

**From Critique and apologetics to  
The discursive fight over religious texts  
in antiquity**

**Antiquity and Christianity**

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# ***Antiquity and Christianity, report for 2005/2006***

## ***By Anders-Christian Jacobsen***

The research group *Antiquity and Christianity* published its previous newsletter in July 2005. Since then, much has happened: Several seminars have been held; many interesting scholars have visited the project; books have been published and a new research project has been formulated.

### ***From apologetics to religious texts***

Since January 2003 the research group has worked with the project *Jews, Christians and pagans in antiquity – Critique and apologetics*. See the project's website: <http://www.teo.au.dk/en/research/current/christians>. As planned this project will finish with an international conference in January 2007. The project group has recently inaugurated a new research project which will run until January 2010. The title of this project is *The discursive fight over religious texts in antiquity* and constitutes theme 1 of the University of Aarhus research priority area *Religion and normativity*. The project investigates the normative function of religious texts in religious discourses in antiquity. Whereas the apologetics project primarily focused on the relation between Christianity and other religions in antiquity, the key focus

of the new project will be to examine how different forms of early Christianity used texts in an attempt to try to make their own views normative and reject those of others. The project is described further in the following. Further details about the project is available on the research priority area's website:

<http://www.relnorm.au.dk/en/theme1/index-theme1>.

### ***Apologetics***

The work with apologetics, which is now finished, has been very rewarding. The basis of the project was monthly seminars at the Faculty of Theology in Aarhus, at which many themes and texts were read and discussed. This has developed the participating scholars' understanding of the theme and been an important factor in the interdisciplinary discussion among the faculty's scholars who are concerned with antiquity and early Christianity. The work has also resulted in publications, lectures for the faculty's students and popular communication of the theme. The project's two latest publications are presented in this newsletter, and a number of books by the apologetics project are pending. They will be published in

2007 and the beginning of 2008. Besides that, the project will publish a final report, compiling experiences and results.

## ***Funding***

The apologetics project was funded by the University of Aarhus Research Foundation, by the Faculty of Theology, and by minor external grants. The project *The discursive fight over religious texts in antiquity* under the research priority area *Religion and normativity* is also funded by the University of Aarhus Research Foundation and the Faculty of Theology, but in addition to this, the project has just been awarded a substantial grant (DKK 1,500,000) from the Danish Research Council for Culture and Communication. These grants make it possible to employ research fellows and to go

through with the planned seminars, conferences, publications, etc

## ***The project group***

The project group currently consists of 12 regular participants from the academic staff of the Faculty of Theology, including exegetes, historians, systematic theologians and scholars in the study of religion. Furthermore, Professor Einar Thomassen, Bergen and Professor Jörg Ulrich, Halle, who are honorary professors of the Faculty of Theology, are associated to the group. Another vital factor for the project's work is the continuous visits by external scholars. For further details about participants and management, see the website at:

<http://www.teo.au.dk/en/research/current/christians>

## ***Project description: the discursive fight over religious texts in antiquity***

### ***By the project group***

As indicated by the title *The discursive fight over religious texts in antiquity*, theme 1 focuses on an area of conflict which became decisive for the development of Christianity.

Several centuries passed before the Church agreed on which group of texts were to be regarded as the norms for the preaching of Christi-

anity. There were no foregone conclusions and a great number of conflicts arose among the Christians, who held diverse opinions about the message of the Gospel. The most viable opinion is reflected in the texts that together form the New Testament canon. Through many years, Christians as a religious and social group

established their own identity by giving preferential treatment to a certain collection of texts which were used at services and in teaching. By doing so, they differentiated themselves from other Christian and non-Christian religious groups with different opinions. These texts thus became normative for the lives and world view of the believers.

However, even in a religious community who agree on the delimitation of the texts which form the basis of the faith, frictions may arise. Read as individual texts, the scripture is subject to interpretation. Theologians were able to explain the meaning of difficult passages of the scripture, but they did not always agree on these interpretations.

This theme aims to enlighten the processes in the history of early Christianity that became important for the formation of the New Testament canon.

### ***The establishment of the project***

Faithful readers of the newsletter are familiar with the history of the project. For the benefit of new readers, a brief outline follows:

#### ***Antiquity and Christianity***

In 1999 interdepartmental cooperation was initiated at the faculty under the heading *Antiquity and Christianity*. The objective was

– through monthly seminars – to bring scholars together who were already focusing on antiquity and thus, for one thing, to utilise each other's expertise and, for another, to keep antiquity as a main field research and teaching at the faculty.

#### ***Critique and apologetics - Jews, Christians and pagans in antiquity***

In 2002 the seminar *Antiquity and Christianity* was chosen by the Dean of the Faculty of Theology as a four-year main research area under the heading *Critique and apologetics – Jews, Christians and pagans in antiquity*.

The aim of the project has been to discuss aspects of the early Christian and Jewish apologetics with special emphasis on the apologies. Because of its status as a main research area, the project was granted financial support, which has made it possible to increase the activities to include international conferences, visits by foreign scholars and the publication of books.

#### ***The discursive fight over religious texts in antiquity***

The theme *The discursive fight over religious texts in antiquity* is one of the three themes of the Faculty of Theology's research priority area *Religion and normativity*, which is incorporated in the University of

Aarhus Development Contract 2005-2009. It is a natural continuation of the existing work undertaken under the auspices of the main research area as the same group of scholars continue their work. By changing focus from apologetics to the issue of a canon and the discursive fight over religious texts the theme's work will focus on (a) an analysis of historical factors and (b) a methodical and theoretical reflection. Both focus on (c) the lasting importance of antiquity.

### ***A. Development of Christianity in antiquity***

The project focuses on the factors that played a role in the development of a normative Christian scripture tradition and Christianity's response to a legitimate interpretation of this tradition. Christianity developed from being a charismatic movement to becoming institutionally more organised. The close relationship between Judaism and Christianity changed, and Christianity manifested itself as a separate religion. Also the development of a number of alternative interpretations of Christianity generated a demand for an authoritative collection of texts, binding doctrines, regulations, dogmas and officials.

