University of Alberta

Christianity, Christians, and Christianization:
On the Affective Dimensions of Religious Formation

by

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Abstract

A critique and reformulation of some of the concepts and theoretical models most integral to the dominant scholarly use of the category "Christianization." The first chapter focuses on several key problems with the use of the term and attendant concepts such as conversion and syncretism, as well as with the general narratological model of the rise of Christianity. The second chapter treats elements of social theory and of cognitive theories concerning emotion, memory and social identity in order to suggest alternative approaches to conceptualizing the process of Christianization. In chapters three and four, these theoretical insights will be tested with reference to two separate case studies: exorcism, and the emergent Christian association at first-century Roman Corinth. Through these examples, it is demonstrated how common practice forms a more cogent basis for articulating a model of Christianization than a model that is predicated primarily on notions of ideological, doctrinal persuasion.

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Introduction

If scholars have found it difficult to draw a history of Christianization in the early centuries, it is because they continue to be hampered, in large part, by inadequate, but resiliently enduring conceptual frameworks. Though they are less likely now to speak of "pagan survivals," or of cultural "borrowings" or "corruptions," the problems posed by such notions continue to trouble attempts to define precisely what is entailed by scholars' use of the term "Christianization." Some historians have recognized that bold narratives of Christianity's rise from its humble origin to its victory as the official Roman imperial religion, then to its eventual corruption or distortion thereafter, are not adequate to describe the complexity of religious history as it appears in the record. Instead, they have come to consider these "facilitating narrative[s]" as the attempts of early authors to imagine their collective past and come to terms with the ambiguities of their present history (Brown 1997: 4). Consequently, they have also come to question the sufficiency of the terms and categories by which they imagine the process of Christianization.

Despite the cautions and critical challenges posed by these thinkers, ideas formulated by previous generations of historians continue to instruct the way many historians imagine Christianization. This is most evident in the tenacity with which they hold to the notion that Christianity is, in its origin and essence, a religion of doctrine. In such instances, doctrine defines the parameters of what may be called "Christian," so that ideas and practices which cannot be unequivocally aligned with Christian "belief" (especially as articulated in the canonical biblical texts) are thereby classified as "not Christian." Consider the following statement by Bernard Hamilton, for example, and the certainty with which Christianity is set apart from, and situated against, pagan religions: "Although on a rational level people in the medieval west accepted the Christian account of the nature of the universe and of man's place in it, older concepts, derived from the pagan religions of the west, lingered in their consciousness and helped to shape their attitudes in ways which were not Christian at all" (Hamilton 1986: 96). Such a state of affairs was made possible, he continues, because "there were seldom enough priests to instruct new converts in the practice of the faith, and a network of churches was established only

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very slowly. Consequently in many parts of Europe paganism was practised alongside a nominal form of Christianity" (1986: 99). Note that it is the qualification of a "nominal" (that is, "not fully Christian") status that enables the practice of paganism "alongside."

In another instance, James C. Russell asserts that the "unique characteristics of Christianity are to be located ... in the belief in individual redemption through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ" (Russell 1994: 35), and so he attempts to measure the success of efforts at Christianization among the Germanic peoples by determining "the extent to which the distinctive soteriological-eschatological core of Christianity is consciously accepted" (1994: 36). That he is finally unable to discern this conscious acceptance, Russell explains, comes as a result of "accommodation" or "deliberate inculturation of Germanic religiocultural attitudes within Christianity by Christian missionaries" (1994: 39), an initial mission policy adopted on the assumption that "more rigorous ethical and doctrinal formation would soon follow and eliminate incompatible Germanic ideological elements" (1994: 209). Again, it is a lack of proper instruction in doctrinal matters that led to a failure of Christianization.

The problem with such representations is not that they emphasize the importance of explicit educational policies as a means to inculcating Christian ideas, beliefs and values. The problem, instead, is that they assume the complete and exclusive acceptance of such to be the proper end and measure of Christianization. This assumption severely restricts a descriptively nuanced and historiographically useful sense of "Christianization," if simply for the fact that doctrinal concerns were not evenly or consistently applied throughout this period (if ever). Not all who called themselves Christian subscribed to the same doctrinal set. Nor did all those who called themselves Christian always understand the substance of a given doctrine, even when it was coherently and systematically arranged. On this, Ramsay MacMullen describes a "'spectrum' of beliefs" among the Christians of late antiquity. "At the one end" of this spectrum, he explains, "was the very most authoritative, best thought-out Christianity, formed of long education in ecclesiastical traditions and literature, while at the other end lay the most careless and ill-informed" (1997: 144). Between the "world of those who delivered sermons" and that of those "who

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seldom or never heard one or understood it" (1997: 158), were a whole host of individuals who, however deeply or superficially educated in the complex of Christian doctrine, identified themselves as Christian.

In short, Christian society was composed of more than the well-spoken, well-educated members of the official Christian establishment. Their elaborate and logically integrated intellectual constructions, predicated on theological notions of soteriology and monotheism and correlated demands for the religious exclusivity of Christian allegiance are—because preserved for us in textual form—only the most readily distinguishable words from among the hum and murmur of the past. Our ahistorical insistence on an extra-historical Christian essence as the motivating factor in Christian affiliation thus makes Christian adherence primarily a matter of ideological consent, and places the burden of understanding the process of (effective) Christianization on the successful transmission of doctrinal material through persuasion at the level of ideas, concepts and creeds. In so doing, it also marginalizes the variety of religious practices that are so characteristic of the early Christian traditions, and thus further obscures the diversity and complexity that characterize religious formation and social change in antiquity. If a description of Christianization is to include the whole spectrum of Christian participation, it should also be able to account for why those with very little doctrinal exposure or ideological commitment should wish to count themselves (and why others should count them or not count them) as Christians.

In what follows, I will attempt a rectification of the notion of Christianization. In this, I will pursue a reformulation of some of the concepts and theoretical models most integral to the dominant scholarly use of the category "Christianization." The first chapter focuses on Christianization as a general concept and isolates several key problems with the use of the term itself, and with the general historical, narratological model most commonly associated with the idea. The second chapter treats elements of social theory and of cognitive theories concerning emotion, memory and the production of social identity in order to suggest alternative approaches to our conceptualization of the process of Christianization. In chapters three and four, these theoretical insights will be tested with reference to two separate case studies. The first of these (chapter three)

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concerns exorcism, a common early Christian practice that seems to have been an important contact point between Christians and others and also a powerful means of attracting people to affiliate themselves with Christian associations. A second case study (chapter 4) examines an emergent Christian association in first-century Roman Corinth. I describe the ways in which the Corinthian case challenges our notions of Christian exclusivism and conversion, and of the essential doctrinal character of Christianity. In both examples, I show how common practices are a more cogent basis for articulating a model of Christianization than a model that is predicated primarily on notions of ideological, doctrinal persuasion.

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Chapter 1

Christianization

There have always been two sides to the story of Christianization. The first is the tale of conquest, typically Christianity's self-narration, told in grand epic style as an ascent through fire and sword to final, inevitable triumph. During this long campaign to imperial dominance, a nascent but ambitiously expanding Christianity is said to have faced challenges of all kinds in the form, especially, of persecution from without and "heresy" from within. But the true church finally did rise not only to become the dominant but also the imperially favoured religion. This is the story told by Eusebius, the fourth-century historian of the Christian church and advisor to the emperor Constantine. His *Ecclesiastical History* traces the glorious rise of the eternal church from before the earthly advent of the divine *Logos*, Jesus, through the works of the apostles, to the age of imperial triumph under Constantine (Eusebius 1926). Launching his narrative on the trajectory initiated by the canonical scriptures (particularly the Gospels and Luke's *Acts of the Apostles*), Eusebius "provides a narrative of opposition and resistance to the eternal truth of the gospel, which would triumph uncorrupted and unchanged, by faithful adherence to the apostolic witness enshrined in privileged accounts of pristine origins" (Cameron 1994: 508).

But the rise of Christianity was accompanied by challenges other than persecution and heresy. A more subtle complication, and therefore more insidious, was the silent, invasive influence of an ancient and obstinate system of pagan religion. This is the second side of the story. It tells of a corruption effected by the gradual incorporation into Christian communities of unchristian customs and ideas, either through the force of cultural habit weighing down on those only nominally won to the Christian movement or through intentional accommodation by Christian missionaries of those customs and ideas for the purpose of winning converts,

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assisted all around by a lack of consistent ecclesiastical regulation. In contrast to the teleological optimism of the Eusebian version, this story chronicles the "vanishing of a clear line of demarcation between the church and secular society in the roman world," which was to become the "major problem that confronted church historians after Eusebius" (Markus 1975: 7). Such was the case for Augustine and his contemporaries, whose everyday dealings with various far-flung Christian communities had taught them just how incomplete the victory had been: "The Church may have defeated the gods; but it had not defeated, in its own congregations, the towering force of religious habits taken directly from the non-Christian past" (Brown 1997: 23). Having judged the resulting admixture of "pagan" and "Christian" unacceptable, the response of such thinkers was to construct a narrative that could both reaffirm the essential and originary perfection of the Christian faith and provide a rationalization for its present imperfections.

Our idea of what we mean when we use the term "Christianization" has been greatly influenced by the structure of this variously-told grand narrative tradition. Few readers could fail to be impressed by a story that begins with an empire without Christianity and ends with the two becoming one in a great Christian empire. By all appearances, it seems a "revolution" (Hopkins 2000: 76-135), by which "at some indeterminable point most people in Europe came to consider themselves 'Christian'" (Van Engen 1986: 550), and by which Christianity comes to figure as a key ingredient of all manner of cultural production, from art, architecture and monument, to literature, philosophy and legislation.

But if, in this wide-angle version of history, the momentum seems to favour Christianity, the shift looks less momentous when viewed on a smaller scale. The irrepressible presence in various local Christian traditions of continuities with the religious forms and social customs of a pre- or extra-Christian world bring into question the plausibility of the totalizing claims of the bearers of the grand narrative tradition. Indeed, some have questioned whether it was in fact Christianity itself that changed (Russell 1994), and some have claimed absolutely that Europe never was "really" Christianized at all (Stark 2001).

