

The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature. Edited by FRANCES YOUNG, LEWIS AYRES, and ANDREW LOUTH. Pp. xxx + 538. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. ISBN 978 0 521 46083 5 and 69750 7. Hardback £91/\$130; paper £17.99/\$34.99.

THE first point to notice about this volume is the absence from the title of any mention of 'theology', although the omission is scarcely noted in the editorial preface—which does, however, take pains to note the deliberate avoidance of the term 'patristics', and not only in the interests of gender neutrality. The intention was to expand the remit of 'early Christian literature' beyond the canonical and the orthodox; and, as a project explicitly defined in terms of history and literature, this history is presented not as a study of early Christian thought but as 'a resource for theological thinking' (p. xiii). This seems to mean an emphasis on genre and rhetoric and social and historical context instead of on doctrines and creeds, or rather as a way of better understanding doctrines and creeds, and this is certainly very welcome. If it is not perhaps revolutionary, that is in large part because of the prior contributions of the editors themselves to the study of the history and literature of early Christianity. The effect is of a summing-up of the most influential developments in this particular field over the last forty years or so, by those who were themselves most closely involved.

Indeed, the contents page alone reveals the extent to which this volume grows out of the concerns of its editors, and (the preface suggests) of Frances Young in particular. Young and Andrew Louth between them are responsible for 18 of the 40 chapters; Lewis Ayres contributes only a single chapter, but a further six are by (the late) Richard A. Norris, Jr. and five more by Ronald E. Heine. This too is explained as an attempt to offer the kind of 'coherent focus' that might be undermined by the close involvement of 'an enormous variety of scholars' (p. xii)—and I do not mean to suggest that this is a weakness. In this case it has certainly led to a clear plan for the volume as a whole, in which the three chronological divisions ('The New Testament to Irenaeus'; 'The Third Century'; 'From Diocletian to Cyril') are each themselves subdivided into sections A and B, with the first offering an overview of the period's literature and the second providing a more synoptic account of historical and literary contexts and developments. Young herself provides introductory and concluding chapters for each period (although

for some reason there is no introduction to the third century), and these are as impressively insightful and thought-provoking as could only be expected from such a source.

Much the same could be said about most of the other chapters: the reputations of the editors and the other scholars involved will speak for themselves, and it is impossible to quibble about the choice of authors for the various specialist topics. Thus Sebastian Brock contributes chapters on Syriac literature and on Ephrem of Nisibis; the article on Augustine is by Henry Chadwick; and there is John David Dawson on third-century Christian teaching, Oliver Nicholson on Arnobius and Lactantius, and Susan Ashbrook Harvey on women in Christian literature, to name only a few. I hope I shall be forgiven if I am unable to comment on every one of these chapters: many of them are brief indeed, and there seems little to be gained in summarizing them still further.

If I had a complaint, it would be precisely the brevity of some of these chapters, and especially of those in section A, in what Young refers to as the 'literary guide' (p. 106). A number of these—notably towards the beginning of the book—come closest in style to encyclopedia entries, or perhaps introductions to translated texts. This is no bad thing in itself, and is clearly part of the design of the volume, but prospective readers ought to be aware that the primary emphasis is evidently on orienting the new student, or else on providing a basic overview for scholars straying out of their specialist areas. The chapters in section B, by contrast, are in general much longer and offer more scope for analysis and argument, although here too there is some variety of content and approach. Karen Jo Torjesen provides an outstanding chapter on the social and historical setting of Christian literature in the third century—notably adding her own subtitle ('Christianity as cultural critique') to the standard title provided by the editors; Ronald Heine's subsequent chapter on 'Articulating Identity' in the same period is similarly impressive, and both engage to a significant extent with the kind of theorized approach to the material primarily articulated in the contributions by Young. This is not true of every contribution, although this is not necessarily a problem: John Behr, for example, provides a detailed and judicious account of the social and historical context of earliest Christianity, in a chapter I shall certainly recommend to my own students. All the same, it begins to suggest that the unity of approach advertised in the preface is as susceptible to decay as in any multi-authored volume. Perhaps this was only to be expected

in a project with such a vast remit, and in which 'variegated' is a favourite word of so many of the contributors.

