

‘The Gracious and Favouring Interposition of God’: Eusebius and Divine Providence

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Having concluded the succession from the apostles in seven entire books, in this eighth treatise we regard it as one of our most urgent duties to hand down, for the knowledge of those that come after us, the events of our own day, which are worthy of no casual record; and from this point our account will take its beginning.¹

Introduction

Eusebius of Caesarea began the eighth book of his *Historia Ecclesiastica* with the above paragraph, reiterating the concluding remarks of his seventh book. The first seven books reflect, amongst other themes, an intense focus on demonstrating apostolic succession, and contain episcopal lists of the four apostolic sees: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. This preoccupation is also evident, and even more comprehensive, in the eighth book of the *Chronici Canones*. Eusebius’ abrupt deviation from this trajectory has been described as a ‘mystery’ by Burgess, who can offer no explanation as to why ‘apostolic succession ceased to be an important issue for Eusebius after the beginning of the persecution and the acceptance of Christianity by Constantine’.² The panegyric quality of Book X (and the *Canones*), inappropriate in a work of historiography, are surpassed only by Eusebius’ rendering of Constantine in *Vita Constantini*, in which he patently flatters the emperor, presenting him as a ‘vice-regent of God’.³ Despite the discernable cleavage caused by these digressions, however, *Historia Ecclesiastica* and *Canones* yield significant evidence that Eusebius followed a plan with a singular outcome in mind. Although he is frequently cast as an innovator in the genre of Christian

¹ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, trans Kirsopp Lake (London, 1926) Vol II, Book VIII, 251. Quote in title from Book VIII, xvi, 2-5, 315.

² RW Burgess, *Studies in Eusebian and Post-Eusebian Chronography* (Stuttgart, 1999) 45.

³ M Grant, *Readings in the Classical Historians* (New York, 1992) 585.

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historiography,⁴ and although his writing in many respects does not conform to the work of the classical historians, he wrote from a vantage point inside the familiar framework of Hellenistic universalism, with an emphasis on unity, continuity and his own adaptation of divine providence.⁵

Historia Ecclesiastica

The extant manuscripts of *Historia Ecclesiastica* date from the tenth to the twelfth centuries⁶ and have been divided into two groups: BDM_L and ATER. Manuscripts in the former group contain errors which have been reconciled in those manuscripts that fall into the latter group. It appears that a version of the third edition (produced between 315 and 318) was used as the archetype for the corrections made to the manuscripts collected under ATER, as those manuscripts contain favourable references to Licinius which were excised from the fourth edition in accordance with the *Damnatio Memoriae* of Licinius.⁷

The question of how many editions of *Historia Ecclesiastica* were produced in order to arrive at its received state may never be answered with any degree of confidence. Most studies, however, postulate that Books VIII onwards were added after Eusebius originally concluded the first edition of *Historia Ecclesiastica* at the least. In his *Prolegomena*, Schwartz concluded that Eusebius completed a first edition of *Historia Ecclesiastica* during or after 311, given the specific references to the Edict of Toleration in the preface to the first book and passage 16 of Book VIII, and the wording, ‘in our own time’. The resumption of persecutions under Maximinius in 312 and his subsequent defeat by Licinius necessitated the

⁴ A Momigliano, ‘Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century AD’ in A Momigliano (ed) *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1963) 90-91 and Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans G A Williamson (London, 1965) xix-xx.

⁵ G W Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography: Narratives of Retributive Justice* (London, 2000) 134.

⁶ M Grant, *The Ancient Historians* (New York, 1970) 408.

⁷ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol I, xxvii-xxx.

composition of Book IX, which formed part of the second edition and was produced during or after 315. Book X, with a dedication of the Basilica at Tyre, was added to the third edition during or after 317 and, apart from the conjectured addition of a paragraph to Book VIII and the relocation of some text from Book IX to the end of the new Book X, Schwartz believes no other changes were made. The final edition, which all of the major extant manuscripts largely reflect, was produced after the defeat of Licinius in 323.⁸

An alternative to Schwartz's model, that of Lawler,⁹ holds that Eusebius had almost finished writing Book VII when the Edict of Toleration was issued by Galerius.¹⁰ At that point, Eusebius would have written an outline of the persecutions and included Book VIII in the first edition. Shortly afterwards, according to Lawler, Eusebius added an abridged version of his *Martyrs of Palestine* and released it as a second edition. A third edition, revising Book VIII, adding Book IX and making changes to Book VII, followed after the resumption of persecutions and the subsequent Edict of Milan, and was probably released after 313. A fourth and final revised edition, adding Book X, was finished in or after 324.¹¹