The problem of Christianization is a problem of both definition and identity. To suggest that something—artistic forms, people, societies—has been

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"Christianized" presupposes, first, some sort of definition of what "the Christian" is. Russell explicitly acknowledges this fact in his attempt to "isolate the most distinctive and essential characteristic of Christianity" (1994: 35) by which the success (or, as it turns out for Russell, failure) of Christianization might be measured. But "Christianization" also involves assumptions about what it means for a person to become "a Christian." On this point, we might turn to Rodney Stark's claim that "most of Europe [remained] unconverted except in the most superficial ways" and so that "there never was any Christianization in the first place" (2001: 105). His provocative declaration rests on a particular theory—as it happens, the most conventional one, which Stark takes to its most extreme implications—of what it means to "convert," namely that conversion is the "formation of a new and exclusive religious commitment" (2001: 106). Conventional understandings of conversion, however, have not produced conclusive results. In fact, as John Kitchen observes, "the question of conversion as a personal experience" has been a source of scholarly perplexity. Even more demanding has been the attempt to understand religious change at a societal level: "problems of historical reconstruction are magnified enormously when the issue of conversion is approached on a grand scale, in terms of a broad social and cultural phenomenon involving whole communities over *la longue durée*" (2002: 276). Kitchen raises an important issue, for the problem of Christianization is in part a problem of *scale*, of how to account for religious change at both the individual and societal levels. Both are problems which rest on the terms by which we conceptualize and define "Christianity," and also upon the model of religious change we use to define Christian membership.

Defining Christianity: Essence and Belief

We can see definitions of Christianity constructed in two ways. The first presumes an essential nature for the Christian religion, supposed to be located in a common set of beliefs and a common *Christian* experience. The second has a comparative thrust and defines Christianity by contrasting it with other religions, primarily "paganism," on the basis of contrasted beliefs. The grand narrative tradition provides us with a strong sense of the first definition, by suggesting that what we are looking at when we study the history of Christianity is the biography of a "tiny and

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obscure messianic movement from the edge of the Roman Empire" that was able to "dislodge classical paganism and become the dominant faith of Western civilization" (Stark 1996: 3). The Christianity of this story "seems simply to burst upon the scene, appearing from the beginning as a singular and fully formed entity" (Braun 1999: 130), from which point its history follows a pattern of "monolinear development" (Mack 1999: 133). Despite minor regional and temporal variations, "Christianity" is defined principally by its unique ideological position, whether philosophical, theological, moral, ethical. It is said to be "unified by a core of common belief, however diverse their expression" (Hopkins 2000: 96), which is usually related in some way to its appreciation for the "eschatological" (see Smith 1994: 41), or the "soteriological-eschatological" (Russell 1994). At base is a presumption that what we see Christians doing and saying is not quite the same as what Christianity *is*.[1] On the whole, Christianity is conceived of as a single entity, unchanging in essence from the event of its unique historical origin (Martin 2000: 70-72; Smith 1994: 1-35) through the history of its later manifestations.

This view has not been without criticism, however. Various archaeological discoveries and changing scholarly perspectives on the interpretation of historical materials and sources have begun to impress on scholars both the great diversity of early Christianities (O'Loughlin 2001) and the insufficiency of attempts to "integrate the historical evidence of a multiplicity of ancient Christianities into a coherent narrative concerning 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' or Christianity and Hellenism" (Lyman 2003: 210; with reference to Lim 1999).[2] From the very

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[1] Note the distinction MacMullen makes between "looking at Christians (at behavior, that is), not at Christianity (that is, at belief)" (1993: 30).

[2] On the supposed contrast between Christianity and its Hellenistic cultural context, see Graydon Snyder (1985), whose survey of the archaeological evidence of early Christianities indicates that early Christians were materially indistinguishable from others in the greater Graeco-Roman context: "distinctively Christian archaeological data does not appear until about 180. ... It took over one hundred years for a clearly Christian culture to take a form different from that of the social matrix" (Snyder 1985: 2). Concerning the multiplicity of early Christianities, see especially the published collection of proceedings from the Society of Biblical Literature's Seminar on Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins, *Redescribing Christian Origins* (Cameron and Miller 2004), whose various essays engage with both specific historical instances of Christian activity and the scholarly problems of method and theory that attend the historical enterprise. Cf. Mack 2001: 59-80. Note in particular the comments of Stanley K. Stowers on the tenacity of the Christian self-narrative, in his suggestion that even scholars who contest or reject the monolinear model of Christian history nonetheless often follow "linear" schemas of Christian historical progress: "concluding that there were several lines rather than one line in the earliest period of formation (going back to Jesus!) will

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beginning, "Christianity" was composed of "many different configurations of groups and movements that appealed to Jesus as their founder. We now refer to the Jesus schools, the Christ cults, the Pauline churches, Thomas Christianity, the Johannine enclaves, Jewish-Christian communities, Gnostic Christian groups, the Pauline school, and others as distinct and particular configurations of social experimentation in the first centuries" (Mack 1999: 133). The idea of a unified Christian orthodoxy is a product of later centuries, a product of the debates, councils and ecclesiastical institutions that attempted to define the boundary between "orthodox" and "heretical" doctrine. Orthodoxy, after all, is an "insider" term, used to circumscribe the realm of acceptable thinking for its members. But from an outside perspective, in the absence of confessional commitments or theological partiality (O'Loughlin 2001: 124-128), questions of who is right and who is wrong are not easily answered. What we are faced with are numerous parties, each making claim to the authenticity and correctness of their own viewpoint, all with reference to a common founding figure, theological corpus and sacred texts.[3] Eusebius and those who followed after him were able to fashion an "unbroken chain [of] ecclesiastical history linking their age with that of the apostolic church" which fostered a "strong sense of continuity" for the inheritors of an "orthodox" Christian Empire (Markus 1975: 17). But retrospective accounts drawn up according to the overarching concerns of a tightly-drawn thematic plotline do not add up to a single church triumphant. Even under the umbrella of these burgeoning organizations, variety and nonconformity continued to be the rule.

Christianity and Paganism

All difficulties raised by intra-Christian variation aside, there remains the matter of Christianity's differentiation from other religions of the ancient world. This

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not allow for an account that fully escapes the Christian myth" (2004: 490).

[3] In addition to shared elements such as these, which are plainly recognizable, Jacques Berlinerblau observes, with reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu (especially) and others, that the relationship between orthodoxies and heresies might rest on certain other shared, but unspoken (even unrecognized) beliefs and assumptions about the world. As he suggests, "the identification of such tacit commonalities may be useful in foregrounding and contextualizing the explicit disagreements of the participants: by understanding what is not being argued about we may better understand what is" (2001: 348).

distinction is drawn up primarily through contrast with the world of paganism,[4] which, as a descriptive class, was supposed to include "all that Christians defined as non-Christian (except Judaism, which always constituted a special category)" (Markus 1992: 157). While in reality a highly variegated collection of particular, local customs and mythologies, scattered across Europe and the Mediterranean (Anderson 2001), "paganism" came to be understood as an entity in the most abstract of terms. In large part, this has to do with its rampant diversity and the obscurity of its historical development. It was ancient, traditional, localized, and ritualistic, composed of age-old customs and hereditary beliefs, and on this count "paganism" came to stand for the *religious aspect* of a highly generalized and monothetic Graeco-Roman *ethos* that formed the cultural setting for early Christianity and the undifferentiated background against which the difference of Christianity was highlighted.

By contrast with this "motley paganism, with all its heterogeneous standards of life and conduct" (Strachan 1935: xiii), and its "very spongy, shapeless, easily penetrated structure of beliefs" (MacMullen 1984: 16), Christianity could be characterized by its insistence on and adherence to a considered set of beliefs. As Keith Hopkins asserts:

> The very existence, from early on in Christian history, of brief statements of Christian beliefs set Christianity apart from Judaism and paganism. Put crudely, the contrast is that Christianity became a religion of belief, whereas Judaism and paganism were religions predominantly of traditional practice, with settled adherents. Judaism was the religion of a nation, with few converts in each generation, and few expulsions. Pagans (as we usually conceptualize them) simply did what they had always done. (2000: 80)

Christianity, though it too was a product of the Graeco-Roman cultural milieu, earned for itself a unique place among the ancient religions through its definitive

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[4] Judaism was less problematic, for it was already a coherent entity, a "nation," replete with a complex of theology and ritual and ethical codes ("laws") from which Christianity was a breakaway sect, purporting to have superseded its Jewish progenitor: some continuity is expected and conceded, but Christians had already clearly marked the distance between them. The distinction is not without difficulties, as the various quotations offered here might suggest, for Judaism is often included within the range of comparisons as a sort of middle category: like Christianity in some ways (in their cultic exclusivism, for example; Goodman 1994: 17), but also like paganism in others (in their traditionalism; Hopkins 2000: 80; see also Smith 1998 for various configurations of religious classifications).

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historical self-understanding,[5] its exclusive devotion to a single god and the particular system of doctrinal, moral and ethical directives that flowed from that devotion. The new religion stood like an "island in a sea of paganism" (Strachan 1935: xxxv), outside of which (except, again, for Judaism) there existed only a "twilight world of pagan syncretism, magic and astrology" (Chadwick 1967: 33). Whatever particular internal differences of theology or tradition existed within the Christian movement, Christians could at least be distinguished from their various Graeco-Roman proximate others by their commitment to principles of religious belief.

This proposition of an elemental distinction between Christianity and paganism, along with the definition of stark boundaries around the former, is at the core of most attempts to resolve the problem of Christianization. A look, for instance, at scholarly attention paid to that innumerable, and geographically and temporally diffuse, variety of local Christian practices which have come to be known collectively as "the cult of the saints" provides an indication of how the distinction is applied.[6] One sample is offered by Hippolyte Delehaye in his examination of the historical foundations of Christian hagiographical literature. As part of this project, he presents a response to certain accusations that the cult of saints is nothing but a "prolongation of idolatrous paganism," specifically of Greek hero worship (1962

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[5] Possession of a history, as J. Z. Smith observes, has been one of the defining characteristics of the "high religions," according to certain classificatory systems produced by students of the history of religions. These 'historical' religious traditions are classified by contrast with the category of "primitive" or "nature peoples": "Often mistermed evolutionary, these theories conceded no historical dimensions to those being classified but rather froze each ethnic unit at a particular 'stage of development' of the totality of religious thought and activity" (1998: 277).

