism was allowed so long as it did not deny the gods, threaten imperial society, or lead to impiety. Roman religion knew both continuity and change. Society was anchored to a belief in divination, while the practice and techniques of divination developed and changed (J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1979]).

⁷ Chap. 9; cf. M. Beard, J. North, and S. Price, *Religions of Rome*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998) 1.212, n. 2.

⁸ Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (ed. J. Fieser; New York: MacMillan, 1992) 42.

⁹ R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven/London: Yale University, 1981) 2.

¹⁰ Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* 198.

¹¹ MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* 2.

¹² J. Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University, 1970) 211–43.

¹³ *Ibid.* 243.

¹⁴ P. Garnsey, "Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity," in *Persecution and Toleration* (ed. W. J. Sheils; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) 1–27.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 6–7; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome* 1.363.

¹⁶ Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome* 1.361–63.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 1.211–36. The following discussion is indebted to these pages.

public context expected *religio*, or behavior that honored the gods of the state. Such devotion, however, was not to involve *superstitio*. That is, it was not to be excessive, particularly by moving toward magic or unacceptable foreign cults. The regulation of religious practice, of course, always had *religio* in mind. Some societies were permitted to meet while others were prohibited; some activity of divination was declared illegal as was magic and human sacrifice. It needs to be said, also, that propagandistic concerns were not unique to Christians.¹⁸

What becomes quite evident, especially by observing Rome's relationship to oriental cults, is that Rome had it both ways. Rome established religious limits, but also integrated foreign gods; Rome was both intolerant and tolerant, exclusive and syncretistic. Robert Turcan demonstrates the tension convincingly.¹⁹ So while Varro, Cicero, Juvenal, and even Lucian of Samosata, a Hellenized Syrian, could despise the influx of foreign gods, these same gods were being Romanized and shown favor by Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, and Marcus Aurelius. Roman religion took on the nature of hybridity. It was not a question of whether Rome embraced a concept of religious exclusivity, but rather the degree to which Rome embraced it.

Recent studies have reoriented our understanding of Roman religion and now allow us to appreciate both its diversity and unity. Questions of orthodoxy and heresy, tolerance and intolerance, exclusivity and syncretism are issues common to both Roman Hellenism and Christianity. It is historically inaccurate to continue to present, as some have done, the Romans as admirably tolerant and the early Christians as disappointingly intolerant.²⁰ No doubt there is a difference of degree.²¹ The struggle to define truth and communities was a common concern of groups in the second and third centuries.

For our interests, this is an important perspective to grasp. We are interested in various accounts of development and diversity in early Christianity. Some accounts reflect a theory of exclusivity and intolerance within Christianity and Roman Hellenism. We shall return to the role of such theories later.

The manner in which scholars have understood the struggle of early Christian self-definition reflects diversity and development itself. From the classical

¹⁸ For example, pagan and Jewish literature of the Hellenistic and Roman periods manifest developed apologetic traditions within nationalistic histories claiming the superior antiquity of the civilization at issue (A. J. Droge, *Homer or Moses?* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989] 1–11, 194–98). Propaganda also helped certain cults gain in popularity. The cult of Isis experienced steady success throughout Greece and Rome, it seems, not because of mission, but because of the Isis aretologies (J. dan Boeft, "Propaganda in the Cult of Isis," in *Persuasion and Discussion in Early Christianity, Ancient Judaism, and Hellenism* [Leuven: Peeters, 2003] 9–23). And the Greek way of life had its own defenders. Philostratus's *Apollonius* provided a justification for the value and virtue of the ideals of Hellenism (S. Swain, "Defending Hellenism: Philostratus *In Honour of Apollonius*," in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagan, Jews, and Christians* [ed. M. Edwards, M. Goodman, and S. Price; Oxford: Oxford University, 1999] 157–96).

¹⁹ *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (trans. A. Nevill; Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 1–27.

²⁰ Cf. e.g. B. D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University, 2003) 91–92, 254–56.

²¹ Cf. Rebecca Lyman, "Hellenism and Heresy," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003) 215.

view to the old historicism to post colonialism, the discussion has manifested anything but continuity. Instead, it reveals shifts in the interpretation of ancient religion, historiography, metaphysics, and literary criticism, frequently in parallel to shifts in biblical studies. My purpose here is to portray the landscape of the discussion with some of its more brilliant colors and angles, and then to offer a brief suggestion of theological parameters which may help to shape evangelical historical reflection.

II. DEVELOPMENT AND DIVERSITY IN MODERN DESCRIPTION

1. *The classical theory.* Discussion about development and diversity in Christian thought as well as about the difference between orthodoxy and heresy used to be so simple. Or at least that was what the Church had told itself. What H. E. W. Turner labeled the “classical theory” seemed to settle the question for the early Church.²² Originally, in this theory, the Church kept the Lord’s teaching and the apostolic tradition untainted and pure. It understood orthodoxy as temporally prior to heresy. Heresy was a crooked deviation from orthodoxy, a heretic one who departed from the truth. Orthodoxy’s temporal priority could be seen in Scripture’s prophecies of heresy while the crookedness of the heretics’ doctrine was believed to follow from

²² H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations Between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1954). A. J. Hultgren refers to it as the “traditional view” in which “truth preceded error” (*The Rise of Normative Christianity* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994] 7–8). The following discussion of the classical view and modern objections is informed by Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* 3–35, who points out that the heretics, however, raised objections to the manner in which the “classical theory” categorized them. Some claimed that rather than being innovators, they were conservative guardians of elements of the faith. Marcion, for instance, preserved the new covenantal nature of Christianity. The Gnostics believed that their myths were to be found in revealed traditions ancient and secret. Furthermore, the heretics of all stripes constructed their arguments from the Scriptures and linked themselves to Jesus Christ and took his name. Modern scholarship was doubtful about the classical theory: “But what tells most against the adequacy of this view is the assumption that orthodoxy represents a fixed and unyielding deposit of faith. A modern investigator finds it difficult to accept the static conception of orthodoxy which the classical view presupposes. Its arguments either ignore the presence within orthodoxy of factors which it regards as peculiar to heresy or else by an historical anachronism read back into the earlier period a degree of definition only later attained, and then only within relatively narrow limits” (Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* 8–9). The modern objections to the ancient notion of an orthodoxy without development or diversity are valid in measure. First, orthodoxy demonstrated aspects of fluidity; therefore heresy cannot be defined essentially as a deviation from an unchanging norm. Orthodoxy itself would need to answer this charge. Second, the classical position is also challenged by orthodoxy’s development. Shorter, simpler affirmations gave way to fuller statements; theologians revered in one age were replaced by the theological rock stars of another; doctrinal emphases normative at one time and place were assessed as intolerably imbalanced by another. Therefore, what appeared to Turner as such obvious diversity and development in early Christian thought brought him to the following perspective. The patristic theological journey to decipher the meaning of the One and the Many in relation to the Christian God (the problems of Trinity and Christology) indicates shifts in the composition of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy in the fourth and fifth century differed from that in the second. Even in the same century measurements of orthodoxy for different doctrines varied in terms of degrees of completeness and debate.

the adulterous, factious, criminal intent of their motives. They preferred to choose novelty rather than to receive that which was handed down.