Trompf prefers the more recent estimates of Grant and Barnes, who have Eusebius completing the first edition with the end of Book VII in the 290s. They concur with Lawler that Eusebius commenced writing *Historia Ecclesiastica* much earlier than Schwartz believed. On this model, the second edition contained some of the stories later included in *Martyrs of Palestine* and was probably completed in 313-314. In approximately 315 a third edition of *Historia Ecclesiastica* was produced, containing an abridged version of *Martyrs of Palestine*, and the fourth edition was completed after 325.¹² According to Burgess and Grant, the Syriac translation from the BDM_L group of manuscripts represents an even later edition which

⁸ *Ibid.*, xix-xxi.

⁹ H J Lawlor, *Eusebiana: Essays on the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Bishop of Caesarea* (Oxford, 1912) 243.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹² Trompf, *op cit*, 134.

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was revised to expunge all references to Crispus, the eldest son of Constantine, rendering it consistent with the practice of *Damnatio Memoriae* and with the *Vita Constantini* (from which Constantine's second wife, Fausta, is also 'expurgated').¹³ This edition would have been produced after Crispus was executed on his father's orders in May 326.¹⁴

The advantage of this more recent estimate is that it supports the claim that Eusebius concluded the first edition of *Historia Ecclesiastica* with Book VII. A crucial problem posed by completion in the 290s, however, is that Eusebius abandoned the subject of apostolic successions at the end of Book VII, having provided episcopal lists which spanned the period 'from the birth of our Saviour to the destruction of the places of prayer', a subject that by his own reckoning extended 'over three hundred and five years'.¹⁵ This would push the date of completion of Book VII forward to the very early 300s and, if Eusebius's reckoning is anything to go by, quite specifically to after 302-305. There is no reason to doubt Eusebius' calculations. Burgess notes in his study of the latter text that Eusebius was using a combination of three main calendric systems: years since the birth of Abraham, Olympiads and the regnal years of kings, emperors, pharaohs and so forth.¹⁶ He notes that those calculations falter only once in the first 260 years of his *Canones*.¹⁷ If, as Barnes explains, the first persecuting edict (Diocletian/Galerius) was published on 24 February 303, it is entirely plausible then that a first edition of *Historia Ecclesiastica* (and probably *Canones*) was completed before that.¹⁸

¹³ Burgess, *op cit*, 67-68.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, and R M Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford, 1980) 10.

¹⁵ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol II, Book VII, xxxii, 31-32, 245.

¹⁶ Burgess, *op cit*, 28-35.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 36-37.

¹⁸ T D Barnes, 'The Constantinian Settlement' in H W Attridge and G Hata (eds) *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism* (Leiden, 1992) 638-639.

Chronici Canones

The various editions of the *Chronici Canones* probably followed a relatively comparable pattern of composition. Certainly the final edition was completed at around the same time as *Historia Ecclesiastica*, with convincing evidence that references to both Licinius and Crispus were altered to reflect the respective *Damnatio Memoriae*.

Burgess maintains that the *Canones* – a two part chronicle consisting of lists and such ‘raw materials’ (*chronographia*), and chronological tables – was first composed between 308 and 311 (during a lull in the middle of the Great Persecution). References in *Eclogae* (i.1 and i.8), however, suggest that the first edition was completed before 303¹⁹ and this earlier date would accommodate a post 302-305²⁰ estimate for completion of the first edition of *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Eusebius admitted in that work that he was elaborating on material he had already published in outline in the *Canones*.²¹ A second edition incorporating the death of Maximinius emerged in 313 or early 314, and the final edition was completed some time after Constantine’s *uicennalia* on 25 July 325. Unfortunately no extant version of the *Canones* is in the original Greek and no version is unadulterated. In his translation, which takes the history up to 380/381, Jerome added 57 of his own chapters to 78 of Eusebius’²² and so, by his own admission:

served as both translator and, to some extent, author, since I have translated the Greek very faithfully and I have added quite a number of items that I felt had been omitted, especially with regard to Roman history ... Therefore, from Ninus and Abraham down to the capture of Troy is straight translation from the Greek. From Troy down to the twentieth year of Constantine I have added many new entries and augmented many existing entries using material ... from Tranquillus and other famous historians. And from the above-

¹⁹ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol I, xvii.

²⁰ My estimate as noted earlier based on the quote from *ibid*, Vol II, Book VII, xxxii, 31-32.

