century scholarship; the most obstinate 'reception theorist' might decline to endorse his substitution of conjugal slavery for the actual slave whom Paul encourages to buy his freedom at 1 Cor. 7.21 (p. 300). C. collates her sources as though there were no such thing as good or bad exegesis; yet what *praxis* could be based on interpretations that are seen to be untrue or arbitrary? The expositor of the Bible aims at truth, and while his labours may be stimulated, they cannot be circumvented by appeals to the epigrams of Roland Barthes.

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CONSTANTINE'S CHRISTIANITY

H. A. DRAKE: *Constantine and the Bishops. The Politics of Intolerance*. Pp. xx + 612. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Cased, £52.50. ISBN: 0-80-186218-3.

In the wake of Jacob Burckhardt, scholars have continued to ask whether Constantine was a Christian or a statesman; the subject of this book is Constantine the Christian statesman. Drake contests the premiss that a truly Christian monarchy is by nature autocratic and untempered by any charitable alliance with expediency or justice. He assumes, perhaps unwarily, that this prejudice reigns outside the USA, and imputes it even to Gibbon, that unruly child of the Anglican settlement. It remains true that much previous work on Constantine neglects the possibility that he held his faith with the tolerant ardour of his friend Lactantius, who believed that pagan philosophy and literature were rich in premonitions of the Gospel. If Constantine himself is to be acquitted of hypocrisy or syncretism, this thesis must be adapted to the interests of diplomacy and ambition, which have always been compatible with strong religious zeal. This once admitted, D. can show that Constantine's sincerity is not compromised by resemblances—some hitherto unnoticed—between his dream of Christ in the sun and the solar visions of his youth. The eclipse of all divinities but the sun-god on his coinage may not prove his Christianity outright, but it gives historians the answer to the right question, namely 'what kind of Christianity' he adopted. The sovereign's late account of his conversion in Eusebius is neither propaganda nor a historian's lie: it is rather the mature report of one whose recollections, like his temperament, were conditioned by his times. D. shows this well, and is also right to argue that it was imperial policy rather than the Church that forced the question of toleration on Christian emperors. His case would be even stronger if he did not, like most historians since Gibbon, extenuate the severity of the pagans. We are not allowed to forget that the clement Pliny gave the Christians three opportunities to forswear themselves; nor are we reminded that he acted on anonymous delations, that he applied the capital remedy where others stopped at flogging, and that no one was released unless he cemented recantation by a blasphemy of which even lapsed believers would have been incapable. The infancy of the Church itself is crudely portrayed, in terms that are not quite Weber's, as a struggle between the institutional and the charismatic, though the honour of securing the cohesion of the Church goes to the martyrs. In fact, even the Montanists maintained a salaried clergy, and on the other hand it was the Catholic Church in Asia, not its charismatic monitor Ignatius, who demanded that the majesty of the bishopric should shine forth in the bearing of the man.

The second half of the volume argues skilfully that the handling of episcopal

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controversies reflects the policy of an emperor whose eye was fixed consistently on unity and consensus. Apparent vacillations are attributed to successive 'shifts of focus' at the prompting of the wily Athanasius or his adversary, Eusebius of Nicomedia. In D.'s account there is much that persuades, but little that surprises: Athanasius being the principal source, his colours are diluted, but the outline of the picture remains intact. The letter of the Caesarean Eusebius after Nicaea is still disingenuous; Athanasius is said to have revealed the mind of the Council with his tendentious definition of the term *homoousios*. The chapter entitled 'Controlling the Message' does, however, make progress, showing that Constantine's cultivation of the popular ear is a natural corollary of his desire to secure a 'common agreement' in matters of religion, which to him were matters of state. Also to be welcomed is D.'s judgement that the *Oration to the Saints* cannot be tied to a particular date and venue, as such a manifesto, both a defence of monotheism and a charter for single monarchy, could have been revised for every new occasion. The same desire to marry peace with justice, rather than a plot to bring the Empire under the heel of the episcopate, gave rise to the legislation that forbids appeals from bishops and allows some judgements to rest upon the word of a single prelate. Yet here it is, says D., that the earnest sovereign lost control of his 'agenda'. Eusebius of Caesarea is now brought forward as the draftsman of the 'fine print' that transformed the noble sentiments of the ruler into a writ of ecclesiastical supremacy. While owning that he had a passion for truth as he conceived it, D. finds in the historical and panegyrical writings of Eusebius a host of ambiguities and lacunae which cannot be blamed in every case on the poverty of his archives. His writings, like the decrees of Constantine, are informed by Hellenistic concepts of the good king; but as the good king for Eusebius must also be a good Churchman, he conceals those elements in his master's strategy that did not conduce to the exaltation of the higher clergy. One might have hoped for more discussion here of his theology and the private ends that caused him to adduce so many documents bearing on his own career. Instead the next chapter, arguing the safe thesis that the idiom of peace survived the era of toleration, attempts to surprise us with the bland discovery that heretics rather than pagans were the first objects of coercive legislation. Notwithstanding the promise of the title, nothing more is said about Eusebius of Nicomedia than might have been lifted straight from Athanasius; Marcellus of Ancyra also deserved a chapter, even had it been at the cost of the epilogue on Ambrose, which as always is astute but lacks the trenchant originality of D.'s articles. While this is perhaps the best study of the Constantinian epoch, it may come to be valued more for its copious learning and the light that it sheds on details than for its general theories, many of which are truisms, not only for sociologists, but for anyone who has noticed, *sine magistro*, that the history of the Church belongs to the history of the world.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

R. A. BAUMAN: *Human Rights in Ancient Rome*. Pp. xiii + 193. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Cased, £40. ISBN: 0-415-17320-5.

Classics is an academic discipline perhaps uniquely concerned to advertise its relevance to contemporary society. In professional and social situations, we are

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