For early Christianity, the ideological variety and diversity of heresy confirmed its corrupt nature. Heresy's illegitimacy was also evident in its geographical limitation, while orthodoxy was assumed to be universal. Heresy also had to be other than Christian, for it was thought to be an alloy forged from Hellenistic philosophy and apostolic tradition. Nevertheless, Turner himself recognized certain validity in objections to the "classical theory." In 1954 he argued that orthodoxy's journey manifested its own fluidity, shifts and evolution.

2. *The decline of primitive Christianity.* Both prior and subsequent to Turner, historians have offered alternatives to the "classical theory." It is now appropriate to review a few important ones.²³ We begin with Adolf Harnack who argued that the development in Christian doctrine out from the simple spirituality of the Gospel of Jesus should be understood as secularization.²⁴ Christian theology had united itself to a Hellenistic philosophy which led to perverse metaphysical reflection and dogmatic definition. The Gnostics were the first to "transform Christianity into a system of doctrines (dogmas)," and their systems "represent the acute secularizing or Hellenizing of Christianity."²⁵

In the conclusion to his *History of Dogma* Harnack wrote: "The Gospel entered into the world, not as a doctrine, but as a joyful message and as a power of the Spirit of God, originally in the forms of Judaism."²⁶ Because of the degenerating effects of dogmatic Christianity's amalgamation with Roman Hellenism, the world would not see the Gospel as a "glad message" again until Martin Luther.²⁷ Doctrinal development in early Christianity, for Harnack, meant change in the gospel, its misdirection, its impairment. Harnack sought to answer the question of how early catholic Christianity developed from primitive Christianity and attempted to understand it in terms of Hellenism as an exterior structuring force.²⁸

²³ For brief summaries of Harnack, Werner, and Bultmann see Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* 16–35, which has helped inform some aspects of the following presentation. For a short biography of Harnack see W. H. C. Frend, "Church Historians of the Early Twentieth Century: Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930)," *JEH* 52 (2001) 83–102.

²⁴ *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 3 vols. (Freiburg: Akademische Verlagsbuchhandlung von J. C. B. Mohr, 1886–1890); ET: *History of Dogma* (trans. 3d German ed.; 7 vols.; trans. N. Buchanan et al.; London: Williams and Norgate, 1894–1899).

²⁵ Harnack, *History of Dogma* 1.227, 226.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 7.272.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 7.273. Although for Harnack, Lutherans contradict this gladness in their loyalty to dogma.

²⁸ The same, to a degree, could be said about Friedrich Loofs with the qualification that he wished to keep the dynamics of primitive, or apostolic, Christianity, distinct from the development of early, post-apostolic Christianity. For the latter period Judaism and Roman Hellenism were determinative, and the catholic construct of the Trinity was a dogma disassociated from the NT. See *Leitfaden zum Studium der Dogmengeschichte* (Halle-Saale: M. Niemeyer, 1889); M. Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma* (trans. S. G. F. Brandon; New York: Harper and Bros., 1957) 6; O. W. Heick, *A History of Christian Thought*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965) 1.10.

But Martin Werner was a bit different.²⁹ He followed F. C. Baur, who saw the early history of doctrine as a discipline concerned with comprehending development in light of causes or tendencies internal or implicit to the Hellenization of early Christianity. What were the inner presuppositions of primitive Christianity which served as impulses for early catholic doctrine? He found the answer in Jesus' catastrophic eschatology, which eventually was de-eschatologized. This change led to primitive Christianity's transformation into Hellenized dogmatism; the new eschatology of a more personal, realized type was not the "consequence of [Christianity's] Hellenization," but rather "the cause of it."³⁰

Thus, Martin Werner offered another way to understand development. For Werner, only the consistent eschatology of Albert Schweitzer (to whom he dedicated his book) accurately portrayed the viewpoint of primitive Christianity. The history of the development of Christian dogma, from his perspective, is the history of a departure from the eschatological expectation of authentic Christianity and the theological and Christological elements inherent within it. In doctrinal development, the primitive gospel is de-eschatologized and transformed into the dogmas of Catholic and, eventually, Protestant orthodoxy. There is an intersection with the thought of Harnack, as Werner speaks of early dogmatic Christianity as a Hellenistic mystery religion. Later orthodoxy, in the mind of Werner, "is virtually an *ersatz* production with little or no real continuity with the faith of the New Testament."³¹

3. *Early diversity and the establishment of orthodoxy.* These first two modern attempts to explain development in early Christianity share a belief in an original, primitive form of gospel, although their concepts of this form and its evolution differ. A drastic change occurred in the fourth decade of the twentieth century when Walter Bauer published his paradigm-shaping book *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (ET 1971).³² In Bauer's argument, orthodoxy was a late development, which in Edessa, in Eastern Syria, was preceded by Marcionism with orthodoxy becoming "the decisive influence" only at the close of the third and beginning of the fourth century.³³ In Egypt, a clear differentiation between orthodoxy and heresy was still wanting into the third century. In the late second century, Egyptian Christianity, for him, was "decidedly unorthodox," with a Gnostic representation. There was little evidence for an originally orthodox Egypt.³⁴

²⁹ *Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas problemgeschichtlich dargestellt* (Bern/Leipzig: P. Haupt, 1941); ET: *The Formation of Christian Dogmas: An Historical Study of Its Problems* (trans. S. G. F. Brandon; New York: Harper and Bros., 1957) 3–27.

³⁰ Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogmas* 293.

³¹ Turner, *The Problem of Christian Truth* 20.

³² *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (BHT 10; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1934; with G. Strecker's supplements, 1964; ET: trans. a team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins; ed. R. A. Kraft and G. Krodel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

³³ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* 1–43, esp. 33.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 44–60, esp. 48, 59.

His picture of early Christianity in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Crete is just as bleak in its portrayal of the early, substantial presence of orthodoxy.³⁵ The reliability of Ignatius of Antioch is suspect.³⁶ Bauer finds it unlikely that the orthodoxy of the bishop of Antioch was the stable, majority view throughout the cities in Asia Minor.³⁷ The expectations Ignatius places upon Polycarp indicate a very sad state for orthodoxy in early second-century Asia Minor. Orthodoxy “was in danger of being driven back, if not routed from the field, by Gnostic heresy.”³⁸ The Gnostics were so strong in Antioch that they were freely identifying themselves as Christians.³⁹ The struggle was not limited to Antioch. Bauer sees at least one “Gnostic anti-bishop” in Smyrna.⁴⁰ Therefore it is, in his mind, impossible to speak of firmly established orthodox episcopates in Asia Minor in which orthodox bishops had clearly separated from the Gnostics.⁴¹

In sum, according to Bauer, Ignatius was unable “to free himself from Gnosticism,” and Polycarp never successfully restrained heresy in Smyrna, including that of Marcion, which stood alongside orthodoxy there.⁴² Even Philippi and Thessalonica had heretical bishops representative of the majority.⁴³ Crete, too, originally held to a non-Pauline Christianity, while the epistle to Titus indicates an attempt to convert Crete to orthodoxy.⁴⁴

Furthermore, for Bauer, orthodoxy’s desperate situation among the cities of Asia Minor is evident also in John’s Apocalypse and 1 Peter.⁴⁵ Not even Ephesus avoided the scourge prior to Ignatius.⁴⁶ In his survey of other NT documents, which cannot be located with certainty in Asia Minor, he argues again for a strong early presence of heretics.⁴⁷

³⁵ Ibid. 61–76.