²¹ *Ibid*, Vol I, Book I, I, 5, 11.

²² M Grant, *Ancient Historians*, 408.

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mentioned year of Constantine down to the sixth consulship of Valens Augustus and the second of Valentinian Augustus the material is all mine.²³

Burgess has demonstrated that Jerome also made changes to rather significant dates, thereby undermining the reliability of this received version.²⁴ Similarly, a major Armenian translation (which exists in two extant manuscripts and conflates an earlier Armenian and a Syrian translation) from the thirteenth or fourteenth century ends with 16 Diocletian (301 CE) and its chronology has also been adjusted. Of limited benefit are two later Arabic translations and two Syriac epitomes.²⁵

Having outlined speculation as to the dates and editions of *Historia Ecclesiastica* and *Canones* Eusebius produced, it is now possible to examine the methodological signature of Eusebius manifest in *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Eusebius has been much acclaimed for his extensive contribution to early Christian historiography. His works were amongst those histories on which Renaissance historiography was modelled, on which the discourses and theories on political science, the art of war and the cognisance of God were centred.²⁶ He is described by Burgess as ‘an innovator who expanded the classical repertoire of genres and embarked upon new and bold directions. The *Canones*, *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Vita Constantini* were unlike anything that had gone before’.²⁷ Eusebius himself pronounced on the originality of his undertaking at the beginning of *Historia Ecclesiastica*:

... nowhere can we find even the bare footsteps of men who have preceded us in the same path, unless it be those slight indications by which in diverse ways they have left us partial accounts of the times through which they have passed ... We have therefore collected from their scattered memoirs all that we think will be useful for the present subject ... To work at this subject I

²³ Jerome, *Chronici Canones*, 6.8-7.3 in Rudolf Helm (ed) *Die Chronik des Hieronymus. Hieronymi Chronicon*, Eusebius *Werke* 7 (Berlin, 1984 [1956]), translated in R W Burgess, *op cit*, 23-24.

²⁴ Burgess, *op cit*, 24-25.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 22-27.

²⁶ A Momigliano, *Sui Fondamenti della Storia Antica* (Torino, 1984) 313.

²⁷ Burgess, *op cit*, 73.

consider especially necessary, because I am not aware that any Christian writer has until now paid attention to this kind of writing; and I hope that its high value will be evident to those who are convinced of the importance of a knowledge of the history.²⁸

Eusebius introduced a new type of historical strategy in that he systematically included some 250 verbatim quotations from 49 authors and over 100 books, a practice apparently only previously employed by Suetonius in his writing on Augustus.²⁹ Suetonius also cited a gazette (*acta diurna*) in relation to Caligula's birth, along with notebooks and papers with 'some well-known verses of Nero's, written with his own hand ... not copies or taken down from dictation, but worked out exactly as one writes when thinking'.³⁰ Eusebius likewise supported his records with documentary evidence where possible, such as the inscriptional evidence supporting his translation of the *Rescript of Maximin* (Maximinus II) taken from the 'Tablet at Tyre'.³¹ Momigliano suggests that Eusebius further differentiated his work by excluding the 'contrived' rhetorical speeches much adapted by Herodotus from Homer and refined by Thucydides who states in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*:

In this history I have made use of set speeches ... while keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words that were actually used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation.³²

Momigliano's further observation – that Eusebius ascribed nationhood to Christianity, thereby creating a 'national history' for Christians³³ – is debated by Mortley, who notes that the concept of nationhood had already appeared in Clement of Alexandria and in the debate between Origen and Celsus on the cultural affinity of

²⁸ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol I, Book I, I, 2-5, 9.

²⁹ Presumably during his secretarial appointment at court when he had access to archived documents up until his dismissal, at which point he had only completed the biography of Augustus, as noted by M Grant, *Ancient Historians*, 338-339.

³⁰ Suetonius, *Gaius*, 8, 2 and Suetonius, *Nero*, 52 (both translated by J C Rolfe and cited in M Grant, *Ancient Historians*, 339).

³¹ M Grant, *Ancient Historians*, 357.

³² Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans Rex Warner (Harmondsworth, 1972) Book 1.22, 47.

³³ Momigliano, 'Pagan and Christian Historiography', 89-91.

