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utgiven av Göran Eidevall

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CHRISTOPH MARKSCHIES

*Christian Theology and Its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire:  
Prolegomena to a History of Early Christian Theology*

Baylor–Mohr Siebeck Studies in Early Christianity. Waco: Baylor, 2015, Hardcover,  
xxv + 689 pp, €79, ISBN: 978-1-48130-401-6

New ideas cannot be established in society without the social basis of institutions. This sociological theorem is the basis of Christoph Marksches's 2007 monograph *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie und ihre Institutionen: Prolegomena zu einer Geschichte der antiken christlichen Theologie*, which now is available in a considered and accessible English translation by Wayne Coppins. Marksches's aim is to understand the social institutions of second- and third-century Christianity—such as the schools of Justin and Origen, the circle of disciples around the Montanist prophets, and the Eucharistic prayers offered in early Christian worship services—and the roles they played in the development of early Christian theology. Marksches argues that while the quartet of worship service, office, rule of faith, and canon have been addressed in many studies of early Christian development, these are just a sample of the institutions that may be of relevance. A measure of norm-setting, canonization, dogmatization and hierarchalization comes with any establishment of new ideas—not primarily as a result of a specific strategy, but more or less automatically, Marksches argues. Within his concept of “institution” falls, therefore, not only the first traces of the episcopal hierarchy that later came to be allied to the imperial power, but every sociological effort to consolidate early Christian theology and enables it to outlive the current generation.

Marksches stresses that all forms of Greco-Roman education were thoroughly ingrained with pagan traditions. In order to master the Greek language, Christian students had to copy, recite, and discuss numerous writings lauding Zeus, Apollo, and the whole Greco-Roman pantheon. Nevertheless, the participation of Christians as both students and teachers seem to have been generally regarded as unproblematic. Even when Apollinarius and Origen made efforts to Christianize their curricula, large portions of the Greek *παιδεία* remained. Even in Grego-

ry's *Address of Thanksgiving* to Origen, which describes the education given in what Markschie calls "the first clearly attested private Christian university" (84), the Greco-Roman model shines through. This discrepancy might be explained by the gradual fading of pagan religious texts into popular cultural mythology, but Markschie prefers to speak of a limited "degree of Christianization among the adherents of the new religion" (48) and the interest of Origen's school "in being able to release its students again" (89). In Markschie's view, early Christian teachers lived in a decidedly pagan world.

A more difficult comparison is the one Markschie makes between pagan oracles and the Montanist prophets. While both collected and spread what they claimed to be divine words from human mouths, the well-established urban institutions of pagan oracle sites were very different from the radical splinter group from a minority religion that Montanus led. The "new prophesy" doubtlessly benefitted from its proximity to well-known pagan oracle sites, but the similarities are more a matter of convergence of religious forms than of any common origin, Markschie concludes.

While higher education was limited to larger cities, and the Montanists were marked by their specific religious environment, the theologies supported by various forms of Christian worship services were more widespread, Markschie asserts. With a refreshing respect for the difficulties of the source situation, Markschie discusses Eucharistic prayers in the *Didache*, *Apostolic Tradition*, *Acts of John*, *Acts of Thomas*, *Pistis Sophia*, and various early Christian authors. He concludes that the implicit theologies that prayers such as these made available to the majority of early Christians were remarkably diverse in form, in the educational level they presumed in their audiences, and in what problems they were addressing. In this diversity, Markschie discerns efforts to adapt the forms in which Christian theology is communicated to existing cognitive categories—precisely as in the cases of education and prophecy. Just like Justin aimed to present Christianity as the true philosophy and Montanus claimed to hand down oracles from the true

God, Cyprian—even in the absence of a sacrificed animal—spoke of a true and complete sacrifice.

As an example of the connection between norm and institution in early Christianity, Markschies explores the action of making biblical texts binding for the larger community. This is a prolonged and complex process, whose sources invariably have other aims than to specify a canon of books. When Athanasius of Alexandria presents an authoritative list of writings, his larger aim is to argue against certain opposing free teachers—and Markschies suggests that similar aims may lie behind the enigmatic Muratorian Fragment. Marcion's aim was perhaps not to establish a canon, but merely to determine a philologically correct edition of a text whose authority was already established. Serapion of Antioch discussed the orthodoxy of the Gospel of Peter not to establish a canon, but as a factor for determining the orthodoxy of a community who apparently read it. Clement of Alexandria used texts as canonical to derive axioms for the argument he was trying to make, not to establish a canon for other areas. The holdings of early Christian libraries do not match early canon lists. Markschies concludes that the norm of a biblical canon originates with several different institutions—free teachers, established schools, bishops, synods, and liturgies—and that the canons developed in different circumstances differ both in content and in emphasis.

Markschies finds both Walter Bauer's concepts of "orthodoxy" and "heresy" and the more recently established model of "inculturation" of the gospel into a specific culture, to be lacking, since they imply that a culturally "pure" gospel can be separated from an equally "pure" culture. In their stead, Markschies prefers to frame further discussion in terms of "identity" and "plurality." Markschies understands "identity" as a property of the individual formed in interaction with a community—such as when early Christians participated in worship and education. "Plurality" can be understood either as a systematic network in which such individualities can still be captured, ordered, or framed by conceptions of unity—or as a vaguer variety where such limitations no longer hold. For the Christian movement in the second and third centuries, Markschies



holds that the former understanding fits best. Most of the diversity of early theologies can be explained by the experimental contextualization prompted by diverse circumstances, and the common conception of a “crisis” of Christian theology in the second century is unnecessary, Markschiefs argues. Amidst the many different Christian theologies developed in various circumstances, Markschiefs estimates that a shared theological center—Jesus of Nazareth as the crucified and resurrected Christ, certain ideals of a Christian life in a Christian community, and a basic stock of holy scriptures—is enough to speak of a common identity, even though this identity is a plural one.

With its terminological precision and detailed analysis of Greek, Latin and Syriac sources, Markschiefs’s monograph has already proven to be valuable in the on-going conversation of how best to conceptualize the theological developments in the early church. It will prove to be even more useful in this attractive English translation.

*Carl Johan Berglund, Uppsala University*

TRYGGVE N. D. METTINGER

*Reports from a Scholar’s Life: Select Papers on the Hebrew Bible*

Edited by Andrew Knapp, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015, Hardcover,  
xxv + 349 pp., \$59.50, ISBN: 978-1-57506-379-9

This book contains a selection of short works in English by Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, internationally renowned and highly influential Professor of Hebrew Bible at Lund University from 1978 to 2003. The works, including one monograph, twelve articles and essays, and three reviews, published 1970-2008, reflect the primary focuses of his work on the history of ancient Israelite religion and theology, royal ideology, and the book of Isaiah. A retrospective lecture delivered by Mettinger upon retiring is also published here for the first time.

*Reports* is divided into six parts. Part I addresses the central theme of Mettinger’s scholarship: “the Study of the *Gottesbild*” (ch. 2), that is, the development of Israelite images of God in their ancient Near Eastern milieu. In ch. 3, “The Elusive Essence,” Mettinger argues that the Canaanite heritage of Israelite religion is evident in the fact that Yahweh