³⁶ Ibid. 61.

³⁷ Ibid. 61–63, 70.

³⁸ Ibid. 65, 69.

³⁹ Ibid. 67.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 69.

⁴¹ Ibid. 70.

⁴² Ibid. 67.

⁴³ Ibid. 71–74.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 76.

⁴⁵ John’s rebuke of Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea in the Apocalypse, along with the absence of Ignatian correspondence with these communities, indicates that they were already in the hands of the heretics without orthodox bishops. The same thing can be said for Colossae, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Lycia Pamphylia, and Cilicia from the silence of John and 1 Peter. There was nothing for the Orthodox to gain in these cities of the heretics (Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* 79–80).

⁴⁶ Rom 16; 1 Cor 16; Acts 20; Rev 2; 1–2 Tim manifest a dangerous presence of heresy at Ephesus and ultimately the loss of the consciousness of Paul and to a significant degree, his heritage. As the story unfolds, Gentile Christianity takes on Gnostic aspects, and it is only the immigration of orthodox Jewish Christians that will eventually, in later times, preserve orthodoxy for the Church (Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* 82–89).

⁴⁷ Jude, in his reading, evidences an important Gnostic influence within the community described, one which probably arose from inside the group. The Pastoral Epistles, for him, also reveal a deep conflict between the orthodox and heretical which are not to be viewed as the “majority and minority,” or original and deviant. Likewise, in the Johannine epistles, orthodoxy here appears to have been pushed completely onto the defensive, and to be severely restricted in its development. Rather than understanding these letters to reflect the retreat and departure of

The final element of Bauer's main argument comes in his treatment of Rome.⁴⁸ It is this city which is the original "center and chief source of power for the 'orthodox' movement within Christianity."⁴⁹ As a matter of fact, it is the majority in Rome who represent the type of Christianity known as orthodoxy. And it is Rome which takes its orthodoxy eastward, defeating heresy and establishing orthodoxy, through persuasion and polemic, so that eventually Rome draws "everything within reach into the well-knit structure of ecclesiastical organization."⁵⁰

Bauer, then, was testing what he labeled "the ecclesiastical position."⁵¹ From this vantage point the Church understood that from Jesus to the apostles to their immediate successors, pure doctrine had passed and been maintained and conversions were originally in continuity with that purity. But, eventually, pure doctrine was abandoned. The order of the ecclesiastical position was: "unbelief, right belief, wrong belief" without "the faintest notion anywhere that unbelief might be changed directly into what the Church calls false belief. No, where there is heresy, orthodoxy must have preceded."⁵² In reply, he formulated two theses: (1) "heresy," for most of the Mediterranean Christian communities, was earlier and more dominant than "orthodoxy"; and (2) the later victorious development of "orthodoxy" was largely due to the influence of Rome.

Development in early Christianity, then, for Bauer, is the journey from heresy or "false belief" to orthodoxy or "right belief." Or as MacRae put it, "orthodoxy is not the presupposition of the early church but the result of a process of growth and development."⁵³ Early Christianity *becomes* orthodox; it was not so from the beginning.

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the Bauer thesis for either NT or patristic studies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although penned in 1934, its impact outside of Germany was not felt, for the most part, until an English translation was produced in 1971. Within Germany, however, it had already impacted Rudolf Bultmann.

In a departure from Harnack and Werner, Bultmann saw survival of the old in the new, not replacement of the old by the new.⁵⁴ Hellenistic culture,

those who helped to a form of Gnosticism, Bauer prefers to argue that it was the orthodox who withdrew in a state of weakness. The epistles, especially 3 John, show us an attempt by an orthodox leader to victoriously promote orthodoxy within other communities (Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy* 89–94).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 95–129, 229–31.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 229.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 231.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* xxxiii.

⁵² *Ibid.* xxiii.

⁵³ "Why the Church Rejected Gnosticism," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 1: *The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries* (ed. E. P. Sanders; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 127.

⁵⁴ *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (4 vols.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1948–1953); ET: *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; trans. K. Grobel; New York: Scribner, 1951–1955); *Das Urchristentum im Rahmen der antiken Religionen* (Zürich: Artemis, 1949); ET: *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting* (trans. R. H. Fuller; London: Thames and Hudson, 1956).

of course, necessarily impacted primitive Christianity so that the original sect, Jewish and eschatological in nature, merged with elements of Gnostic dualism and mystery. With Bultmann, both the primitive and the Gnostic continue in tension.

His thesis was already specifically informed by Bauer.⁵⁵ Hellenistic Christianity was a diverse, syncretistic movement, characterized by conflicting expressions and formulations, some of which only later would be branded heretical by the victory of orthodox Christianity. "Thus," Bultmann wrote,

Hellenistic Christianity is no unitary phenomenon, but, taken by and large, a remarkable product of syncretism. It is full of tendencies and contradictions, some of which were to be condemned later on by orthodox Christianity as heretical. Hence also the struggles between the various tendencies, of which the Pauline Epistles give such vivid impression.⁵⁶

Yet, for Bultmann, there is also a unity underlying the diversity: a particular view of human existence which stands out from the other instances of affinity and differences between Gnosticism and Christianity.⁵⁷

Unsurprisingly, two of Bultmann's students in America also took account of Bauer's book. The same year the English version appeared, a collection of eight essays was published as a single volume with focused intention. James Robinson and Helmut Koester introduced their own thesis influenced partly by Bauer under the title *Trajectories through Early Christianity*.⁵⁸ Both of the authors "are involved in the current indigenization of the Bultmann tradition on American soil."⁵⁹ The authors do not explain, however, why the indigenization of Bultmann on American soil must occur.⁶⁰ Their own perspective differs somewhat from that of their teacher.

The overarching thesis of this important book has to do with reorienting modern NT scholarship's metaphysical and historiographical perspective. It has entered a "period of crisis" in which its basic categories need to be dismantled and reassembled.⁶¹ Categories once fueled by modern historiography's emphasis on the historic consciousness have become paralyzed and antiquated due to the control of the traditional, static metaphysics in historical thinking. These established, now historically insensitive, categories have prohibited authentic access to the "text itself" despite the recognition

⁵⁵ Cf. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity* 178, 230, n. 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 177.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 12, 178–79, 203, 208.

⁵⁸ James Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 16, 114, 119, n. 9. Four of the essays were published previously (1964–1971) to their appearance in the book, while the introduction is an enlarged version of an earlier publication. Only the final three chapters/essays are original to the volume. Cf. H. Koester, "The Theological Aspects of Primitive Christian Heresy," in *The Future of Our Religious Past: Essays in Honour of Rudolph Bultmann* (ed. J. M. Robinson; trans. C. E. Cariston and R. P. Scharlemann; New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 65–66.