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Mediterranean nations.³⁴ Josephus also addressed the question of nationhood in *Contra Apion* and was the first author to make use of documentary evidence to bolster claims of nationhood.³⁵

Neither the claims of Momigliano nor Mortley are incorrect. In the nationalistic outlook and evidence-based method used by Eusebius were inherent features of the ‘pervasive Hellenistic universalism’ in which, as Mortley argues, Eusebius’s writing was grounded.³⁶ They were nonetheless applied for the first time in the venture of Christian historiography by Eusebius, as Momigliano states. In his introduction to *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, Louth notes that ‘Eusebius was doing something new’ in writing a Church history in an annalistic vein with ‘the extended notes of a chronologer’.³⁷ A glance at the quotation from Book I of *Historia Ecclesiastica* cited above demonstrates that Eusebius himself specifically contrasted the originality of his approach to that of ‘any Christian writer’ before him.

Similarly, Eusebius produced something unique when he refashioned the chronicle beyond the scope of his Hellenistic, Roman and Christian precursors.³⁸ In the well-appointed library at Alexandria, Eratosthenes and Apollodorus after him compiled systematic histories of the Greek world, which came to delineate the composition of the chronicle: lists of kings, wars, destruction of cities, migrations, treaties, lives of famous people and so forth.³⁹ These shaped the Roman annalistic tradition. The Romanisation of the Mediterranean facilitated the sweeping collection of all world history into a Hellenistic framework of universal history.⁴⁰ Julius Africanus and Hippolytus after him sought to synchronise sacred history, giving the

³⁴ R Mortley, *The Idea of Universal History from Hellenistic Philosophy to Early Christian Historiography* (Lewiston, 1966) 155.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 99-123.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 154-156.

³⁷ Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, xx.

³⁸ B Croke, ‘The Origins of the Christian World Chronicle’ in B Croke and A M Emmett (eds) *History and Historians in Late Antiquity* (Rushcutters Bay, 1983) 116.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 117.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 120.

Hebrew tradition historical priority over the Hellenistic, which Diodorus Siculus had dated back to Troy. For Eusebius, the imperative to produce a comprehensive and accurate world chronology was underpinned by the opinion that world history would span 6000 years. A chronology would therefore facilitate the calculation of the anticipated *parousia* (second coming).⁴¹ Apart from his original method of making calendrical calculations,⁴² Eusebius surpassed his predecessors in his presentation of chronological material in tabulated format,⁴³ rather than in a continuous annalistic record.⁴⁴ Of paramount importance was the need to consolidate all world history in this fashion, obviously with a view to emphasising the primacy of the Christian nation by its association with Abraham.

Working within an established framework of Hellenistic universalism, the use of supporting documentation (and indeed chronologies) helps to verify the claim of the continuity of Eusebius' work with an established cultural tradition. This intellectual orthodoxy eschewed the 'intellectual estrangement inherent in Judaism'.⁴⁵ Whilst *Praeparatio* deals with the Greek appropriation of 'barbarian' cultural assemblages, some aspects of which Eusebius disparages, he does not wish for Christianity to abandon links, but rather to absorb or appropriate the more venerable aspects of those intellectual and philosophical traditions.⁴⁶ The most obvious manifestations of the Stoic influence in Eusebius' writing are his concern with universalism⁴⁷ and the recurrent operation of divine providence in the course of human history.⁴⁸ The Platonic tradition also greatly influenced Eusebius' approach. Examined in isolation, *Historia Ecclesiastica* yields no evidence of the Christian Platonism

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴³ A A Mosshammer, *The Chronicle of Eusebius and Greek Chronographic Tradition* (New Jersey, 1979) 37.

⁴⁴ Croke, *op cit*, 124.

⁴⁵ Mortley, *op cit*, 170.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, quoting from *Praeparatio* I.5.10-13 and XI.

⁴⁷ Another feature he shares with Diodorus Siculus: M Grant, *Ancient Historians*, 240-242.

⁴⁸ Croke, *op cit*, 120 and J Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius and Athanasius* (Oxford, 1993) 99.

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which Eusebius exhibited in writing *Praeparatio*. In XI.9 of the latter, he dealt with ontology ‘according to Moses and Plato’ and in XI.10.12 asked ‘What else is Plato, but Moses speaking Greek?’⁴⁹ The similarities between these two traditions had been dealt with by Clement, Justin and Origen before him, who variously attributed the correlations to plagiarism, diffusion or a ‘commonality of ideas’. In answer to Celsus’ claim that Jesus had plagiarized Plato’s *Crito*, Origen replied that Moses and other prophets had taught the doctrine (about turning the other cheek) before Plato.⁵⁰ Josephus also attributes the acquisition by Greeks of philosophical conceptions from ‘principles which Moses supplied them’.⁵¹ Justin the Martyr (c100-165 CE) explicitly saw ‘God’s intervention’ as instrumental to the evolution of Greek philosophy, which would ultimately guide ‘the Greek world to the Church’.⁵² In this way the Greek cultural tradition would be incorporated into the continuous Christian history.