[6] The cult of saints is particularly rich in the sorts of conceptual difficulties that are characteristic of the problems with the term "Christianization," since practices connected to the saints appear as a curious mixture of Christian concepts and symbols with elements of pagan religious practice. In aspect and technique, these practices seem more akin to pagan forms of religiosity, involving, as they do, the use of potions and amulets, the veneration of images, and an excessively "superstitious belief" in the miraculous power of relics and holy persons (Harnack 1962 [1902]: 316-317). Often, because of their association with local and traditional approaches to religious practice, such activities and ideas are described as "popular" expressions of Christianity. But under both titles, pagan and popular, the cult of saints is rendered as a persistence of age-old forces of thoughtless superstition in the face of a doctrinally-grounded Christian religion. For a general introduction to the cult of the saints see Wilson (1983: esp. 1-53, with an extensive annotated bibliography). Peter Brown's landmark work, *The Cult of the Saints* (1981), provides an examination of the cult's development in late antiquity and a discussion of its treatment in scholarly literature. Geary (1996) also examines more recent issues and problems in the study of hagiography and of saints and their social environments, especially on the problem of contextualizing the textual material.

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[1907]: 126). Delehaye maintains that, although there are certain "parallels" between hero worship and the cult of the saints, they are only "alike in their outward manifestation" (1962 [1907]: 126). And although he concedes that certain practices may have done "harm to the spirit of religion" (1962 [1907]: 131), he assures his readers that "it is not the religious element at work in such cases" (1962 [1907]: 143). What *is* at work is the "popular propensity for material and tangible things" (1962 [1907]: 131), the "mass mind" which is "narrow, unable to deal with several ideas at once, or even with a single idea if it be at all complex, unable to follow any chain of reasoning that is close or subtle," and which operates at the "intellectual level … of a child" whose "memories and thought are all indissolubly bound up with concrete material things" (1962 [1907]: 28). Any similarity between the two religious practices is merely superficial, a matter only of form or style demanded by the predilections and limitations of popular intellect, and happens quite apart from the "theological basis" that separates the two religions (1962 [1907]: 130).[7]

Ernest Brehaut makes even more explicit use of the Christian/pagan distinction in his portrayal of the bishop Gregory of Tours. Of the Frankish churchman he declares that "under the externals of Christianity Gregory was almost as superstitious as a savage. His superstition came to him straight from his father and mother and from his whole social environment" (1916: xi). Brehaut clearly discerns a contradiction in the thought of the learned Christian bishop who, *despite* his education, still manages to be superstitious. Yet, Brehaut continues, we should not be overly surprised at this incongruity, for Gregory lived in an age where superstition was endemic, in "a primitive society with a primitive interpretation of life and the universe" (1916: xviii), where religion was characterized by a "system of superstition [not] calculated to nourish delicate moral sensibilities. Life had gone too far back to the primitive" (1916: xxi).[8] Thus, we find that Gregory's

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[7] Consider also the terms of contrast in the following passages: "But it would have been very surprising if the Church, seeking to spread her faith amidst the Graeco-Roman civilization, had chosen to address the people in entirely novel terms, systematically rejecting everything that up till then had been used to give expression to religious feeling" (Delehaye 1962 [1907]: 120); and: "at the same time we do not deny the survival among Christian peoples of a number of usages, of very ancient origin, which are point-blank opposed to Christian beliefs or morality. Most of these superstitions are a legacy from our heathen ancestors, and the Church has never ceased to fight against them, varying her tactics with different degrees of success" (Delehaye 1962 [1907]: 125).
[8] Brehaut frames this turn to the "primitive" as part of a general "reversion" from all aspects of high

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"conception of religion ... seems most explicable, not by the creed he thrusts at us or by any traditional elements interpreted in a traditional sense, but by the living attitude toward the supernatural which he held" (1916: xix), for this

> system of superstition ... is the greater and more real part of Gregory's religion. There was the right mystery and the wrong mystery; and both were of a low order; men had to deal with capricious saints and malignant demons. It was a real, live, local religion comparable with that of savages. By the side of this and intertwined with it the elements of traditional Christianity in a more or less formalized and ritualized shape were retained. Here the great stress was laid on the creed, not, however, that it amounted to anything in Gregory's mind as a creed. He was no theologian. His acceptance of it and insistence on it was ritualistic. (1916: xxi)

If there are "incongruities" (1916: xviii) in Gregory's thought, it is because he is appealing to ideas derived not from "traditional Christianity," as we might expect of a bishop, but from a social environment that had reverted, according to Brehaut, to a more archaic, less delicate, less sensible condition.

Where Delehaye contrasts the "spirit of religion" with the intellect of the "mass mind," Brehaut contrasts the moral "creed" of traditional Christianity with the superstition and primitive ritualism of Gregory's social environment. When A. D. Nock takes up this distinction, it is to show that early Christianity was, from the start, distinctive among the religions of its age in that it, like other "prophetic" religions and like the philosophical schools, was devoted to intellectual constructions of universal order and to the moral and ethical implications for behaviour that follow from such devotion. By contrast, cult in antiquity was oriented around ritual practice, not creed; it was "independent of ideas, which were always fluid" (1998 [1933]: 11) and so, like other "primitive religions," it was concerned mainly with the transmission of static cultic traditions. In this he follows in the general distinction made between a "Christianity" that is essentially intellectual, doctrinal and creedal, and other ancient religions which are primal, tactile and ritualistic.[9]

Roman culture, not only in religion.
[9] Jonathan Z. Smith provides a salient example of this tendency, when he says that "the most frequent distinction drawn in modern scholarship between the early Christian 'sacraments' (especially the Pauline) and those of the 'mystery cults' is that the latter exhibit a notion of ritual as *ex opere operato*" (1994: 34).

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The result of these kinds of comparison is that, while Christianity is set apart by its cogent and forceful application of principle, the "popular" or "pagan" continues to persist only as "a monotonous continuity" (Brown 1981: 19), or as a culture of "passivity and ignorance" (Frankfurter 2003: 340). Thomas Tentler criticizes this sort of comparative manoeuvre in his examination of the search for "two religious cultures" in the Middle Ages:

> Clergy versus laity—urban versus rural—*docti* versus *rudes*—élites versus the folk: at the lower end of these antipodes is "popular religion," the underbelly of European society. As it is used, popular religion is generally taken to mean the belief system of most medieval Europeans, which is ancient, pagan or semi-Christian, and resistant to change. It is often presented as the ideology of exploited segments of society. Evidence of it is usually indirect, and it is most often seen as the 'other' in religious practice and belief. If religious authorities embark on a campaign of education, the assumption is that people resist indoctrination because they cling to contrary beliefs. But the content of that other system is elusive and protean. (1985: 254)

The problem, he continues, is that "we accept the language of opposition (the sources often speak it anyway) and we do not look for variety and complexity in what we hold to be the simple beliefs of simple people," even while we imply "monolithic coherency at the top" (Tentler 1985: 254). We accept that "belief" is what separates the two, and that we are dealing with "belief" at a systemic level. Thus, as Brown observes, the process of Christianization "has tended to be presented largely in terms of the impact of a formidable body on the inert and static mass of ancient paganism" (Brown 1997: 6): the one, a system of belief organized around and for an articulate, integrated body of doctrine; the other, inarticulate (to the point of near silence) and possessing theological ideas so variegated that its only common features are its unsophisticated and superstitious (that is, unreasoned or even irrational) attitude toward the supernatural and (consequently) its penchant for the doctrinal uncertainty of a religion oriented around ritual practice.[10] Thus the

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[10] The profile I have sketched here can be firmly located within other classificatory dualisms provided by Christian engagements with other religious forms which have so powerfully shaped the course of scholarly imagination of the definition of Christianity and of the classification of religion and religions. Thus Jonathan Z. Smith: "By the time of the fourth-century Christian Latin apologists, a strong dual vocabulary was well in place and could be deployed interchangeably regardless of the

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tendency to conceive of Christianization as a movement toward "belief" in Christian

doctrinal tenets and away from customs not generated (directly and unambiguously)

from such doctrines—customs that Brown describes as "modes of thinking and

worshipping that are best intelligible in terms of a failure to be something else"

(Brown 1981: 19).[11]

Syncretism and the Preservation of Categories

For reason of the special and unique status with which historians have endowed

Christianity relative to other ancient religions and to ancient culture in general, the

appearance within Christianity of similarities with "external" religious and cultural

forms had to be resolved. In modern scholarly literature, this has resulted in a turn

to the explanatory potential of the notion of syncretism, a term which "often

substitutes—with somewhat more scientific prestige—for 'pagan survival'"

(Frankfurter 2003: 341). In its broadest sense, the term describes the amalgamation

of various elements of different traditions into a separate hybrid tradition, or is taken

as a "generalization about diverse elements incorporated into some target religion

from an external religious or secular source or sources" (Leopold 2004: 105). Most

often it is used—in both Christian historiography and in the history of religions

generally—as a catch-all classificatory device that serves to "label either transitional

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individual histories of the terms: 'our religion'/'their religion,' with the latter often expressed through generic terms such as 'heathenism,' 'paganism,' or 'idolatry'; 'true religion'/'false religion'; 'spiritual (or 'internal') religion'/'material (or 'external') religion'; 'monotheism' (although this term, itself, is a relatively late construction)/'polytheism'; 'religion'/'superstition'; 'religion'/'magic'" (1998: 276).

[11] We should be wary, however, in applying such a representation, especially insofar as it draws on language employed by the authors of the period themselves: "From listening to the dialogue, historians sometimes conclude that here were two systems of belief at odds with each other, one to be called of 'the people,' the other of 'the learned'" (MacMullen, 1997: 144). Of course, it is true that this dialogue (available to us in the form of texts) *is* the product of a learned sector. But we should also recognize that this material represents, in most instances, the discourse of a fairly specific group of persons, namely, sanctioned members of an official Christian establishment, who styled themselves as *the* authority in matters of a religious nature—and, increasingly, in political matters as well (Markus 1990; Brown 1982). As persons "formed of a long education in ecclesiastical traditions and literature" (MacMullen: 1997: 144), who possessed the means to produce and (perhaps more important for its consequences to later scholarship and the material which survived for such scholarship to work with) reproduce ideology in text, we should expect these individuals to have had a distinct interest in maintaining a certain consistency with creed and canon (and with one another). But it is an interest that need not have been shared by everyone else. Firm distinctions between paganism and Christianity, or between elite and popular Christianities, constructed along doctrinal lines, may more accurately represent the rhetorical strategy of a select group of intellectuals, who had an interest in defining certain, select systems of allegiance, thought and conduct, than it does the interests of those outside that select group.

