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EDITORIAL:
The Center for Ancient Christianity and Ancient Christian Studies

The past thirty years of Patristic scholarship has surely seen a revival among broader critical scholarship and among prominent Evangelical thinkers. In 1990, Charles Kannengiesser delivered the North American Patristics Society presidential address entitled “Bye, Bye Patristics” in which he stirred waters for a potential name change for the academic society.¹ Just a year earlier, Kannengiesser offered a prophetic voice of renewed interest and retrieval of classical Christianity through means of the “Fathers.”² As Elizabeth Clark details, Patristic studies was a dwindling discipline in European scholarship shortly after the Second World War,³ but has since emerged as a broader discipline encompassed within early Christianity and is making new strides in cross-disciplinary conversations.

¹Elizabeth A. Clark, “From Patristics to Early Christian Studies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

²Charles Kannengiesser, “Fifty Years of Patristics,” *Theological Studies* 50, no. 4 (1989): 656.

³Clark, “Early Christian Studies,” 7.

Patristics vs. Ancient Christian Studies

Although early Christian fathers were read and engaged by Medieval and Reformation theologians, the term “Patristics” was coined relatively late. Isaac Taylor (1787–1865) is credited as the first to use this term in the nineteenth century.⁴ Shortly thereafter, the Benedictines of St. Maur and J.-P. Minge helped provide stability for this emerging scientific discipline by producing the *Patrologia Latina* and *Patrologia Graeca*. Obviously, those involved in the discipline have seen other sources rivaling Minge and offering better critical editions (e.g., *Source Chrétiennes*, *Corpus Christianorum*, and others).

This brief background to the origins of Patristics as a scientific discipline and the standardization of texts leads us, then, to ask, why “Ancient Christianity” instead of the term “Patristics”? With the rise of institutional and social factors, “Patristics” has slowly undergone a disciplinary change. Stating “Patristics”, according to Elizabeth Clark, from the outset, affirms certain presuppositions, as recognized by those broadly associated with the discipline.⁵ If this is so, then Patristic terminology may no longer satisfy the interests of early Christian scholars when engaging Jewish literature, female contributors, and broader heterodox literature.

The Center for Ancient Christian Studies seeks to be sensitive to the changes in the academy and institutional influences while

⁴Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, “Taylor, Isaac,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 53:912. Also found in Clark, “Early Christian Studies,” 8.

⁵Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth, Editors' preface to in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, eds. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xi; Clark, “Early Christian Studies,” 14.

maintaining evangelical convictions. Rather than speaking solely of “Patristics” as a discipline, we are concerned with early Christianity or ancient Christian studies.⁶ In this way, we will not focus upon one discipline, per se, but on a general era—AD 80–700.

The move from “Patristics” to ancient Christian studies is purposeful and will allow broader study of the ancient world. Rather than focusing upon the perceived male orientation of Patristics, early Christian female authors, such as Perpetua, will also find a voice.⁷ Rather than focusing solely on ecclesial orthodoxy, scholars will be able to engage heterodox writings and ideological opponents to Christian orthodoxy. Moreover, this shift also permits scholars to interact with social history and Roman and Jewish backgrounds.

Foci of the Center for Ancient Christian Studies

The Center for Ancient Christian Studies will devote attention to multiple fields of study. Early Christian, New Testament, and some Jewish scholarship will be afforded a voice. Drawing from the numerous insights of various historiographical perspectives, the Center for Ancient Christian studies seeks to affirm the best of the best

⁶Note the names of two publications in similar fields: Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth, eds., *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Angelo Di Berardino, *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, 3 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

⁷Matristics seems to be a valid title to demarcate female authors in early literature. The problem, however, is the time period this term refers. According to Børresen, “Matristics” rightly demarcates male and female authors. However, it is a term mainly used to reference the medieval church mothers (12th–15th c.). So, if this is true, then we cannot use this term. K.E. Børresen, “Matristics,” in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, vol. 2 F–O (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 730–35.

while adhering to confessional Christian orthodoxy. As we follow along the postmodern shift and the linguistic turn, which sheds light on the myth of objectivity within historical inquiry, we affirm our confessional Christian presuppositions when approaching the texts of early Christianity.⁸