This institutionalisation and a variety of more anonymous processes have influenced the canon of Christian scriptures. Many

texts were already used at church services and in teaching, which also contributed to the formation of the Christian canon. Another characteristic feature is that religious groups have consolidated their identity and thus distanced themselves from other religious and social groups by favouring certain collections of texts. Some texts were considered to have a greater degree of truth than others. This meant that certain texts were perceived as generating the norms and values for the religious group's ethics and world view. Eventually, the development of liturgical uses of the texts and the social process of using these texts for identity making meant that these texts contributed to the shaping of the criteria that legitimated their own normative status.

This development included a shift from oral to written tradition. As written narrative to a lesser extent than oral narrative can be adjusted to the expectation of the audience, this tends to lead to dissonance between the values and views of ancient texts and the values and views of readers in a subsequent age. To overcome this disagreement and to justify the normative role of the text, it became necessary to develop special interpretation strategies. In particular four factors should be mentioned:

### *1. Christianity's relation to Judaism*

How did the relationship between ancient Christianity and Judaism affect the Christians' perception of the biblical texts and their interpretation? How did the Jewish canonisation of certain texts and the Jewish debate about which texts belonged to this canon influence the Christian debate? How did it influence the formation of a canon of Christian writings that Christians were also using scriptures of Jewish origin?

### *2. Christianity's relation to ancient Graeco-Roman culture*

How did the relation to Graeco-Roman culture in general contribute to the formation of a Christian literature and to which extent was this literature shaped by an idea of Christian written tradition as an alternative basis for a new culture? How have the ancient texts affected Christianity? These issues include both the Christian religion's use of Greek philosophy and of Greek mythology and iconography.

### *3. Christianity's influence on the Graeco-Roman world*

To which extent have the Christian scriptures affected Graeco-Roman social conditions, such as politics, law and ethics, and to which extent can such influence be ascribed to the special normative status attached to these texts?

### *4. Christianity's development towards orthodoxy*

understood as the dominant doctrine of church institution. In the first stage of the Christian era (1st-3rd centuries) the conflict between the church's main stream and heterodox interpretations (e.g., montanism and gnostic currents) was due to disagreement about the fixation of the scripture, its canonic status and interpretation. The Nag Hammadi sources have helped us to shed light on interpretation and the meaning of texts in the relation between orthodoxy and heresy. In the later stage of the history of ancient Christianity (3rd-6th centuries), however, there was consensus about the canonical status of a rather fixed corpus of texts. Now the conflict was only about interpretation. This led to internal dogmatic disputes. All these conditions give rise to a systematic-theological discussion of the concept of legitimate and justified interpretation.

## ***B. Crucial concepts and issues***

### *Religious text, canon and normativity*

The theme focuses on the definition of a religious text and the meaning of normativity. Which aspects (form, content and use) contribute to making a text religious? It has to be investigated whether some factors are more normative than others and

whether the norms only apply to the individual or to the group in general? Finally, it has to be clarified whether the idea that a text is canonical is of decisive importance to its normativity?

This leads to a differentiation in normativity between canonical texts and other texts and thus also between commented text and commentary. It is therefore necessary to define the text/commentary relationship, and it must be clarified when and why conflicts occur about the normative status of texts.

### *Religious groups – imagined communities and institutionalisation*

The following groups in antiquity are included in the investigation: Christians, Jews, pagans and heretics. These religious groups will be described and discussed by means of, for example, the concept of Imagined Communities. It is important to emphasise that the concept imagined does not imply that the community is less real. The point is simply that the community is significant because its individual members share an idea of it (e.g., native country, God's congregation, the chosen people) and of themselves as belonging to it. By using the concept of 'imagined communities' about the religious groups in antiquity, we avoid making biased and anachronistic distinctions between, e.g., orthodoxy and heresy, Judaism and

Christianity. The distinction is instead made with reference to the notions of how ancient religious groups perceived themselves and others.

### *The fight*

The establishment of defined religious groups in antiquity was often characterised by polemics. One or more of these groups were sometimes subject to persecutions. The issue was not only about how to define the different groups but also which texts to be used by one or the other group, for which aim and with which status.

Such fights were fought internally in the individual groups and externally among the different groups. The ends and means of the fights were sometimes defensive (preserving/apologetic), aiming to maintain well-known positions, to keep existing support to the group or to defend it against persecution. At other times the ends and means of the fights were offensive (repressive/ proselytising) aiming to take over the positions of other groups (usurpation), to suppress other groups or make proselytes/converts. Fights among religious groups in antiquity were about: (1) texts; (2) the right interpretation of texts; (3) the normative role of texts. This also applies to alternative sources of status and authority.

### ***C. Lasting importance of antiquity***

The theme focuses on cultural patterns introduced and developed in antiquity, and which still manifest themselves in a modern context:

#### *Groups*

Development of the conception of groups cutting across ethnic or geographic boundaries, with special emphasis on the emergence of philosophies and religions basically independent of ethnic and geographic boundaries and thus claiming to have universal validity.

#### *Written tradition*

The role of the written tradition in establishing, defining and consolidating such philosophical schools and religious movements, with special emphasis on the emergence of normative religious texts which are claimed to have universal validity – not least the formation of the Christian canon and symbols.

#### *Textual interpretation*

Textual fixation of traditions in antiquity resulted in a gap or dissonance between the concepts of the reader and his/her contemporaries and the concepts of the often mythical narrative of an ancient text. To justify the meaningfulness of such texts, textual-semantic considerations were used and hermeneutic strategies (e.g., allegory)

developed. Such considerations became the root of all later textual theory.