⁵⁹ Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* 1.

⁶⁰ Cf. F. Staggs's review of Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* in *Review and Espositor* 71 (1974) 396.

⁶¹ Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* 4.

that this was their original intent.⁶² Whether “Palestinian” or “Hellenistic,” “background,” “environment,” or “context,” “Rabbinic Judaism” or “Gnosticism,” “orthodoxy” or “heresy,” all basic categories require reconfiguration.⁶³ The problem with NT scholarship is its metaphysics and the integration of its metaphysics into its historiography. A shift from “essentialist” to “historic” metaphysics is required.⁶⁴

The traditional static, substantial, essence/accidence-oriented metaphysics which gave our inherited categories their most basic form [needs to be replaced] with a dynamic, historic, existence/process-oriented new metaphysics, in terms of which a whole table of restructured categories may be envisaged.⁶⁵

Robinson and Koester acknowledge the benefits of “modern historicism,” but they are unhappy with the manner in which it is being practiced; they wish to drive it toward a dynamic metaphysics.⁶⁶

The concept of “trajectories” reflecting the new metaphysics of the dynamic process replaces the static notions associated with the terms “background” or “context.” The crisis arises out of the tendency to regard these concepts as indicating a single, unmoving position. Instead, events, persons, and texts can only be understood “in terms of the trajectories in which they are caught up,” and these trajectories involve “a plurality of spinning worlds, with conflicting gravitational fields.”⁶⁷ The various features of the environment in which Christianity is developing are not themselves static, but moving and shifting. These features have their own trajectories, and the trajectories of Christianity cannot be understood outside these dynamic cultural factors.⁶⁸

Although both note the importance of Bauer, it is a mistake to understand their work as fundamentally a consequence or pure development of Bauer’s

⁶² Ibid. 7–9.

⁶³ Ibid. 8, 12–13.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 13.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 2, 5, 9.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 14, 16.

⁶⁸ R. H. Fuller, “New Testament Trajectories and Biblical Authority,” *Studia Evangelica* 7 [TU 126] (1982) 190. An approach operating under the notion of trajectories is not tempted, say, to understand Gnosticism merely as a movement related to a failed Jewish apocalypticism or to the progress of syncretism. Instead, it will view Gnosticism as “related to the wider stream” or “spirit of late antiquity.” Whether Gnosticism or orthodox (“normative”) Christianity, both movements, within a framework of trajectories, will be seen as instances in which there is conformity “to a trend of the times,” rather than as instances which result from uniquely interior phenomenon (Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* 15). Within this framework the authors argue for the dynamic, multifaceted essence of the inherited categories of “kerygma” and “history,” the “sayings” genre, the Christian criterion of the earthly Jesus, gospel forms, early Christian creeds, and the Johannine tradition. These categories, in the chapters of Robinson and Koester, do not emerge as fixtures. One sees curvature rather than flat continuity. And such awareness of complexity and trajectories in the NT era must be extended to include the first three centuries. The literature of that period “must be treated as one inseparable unit” without divorcing “canonical” from “non-canonical” or “apocryphal” and “orthodox” or “patristic” from “heretical.” Such distinctions are obsolete and irrelevant (Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* 270–73).

thesis.⁶⁹ Robinson notes Bauer's argument as "epochal," but it is merely one trajectory, a bifurcating one. So, too, is the thesis he refers to as the dialectic one, which mirrors that of Werner. He lists also the trajectory of the classical thesis. Each is one trajectory or category with the risk of being Procrustean: forcing those things which belong together into separate beds. The agenda of Robinson and Koester is to recategorize these Procrustean categories. Here there is a movement beyond Bauer.

For Robinson and Koester, there is the earthly Jesus, but there is no "clearly formulated point of departure, like *the* primitive kerygma, or the biblical Christ."⁷⁰ Instead, there are trajectories—diverse, sometimes paradoxical solutions to the offensive, demanding problem of the human Jesus, all of which are related to other trajectories in the complexity of development within history.⁷¹

But development within early Christianity, for these authors, is not random. Courses can be traced, there is connection, there is sequence, there is determinism, and there is freedom.⁷² As Robinson notes, "the term trajectory may suggest too much determinative control at the point of departure, the angle at which the movement was launched, the torque of the initial thrust," but there is still control, angle, and torque.⁷³ Our authors see not only "specific trajectories," but also speak of an "overarching movement" of a trajectory or "overarching trajectories."⁷⁴ All connections and trajectories related to early Christianity find their point of origin and departure, find their "criterion" and "roots," in the earthly Jesus, for it is "beyond dispute that the historical origin of Christianity lies in Jesus of Nazareth, his life, preaching, and fate."⁷⁵ Within their metaphysics, then, we are to understand that Christianity *is* development and diversity and therefore Robinson and Koester leave us only with many solutions to the challenge of Jesus. Yet it is important to note that while there are many trajectories, indeed, many Christianities, Robinson speaks not of realities, but of *reality*. The fruit of historical study, and therefore of NT studies, is the revision and enlargement of our understanding of the unity of reality.⁷⁶ This singular reality is the ultimate cause or essence which determines all that becomes visible in history.

The fundamental relationship between a philosophical construct and early Christian and biblical studies should come as no surprise. Metaphysical assumptions have always determined exegetical and historical study. Robinson and Koester have simply made the relationship between metaphysics, historiography, and such study explicit. For them there can be

⁶⁹ Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* 16.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 277.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 278–79.

⁷² *Ibid.* 16–17. Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1977) 21–22, who presents a critique of Robinson's determinism.

⁷³ Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* 14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 16–17.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 117, 157.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 1–2.

no original truth less subject to the contingencies of history and culture than the “purely human man, Jesus,” who was “fully subject” to those contingencies.⁷⁷ Their opinion here resonates with that of Kurt Rudolph, expressed in the Koester *Festschrift*, where he says that his argument provided

no support for the notion that there was a “pure and unadulterated” Christianity in a historical sense even in its beginnings. This indeed could not have been the case, since the canonical writings of the New Testament, including the Gospels, and even Jesus himself did not propagate a message that was “pure” and isolated from the surrounding world. For the history of religions, there has never been a “pure religion”; this would be an ahistorical construct. . . . It makes no historical sense to speak of an “essence” of Christianity, except to say that the “essence” of Christianity is its history.⁷⁸

Rudolph here is advocating a historiography closest to that of classical historicism linked in his case to the likes of Friedrich Meinecke (1862–1954), an association we would not be far wrong to assume for Robinson and Koester. In his Haskell Lectures at the University of Chicago published in 1985, Rudolph contrasts his preferred historiography to Hegel’s which the latter expressed in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1892).⁷⁹ Hegel had argued for a particular conception of “development” which involved two distinguishable states: the state of “being-in-itself” (*An-sich-sein*), which entails capacity and power and the state of “being-for-itself” (*Für-sich-sein*), which entails actuality. Or, to put it another way, the former relates to that which is inherent, that which is “in embryo,” that which is “implicit,” subjective, “in word,” that which is in “germ,” that which “is yet hidden and ideally contained within itself.” The former, Rudolph says, addresses “the predisposition, the possible.”⁸⁰ On the other hand, the latter relates to that which is “explicit,” that which has “become an object,” that which “comes into existence,” that which “is the fruit or the produce of the germ.”⁸¹

For Hegel, however, no complete rupture can be introduced between the two. Development, he argues, finds its most helpful analogy in the field of horticulture. “The germ cannot remain merely implicit, but is impelled towards development,” so that it “will produce itself alone and manifest what is contained in it.”⁸² Yet although the subject, that which was implicit, is different from the object produced, that which is explicit, as fruit is different from the original seed, they are also the same. Development has a doubling effect, but it is the effect of separating into two things that which in content is the same.⁸³ Thus development is when something subjective is

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 277.