Eusebius explicitly recommended assimilation and justified it by demonstrating philosophical continuity. Eusebius’ purpose here, according to Mortley, was to ‘recapture Plato for Christianity by reinterpreting him’.⁵³ Ascribing Old Testament literature such as Genesis to Moses and juxtaposing quotations from it with a citation from *Politicus* (271e5-272b3), Eusebius invested the grand Christian patriarch with the authorial and sagely capabilities of Plato. He did not attempt to conflate the two entities, since he excluded facets of Platonic thought which he deemed morally inappropriate for the Christian. Expanding on Aristobulus (c180-146 BCE), the Jewish-Alexandrian religious philosopher who sought to convert Greek philosophers to Judaism on the grounds that Moses had ‘anticipated’ Greek philosophical tenets,⁵⁴ Eusebius’ intention was to absorb Plato

⁴⁹ Mortley, *op cit*, 169.

⁵⁰ J W Trigg, *Origen* (London, 1998) 59.

⁵¹ Mortley, *op cit*, 113.

⁵² V Adrahtas, ‘Socrates Christianus: Images of Socrates in Early Greek Christian Literature’, *Phronema* 17, 2002, 158.

⁵³ Mortley, *op cit*, citing *Praeparatio*, Book XII, Chapter 13.

⁵⁴ William Fairweather, *The Background of the Gospels: Judaism in the Period between the Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh, 1961) 331-332.

into the Christian ‘pantheon headed by Moses’.⁵⁵ It is notable that Justin the Martyr before him had configured Greek philosophy as fulfilling a role in ‘human history ... partaking in God’s intervening in human affairs’,⁵⁶ drawing a parallel between the roles of prophets and philosophers, who offered ‘differentiated versions of a single vocation, namely the discerning of God’s presence in human history’.⁵⁷

Eusebius did not hesitate to depict Old Testament figures such as Abraham and Moses as Christians.⁵⁸ He quotes an unnamed early writer as testimony to the inherent christological belief in early hymnology:⁵⁹ ‘And all the Psalms and hymns which were written by faithful Christians from the beginning sing of the Christ as the Logos of God and treat him as God’.⁶⁰ From the beginning of *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Eusebius seized every such opportunity to extend the tentacles of Christian history and emphasise the ‘constant, the enduring and the continuous in the Church’s past’.⁶¹

Him even from the creation of mankind did all who are said to have been pre-eminent in righteousness and virtuous piety recognise by the contemplation of the pure eyes of the mind, and pay him the reverence due to a child of God; thus did Moses, the great servant, and his fellows, and even before him Abraham and his children.⁶²

Eusebius also attempted to cement etymological links between Christianity and Judaism by claiming that Moses first conceived of applying the titles ‘Jesus’ and ‘Christ’ to great men in Jewish history.⁶³ The chain of ‘Christ-like’ figures continues throughout the Old Testament to the Christian period and is, for Eusebius, bound by

⁵⁵ Mortley, *op cit*, 167-168.

⁵⁶ Adrahtas, *op cit*, 157.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 158.

⁵⁸ M Grant, *Ancient Historians*, 348.

⁵⁹ R L Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London, 1908) 149.

⁶⁰ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol I, Book V, xxxviii, 6-9, 519.

⁶¹ R A Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1998) 91.

⁶² Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol I, Book I, ii, 4-7, 15.

⁶³ *Ibid*, Vol I, Book I, iii, 1-19, 29-39.

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‘the invisible thread of the chrisim’.⁶⁴ A similar pursuit was undertaken by Plutarch and Diodorus, before Eusebius, who attempted to synthesise Egyptian and Greek culture by demonstrating (albeit tenuous) etymological links.⁶⁵ Both writers were similarly dedicated to a holistic interpretation of history and Diodorus in particular preceded Eusebius in his very stoic fixation with the operation of *providence* in history.⁶⁶ The notion was one of Justin’s incisive conceptual devices and was also frequently used by two other historians whose work Eusebius quoted: Josephus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The term ‘divine providence’ was a specifically Christian adaptation and appears in Clement and Origen.⁶⁷ The tendency to assert such consistency is a prevalent feature of Eusebius’ writing in both *Canones* and *Historia Ecclesiastica* and is overtly articulated in his treatment of apostolic succession:

We shall endeavour to give them unity by historical treatment, rejoicing to rescue the successions, if not of all, at least of the most distinguished of the apostles of our Saviour throughout those churches of which the fame is still remembered.⁶⁸

It is apparent from *Praeparatio* and *Ecologiae propheticae* that Eusebius ‘knew how to plan a treatise and stick to his plan’.⁶⁹ His ‘mastery’ of the compilation of history⁷⁰ should not be understated.⁷¹ That Eusebius followed a strategy in the composition of the original edition of *Historia Ecclesiastica* is evidenced by his statement that the underlying diachronic structure of *Historia Ecclesiastica* was derived from his *Canones*:

⁶⁴ Mortley, *op cit*, 193.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 81.