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phenomena or religions that [escape] easy categorization" (Smith 1995: 1042), usually implying, in its usage, a number of negative consequences. In the first place, the application of "syncretism" "frequently suggests that while some (non-Western, non-elite, or primitive) religions are formed of a jumble of barely understood components, others (such as Christianity) purportedly exhibit no external influence in their origins and are thus unique and privileged" (Smith 1995: 1042). In the Christian-Pagan comparison under discussion here, "paganism" takes the form of the first pole of this distinction, since the term is used to homogenize the whole multiform world of ancient religious practice, which was itself already syncretic in nature. Christianity, as an integrated and theologically ordered religion, reserves claim to the second.[12]

The idea of syncretism can be extended even further, so that when elements of one religion appear within a second religion, the appeal to syncretism often carries pathological implications. Elements that intrude into, or are not native to, a host religion are supposed, perhaps only in the subtlest of ways, to infect, contaminate, distort or deform it. This aspect of syncretism, in concert with the first, has had a lasting impact on scholarship, since historians have long recognized in early Christian thought and (especially) practice features of ancient, "non-Christian" religions. As John Gager observes, while both sides in the dispute "agreed that in the beginning Christianity offered something radically new" they also "both agreed that Christianity eventually became a syncretistic religion. They disagreed only with respect to the degree of this syncretism and the point at which it first took effect" (Gager 1975: 6). Generally, this syncretic or contaminating "moment" is situated in the centuries following the so-called "apostolic age," which is taken to be "not simply the first period in the history of Christianity" but also the "definitive statement of what 'should' and 'ought' to be the case in every generation. … Amidst the variety and diversity of the Christian past, and amidst the flux and change of the historical development of Christianity, the apostolic age stands forth as a brief moment when men were closer to the gods" (Wilken 1971: 24-25).[13] Only

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[12] See Bultmann's analysis of whether Christianity is "really a syncretistic religion" or if there is "a fundamental unity behind all this diversity" (1960: 213). This unity he does finally locate in Christianity's distinctive doctrines of man and of redemption (1960: 214-246).

[13] Jonathan Z. Smith, for instance, describes notions of "borrowing" and "corruption" as conceptual

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after that brief golden moment of pristine origins did secular culture begin to infect the Christian body.[14]

While this perspective does admit the synthetic nature of "Christianity" as it appears in the historical record, it also preserves its distinctiveness, according to which foreign elements are never allowed to become fully integrated to the religion but survive as non-essential cultural appendages to an incorruptible Christian essence: "In fact no sacrifice of principle was involved, for the church sought merely to accommodate neutral features of the old religions so that new converts would not experience too violent a cultural break" (Hamilton 1986: 100). Despite its overall negative connotations, the notion of syncretism has proven itself to be very useful in formulating a model of religious change that can account for difficult or distasteful Christian ideas and customs, and at the same time protect the Christian claim to eternal, ahistorical, changeless religious truths. Consider, for instance, how the following comments and questions of Hans Conzelmann already presume an essential core to Christianity:

> With the expansion, the form of the church, her manner of thinking and speaking, were changed. A large community needs other forms of organization than a group of twelve men. Does the growth thus lead to the church's being adapted to the 'world,' to her being thereby secularized even inwardly, so that she no longer is what she was or at least was meant to be at the outset? By what standard is it to be decided what is genuinely [sic] Christian possibility of encounter with the "world," and where the substance of the faith begins to be lost? (Conzelmann 1973: 15)

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tools utilized in "Protestant anti-Catholic apologetics" (1994: 34), by which Protestants identified themselves with the apostolic period while equating Roman Catholicism with later "corrupted" forms (1994: 43-46). For the Protestants, and so for "true" apostolic Christianity also, the invocation of claims to "a 'uniquely' pristine 'original' Christianity" (1994: 43) serves to defy attempts at comparison. See also John Gager, who argues that "a combination of theological, cultural and historical factors has conspired to create a protective conclave for this particular religion" (1975: xi), which ensures that "certain events in early Christianity are not only historically distinctive but in some sense religiously unique" (1975: 3).

[14]Compare Walter Bauer's summary of the "ecclesiastical position" on orthodoxy and heresy, which runs as follows: Jesus first "reveals the pure doctrine," which is taken "unadulterated" into the world by the apostles, until, after the death of the apostles, "obstacles spring up within Christianity itself. The devil cannot resist sowing weeds in the divine wheatfield—and he is successful at it. True Christians blinded by him abandon the pure doctrine. This development takes place in the following sequence: unbelief, right belief, wrong belief. There is scarcely the faintest notion anywhere that unbelief might be changed directly into what the church calls false belief. No, where there is heresy, orthodoxy must have preceded" (1971 [1934]: xxiii).

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What we are presented with is an image of "the church" defined in its essence by its possession of an "inward" "substance of the faith," which is itself situated by contrast to an implied external and nonessential aspect of "the church" that serves to buffer the core "faith" from the "secular[ism]" of "the world." Conzelmann's question, he submits, is really an articulation of what has been "the life-and-death question for the church" (1973: 15): how much outside influence, in the form of non-Christian thought and behaviour, might be allowed before Christianity itself ceases to be Christian? But we might also ask which components—religious, cultural, historical—of this structure should be considered essential. For only by defining Christianity as a discrete entity, and thereby establishing its essential elements, does the incorporation of "outside" elements become problematic.

Conversion to Christianity

Essentialist, monothetic and belief-centred definitions of Christianity are but one aspect of the problem of Christianization. The other aspect concerns assumptions about how people become Christians: theories of religious change and "conversion." A look at much of the literature on the subject of conversion to Christianity will direct the reader to the work of Arthur Darby Nock who, in his seminal study of religious conversion in the ancient world, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (1998 [1933]), was able to articulate a highly influential formula for this central mechanism of individual religious change. Crucial to his argument is his suggestion that conversion was a uniquely Christian experience, a consequence of features peculiar to Christianity that differentiated it from other Graeco-Roman religions.

"Conversion," as Nock defines it, refers to the "reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right" (1998 [1933]: 7). Religious conversion in this sense is really only possible among what he calls "prophetic religions" (Judaism and Christianity),[15] which are constructed around creedal

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[15] Though not possible among the ancient cults, Nock allows that conversion was possible in the case of philosophical schools. Their discourse utilized language of "believing," of "seeing," and of

statements that could demand a conscious decision on whether to believe or not. For this reason, any attempt to apply the term to movement across the cults of antiquity is inherently problematic, since they lacked any distinct concept of *creed* (1998 [1933]: 11).[16] Practitioners of the pagan religions could move from cult to cult without difficulty, becoming members of new religious associations without having to give up old allegiances, supplementing traditional practices with novel ones without complication: without strong foundations in creed, an individual might thus commit to the practice of a new form of cult without becoming involved in a cognitive dilemma. And where there is no shift in cognitive commitment, no change of mind, Nock maintains that the term "conversion" cannot be employed. Instead, he proposes a new category of religious reorientation: adhesion. Adhesion involves "an acceptance of worships as useful supplements and not as substitutes, and [does] not involve the taking of a new way of life in place of the old" (1998 [1933]: 7).

　　The definition of conversion with which Nock provides us offers a convenient staging point for a discussion of the key concepts surrounding conversion to Christianity that inform the traditional view of Christianization. One aspect of this view has been broached already, namely that Christianity itself is a single, homogeneous, essentially doctrinal religion and that conversion is therefore primarily an intellectual act of conscious choice among religious alternatives. The second aspect concerns the "model of conversion, based in Protestant theology, that imagines individual psychoemotional 'rebirth' as the standard form of adjusting religious allegiance" (Frankfurter 2003: 343). The archetypical image of conversion in its overall sense is provided somewhere in the overlap between the brilliant and devastating experience of the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19,

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initiation, as a means to "describ[ing] the apprehension of philosophical truth" (1998 [1933]: 181-182), so that, with philosophy, it was possible to make a conscious decision on how one would align oneself with different intellectual perspectives: one could "convert" from one philosophy to another. But philosophers were too detached from the common lot to gain much popularity, there being a "general antithesis of philosophic and common ethic and values" (1998 [1933]: 185).

[16] When ancient cult, for instance, did speak of salvation, the idea "carried no theological implications": "*Soteria* and kindred words applied to deliverance from perils by sea and land and disease and darkness and false opinions, all perils of which men were fully aware" (Nock 1998 [1933]: 9). Its nearsighted focus was directed at the difficulties and dangers of daily life, offering an array of cultic observances to that end. By insisting that *soteria* could entail "theological implications," Christians made *conversion* (rather than mere adhesion) possible.

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22:4-16, 26:9-18) and the contemplative philosophical journey of Augustine.

As to the first aspect, theories of conversion which presuppose a rigidly drawn boundary between Christianity and other religions often also employ the *a priori* presumption that a person must belong either to one or the other set. Accordingly, it is assumed that when we speak of conversion we are not speaking of simple change in commitment, of becoming involved in or experimenting with something novel, as in making a choice of which club to join (Goodman 1994: 7). On the contrary, it is taken for granted that conversion to Christianity involves a deliberate and unequivocal decision by which Christian belief will, over the long term if not instantaneously, "replace" existing beliefs. This, in fact, is what distinguished Christians and their profession of a singular god from the *laissez-faire* spirit of Graeco-Roman polytheism and its attendant pantheon: Christianity was an exclusive religion. The Christian community, it is argued, was an exclusivistic society, putting its monotheism into practice by demanding singular loyalty to its own and barring participation in all other cults of the Roman world, primarily on the basis of belief.

This notion of Christian exclusivity is foundational, nearly axiomatic, in the standard perspective on early Christian definition and identity. As Martin Goodman contends, "the biggest agent of transformation for the convert was negative, withdrawal from pagan worship. Withdrawal from cult immediately separated Christians from the surrounding society. Each day they marked their difference from their non-Christian neighbours simply by abstention, for pagan cult infringed upon every aspect of life" (1994: 105). Note that the demands of exclusivity extend beyond participation in cult to participation in society, since pagan religiosity was so deeply integrated with the everyday social world of antiquity (see chap. 4 below). In its claim to cultic exclusivity, "perhaps the strangest characteristic of Christianity, as of Judaism, in the eyes of the ordinary pagan" (Meeks 1983: 160), Christianity is said to have "[taken] over the Jewish position completely. The world was divided between those who served the 'living, true God' and the idol worshippers (1 Thess 1:9)" (Meeks 1983: 165). In consequence of this division, it was the "first but arduous duty of a Christian to preserve himself pure and undefiled by the practice of idolatry" (Gibbon 1984 [1776-1788]: 103-104). Exclusive loyalty, grounded in

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monotheistic belief, was a necessary precondition to Christian membership and a visible marker of Christian separateness.