#### *Separation of religion and politics*

To the Greeks and Romans in antiquity, the relationship between religion and politics was beyond dispute. The gods preserved the state if they were rightfully honoured. The apologists, on the other hand, argued that the Christians were politically loyal even though they did not take part in the official cult. The apologists also drew up a programme of legally secured freedom of religion. This programme and the separation of religion and politics was not implemented at any time in antiquity but influenced the history of later European thought.

#### *Religion and ethics*

The Graeco-Roman religious conceptions and myths were traditionally not closely related to ethics. In ancient philosophical and Christian thought, however, the ties between religion and ethics became as close and natural as those that traditionally existed between religion and politics. The connection between religion and ethics still plays a role in modern society.

#### *Law and normative religious texts*

On the borderline among politics, ethics and religion is the question about the relationship between law

and normative religious texts. This question was debated in antiquity

and is still relevant.

# ***Introduction to a new international series and its first volume***

***By David Brakke, Jörg Ulrich and Anders-Christian Jacobsen***

## ***Introduction to the series Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity (ECCA)***

It is a great pleasure to be able to present the first volume in the new series *ECCA*.

*ECCA* is one result of a fruitful cooperation among scholars in the field of *Antiquity and Christianity*. This collaboration took its beginning in the year 2000 at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, when a local group of scholars at the Faculty of Theology established a research seminar in the field of *Antiquity and Christianity*. This group was from the beginning interdisciplinary, consisting of scholars of religious studies, as well as historians, philologists and theologians. After a couple of years of introductory studies and planning, this group in 2002 presented a prospectus for a research project called *Jews, Pagans and Christians in Antiquity – Critique and Apologetics*. The project began in January 2003 and will run until January 2007. After that a new project with the title *The Discursive Fight over Religious Texts in Antiquity* will be introduced. The decisive turn in this history, which led to the founding of *ECCA*,

was the internationalising of the Aarhus project. During the work on apologetics the Aarhus group invited foreign scholars to contribute to the project in different ways, for example as guest professors, visiting scholars, speakers at seminars and conferences, and so on. In this way the local research project turned into an international project. We wanted to present the results from the project to the international scholarly community in a way that would do justice to the international level and profile of our research and would present the results from the projects as a coherent whole. The result of these considerations was the establishing of *ECCA*, which is published by Peter Lang.

*ECCA*, however, is not exclusively a place of publishing for scholars who are already part of the projects mentioned above. What began in Aarhus is now turning into an international network of scholars working in the field of *Antiquity and Christianity*, and we invite submissions from other scholars who are part of or wish to join this wider conversation. An editorial board and an advisory board will carefully evaluate all manuscripts submitted

to *ECCA* for quality of scholarship and coherence with the concept of *ECCA*.

*ECCA* wants to establish itself as a leading series of books in the field of *Antiquity and Christianity*. Choosing to describe the field of research by these terms, we are aware that we place *ECCA* in a long and outstanding tradition of research which, for example, has been represented by excellent publications like *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, *Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum* and *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum/Journal of Ancient Christianity*. However, *ECCA* is not tied to any of the concepts of *Antiquity and Christianity* which lie behind these publications. The editors of *ECCA* want to present a multifarious picture of religious and cultural relations in Antiquity by studying as many forms of ancient Christianity and as many forms of other antique and late antique religions as possible. But first and foremost we want the relations – positive and negative – between religions and cultures to be stressed in studies to be published in *ECCA*. The reason for this is a fundamental understanding of religion as a phenomenon which always functions and is expressed in relations of different kinds.

By using the expressions *Early Christianity* and *Antiquity* we do not want to give principal preference to any particular form of early Christ-

ianity as a standard by which other religious phenomena should be measured. We accentuate Christianity for two reasons. First, early forms of Christianity played a most decisive role in the transformations of society in the historical period that *ECCA* seeks to cover. Second, and more pragmatically, the different forms of early Christianity are a core interest for most of the participants in the research network behind *ECCA*. This raises the question of the temporal and geographical limits to our use of the term *Antiquity*. The period on which *ECCA* will concentrate is the period from about 200 B.C. until about 500 A.D, and thus *ECCA* does not include studies in the period of classical antiquity except when this period is dealt with as a precondition for understanding later periods. It also means that *ECCA* includes studies in the period just before the rise of Christianity and in the period which some scholars would prefer to call *Late Antiquity*. The geographical limits for our understanding of *Antiquity* are roughly defined as the borders of the Roman Empire in 31 B.C. However, studies dealing with religions from outside this area can be included in *ECCA* if these religions are studied with reference to their influence on religious phenomenon inside the above defined area.

We are confident that *ECCA* fulfils the needs of the network for

publishing its results, and we hope that it will also evoke the interest of our colleagues around the world who are working on topics covered by *ECCA*. It is thus our hope that

### ***Preface to Beyond “Reception”***

This first volume of *ECCA* contains selected contributions to an international conference arranged by the Aarhus project in January 2005. The title of the conference was *The Reception of Antique Religion and Culture in Judaism and Christianity*. The idea was to investigate how the processes of reception worked when Jews and Christians reused and integrated elements from ancient Greco-Roman traditions. The contributions deal with a number of concrete examples of processes of reception. Our hope was to get a better impression of such processes. We did not expect to find some general principles of reception but to be aware of concrete ways to handle the process of reception. As can be seen from the articles, the participants presented many different ways to treat the theme and many different aspects of the process of reception.

One of the reasons why the term *reception* was chosen as the leading concept in the investigations of the relations between the ancient Greco-Roman traditions and the developing forms of Judaism and Christianity was to stress the question whether the reuse of older religious and cultural elements

*ECCA* will be a stimulating factor in the study of Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity.

most often is the result of pressure from the past or the result of the free choice of the agents of the new religious formations. Using the term *reception* could indicate the freedom of the agents of the new religions to receive and reuse those parts of the older religious forms which they wanted. Using the word *tradition* to describe the reuse of elements of older cultural and religious forms could indicate that the traditions of the past were forced upon the new religions. The introduction of the term *reception* was thus meant as a way to get beyond the concept of *tradition*.