⁶⁶ Croke, *op cit*, 120 and Mortley, *op cit*, 81-82.

⁶⁷ R M Grant, *op cit*, 145.

⁶⁸ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 9.

⁶⁹ R M Grant, *op cit*, 29.

⁷⁰ This was a hard act to follow, if Rufinus’ attempt to follow Eusebian strategy is anything to go by.

⁷¹ G W Trompf, ‘Rufinus and the Logic of Retribution in Post-Eusebian Church Histories’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43:3, 1992, 369.

I have already summarised the material in the chronological tables which I have drawn up, but nevertheless in the present work I have undertaken to give the narrative in full detail.⁷²

From its beginning to the end of Book VII, *Historia Ecclesiastica* appears to adhere to a pattern; the end of Book VII reads, as Grant observes, as though it concludes ‘a whole treatise’.⁷³ Subsequent additions and retrospective alterations, however, undermined the pre-existing symmetry, giving the impression that Eusebius became distracted or lost interest in a theme as he moved on to another. For example, Eusebius included episcopal lists in both *Historia Ecclesiastica* and *Canones*. In *Historia Ecclesiastica*, however, he abandoned the episcopal lists in Book VII, concluding:

In these books having concluded the subject of the successions, from the birth of our Saviour to the destruction of the places of prayer – a subject that extends over three hundred and five years – come, let us next leave in writing, for the information of those also that come after us, what the extent and nature have been of the conflicts in our own day of those who manfully contended for piety.⁷⁴

This suggests that Eusebius ceased his preoccupation with demonstrating apostolic succession once the persecutions commenced; his focus shifted to the conversion of Constantine. Grant notes that, apart from these episcopal lists, the *Canones* contains less than one hundred historical items from the birth of Christ to the beginning of the persecutions ‘and nothing, not imperial or episcopal from that point to 325’.⁷⁵ In his reconstruction of the *Canones*, Burgess expressed bewilderment at Eusebius’ complete abandonment of what had previously been a major imperative:

When he came to write the final book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and to update the *Canones* in 325, he saw no need to continue the account of apostolic succession beyond the beginning of the persecution. Why this should be so is a mystery.⁷⁶

⁷² Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 11.

⁷³ R M Grant, *op cit*, 31.

⁷⁴ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 245.

⁷⁵ R M Grant, *op cit*, 5-6.

⁷⁶ Burgess, *op cit*, 44-45.

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Grant infers that, in Book VII, xxxii, 31-32, Eusebius adhered to a literary pattern he adopted from Josephus, one of his most important sources and a methodological guide, who concluded *Antiquities* with the statement:

the present work contains the 'tradition' from the first creation of man up to the twelfth year of the reign of Nero ... here will be the end of my *Antiquities*, following which begins my account of the war ... [having] endeavoured to preserve the record of the line of the high priests who have served during two thousand years ... the succession and conduct of the kings ... for this is what I promised to do at the beginning of my history.⁷⁷

Probably because he found the addition of material on martyrdom conducive to schematic consistency, Eusebius later incorporated details from his separate work, *Martyrs of Palestine*, into *Historia Ecclesiastica*, using a format which had clearly worked well for Josephus before him. Eusebius took on this topic with great enthusiasm, expounding the virtues of faultless behaviour in the face of persecution in terms that were familiar both to Christians and to Graeco-Roman pagans, and sustaining Athenagoras' narrative of 'divinely redeemed innocent victims'.⁷⁸ No doubt this served, as Trompf suggests, to reconcile one of the 'loopholes of logic'⁷⁹ of the text: Eusebius not only glorified such deaths, but blurred the distinction between voluntary martyrdom and suicide, and even justified Christian suicide.⁸⁰ Although perhaps embittered over his own period of captivity and the death of his beloved mentor Pamphilus, Eusebius deviated significantly from the position of Origen, who in his encomium *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 'scales down the enthusiasm until it is almost matter of fact'.⁸¹ McGuckin maintains that it was the martyr's 'philosophical constancy' in the Socratic tradition which Origen celebrated and that he sought to downplay or displace the 'growing Christian devotion to the martyr

⁷⁷ R M Grant, *op cit*, 32 quoting Josephus' *Antiquities* XX, 259.