⁷⁸ “Early Christianity as A Religious-Historical Phenomenon,” in *The Future of Early Christianity* (ed. B. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 17 and 17, n. 40.

⁷⁹ *Historical Fundamentals and the Study of Religions* (New York/London: Macmillan/Collier Macmillan, 1985) 87–92; G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson; intro. T. Rockmore; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1996).

⁸⁰ Rudolph, *Historical Fundamentals and the Study of Religions* 88.

⁸¹ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* 20–22.

⁸² *Ibid.* 22.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

objectified, when that which is implicit “becomes explicit.”⁸⁴ Development means to “unfold,” “unroll,” “unwrap.”⁸⁵ No novel content has been produced, yet difference exists, and this difference is the result of development.

Rudolph, in his history-of-religions approach, thinks this notion of development is untenable. To his aid he calls Meinecke, the defender and strengthener of Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), the theorist of nineteenth-century historicism. With Meinecke, he offers an alternative understanding of development, an understanding rooted in the historical rather than the ideological, or the natural. In historicism, one finds a rejection of the static notion of Being (C. J. Braniss [1848]), an emphasis upon the temporal and spatial (C. Prantl [1852]), the replacement of a generalizing approach with one that is individualizing (Meinecke [1936]).⁸⁶ In general, historicism reads history as a scene which displays the diversity of human existence in a dizzying variety of forms. As a critique of the Enlightenment, classical historicism assumes that there is no human nature, there is only history. Furthermore, it assumes that history is not a flowing stream of continuity, but a series of spaces contiguous, but discontinuous; that all knowledge and experiences are historically conditioned; that there are no natural laws, only those which arise within particular historical contexts; that truth is a function of historical situatedness; and yet, that there is at least some notion of continuity between diverse historical occurrences.⁸⁷

As Rudolph points out in his analysis of Meinecke, the notion of development within historicism differs from that of the idealism of Hegel; it is not purely organicistic, natural, or necessary.⁸⁸ Instead, Meinecke sees development as “an uninterrupted continuity of activity” resulting primarily from the creative, ineffable power of the individual within the dynamic drama of particular historical circumstances.⁸⁹ Determinative, external influences are

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 21.

⁸⁵ Rudolph, *Historical Fundamentals and the Study of Religions* 88.

⁸⁶ G. G. Iggers, “Historicism,” in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (4 vols.; ed. P. P. Wiener; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973) 2.456–57.

⁸⁷ C. Thornbill, “Historicism,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (10 vols.; ed. E. Craig; London/New York: Routledge, 1998) 4.444; F. Lentricchia, “Foucault’s Legacy—A New Historicism,” in *The New Historicism* (ed. H. A. Veeger; New York/London: Routledge, 1989) 231. The last point relates to what Franks Lentricchia calls historicism’s “prime antihumanist assumption”: “all cultural and social phenomena especially selves, like all natural phenomena, are to be understood as effects produced by imperious agents of causality (cultural traditions, institutions, race, ethnicity, relatives of gender, economic and physical environments, dispositions of power).” The classical historicism is loyal in different degrees to the “metaphysics of determinism” in which all natural phenomena are effects caused by a variety of external, determining forces which somehow are still monolithic. Determinism in its strongest manifestation within classical historicism reflects a commitment to the unity of culture, so that each historical instance is a synecdoche, a component, constituent of an exterior, invisible, determinative, causal essence (Lentricchia, “Foucault’s Legacy—A New Historicism” 231–32).

⁸⁸ Rudolph, *Historical Fundamentals and the Study of Religions* 90–91.

⁸⁹ F. Meinecke, “Ein Wort über geschichtliche Entwicklung,” in *Aphorismen und Skizzen zur Geschichte* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1942) 96–97. For additional helpful orientation to Meinecke see “Historicism and Its Problems: *Meinecke*,” in *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present* (ed. F. Stern; New York: Vintage Books, 1956) 267–88.

not entirely discounted. To the freedom of the individual within history, Meinecke adds a concept of necessity, but one which is not suprahistorical.

In Meinecke's, as in Ranke's historicism, "Individual historical development is no mere evolution of tendencies already present in the germ cell. Rather does it possess a large measure of plasticity, of capacity to change and be regenerated as it is worked upon by the ever-changing forces of time."⁹⁰ To the "notion of a purely biological development, including the plant world (in fact, an evolution from innate tendencies)," historicism adds individuality with its "plastic capacity to change its forms under the influence of specific factors."⁹¹ In order to do this historicism had to break down "the rigid ways of thought attached to the concepts of Natural Law" and had to alter the notion of an "unchanging human nature."⁹² "The essence of historicism is the substitution of a process of *individualizing* observation for a *generalizing* view of human forces in history."⁹³

The development of early Christianity, then, for Robinson, Koester, and Rudolph must be understood within the parameters of classical historicism as a pattern of individualized interpretations of Jesus effected by the freedom and necessity within dynamic historical situatedness.⁹⁴ Here one finds the cosmological metaphor of Robinson: development in early Christianity must be understood as a dynamic taking place amidst "spinning worlds" and "conflicting gravitational fields." It is not the implicit germ becoming explicit, although some have argued that Robinson's view of trajectories is heavily deterministic with his assumption that history is "always composed of sequential developments which lead to terminal points."⁹⁵ Whether from a perspective of tradition history (Robinson/Koester) or the history of religions (Rudolph), representatives of these approaches are advocating a classical historicism with a deeper commitment to a process-oriented metaphysics, rather than Idealism, as a model for the interpretation of early Christianity.

Rudolph is happy to place all models, from Bauer to Bultmann to Robinson and Koester, under the influence of the history-of-religions school on account of their emphasis on understanding early Christianity within the context of its environment.⁹⁶ Here it has been freed from a historiography which was theologically and canonically restrained. Even Bauer takes a few words to clue the reader into his allegiance to such a historiography.⁹⁷ Each model continues Hermann Gunkel's emphasis on the syncretistic nature of Christianity, yet they understand the dynamic of development differently.⁹⁸ The first sees

⁹⁰ F. Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* (trans. J. E. Anderson; New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 504.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 3.

⁹² *Ibid.* 126.

⁹³ *Ibid.* iv (italics original).

⁹⁴ Cf. Rudolph, "Early Christianity as a Religious-Historical Phenomenon" 18–19.