However, the discussions at the conference showed that the term *reception* was not ideal to describe the relation between the ancient Greco-Roman traditions and the rising Judaism and Christianity. The main problem in using the term *reception* seems to be that this concept includes an idea that religious and cultural traditions are blocks which have well defined borders. Reception is then understood as taking something from one block of religion and culture and bringing it into another – often chronologically later – block. This ordinary understanding of the

relations between religions and cultures in the antique and late antique period must be questioned. This was a common opinion at the conference. There were of course different opinions about how radical consequences one should draw of this critique of the traditional paradigm. Some of the participants opted for a quite radical conclusion claiming that we hardly can talk about Jews and Christians, Greeks and Romans and so on as clearly distinct religious groups in antiquity. Others were more hesitant to go that far, and talked instead about, for example, overlapping communities. However, all agreed that Jews and Christians were deeply involved in the Greco-Roman society in many different ways. They shared beliefs, opinions, practices and so on with non-Jews and non-Christians. The term *reception* did not make this point clear enough. Unfortunately the conference did not manage to find

another single term to be used instead of the term *reception*. For this reason we have chosen the title *Beyond "Reception"* for the present volume. This title thus indicates that the lectures and the discussions at the conference pointed beyond the implications of the term *reception* to an understanding of the communication of cultural and religious ideas and practices without the notion of fixed religious and cultural communities without any "overlap".

The present volume contains twelve contributions which are all rewritten versions of lectures delivered and discussed at the conference. The conference was organised in a way which left from 30-45 minutes of discussion of each contribution. The discussions were initiated by prepared responses from one of the participants. Thus the articles in their present form have all benefited from these quite intensive discussions.

## ***Introduction to anthology: Til forsvar for kristendommen – tidlige kristne apologeter (In defence of Christianity – early Christian apologists)***

***By Jakob Engberg***

The third volume of the series *Antikken og Kristendommen* (Antiquity and Christianity) was published under this title on 24 October 2006 by the Danish publisher: Anis (funded by the *University of Aarhus Research Foundation*). Several participants of the research project have contributed to this anthology (see below), which is edited by Jakob Engberg, Anders-Christian Jacobsen and Jörg Ulrich.

The current third volume introduces colleagues and a wider interested audience in Scandinavia to some of the fruits of the faculty's four-year main research area (2003-2007), *Jews, Christians and pagans in antiquity – Critique and apologetics*. This project has examined the exchange of views among different religious and cultural groups in antiquity, the key figures being the early Christian apologists who are presented and analysed in this anthology. The anthology contains 12 articles divided into four parts.

In Part I, Jörg Ulrich provides an introduction to apologetics in antiquity, an outline of the early

apologists and the main lines of their thinking. Jörg Ulrich discusses the context of the writings, a pluralistic and religious culture; he expounds that posterity has generally viewed the apologetic writings very unfavourably, as theologically uninteresting or even illegitimate in their defence of Christianity on the premises of the outside world; finally, he argues that the apologists have gained renewed relevance as the church in Europe is again part of religiously pluralistic societies.

Part II is the principal part of the anthology and consists of nine articles, each of which deals with one of the early Christian apologists: *Aristides* by Nils Arne Pedersen, *Justin Martyr* by Jörg Ulrich, *Tatian – apologet og kætter* (Tatian – apologist and heretic) by René Falkenberg, *Athenagoras* by Anders-Christian Jacobsen, *Theofilus* (Theophilus) by Jakob Engberg, *Himmelbåren i verden: en studie i Diognetbrevet* (Heaven born in the world: a study of the letter of Diognetus) by Anders Klostergaard Petersen, *Klemens af Alexandria* (Clement of Alexandria)

by Jesper Hyldahl, *Tertullian* by Niels Willert and *Minucius Felix* by Svend Erik Mathiasen. The nine articles show, on the one hand, the diversity of the Christian apologetic literature, a literature that included philosophical dialogues and writings addressed to emperors, Roman officials, named pagans familiar with the apologists, and the pagan general public. On the other hand, the articles show that despite differences in style and genre, there was a substantial continuity in the apologists' defence, arguments and aims.

Part III consists of an article and an appendix. In the article, Jakob Engberg analyses the relatively few contemporary statements about Christians and Christianity that have been preserved by pagan writers. According to the analysis, there is general agreement

between the outside world's critique of Christianity and the apologists' defence. In the appendix there are Danish translations of the passages analysed in the article. This is the first outline in Danish of third-party Greek and Roman statements about Christianity, something which is also rare internationally.

In Part IV Marie Gregers Verdoner analyses how Eusebius perceived and used the apologists and their writings in *Church History*. She argues that Eusebius, as the first church historian, has not only "informed" us about the history of early Christianity but also influenced posterity's opinion about the period, the church and various phenomena of antiquity, such as the apologists being a group of writers that can be distinguished from other writers of antiquity.

## ***Academic profile: Honorary Professor Jörg Ulrich***

### ***By Jörg Ulrich***

Mein Name ist Jörg Ulrich, ich bin 1960 geboren und habe in Deutschland (Hamburg, Bethel, Tübingen) und England (Durham) Theologie studiert. Seit Abschluss meines Vikariats 1990 bin ich Pfarrer der ev.-luth. Kirche. Die akademische Laufbahn habe ich zunächst in Erlangen eingeschlagen, wo ich am Lehrstuhl von Hanns Christof Brennecke meine Dissertation (Die Anfänge der abendländischen Rezeption des

Nizänums, 1993) und meine Habilitation (Euseb von Caesarea und die Juden, 1997) angefertigt habe. Darüber hinaus liegen etwa 150 weitere Publikationen aus dem Bereich der Alten Kirchengeschichte vor. Als weiteren Forschungsschwerpunkt neben der Patristik habe ich mich dann auch mit dem Mittelalter (v.a. 12. Jh.) beschäftigt. Nach Lehrstuhlvertretungen in Bayreuth und Jena wurde ich im Jahre 2002 Professor für Kirchen-

geschichte in Kiel und wechselte bald darauf an die Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Zurzeit arbeite ich an einer Kommentierung der Apologie(n) Justins des Märtyrers und an verschiedenen anderen Projekten.