This brings us to the second aspect of the conversion model, which has to do with the supposed *nature* of religious conversion in general. Here conversion is characterized as a sort of "psychoemotional 'rebirth'" (Frankfurter 2003: 343), a formulation that echoes older theories about the nature of religion itself and about Christianity's privileged place among the religions. In its broadest sense, religious conversion is an event that transpires as a result of the human yearning for resolution to the trials, difficulties, anxieties and dissatisfactions of life (Nock 1998 [1933]: 229-253; Rambo 1987; Rambo and Farhadian 1999). [17] At root is the presumption that religion is a separate and autonomous sphere of the human experience, and that the impulse to conversion derives from the compulsion of this innate human religiosity, which both senses a divine reality and seeks to resolve the tension between it and one's beliefs about the world.[18] William James provides the

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[17] Lewis Rambo (1987, 1999) argues that conversion is a matter of personal "quest," instantiated by some kind of "crisis," by which an individual seeks to "maximize meaning and purpose in life" and which, "under abnormal or crisis situations ... becomes more compelling; people look for resources for growth and development in order to 'fill the void' and/or enrich life" (Rambo and Farhadian 1999: 27). Conversion is thus the process by which the individual achieves "spiritual" fullness or completeness. It is also a psychological matter of specifically religious significance: "Perhaps the underlying theme is the ancient and persistent dream of the metamorphosis of frail humanity into beings who find unity with the divine and the cosmos and in so doing find joy and redemption. Connection with the sacred, as mediated through human institutions, personal and social relationships, and religious experience, gives people moments of transcendence. These powerful moments sustain hope for some ultimate transformation that will create a new heaven, a new earth, a new humanity" (1987: 78).

[18] This perspective on religion is phrased in terms similar to those utilized in the study of Christianization, namely that "religion" is best understood according to its authentic essence. Here, religion is something other, and something more, than any one of the specific historical forms of human religiosity, or even of the sum total of all religious forms, but is an autonomous realm of the human experience, existing in essence *a priori* to any of its particular historical "expressions" or "manifestations." Critical to this formulation is the notion of "religious experience," which has been a mainstay of many modern theories of religion (Sharf 1998; Fitzgerald 2000). Briefly stated, the religious experience is held to be the authoritative means by which humans come to perceive and know "religion," "the divine," "the transcendent," "the sacred," etc., which is otherwise inaccessible and ineffable to humans. The idea of religious experience can be traced back at least to the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1958 [1799]), who used the term "religious feeling" to describe the direct and immediate apprehension of "the Deity," "the Infinite," "the Whole," "the World-spirit." This "feeling," Schleiermacher argued, cannot be conceived of as being like other natural human feelings and emotions, not even in degree, but is of a separate order entirely. Neither is it grounded in our faculties of thought or subject to contemplation or articulation: "All is immediately true in religion ... but that only is immediate which has not yet passed through the stage of idea but has grown up purely in the feeling" (1958 [1799]: 54). Rudolf Otto later took up the argument, attempting to refine the idea by asserting that what he calls "the numinous" is of a "non-rational" order altogether. The "numinous-feeling" he characterizes as *mysterium tremendum* and also *fascinans*: at once a terrifying and

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decisive definition in this regard:

> To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an
> assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self
> hither to divided, and consciously wrong and inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and
> consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious
> realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we
> believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about. (1982
> [1902]: 189)

Of all the religions, Christianity, due to its comprehensive grasp on the human
condition and because of its coherent theological and practical response to that
condition, is widely held to have provided the fullest and most appropriate solution
to the cosmic predicament of *homo religiosus*.[19]

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alluring sense of the "Wholly Other" (1928 [1917]: 12-41). More recently, Mircea Eliade has
developed this perspective by contrasting the "sacred" with the "profane" orders of human
experience. Humans, he argues, are innately religious beings (*homo religiosus*) who perceive a sacred
order of things through the "hierophany," or the "manifestation of something of a wholly different
order, a reality that does not belong to this world" (1959: 11). In their desire to shield "religion"
from criticism, advocates of the religious experience have formulated a conceptual framework
wherein the subjective experience of sacred reality is presented as the unique and indisputable source
of all religious knowledge. This, in the end, is what critics have found most problematic about the
appeal to religious experience—indeed, about the appeal to "experience" in general. The appeal to
experience, "whether conceived of as internal or external, subjective or objective, establishes the prior
existence of individuals ... who are considered reliable sources of a knowledge that comes from
access to the real by means of their experience" (Scott 1991: 782). At the same time, "the word
experience is ambiguous. It can be used to refer to how something seems or appears to a person,
without regard to the accuracy of that seeming or appearing" (Proudfoot 1985: 229). Experience, as
it has come to be used in such instances (see Williams 1985: 126-129), is thus too uncertain a ground
both for claims to knowledge and for scholarly analyses directed at such knowledge. As Robert Sharf
asserts: "the salient characteristic of private experience that distinguishes it from 'objective reality' is
thus its unremitting indeterminacy ... The category experience is, in essence, a mere placeholder that
entails a substantive if indeterminate terminus for the relentless deferral of meaning" (Sharf 1998:
113). Still, the idea of the religious experience continues to hold a place in scholarly explanations of
what motivates religious activity in general. In this regard, note Van Engen's assertion that "any
study of religious culture must take religion seriously." While he concedes that recent "functionalist"
studies have made "religion central and accessible without raising confessional issues," he also warns
that such studies "can easily become reductionist, thus ultimately unsatisfactory and even erroneous.
Historians of religious culture must take 'religious man' seriously ... Anything less will ultimately fail
to do justice to the phenomena under investigation and, in particular, fail to account for the dynamic
inherent in people acting on religious conviction" (1986: 544).

[19] "In a word, Christianity directly answered to the human quest for true happiness – by which more
is meant than *feeling* happy" (Chadwick 1967: 55). Nock argues that Christianity could offer a fuller
response to the various needs, problems and issues of the early Christian era, which could not be
achieved in such a complete way through conversion to a certain philosophy nor through adhesion to
creedless cult worship. Though it may not have been popular for its condemnation of magic and
astrology (1998 [1933]: 229), Christianity did offer an imposing vision of a creator God (1998 [1933]:

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Integral to this model of conversion is the notion that, once a person has made the decision to convert, "religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy" (James 1982 [1902]: 196). Prior patterns of thought and lifestyle are abandoned out of a singular and earnest commitment to new-found ideas. So the rendering of Christian conversion as an "awakening," an "alteration," a "renewal" (Barth 1978), a "regeneration," a "reconstruction," (Niebuhr 1978 [1943]), a "reorientation," a "turning," a "great change," which involves a realization that "the old was wrong and the new is right" (Nock 1998 [1933]: 7). The base assumption, taken to various degrees, is that "life as a Christian was so radically different from one's previous existence that, as the Fourth Gospel puts it (John 3:3), to be converted was to be 'born over again'" (Thrall 1965: 37), that "when a man became a Christian he began to be inspired and motivated by some new inward power which was not human in origin but came from God" (Thrall 1965: 86). Even when such boldly supernatural claims are not made of the experience of conversion, it is still tenaciously held that "Christians assumed, correctly, that the lives of those who joined their churches would be transformed" (Goodman 1994: 104). And if the change was not immediate and comprehensive, it should at least be genuinely committed to that end: "if one seeks to embrace everyone within the church, and does not demand too great a reorientation of life and attitudes of those who come seeking baptism, then one must attempt to teach them gradually the true meaning of the religious commitment they have taken upon themselves; otherwise, there is little point in pretending that they are Christians" (Stancliffe 1979: 58-59). At heart and

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229-233), an intellectually satisfying understanding of history (1998 [1933]: 233-235) and of the carnal human condition (1998 [1933]: 236-237), an impressive record of fulfilled prophecy (1998 [1933]: 237-241), a secure and supportive community (1998 [1933]: 241-242), and a promise for the future (1998 [1933]: 242-249). It addressed both the practical, social needs of living in the world and offered a solution for the growing anxieties and intellectual dilemmas of the age: "it never set its face against the compatibility of normal life with the full practice of religion. It valued a hot-house atmosphere, but it did not insist on it ... its teachings commended themselves as fitting the needs of the age better than did the doctrines which were more deliberately assimilated to thought around" (1998 [1933]: 253). Similarly, Rodney Stark describes "what appears ... to be *the ultimate factor* in the rise of Christianity," namely, that the "*central doctrines of Christianity prompted and sustained attractive, liberating, and effective social relations and organizations*" (Stark 1996: 211; emphasis original): modes of thinking and living—"virtues"—that provided a more positive response to the "groaning of the ancient world" (1996: 212). On this point, Birger A. Pearson agrees with Stark, "at least for the first three centuries of Christian history" (1999: 173). See also Schleiermacher (1958: 241-253) and Otto (1928 [1917]: 159-178) for statements on Christianity as the highest form of religion.

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in its truest form, conversion is a momentous, intensely private transfer of personal allegiance to new ideas and habits, a commitment of the self to a new "way of being" that involves the abandonment (or at least trivialization) of all previous loyalties.

On this point, Nock correctly observes the difficulty in attributing to ancient religions this sort of dramatic noetic-devotional shift as a condition of membership. Yet it is difficult to credit even Christianity with this characteristic, for to assume that "religious belief does not deserve the name unless it is intense and consuming" (MacMullen 1984: 4) simply does not fit with evidence provided by the historical record.[20] Still, the notion that conversion is primarily a matter of conscious deliberation on matters of belief has kept its currency; it is because Christianity was a religion of belief that Christianity was also a "religion of converts" (Hopkins 2000: 96).

We have already seen Russell's position, which says that a "thorough attempt should be made to determine the extent to which the distinctive soteriological-eschatological core of Christianity is consciously accepted" (1994: 35-36). MacMullen, while rightly uncomfortable with defining conversion according to the intensity of its devotional fervour, *does* define conversion as "that change of belief by which a person accepted the reality and supreme power of God and determined to obey Him" (MacMullen 1984: 5). And, though he follows this definition with qualifications, his formulation still begins with "belief" and retains the implication that the fullest conversion is the one that finally, by whatever process the change takes place, results in "actual, entire, and doctrinally centrist obedience," produces an "exclusive loyalty" and is "warmly felt" (MacMullen 1984: 5).[21]

Asserting that conversion is a process, never simple but complex and

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[20] James C. Russell also finds this sense of conversion too extreme to be useful, and instead offers the term 'Christianization' which he says "spans Nock's notions of adhesion and conversion and connotes a sense of progression from 'non-Christianity' through adhesion to conversion and does not necessarily imply radical religious reorientation" (1994: 30). He suggests, in addition, that Christianization is a term that "overcome[s] the semantic limitations of the term 'conversion' when it is applied societally" and can "convey the complexity of the interactive process which ensues when a non-Christian society and Christianity encounter each other" (1994: 30-31).