⁹⁵ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* 22.

⁹⁶ Rudolph, "Early Christianity as a Religious-Historical Phenomenon" 9–11, n. 4; idem, "Heresy," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2d ed.; Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005) 3920–21.

⁹⁷ Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* xxii–xxiv.

⁹⁸ Cf. Bultmann on Gunkel in *Primitive Christianity* 177, 230, n. 1; cf. Koester on the syncretistic and diverse nature of Christianity in *Trajectories through Early Christianity* 115–17.

it as the integration and coexistence of the nascent and the Gnostic. The second sees it as the late introduction and ultimate victory of orthodoxy. The third understands it as a pattern of historically situated interpretations of a primitive religious figure, Jesus. Gone in the second and third is the concept of an original, primitive, nascent orthodoxy. The same perspective holds for our next model, which expands and partly redirects the earlier Bauer. This is a bit unexpected, because here the momentum of Robinson and Koester is somewhat stalled. The focus returns to Bauer's thesis.

According to Bart Ehrman in his monograph, *Lost Christianities*, Bauer's study "was arguably the most important book on the history of early Christianity to appear in the twentieth century."⁹⁹ Ehrman's own book begins by arguing for early Christian diversity in ideology and practice in questions of Christology, asceticism, soteriology, and ethics. He does this by examining four early non-canonical Christian texts.¹⁰⁰ Following his analysis of literary texts, Ehrman makes the same argument for early Christian diversity through a consideration of four social groups.¹⁰¹

For our purposes, Ehrman's pivotal discussion comes next. With Hermann Reimarus (1694–1768), F. C. Baur (1792–1860), and Walter Bauer (1877–1960), who "changed forever how we look at the theological controversies prior to the fourth century," he moves his reader away from the classical theory of developments in early Christianity to one which echoes and extends that of Bauer.¹⁰² His theory rests upon his previous evidence for early diversity, his skepticism concerning the historical accuracy of the Gospel sources, the Acts of the Apostles, and Eusebius, and the literature and polemics of proto-orthodoxy: (1) "the doctrines of orthodox Christianity must have developed at a time later than the historical Jesus and his apostles, later even than our earliest Christian writings"; (2) the extent of proto-orthodoxy in the second and third centuries was even less than Bauer had estimated; (3) "early Christianity was even less tidy and more diversified" than Bauer had realized; and (4) the victory of the proto-orthodoxy group had less to do with the influence of Rome than with polemical strategies in the art of literary combat.¹⁰³ Ehrman presents us with a revised version of Bauer's argument. Development in early Christianity is a movement away from an originally broad variety of Christianities, ideologically in conflict with proto-orthodoxy, to a later, but strategically superior, "orthodoxy."

Next, I briefly mention the thesis of Einar Thomassen who not only reconfigures Bauer's thesis, but also the very notion of the creation of

⁹⁹ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* 173.

¹⁰⁰ He calls the texts he examines "forgeries," *The Gospel of Peter*, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Secret Gospel of Mark*. His examination displays perspectives on the questions mentioned just above which are alternatives to those of mainstream Christianity (Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* 9–89).

¹⁰¹ He discusses the Ebionites, Marcionites, Gnostics, and proto-orthodox Christians. Again, ideology and practice are the focus. Competing beliefs regarding theology, cosmology, soteriology, Christology, and canon characterized relationships between the various groups and their acts of self-identification (Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* 91–157).

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 159–257, esp. 167–79 (quotation on p. 173).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 170, 176.

“orthodoxy.” He is unable to accept Bauer’s “view of early Roman orthodoxy and uniformity.”¹⁰⁴ The early diversity of Christianity also characterized Rome. There was no Roman exception and until the middle of the second century no group had excluded others from the general definition of “Christian.” Not until Marcion and Valentinus, he argues, do we find restrictive, exclusive self-definition and the establishment of orthodoxy.¹⁰⁵ Remarkably, his view argues that the first Roman “orthodox” Christians were the “heretics” Marcion and Valentinus. Here we have the orthodoxy of heresy. Unsurprisingly, Thomassen clarifies his preference for a conception of the dynamic rather than the static in the interpretation of historical development.¹⁰⁶

Our final model assumes Bauer’s thesis of early heresy and diversity but is not focused upon expanding or reconfiguring its main components. Instead, it offers a way to understand the early development of Christianity’s diversity in relation to Roman Hellenism.

4. *Beyond hellenization and syncretism to hybridity.* Rebecca Lyman, in her presidential address to the North American Patristic Society in 2002, moved forcefully beyond Bauer and Ehrman and the classical historicism of Robinson and Koester.¹⁰⁷ She attempted to provide a model for development in early Christianity based on a historiography informed by postcolonial theory, in particular the work of Homi Bhabha on “hybridity” developed in *The Location of Culture*.¹⁰⁸ In an earlier essay she had also brought Edward Said into the discussion.¹⁰⁹

According to Lyman, further attention must be given to recent studies which challenge the polarities usually assumed by European imperialism to define cultural contexts and cultural production. The polarity of East and West, she argues, is as false in its clarity as the polarity between Christianity and Hellenism. To attempt to comprehend the development and diversity of early Christianity within the limits of the latter polarity is to miss “the cultural and historical realities of second-century provincial life.”¹¹⁰

Lyman finds the narrative which seeks to explain the history of development and diversity within early Christianity by contrasting the static exclusivity and intolerance of Christianity with the diffuse Greco-Roman culture of plurality to be confusing. Here, in the context of her argument,

¹⁰⁴ Einar Thomassen, “Orthodoxy and Heresy in Second-Century Rome,” *HTR* 97 (2004) 250, n. 38.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 155–56.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 248.

¹⁰⁷ Lyman, “Hellenism and Heresy” 209–22. Cf. her negative assessment of historicism’s determinism and confusion of substance and contingent properties in “Historical Methodologies and Ancient Theological Conflicts,” in *The Papers of the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology*, vol. 3 (ed. M. Zyniewicz; Atlanta: Scholars, 1999) 77–78.

¹⁰⁸ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁰⁹ Rebecca Lyman, “The Politics of Passing: Justin Martyr’s Conversion as a Problem of ‘Hellenization,’” in *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing* (ed. K. Mills and A. Grafton; Rochester: University of Rochester, 2003); E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

¹¹⁰ Lyman, “The Politics of Passing” 37.

she opposes Lim and others.¹¹¹ Within the context of our discussion, she is also in disagreement with Ehrman.¹¹² Although, traditionally, the literature on the development of early Christianity understood Christian identity as something defined in contrast to its surrounding culture, Lyman wants us to see it, and believes recent studies point the way toward us seeing it, as a function of “shared identifications.”¹¹³ Christianity before Nicaea needs to be understood, not as a translation of an essential orthodoxy into the categories of Roman Hellenism, but as an “intellectual creation by particular individuals within Roman Hellenism.”¹¹⁴

Hellenism, recent studies have shown, was not a static entity. It shared diversity with early Christian expression. But, Lyman also stresses, there were quests for “universalism in histories of particular peoples as well as in scholastic philosophies.”¹¹⁵ Contemporary pluralism was viewed as a “decline from the original unity of philosophy,” and it is within the context of this search for unity that the propagandistic philosophical literature of the second and third centuries should be understood.¹¹⁶ It is also, for Lyman, the setting in which early Christian development should be interpreted.