Seit 2003 arbeite ich regelmäßig beim Apologetikforschungsprojekt der Universität Aarhus mit. Ich habe an verschiedenen Seminaren mitgewirkt und Vorträge über Justin und über Eusebius von Caesarea gehalten. Die Zusammenarbeit mit der Universität Aarhus hat sich so positiv entwickelt, dass eine eigene Schriftenreihe (Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity) ins Leben gerufen worden ist, die ich mit Anders-Christian Lund Jacobsen (Aarhus) und David Brakke (Bloomington, USA) gemeinsam herausgebe und deren erster Band im August erscheint. Im Zusammenhang des Forschungsprojekts, in das eine große Zahl internationa-

ler Forscher eingebunden ist, komme ich mittlerweile regelmäßig nach Aarhus, teilweise zu Kongressen, teilweise zu eigenen Forschungsaufenthalten, teilweise zu Vorträgen im Rahmen des Projekts. Wichtig ist mir darüber hinaus, auch an der „normalen“ Lehre teilzunehmen, so dass ich 1x im Jahr auch die BA / MA Studenten der Universität Aarhus in der Alten Kirchengeschichte unterrichte.

Meine Aufgabe als adjungeret professor in Aarhus ist zunächst bis Ende 2010 zeitlich begrenzt. Ich halte das für einen guten Zeitraum, der lang genug ist, um durch regelmäßige Kooperation die bestehenden Kontakte weiter zu vertiefen und eine internationale, überkonfessionelle und fächerübergreifende Zusammenarbeit durchzuführen, die für alle Beteiligten fruchtbar sein wird. Ich freue mich deshalb auf meine Arbeit in Aarhus in den nächsten Jahren.

## ***Academic profile: Honorary Professor Einar Thomassen***

### ***By Einar Thomassen***

I was born in Bergen, Norway in 1951, studied classical languages at Bergen Katedralskole (cathedral school of Bergen) and was awarded the MA Research Degree in the history of religions from the University of Bergen in 1977. In 1982 I obtained the PhD degree from the University of St Andrews, Scotland. After working for a

number of years in Uppsala and Oslo, I returned to Bergen in 1993 to take a professorship in the study of religion, which I still hold.

My research soon became oriented towards the library of Coptic texts found at Nag Hammadi in 1945, which in earnest became available to scholars in the 1960s and 1970s. The vast majority of

these texts represent a “gnostic” understanding of Christianity. They therefore provide direct information about forms of Christianity which prevailed in antiquity but which succumbed in the fight for the right teaching in late antiquity. The work with these “heretic” texts includes interesting interpretation work in itself, but it also raises questions about the genesis of Christianity. To a historian of religion, there is no “right teaching” as such, but a variety of more or less competing schools of interpretation. It is interesting to try to understand why some of the schools survive and prevail whereas others perish. During recent years I have therefore also been concerned with the very concepts of orthodoxy and heresy and how and why these concepts were developed and used by early Christians. It is striking that “orthodox” Christian theologians were much less tolerant towards religious diversity than other groups in antiquity’s religious world.

Historians of religion are concerned with a wide range of issues. During the years, I have therefore been teaching in – and publishing works on – other aspects of antiquity’s history of religion, Islam (e.g., Islamic mysticism) and theoretical subjects like, for example, hermeneutics, syncretism, and ritual theory. In my view there is no difference between, on the one hand, the

comparative approach to the study of religion and, on the other hand, the historical-philological approach to the study. From the basic point of view that the general principle applies in the specific context, I have always aimed to combine the two aspects, in such a way that even the strictest and most specialised philological interpretation of a text is always enlightened by the analytical methods derived and developed in comparative studies of religion – even when this is not explicitly stated. This is what I attempted to do in my latest book on the Valentinians, the most important gnostic Christian movement in Antiquity (*The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the “Valentinians”*, Leiden: Brill, 2006). Here I wish not to describe Valentinianism as a series of isolated text fragments, but to construct a coherent picture of it as a religious system in continuous movement based on mythical thinking, philosophy, rituals and social establishment of identity.

Our research environment in Bergen (PROAC, see website at <http://www.hf.uib.no/i/ikrr/proak/English.html>) has close common interests with the groups concerned with the study of ancient Christianity at the Faculty of Theology in Aarhus. This especially applies to the encounter of different religions and the tensions between religious pluralism and orthodoxy in

antiquity. We also have fruitful cooperation with the more specialised, and very successful, Nordic Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism Network, funded by NordForsk. I am therefore very grateful for having been appointed

honorary professor at the Faculty of Theology in Aarhus, which facilitates further development of our cooperation and knowledge sharing in this very interesting and topical research area.

## ***Introduction to Finnish research project: The Faces of the other – Otherness in the Greco-Roman world***

### ***By Maijastina Kahlos***

The research project *The Faces of the other – Otherness in the Greco-Roman world* focuses on the perception of the otherness – other peoples or religions – in Greco-Roman Antiquity. The research group consists of four Finnish scholars: the researcher in charge is Maijastina Kahlos (Academy research fellow in Dept. of Classics, University of Helsinki), the other three members are PhD students Päivi Collander (in Dept. of History, University of Turku), Markus Mertaniemi and Marika Rauhala (both in Dept. of History, University of Oulu).

Kahlos has worked on Christian-pagan debate and dialogue in 360-430 and her monograph on the subject is forthcoming in 2006 (*Christian and Pagan Cultures c. 330-430 – Debate and Dialogue* to be published by Ashgate). She works now on the transformation of Christian polemical strategies in

300-340 in her research project *From Defence to Assault*.