[21] The terms here are drawn from his qualification to the definition of conversion he offers: "Whether actual, entire, and doctrinally centrist obedience resulted would depend on cases. It would depend on cases whether the change lay half on the surface and in conduct, or produced an exclusive loyalty, or was warmly or little felt" (MacMullen 1984: 5).

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complicated, is important. Yet even when conversion is thought of as a process, its outcome is imagined to be the same, always directed toward a *certain end*. The notion of "process" is thus allied with that of "progress" by assuming that the most complete form of Christianity is the one that is most consistent with core essences, most orthodox, or most articulate. Theological, doctrinal or intellectual elements of Christian religion are given the primary position in this formulation and are made central to understanding conversion, since it is in the realm of ideas that the "real" transformation takes place.

Christianization/Categories/Conversion

Traditionally, scholars have tended to define "'Christian identity' by highlighting what is at odds with the surrounding culture" (Lyman 2003: 213), though the distinction between the world of Christianity and the pagan world was never as clear as such binary classifications suggest. In fact, a look at Christianity in any age reveals that "identical practices may exist in societies of baptized Christians, or societies untouched by Christianity" (Markus 1992: 157), a problem for which the tendency has been to rationalize the historical evidence rather than question the categories. So the introduction of "corruptions," "'vestiges of paganism,' or 'pagan survivals,' within groups perhaps referred to as 'semi-Christian'" (Markus 1992: 157): all terms that could convey the sense that such things are external to the pure concept (thus salvaging the purity of the concept) and, like the human appendix, nonessential vestiges of bygone utility that could flare up in mortal threat. As we have seen, however, even such prominent figures as the bishop Gregory of Tours were vigorously involved in "popular" customs and some, "including those in the highest positions," were even as "active in the old faith [that is, paganism] as in the new" (MacMullen 1997: 146). Such contingencies make it difficult to maintain that there "existed in any deep, sharp sense" two distinct religious systems. Instead, we find that "the conceptual sets 'pagan' and 'Christian' do not always serve adequately to study the religious world of late antiquity. For some questions, they suffice, but for others they obfuscate" (Rothaus 2000: 2). We also see the blurring of lines (both theirs and ours) between "religion" and "culture," between the "sacred" and the "secular" (see Markus 1990: 1-17), calling into question our notions of

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Christianization as a confrontation between two self-contained, mutually exclusive systems of belief.

The language of conversion also remains popular in the writing of Christian history and continues to inform the ways we think about what is going on at specific historical moments and in particular locales. Above all, it works to homogenize historical configurations of various Christianities by obscuring the particular differences between particular cases. Assuming that Christianity comes to the potential convert as a complete package, which is then accepted wholesale and continues to operate as the ultimate goal toward which that convert strives (and from which he or she can then apostatize, or revert to old ways, or "backslide") obscures the delicate complexities of the process of change and the affiliative links between self and group(s). It also insists that the process of religious change is instantiated by an intellectual shift, from which changes in belief, attitudes, values and behaviour will (and should) follow in sequence toward its own end. Beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours that do not "fit" with the Christian intellectual framework then come to be described as pagan "survivals" or "cultural influences" (that is, nonessential peculiarities that give "Christianity" its certain historical flavours). Yet to marginalize such thoughts and practices to the categories of "cultural influence" or "survivals from the past" restricts their ability to operate as instances of situated, historical religious activity and so of the complicated processes of social and religious formation that are the chief characteristic of Christianization.

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Chapter 2

Sentiment and Social Formation

In this chapter I will address societal and individual religious change not as a result
of influence and exchange between societal systems as such, but as a product of the
activity of those persons who operate within and between social formations.
Specifically, this is a study in the affective dimensions of social formation, by which
persons come to identify themselves as part of particular, local social formations.
The approach focuses on Christianization as a process of social formation, as a
process of constructing social units—built with reference to doctrinal, ideological
elements but grounded largely in the affective connections formed among fellow
members, connections that run along the lines of social relationships already
established but that are also central to the incorporation of new individuals. Here
ideology and practice are put to the service of maintaining, organizing, configuring
and refining individual and shared interests. Social formational processes, in this
sense, are not primarily intellectual or the result of conscious deliberation and
choice, but depend on the establishment of affective relationships formed when
people interact with one another. The focus therefore will be on practice, on the
shared activities by which people come to be introduced and exposed to ideas and
by which, especially, they come to feel a sense of affinity for one another.

Social Formation

The first step in this endeavour requires that we extract religion from conceptual
frameworks that isolate it as a unique, extrahistorical phenomenon and place it
within the bounds of historical analysis. Above all, this will mean that we evacuate
religion—and so religious change—of its special status in relation to all other

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aspects of human thought and practice, and appreciate it as one of the many ways that humans conceptualize, arrange and relate to the world around them.[22] It will also mean that we abandon definitions of Christianity derived through reference to a pristine and originary Christianity. "It is the task of the critical historian," Luther Martin contends, "to step out of one or another of the fictive circles of theological style by which a Christian origin has been imagined and attempt to describe the actual communities with which a Christian tradition might be said to have begun" (2000: 72).[23] A turn to the particular histories of particular communities will involve, thus, a seeking out of the points of difference across time and space as evidence of particular social experiments conducted with reference to the panoply of Christian ideas, practices and personages, and a move away from essentialist definitions of Christianity which imagine a sort of ontological connection, drawn according to shared elements of belief, between such historical locales.[24]

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[22] As Jonathan Z. Smith observes, "in both Roman and early Christian Latin usage, the noun forms *religio*/*religiones* and, most especially, the adjectival *religiosus* and the adverbial *religiose* were cultic terms referring primarily to the careful performance of ritual obligations" (1998: 269). Over the centuries and in the hands of numerous scholarly minds, the term "religion" (or "the religious") came to refer primarily to a unique and exclusive dimension of the human experience. This process, explains Richard Rothaus, progressed out of the very discussions that generated such distinctions as were examined in the previous chapter as being most central to the notion of Christianization: "The problem of Christianization was, in part, a problem of identification. The monotheistic and exclusionary claims of Christianity struggled in stark contrast to the diverse polytheism of antiquity. Consequently, various religious and political authorities found it necessary and desirable to categorize religious belief and practice. A major component of the practical problems was creating a territorial model where none had existed before" (Rothaus 2000: 1). Through this process, he continues, Christians developed the discourse "that created the sets 'pagan' and 'Christian,' and began the process of the creation of the concept generally recognized as religion" (Rothaus 2000: 6). As Smith contends, such a genealogy obliges us to recognize that "'religion' is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that 'language' plays in linguistics or 'culture' plays in anthropology" (1998: 281-282).

[23] Martin continues: "Whereas a critical historiography is no less invested with 'interest' than is theology, the theoretical formulation of the former, with its requirements for intersubjective testability, guards against the interests of the historian becoming the foregone conclusion of historiographical research" (2000: 72). Bruce Lincoln makes the same claim, drawing out the distinction between the two approaches: "Religion, I submit, is that discourse whose defining characteristic is its desire to speak of things eternal and transcendent with an authority equally transcendent and eternal. History, in the sharpest possible contrast, is that discourse which speaks of things temporal and terrestrial in a human and fallible voice, while staking its claim to authority on rigorous critical practice" (Lincoln 1999: 395). As Luther and Lincoln suggest, the appeal to an historical approach to religion (and to Christian history) really is a question of method and theory rather than of the self-evident definition of the discipline's object.

[24] Historically, Christian historiographers have evinced a tendency similar to that which Nicholas Thomas has observed in the anthropological study of "human culture": "There are great divergences between perspectives in social theory ... but almost all have made objects for attention which are

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Recent theoretical discussion concerning discourse and the processes of
social formation offers different approaches to the relationship between ideology
and society, and so to conceptualizing the process of Christianization. I begin with
the notion of "social formation," relying on the definition of Burton Mack. "Social
formation," he writes,

> refers to a concept of society as a collective human construct. It differs from the less
> specific term, "society," by emphasizing the complex interplay of many human interests that
> develop systems of signs and patterns of practice, as well as institutions for their
> communication, maintenance and reproduction. The term social formation refers to the
> process by which various configurations of these systems of practice are created and relate
> to one another in the formation of a given society. The term is also used to refer to the
> resulting structure of a society formed by such a process. It is a highly abstract concept with
> specific connotations for social theory. (2000: 283)

Among the most important of these connotations is the way that the concept
focuses attention on processes of *social* construction, on the "inordinate amounts of
curiosity, delight, intellectual labor, experimentation and elaboration [that] have been
invested in the fragile craft and work required to live together in social units" (Mack
2000: 288).[25] Instead of analyzing how such societal elements as myth and ritual

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detached from time, and particularly so from the grimy historical time of events and intrusions. In a
great many cases temporal and historical processes were simply undiscussed or excluded; where they
were not, time and change were understood to be secondary to some field of relationships or entity
which was best understood in non-temporal, systemic terms. ... The discipline's object is a system or
structure which has an ordered character precisely because contingency and temporality are
excluded" (1989: 9-10).

[25] This appeal to "the social" is not, of course, unproblematic. As Mack suggests: "It may well be
that a theory of the human enterprise as a human construct will have to reduce the many practical
interests involved to a profound and complex tautology. At first, the interests involved in the
formation and function of the many practices and systems of signs that support social existence may
appear to be disparate and unrelated, perhaps even matters best explained as forms of personal
desire. One can imagine a large range of frequently acknowledged interests that come to mind when
thinking about the investments humans make in their activities. But in the final analysis, it may well
be that involvement in each and every practice is a form of taking interest in the conception,
construction, maintenance and manipulation of a social formation itself. Thus the tautology at the
highest level of abstraction: the interests that humans invest in social practices, and the interests
humans take in all manner of activities, are derivative modes of collective interest in the processes of
social formation" (2000: 288). See the comments of Arnal and Braun (2004) on the possible
confusion over talk of "interests." The first of their five theses on "social formation" asserts that
"the social is not an interest but a basic fact of human being. The term 'social interests,' which Mack
has introduced as a weighty explanatory category, does not indicate an interest in sociality per se:
humans are social beings who, as a matter of species-being, are constituted in groups" (2004: 462).

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(also kinship, law, political and economic institutions, and so on) "exhibit,"
"manifest" or "reflect" the inherent, essential structure of a particular society,
emphasis is given to the ways in which these elements are organized, manipulated
and utilized in the very construction of that social structure.[26] Society is thus seen
as being in a constant process of formation.