We affirm with Douglas Sweeny the vocational nature of the Christian scholar—“to engage in acts of sacrificial service to our students, colleagues, and others who come in contact with our work.”⁹ He adds, “This sense of vocation...requires nurture in community if it is ever going to flourish.”¹⁰ Scholarship should be viewed as a form of ministry, promoting both peace and justice and the desire to bless those around us. We affirm our place as servants to the church and ambassadors of Christian virtue to those around us. In this task, we seek to build up the church by yielding our scholarly contributions to the benefit of the church and as an expression of loving God and loving others.

The primary focus of the Center will be early Christianity and late antiquity. In this way, topics of social history, early theology and creeds, and patristic exegesis and hermeneutics will absorb the vast

⁸The linguistic turn describes a development in understanding the relationship between philosophy and language, that is, the reality of an objective apprehension of the past is difficult at best. Such a turn also recognizes the reality of ideological presuppositions that historians bring to the text. For more on the linguistic turn and its benefits in reading pre-modern texts see Elizabeth Clark, *History, Text, Theory: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁹Douglas Sweeny, “On the Vocation of Historians to the Priesthood of Believers” in *Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian's Vocation*, ed. John Fea, Jay Green, and Eric Miller (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 306.

¹⁰Sweeny, “On the Vocation of Historians,” 307.

amount of our attention. Because we will not solely focus upon Patristics, heterodox literature, early female Christian writers, and social history will all contribute to our understanding of ancient Christianity. Consider such works as *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*,¹¹ which provides an introductory guide to a fixed period that includes both orthodox and heterodox literature. Also, consider the formidable work of Lewis Ayres' *Nicaea and Its Legacy*,¹² which attempts to provide a paradigmatic change to Trinitarian conversations. Rather than tracing the "orthodox" and "heretical," Ayres instead engages the "theological culture" of early Christianity.¹³

A secondary focus of the Center will allow for some New Testament scholarship. Within the past decade or two, New Testament Scholarship has seen a renewed interest and attention to ancient Christianity. Take for example, *Paul and the Second Century*,¹⁴ which seeks to see the early reception of Pauline literature, or *The Early Text of the New Testament*,¹⁵ which devotes an entire section to the value of early Christian literature to textual criticism. Both of these see value in the intersection of New Testament scholarship and early Christian literature. Our center, moreover, will include topics like these as well

¹¹Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

¹²Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹³Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 1.

¹⁴Michael F. Bird and Joseph R. Dodson, eds. *Paul the Second Century*, Library of New Testament Studies 412 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2011).

¹⁵Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger, eds., *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012).

as canon development, early reception, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, Theological Interpretation of Scripture, and patristic hermeneutics.

Last, but surely not limited to these three, the Center will have some focus upon Second Temple Literature, Pseudepigraphal, and Septuagintal studies. Although vast amounts of Jewish literature may be outside scope of the Center of Ancient Christian Studies, we are devoted to an era and not a discipline. In this way, some Jewish texts find their way in the quagmire of early Christian literature and the parting of the ways with Judaism.¹⁶ For example, consider *The Story of Melchizedek*.¹⁷ This is a 3rd–4th c. document attempting to reread the Melchizedek and Abram narrative, most likely, in light of the book of Hebrews. Also, the LXX is part of Origen’s Hexapla and used with relative frequency in other early literature.¹⁸

So, the Center for Ancient Christian studies will broaden from a particular focus on Patristics to the study of ancient Christianity—AD 80–700—allowing for multiple disciplines to speak into and shape these conversations.

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¹⁶Young, Ayres, and Louth, Editors’ preface, xi.

¹⁷C.f. Pierluigi Piovanelli, “The Story of Melchizedek with Melchizedek Legend from the *Chonicon Paschale*: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, ed. Richard Baukham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 1:64–84.

¹⁸For other works on the Greek Bible in ancient Christianity, consult Paul Blowers, ed. and trans., *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity*, vol. 1 of *The Bible Through the Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).