For further information, see <http://www.maijastinakahlos.net/b/homepage/research/from-defence-to-assault>.

The post-graduate members of the team prepare their doctoral dissertations within the project: Collander on the alleged kingship of the Huns, Mertaniemi on the image of the church in 260-303 and Rauhala on the image of Cybele until the Roman period. The Finnish Academy is now funding the project.

For further information, see the homepage of the *Faces* project <http://www.maijastinakahlos.net/b/homepage/research/the-faces-of-the-other>.

The project *Faces* will trace the roots of the argumentation about religious or ethnic otherness within European civilization. Moreover, the project *Faces* participates in the

current discussion on Greek and Roman identities and the others of the Greco-Roman world. The major contribution of our project to the scholarship of the Greco-Roman antiquity will be the application of the historical research of images. One of the basic assumptions of the *Faces* is that the image of the other reveals more of the creators of the image than of the object portrayed. Thus, the attention is paid to the writers, their audiences and their society, not the objects as such.

The project will publish a collection of academic articles in co-operation with the Aarhus project. This collection of articles (with a provisional name *The faces of the other – Otherness in the late Roman world*) focuses on attitudes towards other religions and peoples in Greco-Roman Antiquity, with a special attention to the Late Roman period. The book will be divided into

two sections “The religions of others” and “‘Barbarians’ as others”. The Finnish group will prepare articles on Christians, ‘pagans’, the worshippers of Cybele, ‘barbarians’ as well as the Persians as others whereas the Aarhus group will possibly contribute to the book on heretics, Gnostics, Arians and Jews as others. A joint seminar connected with the book project will probably be organized.

All the members of the research group *Faces* had the pleasant opportunity to visit Aarhus in May, 2006 and enjoy the Danish hospitality. They participated in the seminar “Religious Conflicts and Exchanges in Antiquity and Today” organized by the Theological Faculty. Kahlos and Mertaniemi delivered papers in this seminar. The future co-operation between the Finnish and Danish projects was planned during the visit.

## ***Introduction to The Nordic Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism Network (NNGN)***

***By Jesper Hyldahl***

Since 2003, a Nordic forum has existed for the study of Coptic gnostic scriptures mainly from the Nag Hammadi collection. The forum is closely related to theme 1 *The discursive fight over religious texts in antiquity* of the research priority area *Religion and Normativity*. The project is

financially supported by NordForsk. Its steering committee consists of Professor Antti Marjanen (University of Helsinki), Associate Professor Nils Arne Pedersen (University of Aarhus) and Professor Einar Thomassen (University of Bergen). The project organises annual meetings,

especially aimed at PhD students and other researchers from the Nordic countries. The budget allows us to invite distinguished guest lecturers from outside the Nordic countries and there has recently been an increasing interest and representation from other countries, which we interpret as a sign of the high standard of the meetings. Thus, there are now nearly as many participants from the rest of the world as from the Nordic countries. The meetings consist of weekly seminars, at which a specific Coptic text is read and discussed or at which papers are presented by several participants. This year, we read the newly published *Gospel of Judas*, an exiting text hitherto uninfluenced by modern research and interpretation. The guest lecturer, Professor Stephen Emmel, was the chair of the reading session. Originally, the venue was to be Cairo, but because of the unrest following the Danish Mohammed drawings, it was decided that it would be better to choose a different place. So we met at Bergen this August.

As an example of the NNGN's association with the research priority area, the research group behind theme 1 had a visit from Professor Einar Thomassen in May 2006. Thomassen is also an Honorary Professor of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Aarhus. He is a distinguished scholar in Valentinian Gnosticism, and the book *The spiritual seed: the church of the "Valentinians"* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006) is among his recent publications. While being in Aarhus, Einar Thomassen gave a lecture on the Valentinians ("Valentinian Christology and soteriology – a misunderstood chapter in church history?"), and two seminars: "A reading of the Coptic *Rheginos* (NHC I,3) on the resurrection", and a seminar entitled "Normativity and Orthodoxy in the Second Century". We are grateful for this important contribution from the international scene, which contributes to maintaining the work of the research priority area on a high international standard.

## ***Academic profile: Visiting PhD fellow Bart Vanden Auweele***

### ***By Bart Vanden Auweele***

My name is Bart Vanden Auweele and I am a native of Bruges, Belgium. After studies in the sciences of religion, oriental

philology and theology at the universities of Leuven, Louvain-la-Neuve and Tübingen, I'm now working on a PhD-project for the

*Université Catholique de Louvain.*

Owing to family reasons, I moved to Denmark last August. For the past six months now, I have had the opportunity of visiting the Faculty of Theology of Aarhus as a visiting PhD-fellow and as a member of the research project on *Jews, Christians and pagans in antiquity*.

The scope of my PhD-study is the concept of utility as a hermeneutic criterion in Gregory of Nyssa's interpretation of the Bible. My aim is to analyse Gregory's view on the relationship between the biblical text and its readers, and to confront his methodology with some newer hermeneutical approaches.

Gregory of Nyssa's particular understanding of Revelation has its roots as well in the writings of the New Testament (e.g., 2 Tim 3:16 and 1 Cor 10:11), as in the classical understanding of literature (e.g., *prodesse-delectare*) and philosophy. It can moreover be situated against the background of his polemics with the Arian bishop Eunomius. In opposition to the latter, Gregory considers the Bible as a *parole adressée*, that presupposes the reader's engagement in the text, but at the same time, he recognises that Scripture, as a human writing, can never express totally God's essence and for this reason it can never be understood as pure Word of God. Revelation is a dynamic process, following the pace of reading.