“The polemical contrast of ‘Hellenism’ to ‘Christianity’ was a product of the fourth century.”¹¹⁷ Thus in the second century, she argues, it is more appropriate to conceive of Christians participating in a cultural movement within Hellenism, rather than as “defecting” from it.¹¹⁸ Wishing to reduce the uniqueness of the perceived exclusivity in early Christianity, Lyman emphasizes that the problems faced by Christians in their concern to provide an exclusive religious discourse were common also to Roman Hellenism.¹¹⁹ Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement, then, should be understood as participants within a “larger cultural discussion on ancestral origins and the identity of transcendent truth within a plurality of traditions.”¹²⁰ Early Christian development did not transform Hellenism, but rather was itself “a reconfiguring within the culture itself as a means of understanding universality and identity.”¹²¹

At this point, Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity” and “mimicry” become helpful for her purposes. Selecting Justin as her case in point, she interprets his work as an “intellectual hybrid” which attempted, as the product of a Christian, provincial philosopher, to present, within a culture of presentations, universal truth.¹²² “Hybridity,” for Bhabha, created the possibility

¹¹¹ Lyman, “Hellenism and Heresy” 209–15.

¹¹² Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* 91–92, 254–56.

¹¹³ Lyman, “Hellenism and Heresy” 213.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 211, 219–20.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 215.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 215–16.

¹¹⁷ Lyman, “Politics of Passing” 40; *idem*, “Hellenism and Heresy” 212.

¹¹⁸ Lyman, “Politics of Passing” 40–41.

¹¹⁹ Lyman, “Hellenism and Heresy” 214–16.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 216.

¹²¹ Lyman, “Politics of Passing” 48; *idem*, “Hellenism and Heresy” 220.

¹²² Lyman, “Hellenism and Heresy” 220.

of negotiation, instead of negation, a position in between. It offers a construct which is not identified with the essentialism of the received tradition, but which unsettles it, which deconstructs the polarities, and conveys the reality that political, or philosophical, referents are not primordial or natural, but historical. History is not teleological or transcendent.¹²³ "Mimicry," a "difference that is almost the same, but not quite," results from the desire for an other which can be recognized, but which is altered. Such mimesis, as "hybridity," subverts established authorities viewed as being essentialist.¹²⁴

Since Justin, in her understanding, sees truth as diffuse, evidence of the Logos may appear in all traditions, but these same traditions may also contain error. Transcendent truth as well as error is found in sources other than those identified as Christian.¹²⁵ Christianity may be superior to philosophy, but it is congruent with it, and therefore truth and error "remain intertwined within the multiplicity of locative religions, texts, stories, and competing philosophies."¹²⁶ Justin does not assimilate Hellenism through the lens of an authoritative tradition or community, instead he offers a portrayal of the unity and parameters of the multiple options reflected within the second century in order to provide a platform for the transcendent faith constructs of his conception of Christianity. Here he is both Hellenist and Christian, his vision, a hybrid, a mimesis. There is a unity of truth which he shares with his culture, an inclusive truth. So heresy, for Justin, must be understood as "improper imitation of a common truth shared by philosophers, Jews, and Christians."¹²⁷ Justin's "orthodoxy" is not a construction of "a priori exclusive Christian belief into philosophical clothing."¹²⁸ It is his own exercise to provide a hybrid representation of universal truth within the diverse cultural patterns of his own day. Development of early Christianity, then, is a participation in Hellenism, resulting in something truly "Christian" and "Hellenistic," not something "Hellenistic" or "Christian." Justin, as a Christian, is an example of Hellenism itself.¹²⁹ Bauer's diversity, then, at least in part, it seems, needs to be seen as multiple instances in which locality and individuality produced different versions of negotiations between universalism and traditions within Roman Hellenism.¹³⁰ The eventual arrival of the discourse of imperial orthodoxy "hid its own origins and hybridity."¹³¹ This, of course, allowed for an illegitimate argument of essentialism beyond particular cultures based on a false teleological view of history

¹²³ For a convenient orientation to these issues see Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 24–26, 113–14 and Lyman, "Hellenism and Heresy" 216; idem, "Politics of Passing" 38.

¹²⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 85–92; Lyman, "Hellenism and Heresy" 219; idem, "Politics of Passing" 37, 45.

¹²⁵ Lyman, "Hellenism and Heresy" 219.

¹²⁶ Lyman, "Politics of Passing" 44–45.

¹²⁷ Lyman, "Hellenism and Heresy" 218.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 219–20.

¹²⁹ Cf. Lyman's citation of Erich Gruen's comment on first-century Judaism, "Politics of Passing" 39.

¹³⁰ Lyman, "Hellenism and Heresy" 209; "abstract" 211, 220–21.

¹³¹ Lyman, "Hellenism and Heresy" 222.

and the colonial polarity of cultures. It is this idea to which Lyman is firmly opposed.¹³²

In summary, we have seen several models of development in early Christianity. First, we saw the theory of the decline of primitive Christianity into Hellenized dogmatism. The early Hellenistic path to catholicity anticipated its later impairment. Second, we saw the theory of the transition from early, broadly distributed non-Roman expressions of Christianity, sometimes viewed as syncretistic, hellenized versions of an earlier primitive Christianity, into "orthodoxy" variously conceived. Third, we observed the departure from any linear, evolutionary conceptions of development to one which conceives early Christian diversity in more rotational, polaric terms. There is here no *development* "from" or "to" something, but rather *developments* "of" something. Fourth, we witnessed the description of development in early Christianity as the participative merging of particular views of Christianity with Roman Hellenism's quest for universalism and transcendent truth by creative individuals in terms of hybridity and mimicry. Correct development, here, is towards proper imitations of commonly shared truth. None seem to me to offer a satisfactory account, or for that matter, a satisfactory historiography, which is the root issue.

III. CONCLUSION

Although it is not my purpose here to critique these various models of development and diversity or to offer a comprehensive model of my own, perhaps you might allow a suggestion or two for evangelical reflection. It seems to me that an evangelical historiographical model ought to reflect continuity with other theological commitments concerning diversity and development. Three come immediately to mind: bodily resurrection, the progress from old economy to new, and the immensity of the Creator but the frailty of the creature. Significantly, all were topics of discussion in the second century.

Caroline Walker Bynum explains how the Pauline seed metaphor for resurrection (1 Cor 15:44) was embraced by theologians in the century after Paul.¹³³ For Irenaeus (and Tertullian), the seed image and organic metaphors are ever present. The change of resurrection highlights continuity: identity necessitates material continuity, "what falls must rise," substance remains,

¹³² Cf. e.g. Lyman, "Politics of Passing" 49; idem, "Historical Methodologies and Ancient Theological Conflicts" 88.