⁷⁸ Adrahtas, *op cit*, 160.

⁷⁹ G W Trompf, 'The Logic of Retribution in Eusebius of Caesarea' in Croke and Emmett, *op cit*, 137.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 137.

⁸¹ J A McGuckin, 'Martyr Devotion in the Alexandrian School: Origen to Athanasius' in Diana Wood (ed) *Martyrs and Martyrologies* (Oxford, 1993) 37.

ideal'.⁸² Origen tended to emphasise alternative forms of devotion, such as the vocation of the *didaskalos*. Having castrated himself at the age of eighteen, Origen harboured extremely negative views of the body and saw celibacy as the highest ideal.⁸³ Of the seven remissions of sins he listed in his *Second Homily on Leviticus*, all but two, baptism and martyrdom, are repeatable actions.⁸⁴ Eusebius' desire to 'endow' him with the 'nimbus of the martyr'⁸⁵ belies the reality that Origen had made no apology for escaping martyrdom. Eusebius attributed Origen's avoidance of martyrdom, however, to the hand of divine providence.⁸⁶

In his assessment of the reasoning of fourth and fifth century Church historians in relation to martyrdom, Markus discerns a demarcation in Christian consciousness between the 'Incarnation of the Word' and all that came before Christ. This is not overtly evident in the work of Eusebius, who, as previously stated, sought to present this event as pre-ordained, a monumental feature of the Christian historical landscape. More compelling is Markus' logic in situating Eusebius among the fourth and fifth century Christian historians who sought to rescue the community which 'straddled heaven and earth'⁸⁷ and redeem the historical unity of the Church by fortifying the continuity between the coming of Christ and his impending return.⁸⁸ The period in which Book VII is concluded marks a turning point for the Church, with the apparent end of persecutions and a time of relative peace and political stability following the release of the Edict of Toleration. Christians were now free to worship through a 'recurrent cycle of celebrations' which underscored what had come before, while they awaited the *parousia*.⁸⁹ The recurrence of persecutions presented an

⁸² *Ibid*, 38.

⁸³ U Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality and the Catholic Church*, trans P Heinegg (New York, 1990) 51-52.

⁸⁴ McGuckin, *op cit*, 39-41.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 38.

⁸⁶ R M Grant, *op cit*, 143.

⁸⁷ Markus, *op cit*, 97.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 89-90.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 88.

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opportunity for Eusebius to assert homogeneity by demonstrating continuity in martyrdom.

The theme of martyrdom also availed itself to the retributive logic which featured so significantly in Eusebius' particular historiographical hermeneutic.⁹⁰ In Book VIII of *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Eusebius ascribes the Great Persecution to 'divine judgement' which *intervened* 'according to the word spoken by Jeremiah' and 'according to ... the Psalms'; again, it was a foreordained event. The intervention had a retributive angle as well: divine providence avenged the 'change to pride and sloth', the fall 'to envy and fierce railing against one another ... with weapons and spears formed of words'. It rebuked an environment in which 'rulers attacked rulers and laity formed factions against laity', where 'unspeakable hypocrisy and pretence pursued their evil course to the furthest end'.⁹¹ Eusebius in fact uses *restitutio* in much the same way as his imperial counterparts, interpreting 'all kinds of temporal blessings as rewards' and all manner of misfortune and tragedy as punishment for the 'arrogance [of some] such as to cause them in their madness to antagonise the Almighty'.⁹²

Thus it was clearly shown for all to see that the rulers of this world would never find it easy to proceed against the churches of Christ, unless the hand which champions us were to permit this to be done, by a divine and heavenly judgement to chasten and turn us at whatsoever times it should approve.⁹³

The inclusion of the most graphic accounts of martyrdom in *Historia Ecclesiastica* proved very useful for the purpose of inverting 'popular logic'.⁹⁴ Eusebius most explicitly restricted what to 'place on record' to 'nothing more ... than what would justify the divine judgement'.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Trompf, 'Logic of Retribution', 134.

⁹¹ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol II, Book VIII, I, 4-9, 253-255.

⁹² Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 124, quoting *Vita Constantini*, ii, 25.

⁹³ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol II, Book VII, XXX, 19-22, 225.