The social-formation approach arose in critical response to a theoretical
tendency—and, in the historiography of early Christianities, a theological
predilection—that privileges "systems of meaning" over "systems of practice,"
whereby the latter (especially formalized practices such as ritual) come to be
construed as "symbolic action—that is, as visible behavioral form requiring
decoding" (Asad 1993: 77; Bell 1998: 205-207). Accompanying this response is the
recognition that there is often a "difference between the imaginary world" of
thought and the "social world" of actual human relations and practice (Mack 2000:
291), or what Marshall Sahlins refers to as "the possible slippage between intentional
values and conventional values" (2000: 287) observed in the frequent tendency of
individual ethnographic subjects to act contrarily to the expected or assumed
dictates of "culture."[27] Any presumption, therefore, that we can translate or

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All interests, therefore, even individual ones, are also simultaneously social.

[26] On the difficulties surrounding the variety of uses of the term "structure," see Jensen (2000). Here
I use it, in the second instance, in the sense of "an empirical and observable order of relations," both
in and between thought and social practice, within a social formation (Jensen 2000: 326), but
especially with reference to the order of relations between the actual persons who compose social
formations.

[27] A tendency which challenges our notions of "culture-as-constituted," that seemingly static
assemblage of ideas, activities, stories, etc., that composes the substance of a culture. Sahlins
addresses the problems associated with the use of the term "culture," of how to reconcile the
experiences and perspectives of individuals with the broader culture in which they are situated.
Specifically, the question is how far "culture" constitutes the individual and of what to do about
novel or innovative forms of expression or practice that seem to deny the determinative nature of
culture. Sahlins moves his discussion towards the "possibility of reconciling the most profound
antinomy of social science theory, that between structure and practice ... in the only way presently
justifiable—as a symbolic process" (2000: 291). As Sahlins states, "the pragmatic revaluation of signs
has to do with their determination in a particular worldly context, process specific to culture in the
dimension of action. Signs are notoriously 'polysemic' as conceptual values; they have multiple
meanings. But as human interests they acquire determinate representations, amounting to some
inflection of the conceptual sense. And because the 'objective' world to which they are applied has
its own refractory characteristics and dynamics, the signs, and by derivation the people who live by
them, may be categorically redefined" (2000: 289). The question of culture, as distinct from society,
is an important one, since the systems of thought and practice and the artefacts produced by a society
are so much at the fore of what we are able to discern about societies in general, especially when it
comes to early Christianity and other past cultures to which we cannot have direct observational
access.

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interpret society as if it were "a text that communicates itself to the skilled reader" (Asad 1993: 187) is thereby made problematic.

This is not to say that thought and practice are oppositional, or that they ought to be considered exclusive of one another. Rather, the move toward theories of social formation acknowledges that thinking about the world is part of living in it, hence that thought is not something other than practice, even while it admits the "absence of any necessary relation between what people do and the reasons they may have for doing it" (Sahlins 2000: 280), and that "the world is under no obligation to correspond to the categories by which it is thought" (Sahlins 2000: 290). It resists essentialisms and the static and determinative relationships between thought and practice that result from them. Instead, it seeks out the specific, historical locations at which thought and discourse are articulated and asks: "who is writing for whom ...what is the point, what was at stake, and what might have been the consequences if the audience had said yes?" (Mack 1999: 134). In doing so, it draws attention away from the supposed substance of ideologies and concepts (what they *mean*) toward a description of how such discursive elements are utilized in social practice (what they *do*). Thus discourse becomes less an implicit "expression" of what society *is* and what its members *do* think, than it is a description of or an argument for what society *should be* and what *should be* thought.[28]

This strategy carries at least two implications. The first is the recognition that our own construal of what we (i.e., those who study societies) consider to be "a society" is itself an imaginative construction. Whenever we delimit a certain social formation as a society, our selection of its constituent elements is always, to some extent, arbitrary and artificial, since a real society is a constantly shifting ensemble of characteristics and persons. The "social borders" we draw around a society are, as Bruce Lincoln observes, "*imaginary* lines that distinguish one group of persons from another" (1989: 9; emphasis added).

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[28] Similarly, Luther Martin argues that "texts may tell us more about cognitive and social processes of production, selection and transmission than about events they purportedly recount. Warning against what he termed a 'fetishism of documents,' E. H. Carr, for example, has cautioned against confusing any text with 'factual' accounts. 'No document,' Carr concluded, 'can tell us more than what the author of the document thought—what he thought had happened, what he thought ought to happen or would happen, or perhaps what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought'" (Martin 2000: 78).

On this point, it is instructive to recall the critique of syncretism introduced in the last chapter, for it is by the reification of these imaginary boundaries that syncretic models gain their persuasive force. It is no coincidence that syncretic models "make best sense in the context of functionalist theories of integrated social systems, or doctrines of cultural holism, that presuppose unified and bounded social or cultural units that, under certain conditions, can be conceived as merging to produce some novel syncretic formation" (Lindstrom 1996: 539). Such perspectives, however, have shown themselves to be problematic in light of much of recent scholarship, especially in the fields of anthropology, postcolonial and cultural studies, which has been directed at trying to understand the complex processes involved in the meeting of cultures, worldviews and societies. People of all times and places, researchers have found, are quite proficient at involving themselves in and negotiating their way through multiple social configurations simultaneously. Thereby their research has also established that "'mixture' is normative to religions, 'purity' rare and often invented" (Frankfurter 2003: 340).[29] In social life as it is lived, the borders we draw around social formations are never as clear-cut and never as stable or impermeable as we may be able to imagine them for descriptive or analytic purposes.

The second implication, thus, involves the recognition that societies are constantly in the process of constructing, deconstructing, reconstructing themselves. Society is neither static nor homogeneous nor monolithic. Nor is it to be equated with "the *established structures* of society, for society is far broader and more complex than its official structures and institutions alone" (Lincoln 1989: 7; emphasis

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[29] See, for instance: Jack Goody's study of various modes of identification and conversion in Ghana which demonstrate the "ambiguity" and "flexibility" of "religious systems," often imagined as being "structured according to some tightly formal pattern" (1975: 106); the studies of Marshall Sahlins on the appropriation ("enslavement") of modern capitalism by local cultural "logics" and modes of relation (Sahlins 1988), by which "global modernity is often reproduced as local diversity" (Sahlins 1994: 377); Gauri Viswanathan (1998), whose studies of conversion in India reveal the "porosity" of religious communities; Birgit Meyer, who characterizes the "appropriation" of Western Christianity by the Ewe of Ghana as a process of hybridization, giving particular attention to how the "diabolization" of traditional religions actually leads to the "spiritual beings of the old religion [becoming] part of Ewe Protestantism" (1994: 6) through processes of "translation," which "necessarily [involve] a positive integration of non-Christian terms (1999: xviii); and Steven Kaplan's (1995) argument that missionary Christianity in Africa was not simply oppressive and coercive, but involved give and take on both the African and European sides. Kaplan provides a tentative typology of the various means by which the two traditions were brought together to create hybrid forms of religious practice acceptable to both positions.

original). Every society is composed of numerous sub-societies or subgroups, each of which possesses its own interests in and designs for the social order (Lincoln 1989: 10); members within a society will have their own ideas about where social borders should be drawn, but not all members will have the same ideas. Consequently, this range of interested parties is always, to some extent, in competition with each other over whose interests get heard, whose interests get recognized, whose interests get implemented. Far from passively acting out the determinations of some pre-existing structural order, then, members of society are continually (and actively) contesting and negotiating the very terms and conditions by which society will be ordered, and by which boundaries will be drawn between tradition and novelty, between what is acceptable and what is not, between who may participate and who may not.

Nancy Jay engages this matter in her discussion of "logical structures" and their relationship to ritual practice. Grounding her argument is the observation that the basic logical structures by which humans classify and organize the world are arranged according to polarized, binary distinctions that humans make between things (for example, between what is pure or impure, what is sacred or profane, which sorts of people may be part of a social group and which may not). What we must recognize, she argues, is that such "A/Not-A dichotomies" are also to be "found nowhere in nature;" rather, they are conceptual categories which are socially constructed and socially maintained (1992: 20).

This is not to say, of course, that because these logical structures do not occur naturally, they do not take on the *appearance of seeming natural.* Such distinctions do seem to be natural (and therefore it seems natural that we live by them), but only because we continue to live by them. They are among "those impeccably real social fictions produced and reproduced by the magic of social belief" (Bourdieu 1987: 9), which gain their power less from the fact of their reference to any naturally occurring distinctions than to the fact that they continue to be employed toward the ordering of society. As Pierre Bourdieu states: "To point out that perception of the social world implies an act of construction in no way entails acceptance of an intellectualist theory of knowledge: the essential part of the experience of the social world and of the act of construction that it implies takes place in practice, below the

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level of explicit representation and verbal expression" (1985: 728). As long as certain items continue to be treated as pure or impure, or as long as certain people are included in society and others excluded, the logical structure will continue to function as if naturally.

This being said, we must recognize that logical structures do not come to us by default but "must be taught and learned. They are social constructions, not supported by any natural order, and as such, continual work is required to maintain them" (Jay 1992: 21).[30] Because they are constructions, and because changing social and historical conditions or challenges from advocates of alternative logical structures can effectively undermine the "naturalness" of an existing logical structure (by changing the conditions for its actualization in social practice as well as the terms of its expression), its structural characteristics (symbolic, social, cultural or otherwise) are neither inevitable nor permanent, but are constantly being reworked and re-established: in any given society, at any given moment, such seemingly static manifestations of society are not beginnings or ends in themselves but are situated moments in the course of change. Change is not something that "just happens," but results from purposeful, interested, intentional negotiation between members of a given social formation. As Mack phrases it, "the patterns of activity essential to the practices of a society may be thought of as rooted in agreements reached in the process of experimenting with better and less better ways to do things and think about them" (2000: 289). So, although we may be tempted to think of religion as a private, individual matter, we must recognize that the terms and conditions of religious practice and affiliation are determined through collaboration at the social level. Religious change, in this sense, is neither primarily individual nor primarily intellectual. Rather, it results from the constant push and pull of negotiation between members of a social formation as they test possibilities for arranging and

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[30] For Jay, this "work" refers to the maintenance of logical structures through ritual practice. The production of myth can also serve this purpose. As Russell McCutcheon (2000), among others, contends, it is the very object of the mythmaking enterprise to make contingent and mundane social values, norms, logics, and so forth seem eternal, extraordinary, inevitable, universal and/or natural. Similarly, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann assert that "the world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these" (1967: 19-20).