My own specialist area of the fourth and fifth centuries accounts for around half of the volume, and makes use of a wider variety of scholars than do the other sections. A lack of space prohibits any detailed discussions of the issues raised here, but a few points may be made. Perhaps inevitably, the engagement of Christian authors in this period with pagan or classical culture is largely set aside, despite Young's introductory chapter which raises it as a concern: for, as she suggests, many of these works imply an audience equally at home with scriptural allusions and the conventions of epideictic rhetoric. Certainly it is well brought out that Christian authors—Eusebius and Jerome above all—were interested in creating and advertising a literary and cultural tradition of their own; but some of the fascinating compromises and continuities risk being overlooked through too sharp a focus on conflict and contention. Thus when Eusebius is discussed it is within the boundaries set by Momigliano, while important works by Averil Cameron and Hal Drake are neither cited nor listed in the bibliography. The fourth-century Latin writers fare rather better, however, with excellent essays by David Hunter—who, having been given the awkward task of introducing multiple prolific authors, perhaps comes the closest to a traditional patrology—and Mark Vessey, whose chapter on Rufinus and Jerome gives full weight to the latter's 'classicism' as well as his 'biblicism' (p. 320). Nor is the Greek world neglected, with chapters on the Cappadocians (as a group), John Chrysostom and Theodoret, and Cyril of Alexandria, as well as separate chapters on hagiography and on 'the literature of monasticism'—all of these contributed by Andrew Louth. Once again the chapters in section B are more substantial: Robert Markus's chapter on 'Social and Historical Setting' is typically thoughtful and wide-ranging, and I find its characterizations of Eusebius and Julian (in particular) more convincing than those in Young's introductory chapter to section A; Lewis Ayres on 'Articulating Identity' is equally acute, and in setting out the complex doctrinal and theological debates of this period offers a remarkable sophistication without sacrificing clarity. It may be too much to say that these two essays alone would justify the purchase, but, taken together with the excellent sketches found elsewhere in the volume, they do much to recommend it.

The question remains, then, of the purpose and the value of this collection. There is no doubt that the aim was to be comprehensive, and the preface speaks of an ambition to become

'a reference work' (p. xiii) and even ('in some respects') of replacing patrologies as guides to the field (p. xii). This latter idea seems misplaced: certainly these chapters will be very useful as a first port of call for those looking for an introduction to an author or a period of Christian writing, and so might be presented as a 'handbook' or a 'companion'—the editors rightly play down any wish to produce an encyclopedia. But it is ill-adapted as a reference work in any stronger sense. Authors looked up in the index are sometimes provided with subentries relating to their works, as in the case of Clement of Alexandria and Augustine, and sometimes not, as in the (hardly less significant) cases of Eusebius and Origen. Indeed, in Origen's case, those looking for information are provided with a list of fifty undifferentiated page references—more than enough to discourage the most assiduous scholar! To take two more obscure examples, Priscillian of Avila receives only a single mention, in connection with a treatise of Augustine, and Lucifer of Cagliari appears only in a subordinate clause (p. 402), though both are duly indexed. These are intended as observations more than as criticisms: the real point is that this is a work to be read according to its chapter divisions, which have after all been carefully thought through. It should be added too that the bibliography is very well designed indeed, offering a listing for each individual chapter and a further general listing for each chronological section. In the end, then, leaving aside the excellence of many individual contributions, it is this clarity of intention on the part of the editors which is most impressive. This volume will certainly stand both as a statement of the progress made so far in this field and as a prospectus for future research; and it may well help to affirm the value and interest of early Christian literature to those readers and scholars who might have been less interested in studying 'patristics'. In that respect, and in many others, this was a monumental task, and it has been carried out with conspicuous success.

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