⁹⁴ Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 123.

⁹⁵ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol II, Book VIII, I, 9-11, 257.

Following the same schema, divine providence again intervened ‘quenching the fire of persecution that had blazed so furiously, by means of merciful edicts (Galerius) and the most humane ordinances’.⁹⁶ Eusebius was quick to qualify that statement to ensure that the reprieve was seen, not as humanely inspired but ultimately, as with every event of history, the product of divine planning and consummation:

... this was not due to any human agency nor to the pity, as one might say, or humanity of the rulers. Far from it ... But it was due to the manifestations of the Divine Providence itself, which, while it became reconciled to the people, attacked the perpetrator of these evils ... For verily, though it was destined that these things should come to pass as divine judgement ... A divinely-sent punishment, I say, executed vengeance upon him.⁹⁷

With martyrdoms accounted for, all that remained was for the ‘happy ending’ of Christian history to be celebrated in the ‘panegyric notes’ which concluded *Historia Ecclesiastica*.⁹⁸ Here Eusebius betrays factuality in favour of panegyric. More importantly, his account is guilty of omissions and amendments to earlier editions, including those concerning Licinius, Crispus and Fausta in the *Damnatio Memoriae*. These intentionally served to substantiate Constantine’s revision of history. Yet, when Eusebius exhumed *Historia Ecclesiastica* in light of the changes to the Christian world brought about by Constantine, he must have been struck by the resonance of his preamble concerning Christ-like figures. Surely this exceptional individual could fall into the line of Christ-like figures before him.⁹⁹ Loaded with such ‘extravagant claims’, the panegyric nature of *Vita Constantini* undermines its historical content. It incites scathing criticisms from Grant, who describes the *Vita Constantini* as:

... groveling, cumbersome, slovenly and full of stupefying inflated praise, interpreting Constantine as the vice-regent of God, and the fulfillment of Old

⁹⁶ Lawlor, *op cit*, 264.

⁹⁷ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol II, Book VIII, xiv-xvi, 313-314.

⁹⁸ Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography*, 128.

⁹⁹ Mortley, *op cit*, 187.

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Testament prophecies, without a hint about the more sinister, murderous aspects of his reign.¹⁰⁰

Trompf argues that such extravagance is lavished not exclusively for panegyric ends, but serves to rectify the great discrepancy – in retributive increments – between the deaths of the pagans and the inordinate degree of molestation and torture to which Christian martyrs were subjected.¹⁰¹ The term ‘extravagant’ was similarly applied by Cochrane¹⁰² to Eusebius’ vision of the future in a universal Constantinian era. In this ‘Golden Age’ revisited,¹⁰³ church and state are one; a new world order eschews the traditional ‘old pessimistic-eschatological approach to salvation history’,¹⁰⁴ in favour of a ‘this worldly yet divinely planned π _____’,¹⁰⁵

Eusebius sought not merely to *record* a history, but to *establish* a universal history for Christianity, a history which could be backdated to the earliest times, whose uniformity and destiny was contingent on his own configuration of divine providence. He availed himself of every opportunity to secure or to manufacture associations between Christianity and the earliest protagonists of historicised time, collapsing all events from the creation of mankind into a rubric of historical inevitability, to underscore the ubiquitous orchestration of divine providence. From the beginning of his *Historia Ecclesiastica* and throughout each revision to the final edition as we have received it, Eusebius took every opportunity to emphasise this retributive dynamic. The shift from episcopal lists to martyrdom is explained by the persecutions up to the period in which he was writing. The inclusion of the persecution material and the Constantinian panegyric served to contrast the brutality of the period with the prognosticated

¹⁰⁰ M Grant, *Readings in the Classical Historians*, 585.

¹⁰¹ Trompf, ‘Logic of Retribution’, 136.

¹⁰² Charles Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New York, 1957) 185, cited in Trompf, ‘Logic of Retribution’, 136.

¹⁰³ G W Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought: from Antiquity to the Reformation* (Berkeley, 1979) 224. Trompf had earlier stressed the Eusebian position that history occurred (as opposed to recurred) in accordance with a divine plan, *ibid*, 208.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 235.

¹⁰⁵ Trompf, ‘Logic of Retribution’, 136.

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deliverance of Christianity under Constantine. It also served to ameliorate the inequity between the suffering endured by Christians and the punishments suffered by their persecutors. Eusebius' accounts of martyrdom and his encomium to Constantine were apologetic instruments, enabling him to demonstrate the continuity and constancy of divine providence in the unfolding of history.