Scripture proposes spiritual nourishment to the reader, but only in an un-masticated manner. Reading the Bible as a *lectio divina* means for Gregory to step into a process of conversion and of spiritual growth. Scripture as well as its readers progress in this process. "By the Song of Songs Salomon [...] initiates the soul into the divine sanctuary by means of the Song of Songs. What is described there is a marriage; but what is understood is the union of the human soul with God"<sup>1</sup>. In our research project, we try furthermore to unfold the soteriological and ecclesiological implications of Gregory's hermeneutic and to evaluate its consequences for his exegetical and homiletical praxis.

The new research theme: *The discursive fight over religious texts in antiquity* bids an excellent opportunity for deepening the understanding of Christian understanding of Scripture in antiquity. In the realm of questions as the canonicity and the normativity of Scripture, the criterion of usefulness could appear to function as a keystone.

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<sup>1</sup> H. LANGERBECK, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 6, Leiden, 1960, 22-23, trans.: C. McCambley, Saint Gregory of Nyssa. Commentary on the Song of Songs, Brookline, 1987, 47. My PhD-project fits within a larger research-project of the Faculty of Theology, Louvain-la-neuve, dealing with the history of interpretation of the Song of Songs. Cf. <http://www.hecc.ucl.ac.be/canticum/canticorum.htm>.

## ***Academic profile: Visiting PhD fellow Jennifer Hart***

### ***By Jennifer Hart***

Greetings to you all.

My name is Jennifer Hart and I am here at the University of Aarhus as visiting, foreign PhD student. I am from the US, where I attend Indiana University in Bloomington Indiana and am currently a candidate for my doctoral degree in Religious Studies. At the moment I am in the midst of writing my dissertation on the Mandaeans and the way in which the expansion of Islam into the Persian Empire influenced the development of Mandaean religious identity. My interest in the Mandaeans stems from a more general study of Iranian religions prior to Islam, as well as from research on religion and religious pluralism in the Mediterranean during late antiquity. I am also interested in the use of narrative and myth in the process of identity formation.

I will be visiting the Faculty of Theology at the University of Aarhus for six months, from September 2006 until February 2007. I do hope, however, to extend my stay for an additional few months if circumstances allow it. While at the Faculty I am exploring the roles played by two characters, Miriai and Yahia, in Mandaean literature.

These characters are of interest because they seem to be rooted in the Christian figures of Mary the mother of Jesus and John the Baptist, and in the past their appearance in Mandaean literature has been interpreted as evidence of Mandaeanism's relationship with Christianity and Judaism. I wish to challenge the traditional approach to the study of Miriai and Yahia by also considering how Islam might factor into Mandaeanism's portrayal of them. Specifically I intend to argue that there is evidence in the Mandaean texts that suggests the inclusion of Jewish and Christian figures in Mandaean literature may have been influenced by an attempt by the Mandaeans to reformulate their religious identity in response to the expansion of Islam.

I also hope that while I am at the Faculty I will have the opportunity to contribute to the new project on the canonization of Jewish and Christian literature.

I invite anyone who is interested in my project or in my visit to the University of Aarhus in general to contact me. I would be happy to speak with you about either of these things in greater detail.

## ***Summary of other Danish and international guest lectures and seminars in 2005/2006***

***By Jakob Engberg***

In addition to the above-mentioned visits by our core partners (Jörg Ulrich, Halle-Wittenberg; Einar Thomassen, Bergen and the research group under the management of Maijastina Kahlos, Helsinki), and in addition to our internal text-reading seminars, we have had a number of guest lectures and seminars since the previous newsletter.

In September 2005 Professor Judith Lieu, Kings College was visiting professor for two weeks at the faculty. She gave guest lectures and was chair of seminars on the audience of apologetic writings and on women in apologetic writings. Judith Lieu argued that the apologetic writings addressed to non-Christians were, in fact, almost only read by Christians and, in reality, were only intended for such informed readers. She thus contributed to the discussion of an issue which also occupies and still separates the regular participants of the research project.

September was busy as we also hosted a 2-day symposium on Athanasios and Eusebius as apologists, with contributions by Professor Jörg Ulrich; Postdoctoral Scholar Sebastian Morlet, Sorbonne; Dr. Uta Heil, Graz; Associate Professor Anders-

Christian Jacobsen and PhD student Marie Gregers Verdoner. The speakers discussed how the improved relationship between Christians and the imperial power, which was a result of the Constantinian turn, influenced and was reflected in the two writers' apologetic works: The legal and political defence towards a hostile regime could be downgraded in favour of a defence towards more epistemological objections towards Christian doctrines or writings and in favour of missionary and edifying argumentation. The contributions and the following discussions showed that the strengthening of these forms of argumentation was only relative as they continued a tradition of missionary and edifying argumentation of the earliest apologetic literature.

On 21-25 November, the research project was visited by Professor Christoph Riedweg, Zürich, who held seminars on the later pagan anti-Christian polemics in the writings of Porphyry and emperor Julian and Cyril of Alexandria's response in *Contra Iulianum*. From Riedweg's contribution and the following discussion, it appeared that Porphyry's and Julian's critique as well as Cyril's response had roots

in earlier polemics between Christians and pagans (with clear relations to Celsus and Origen), but Porphyry and especially Julian had a wider and deeper knowledge of the Christianity that they criticised, a knowledge which, as far as Julian is concerned, also influenced the religious reforms he wished to promote, resulting in a kind of paganism in Christianity's clothing.