¹³³ Bynum argues that Irenaeus and Tertullian developed a view of bodily resurrection which entailed a paradox. In their belief the body restored and resurrected was *the* body buried, rotted and decayed. Resurrection, then, for them, puts the static, a glorified, immutable *body*, in the place of process a *body* which by definition is mutable; the notion of "immutable physicality remained an oxymoron." If body is associated with flux and process, how can it be body if it becomes immortal and incorruptible? "To put it very simply, if there is change, how can there be continuity and hence identity? If there is continuity, how will there be change and hence glory?" (Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* [New York: Columbia University, 1995] 57, 60). Cf. A. H. C. van Eijk, "Only That Can Rise Which Has Previously Fallen: The History of a Formula," *JTS* n.s. 22 (1971) 517-29.

although there is an alteration of quality.¹³⁴ The tension for both is eased only in confession of divine power and providence.

When we pause to consider Irenaeus's understanding of the diversity and continuity of the vision of God between the two covenants and kingdom we find a similar concept. The vision of God comes in three stages for the bishop of Lyons.¹³⁵ The first is prophetic, figurative, and anticipative, given by the Spirit. The second is adoptive provided by the incarnate Son at his first coming. The third is paternal, eschatological, and consummative, when the glories of the Father are seen. The manner and degree in which the Father is seen differ in each stage. Here there is diversity and development. But the vision is always of the same Father. Here is unity. The times of the "greater" vision are superior only in degree, not substance. No other god is seen. The object is always the same.

But there is another theological construct for Irenaeus which must be added to the first two.¹³⁶ In the mind of the Bishop of Lyons, there is tremendous distinction between Creator and creature, between the One who dwells in the heavens and those who dwell here below. It is only God who is always the same while the redeemed human creature always progresses towards him. For redeemed humanity there is always new, fresh conversing with God; there is always growth, progress, increase. Only in the immensity of God is there changelessness.

These three theological conceptions may provide a paradigm and inform a historiography for further evangelical discussion on the problem of development and diversity in early Christianity. In the providential and powerful divine work of redemption either in resurrection or the vision of God, an unfolding takes place in which there is difference in form, or degree, but sameness in substance. The same subject is objectified differently, the substance once implicit, becomes explicitly expressed differently. Although one may be tempted to hear echoes of our earlier discussions of Hegel here, one should instead recognize the voices of Irenaeus and Tertullian. The apostolic teaching, which is one in substance, believed by the faithful, explicitly displays and proclaims, in the light of the Christ event, that which implicitly concerned Christ in the teaching of the law and prophets. The development of orthodoxy continues this process, though with much diversity and occasional departure. Orthodoxy develops as the Church makes explicit, as it unfolds, that which remains implicit, or folded, in the normative apostolic teaching. The language of the apostles requires explication and sound explication constitutes orthodoxy.¹³⁷

Yet, as our third insight from Irenaeus suggests, human participation in this unfolding will involve change and therefore inevitable diversity. Early

¹³⁴ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* 34–43.

¹³⁵ See D. J. Bingham, "Hope in Irenaeus of Lyons," *ETL* 76 (2000) 277.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 280–82.

¹³⁷ I am not using "implicit" here to mean "silent" or to indicate the "material insufficiency" of Scripture, but to indicate that which in Scripture must be "opened," explained, interpreted, "drawn up or out" in confession and doctrinal construct. See H. A. Oberman, "Quo Vadis? Tradition from Irenaeus to Humani Generis," *SJT* 16 (1963) 225–55. I am grateful to David Puckett for helping me in this train of thought.

Christian expression evidences diversity and change as principles essential to Christianity are expressed, unfolded, as doctrinal ideas. But this is expected and anthropologically unremarkable. As Newman put it, great doctrinal principles “reappear under new forms,” as new ideas, for they, in a world of changing forms, must change “in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”¹³⁸ Change within the human theological enterprise of self-definition by the early Church was inevitable. Continuity, due to an essential relation with the apostolic tradition, was just as inevitable. Because of the early Christian theological parameters set forth it is doubtful that the historiography reflected in either the galaxy metaphor of Robinson, or the hybridity metaphor of Lyman, are suitable to describe the dynamic of development. The seed metaphor of the second century still seems most appropriate.

Beard, North, and Price and Turcan have shown the process of “hybridity” within Roman-Hellenism as Roman and local gods merged.¹³⁹ But although early Christianity’s journey shared elements with Roman-Hellenism’s enterprise, this conceptualization fails to satisfy the restrictions of the early Christian theological commitments suggested above. Christianity was not the only religion seeking to formulate a concept of its exclusivity, but it sought to do it differently than Roman-Hellenism. Another historiography, theologically sensitive to the early roots of evangelicalism, is required.

Lyman recommended “hybridity” as a way of accounting for some development in early Christianity and ultimately for the non-essentialist nature of orthodoxy. Ehrman stressed the difference between the tolerant nature of Roman Hellenism and the intolerance of orthodoxy. In this way the waywardness of orthodoxy is highlighted.¹⁴⁰ Both deny the absoluteness of orthodoxy. Bultmann, Rudolph, Robinson, and Koester, with their history-of-religions or tradition history, are not far different. Their orientation to “syncretism” approaches that of Lyman’s postcolonial “hybridity.” Lyman, however, sees herself adding the virtue of conscious negotiation to “syncretism” through “hybridity.” She thereby views syncretism in a more positive manner. She understands her work as an improvement upon Harnack, Bauer, and the “syncretists.”¹⁴¹ But neither extreme of “hybridity” or polarity will account ultimately for the early development of orthodoxy.

¹³⁸ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (6th ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989) 40. The first edition appeared in 1845 (London: J. Toovey), the sixth edition in 1888 (London/New York: Longmans, Green).

¹³⁹ Cf. Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome* 1.317–18; Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* 26–27.

¹⁴⁰ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* 91–92, 254–56.

¹⁴¹ Lyman agrees with Robinson and Koester’s concern regarding essentialized definitions of categories, wishes to offer a corrective to Harnack, and regrets a pejorative concept of syncretism (Lyman, “Hellenism and Heresy” 210–11, 213–14). For a more positive view of “eclecticism” see J. M. Dillon, “‘Orthodoxy’ and ‘Eclecticism’: Middle Platonists, and Neo-Pythagoreans,” in *The Questions of ‘Eclecticism’: Studies in Later Greek Philosophy* (ed. J. M. Dillon and A. A. Long; Berkeley: University of California, 1988) 103–25.

The precise description of the history of that formulation by evangelicals, in many ways, still needs to be written. However, it must be consciously written within the perspective of a theologically conditioned historiography. Far too often we plunge into the data without having established coordinates. In my mind the description needs to proceed within parameters consistent with other early theological constructs. There is work ahead of us.

Orwell's Winston was wrong when he said that "[o]rthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness."¹⁴² Orthodoxy as the unfolding, as the explication of the Creator's normative revelation, within a context of creaturely change, requires more holy, conscious thought than practically anything else.¹⁴³

¹⁴² George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet, 1950) 53.

¹⁴³ For a synthetically helpful essay on doctrinal development, see C. A. Blasing, "Doctrinal Development in Orthodoxy," *BSac* 145 (1988) 133–40.