features associated with traditional Egyptian religion into Christianity, whether it be terracotta figurines of saints seeming to mimic those of pagan deities, the emergence of monasteries as places where one could consult Christianized oracles, or Christian holy men taking on important aspects of the social rôle long associated with temple priests—'examples of custom, of local identity, of traditional expression, of the life-constituting practices of village society asserting themselves through or despite ideology' (p. 283). On this basis, F. argues in the concluding Chapter VII that the eventual success of Christianity in Egypt was due to its ability to capitalize on certain features of the Egyptian cultural landscape—respect for charismatic leadership, for the sacred qualities of the written word, for ritual expertise, for shrines as sources of healing and guidance. He concludes that when inhabitants of the region shifted their allegiance to Christianity, 'they were not choosing an ideology, a definition of spirituality or morality, but an idiom' (p. 272).

This challenging analysis exhibits a formidable grasp of an enormous range of material, and is well-written and sophisticated, but it did leave me a little uneasy at times. First, in his eagerness to minimize the distinctiveness of Christianity, F. underplays certain distinguishing features which I would consider of critical importance in any analysis, notably the organizational strength of the Church and its practical charitable activities (cf., for example, the experience of the young Pachomius).

Secondly, at points in the latter half of the book, I sometimes felt that appeal to comparative data from religious anthropology risked becoming a substitute for ancient evidence, rather than functioning as the valuable heuristic device it does elsewhere in the study. Despite these reservations, however, there can be no doubt that this volume has much to offer not only those with a particular interest in Roman Egypt, but also those concerned more broadly with the character of religious change in the world of late antiquity.

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SCRIPTURAL LESSONS

E. A. Clark: *Reading Renunciation. Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity.* Pp. xiii + 420. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Cased, £41. ISBN: 0-691-00511-7.

Until the last two decades, the New Testament in the early Church was generally regarded as the dowager of the Holy Spirit, forced into a series of unequal marriages with Greek philosophy. A fairer appreciation of Patristic exegesis was impossible so long as scholars held that their only business was to excavate the intention of the author, no countenance being given to the thesis that the author might be God. Even on such premisses, as this learned and comprehensive study shows, we are not entitled to confine the search to what would now be called a literal reading; not only did Paul subscribe to the use of allegory, but late books of the Old Testament availed themselves of the whimsical techniques that we are taught to deplore in the rabbis and Church Fathers. Protestants draw a line between typology and allegory, but Clark confirms the view of Frances Young that this distinction is barely adumbrated even in the Antiochene school of late antiquity. I feel bound to add the rider that it must have been known to Chrysostom, since otherwise he would not have felt obliged to state that the terms were used as synonyms at Gal. 4.24; but C. is right to argue that the Antiochene school is no more a precursor of the 'historico-critical method'

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than its rival, the Alexandrian. Both were in fact suspicious of the term *allegoria*, but both considered the meaning at the time of composition less important than the elucidation of present circumstances from the text. Accordingly, the leitmotif of this book is the dictum of the French philosopher Roland Barthes that 'the unity of a text lies not in its origin but in its destination' (pp. 231, 328). If we assume instead that a text means only what its author meant, we drive it from the pulpit to the library, for many of the precepts of the New Testament seem as obsolete in our day as the feasts and circumcisions of the Old.

Once we acknowledge *praxis* as the goal of exegesis (p. 260, quoting Fiorenza), it is no surprise that a handful of New Testament texts on marriage should furnish matter for such a thick volume. Paul says that it is better not to marry at 1 Cor. 7.1, and was perhaps anticipated in this opinion by his Master (Matt. 19.10). Yet he himself admonishes couples not to deny one another, and a letter in his name denounces the heresy of those who 'forbid to marry' (1 Tim. 4.3). Jesus forbids divorce on four occasions, only once implying that a wife might divorce her husband (Mark 10.12); the Corinthians to whom Paul writes allowed the privilege to both sexes, and when he countermands it he omits the obscure concession to *porneia*, which again is ascribed to Jesus only once (Matt. 19.9). Almost all these utterances are at variance with the practice and legislation of the Torah. Chapter V lists ten approaches that were open to harmonizers of these texts: they might, for instance, eke out a shorter passage from a longer one, expound one allegorically, discount one as a temporary concession, or urge that different periods had called for different laws. To choose one of these expedients was to choose a way of life. The majority of fourth-century interpreters, as they favoured some degree of asceticism, had to mitigate the force of any statement that did not conduce to celibacy. The three who command the centre of this volume—Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine—avoided the extravagance of the Pelagians, who maintained that faith requires us to be virgins; only Chrysostom, however, seems to have thought it possible to make an auspicious marriage. Since matrimony is least desirable when it is least dissoluble, the sayings that allowed divorce were often subordinated to the more stringent rulings. Fornication was no longer a loophole once Augustine had construed it as idolatry; the bigamy of the patriarchs could also be treated figuratively, or else excused as a necessary means of propagation. Now that fruits of the spirit were deemed more honourable than those of the flesh, it was possible for Jerome and Augustine to take different views on the 'spiritual marriages' in which men and women merely shared a bed; Solomon's promiscuity, on the other hand, was easily condemned.

This review has now become a catalogue, and that is the only fault, if fault it is, that I would urge against this book. The opening chapters seem to portend a theory, but the tone remains more provocative than critical, and the instructive final chapters on 1 Cor. 7 and the Pastorals make only occasional reference to the list of exegetic principles in Chapter V. That might be left to the reader, but is it fair to kick away the conventional distinction between the Antiochene and Alexandrian modes without proposing an alternative that would take account of the undeniable differences? Is it not clear that one grew up in a city of rhetoricians and the other in a city of librarians, one setting out to imitate the methods that produced conviction in the original audience, while the other strove to demonstrate the lofty and homogeneous inspiration of the Word? And as for modern hermeneutics, does it follow, because some modern methods fail to satisfy, that everything the Fathers did is possible for us? An 'intentionalist', or even an 'historicist', might now conclude that Origen saw more deeply into the mind of the fourth Evangelist than the Dryasdusts of twentieth-

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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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