Three guest seminars in the spring of 2006 chaired by Dr. Gerd Haverling, Göteborg, Associate Professor Sten Ebbesen, Copenhagen and Associate Professor Arne Søby Christensen, Copenhagen, among other things analysed a number of pagan writers of late antiquity, who felt threatened by Christianity, which was now the majority religion and the dominating world interpretation in the Roman Empire. Compared with the apologetic writings read so far, the tables had now been turned. In a lecture with the title *Symmachus og Striden om Victoria-alteret* (Symmachus and the altar of Victoria) Gerd Haverling analysed the pagan senator Symmachus' attempt to defend and get permission to reintroduce traditional Roman cult. Symmachus used classic arguments in relation to antiquity's pagan religious conceptions by claiming that this cult had brought the world under Roman rule and had prevented attacks by external enemies in the

past and thus would also do so in the future. Sten Ebbesen discussed the philosopher Simplicius' life and works in the 6th century. When emperor Justin closed down the Academy in Athens in the year 529, Simplicius and a handful of other philosophers asked for exile at Justin's enemy, the Persian king, Khosrow I. After the conclusion of peace in 532, Khosrow secured that these philosophers, now apparently homesick, could return to the Roman Empire, where Simplicius resumed his writing. According to Sten Ebbesen, Simplicius endeavoured to harmonise the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. In the following discussion, it was argued that this harmonisation could be interpreted as a defence against the Christian apologists' well-known argument that the internal disagreement of the pagan philosophers proves the insufficiency of the pagan philosophy. The most offensive and confident post-Constantinian defence of the pagan world picture was presented by Arne Søby Christensen in his lecture on pagan anti-Christian historiography in late antiquity. In the works of, e.g., Zosimos, Christianity was still described as a great disaster to the Roman Empire and "The First Christian Emperor", Constantine, as an immoral person ruled by his passions, who had acceded to Christianity only because the

traditional gods had refused to allow him absolution for his sins.

Two seminars were held in May and September 2006 of each a few days, during which it was discussed how and to which extent the debate in antiquity between pagans and Christians formed and forms the basis of the critique of religion in modern times and of the current debate and polemics among various religious groups. The two seminars included lectures by Markus Mertaniemi, Helsinki; Maijastina Kahlos, Helsinki; Peter Widmann, Aarhus; Inge Liengaard, Aarhus and a number of lectures and seminars by Professor Wolfram Kinzig, Bonn. It was concluded that there are several interesting and fruitful points of similarity between ancient and modern dialogues and polemics of religion, which are not

coincidental but, among other things, due to the fact that writers in early modern times related directly to the ancient debate, which they were familiar with from their own studies. At the same time it was emphasised that this relation did not consist of and never can consist of unreflective and passive takeover of ancient positions, but that the arguments and argumentative forms in antiquity were, are and should be actively reinterpreted according to new and different cultural and social contexts.

The many external visits have thus actively and constructively contributed to reaching the collective objectives of the research project.

## ***Introduction to 2007 programme: Conference and research plan***

***By Anders-Christian Jacobsen***

### ***Conference: Jews, Christians and pagans in antiquity – Critique and apologetics***

As is well-known to many readers, this is the title of an international conference held as the final activity of the corresponding research project.

The conference takes place from Monday 22 to Friday 26 January 2007. In continuation of the conference, a PhD-seminar will be held from Friday 26 to Saturday 27 January. The conference programme is available on the conference website:

<http://www.teo.au.dk/en/research/current/christians/programme/conference-january07/finconf22-26jan07>.

It is still possible to attend the conference. Conference fee is 325 euro.

Please contact Anders-Christian Jacobsen ([alj@teo.au.dk](mailto:alj@teo.au.dk)) regarding available places.

### ***Research plan***

The research plan for the project *The discursive fight over religious texts in antiquity* with programme of coming seminars, lectures and international visits can be seen on the research priority area's website:

<http://www.relnorm.au.dk/en/theme1/projectdescription/researchplan2007-09>.

### ***Visiting professors in spring 2007***

***By Anders-Christian Jacobsen***

In the spring and summer of 2007, Professor Karla Pollmann, St Andrews and Professor Lorenzo Perrone, Bologna will visit the Faculty of Theology as visiting scholars associated with the project *The discursive fight over religious texts in antiquity*. Karla Pollmann will be in Aarhus from 1 May to 1 September and Lorenzo Perrone from mid May to mid July. Both professors will participate in and contribute to the activities of the research project, and they will both conduct master-classes for PhDs and MA-thesis students and participate as guest lecturers in the ordinary teaching of BA and MA students.

## **Karla Pollmann**

Karla Pollmann was born and educated in Germany. She has taken Master degrees in classical languages, pedagogy and divinity, PhD degree in classical languages and completed her habilitation on Augustine's hermeneutics. She has been working at different German universities and is now Professor of Classics at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, and she has obtained various visiting professorships. Pollmann has published a wide variety of works and she is a member of international editorial boards and academic committees. She is now the director of a large research project on the Augustine reception from 430 to 2000. Further information about Karla Pollmann is available from her personal homepage:

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/classics/people/pollmann.shtml>.

## **Lorenzo Perrone**

Lorenzo Perrone was for several years a professor of classical languages and literature at the University of Pisa. Since 2004 he has been professor of the same area at the University of Bologna. During the first years of his academic career, Perrone was especially concerned with the history of the Palestinian church and theology in the 5th and 6th centuries, including, for example, the monastic movement in Palestine and the history of the Christological fights. During recent years he has focused on studies of Origen. He is thus the director of a large Italian research group cooperating on the theme of *Origen and the Alexandrian tradition*, and he must be regarded as the nestor of the international Origen scholarship and the prime mover behind the international Origen conferences, held every four years. Perrone has published a great number of books, editions and articles and he has obtained several visiting professorships at recognised universities in, for example, Heidelberg and Berlin. Further information about Lorenzo Perrone is available from his personal homepage:

<http://www2.classics.unibo.it/Organico/profili/perrone.html>.

It is a great asset to our research project that we have got the opportunity to associate these two very qualified scholars to the project. This is due to an allocation of additional funds from the Rector of the University of Aarhus. We look forward to the visits and invite everybody – especially PhD-students and doctoral candidates – interested in participating in the activities in connection with the visits by Perrone and Pollmann to come to Aarhus. A detailed programme of seminars and other activities will be available at the beginning of 2007 on the website: <http://www.relnorm.au.dk/en/theme1/events>.