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relating to their world. All thought and practice, creative and novel or conventional and traditional, is subjected to the demands and interests of others with whom we relate. Religious change can be reconceptualized as a process of cultural redefinition, a reconfiguration or reconstitution of categories and concepts as the interests of individuals are negotiated (considered, confirmed, approved, permitted, deflected, suspended, sidelined, rejected, waylaid, disconfirmed, betrayed, ignored, silenced) and settled upon in calibrating the shared interests of their social formations.

Viewing societal change in this way offers us another possibility for situating the ideological (doctrinal, theological, etc.) aspects of society. Specifically, conceiving of ideology as a social construct "implies that all the tensions, contradictions, superficial stability, and potential fluidity of any given society *as a whole* are present within the full range of thought and discourse that circulates at any given moment" (Lincoln 1989: 7; emphasis original). This entails a move away from deterministic notions of underlying structures which demand strict correspondence within and between thought and practice. Instead, this allows for a wide range of possible configurations of thought and practice, even as it recognizes potential constraints to them.[31] For, as Tim Murphy argues, each configuration is always itself a creative product:

> Religions ... "originate" by transforming, combining, or even inverting pre-existing cultural materials. "Syncretistic religion" is a redundant term. The degree of "exogamous" versus "endogamous" materials, as understood by adherents—or scholars; on this kind of point, the two camps are often in conflict—will, of course, vary greatly. But that religions constitute variations upon pre-existing materials is a point borne out both by empirical analysis and theoretical reasoning. (2003: 51)

Note, moreover, that the "pre-existent" must include *all* available materials, not only those that come to be seen later as "endogamous." Even more, the "pre-existent"

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[31] Frankfurter offers a similar suggestion in his application of Bourdieu's "notion of *habitus* or habit-memory to the study of the process of religious syncretism," by which, he proposes, "one is not proposing immutable religious structures but rather focusing on what structures or traditions *constrain* religious practice, innovation and synthesis in such historical situations" (2003: 347; emphasis original). For discussion on how thought and discourse might be constrained by, for instance, tradition and canon, see Murphy (2003) and Smith (1982).

need not determine what comes after, for it may be utilized in whatever way those who employ it see fit. Ideology is therefore always pliable and creative even as it is constraining, for it simultaneously *invents* the classificatory groupings by which people *naturally* group themselves: "words can make things and, by joining in the objectivized symbolization of the group they designate, they can, if only for a time, make exist *as groups* collectives which already existed, but only in a potential state" (Bourdieu, 1987: 16; emphasis original). What finally matters most in the social context is how and which certain, select elements of thought and discourse are effectively employed as instruments of mobilization for change or continuity.

Persuasion and Sentiment

What are the mechanisms of this mobilization? Lincoln proposes two (1989: 3-5; 1994: 4-6). One is to resort to coercion, the use of physical force or threats of it, to silence those who utter contrary, subversive or dissenting discourses and to impose and enforce another.[32] The other strategy, and the one in which I am interested here, is to win others over by means of persuasion. Most often, perhaps especially in the textually focused study of Christian history, the tendency of theories of persuasion is to "conceptualiz[e] persuasion of and to religion(s) as the result of logographic reasoning," such that they assume that "persuasion is an effect of the convincing force of the right words placed in calculated, correct order and delivered with an appropriate style and tone of pleading" (Braun 2005: 3).[33] Yet this is where Lincoln's scheme is most provocative, for he posits that the persuasive force of discourse does not reside as much in its conceptual, logical or ideational content, as in its ability to evoke a sentimental response in its hearers. He asserts that, in many

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[32] This strategy is most often attributed to those in positions of authority. The application of force is always a delicate matter, since it might serve to incite resistance, which is (in the case of the established institutions) counter-productive to the project of maintaining hegemony (Lincoln, 1989: 3-4; 1994: 4-6).

[33] Braun locates this tendency in the intellectual developments of Western modernity: "When these two complementaries—(1) persuasion indexed with reference to the values of a scriptural reason, coupled, as it is, with an implicit theory of language as a stable, even static, system of logical semantic relations and stable language-referent relations and (2) the human subject as a self-aware, bounded, 'rational' cognitive unit—took root as rather stubborn, incorrigible axioms by which knowledge and discourse came to be defined, we have a powerful set-up for restricting 'rhetoric' to a science on the inter-mental influence of words, ideas, propositions, creeds, doctrines" (2005: 4).

instances, "ideological persuasion has nothing and sentiment evocation everything to do with" establishing a sense of solidarity between individuals (1989: 10). In terms of social formation—and with reference to the proximal metaphor of social borders—the sentimental response that is evoked is one of "affinity" or of "estrangement,"[34] such that people come to identify themselves with certain societies/social formations and not with others because they share a feeling of affinity for one another that they do not feel for others. Of course, since people will always be involved, or potentially involved, in a range of different social formations, sentiments of affinity can be constructed along several lines, even simultaneously. Persuasion, then, results less from intellectual consent to the logical content of discourse than from the effective manipulation of discourse to evoke a sense of affinity toward participation in the common interests of a particular social formation. The persuasive force of that discourse itself depends on the prior formation of sentimental associations with that discourse.

Theoretical Approaches to Sentiment

Lincoln admits that the "use of the term sentiment is likely to cause some problems, given the almost insuperable difficulty of speaking with precision about the affective dimension of social life" (1989: 176 n. 9). But his determination to use the category "sentiment" nonetheless is critical. Others have made an appeal to sentiment (emotion, feeling, affect) in their attempts to explain religion and society. Among theorists of religion, if the emotional is brought into the discussion at all, it is usually with the sense of its being a specifically, uniquely *religious* feeling. The standard formulation of the religious experience, already mentioned, in fact begins with, and is most truly experienced as, an affective type of phenomenon. Schleiermacher's "religious feeling," Otto's "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*," and Eliade's sacred "hierophany"—terms denoting the direct and non-rational apprehension of religious reality—are all variations on this perspective. In such instances, the affective nature of the alleged religious experience is central to the construction of religion as an

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[34] In using these terms, Lincoln means to include "on the one hand, all feelings of likeness, common belonging, mutual attachment, and solidarity—whatever their intensity, affective tone, and degree of consciousness—and, on the other hand, those corresponding feelings of distance, separation, otherness and alienation" (Lincoln 1989: 10).

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autonomous, *sui generis* sphere of the human experience/condition.

The notion of sentiment has also held an appeal for anthropologists and social theorists, who often also connect emotion with the "non-rational" as a means to "explaining" religious behaviour. The declaration of Henry Lewis Morgan, student of indigenous North American cultures, is indicative of this point of view:

> The growth of religious ideas is environed with such intrinsic difficulties that it may never receive a perfectly satisfactory exposition. Religion deals so largely with the imaginative and emotional nature, and consequently with such uncertain elements of knowledge, that all primitive religions are grotesque and to some extent unintelligible. (cited in Turner 1969: 1)

We find similar conclusions drawn by Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss who, in their study of the origins and development of "primitive" systems of classification, made an appeal to sentiment in response to the problem of how to account for the differences in classificatory systems produced by different societies. Here they speculate on "what the forces were which induced men to divide things as they did between classes" (1963 [1908]: 85-86), finally arriving at the following solution: "for those who are called primitives, a species of things is not a simple object of knowledge but corresponds above all to a certain sentimental attitude," so that "the fashion in which they are grouped is more affective than intellectual. This is how it happens that things change their nature, in a way, from society to society; it is because they affect the sentiments of groups differently" (1963 [1908]: 86). Durkheim and Mauss, because they can find no strict logical correlation between the world and the way people think about it, make recourse to emotion to explain such illogical contingencies. But, in the end, they show themselves to be uncomfortable with their appeal to emotion: "Now emotion is naturally refractory to analysis, or at least lends itself uneasily to it, because it is too complex. Above all when it has a collective origin it defies critical and rational examination" (1963 [1903]: 88).

This same discomfort is apparent in the conclusion to E. E. Evans-Pritchard's *Theories of Primitive Religion*, in which he points to the central place that the "role of the non-rational" has been afforded in scholarly explications of religious social life. In the work of Vilfredo Pareto, for instance, he singles out Pareto's argument that "sentiment prevails" in "our social relations and in the sphere of our

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values and affections and loyalties," except in the case of "certain activities that require strictly rational [or 'logico-experimental'] thought," as in "science, military operations, law, and politics" (Evans-Pritchard 1965: 117). Similarly, Evans-Pritchard draws attention to Henri Bergson's appeal to human "instinct" (1965: 115-117), and to Max Weber's typologies of "rational," "traditional" and "charismatic" societies, of which the second is characterized by "conservative and relatively changeless societies in which the affective, or affectual, sentiments predominate" (1965: 117). In the final analysis, Evans-Pritchard finds that each of these scholars' solution to the problem of the non-rational in society and religion is "too vague, too general, a bit too easy, and [that] they smell too strongly of a pragmatist special pleading" to be of use to the anthropological study of religion (1965: 119). This results, he explains, from these scholars "seeking for explanations in terms of origins and essences instead of relations," a tendency which he ascribes to their "assumptions that the souls and spirits and gods of religion have no reality. For if they are regarded as complete illusions, then some biological, psychological or sociological theory of how everywhere and at all times men have been stupid enough to believe in them seems to be called for" (1965: 121). In other words, their turn to "sentiment," "instinct," and "the affective" as explanatory categories was simply a means of dealing with elements of social activity that do not otherwise fit into their rationalist theoretical programmes.[35] Evans-Pritchard is certainly correct in this critique. The appeal to emotion and sentiment as a last-ditch measure upon the event of the failure of intellectualist analyses has indeed done harm both to the way we think about religion and to the role of emotion in human life.

As we have seen so far, emotion has found a place in both the study of religion and in social theorizing. Yet in both instances, it has received an unsatisfactory treatment. Among students of religion, emotion and feeling become the chief mode of the immediate experience and articulation of religious realities: the only appropriate means to comprehending and therefore of having anything to say about religion. Similarly, social theorists have sometimes conceded to this view of

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[35] In fact, the appeal to the "non-rational," "irrational," "emotional," along with "the material," as key characteristics of "primitive" or "archaic" (even "ancient") religions was for a long time common practice, as we have already seen in the works of Brehaut (1916) and Delehaye (1962 [1907]). On this subject see Smith (1998) and Masuzawa (2000).

religion's ineffability, utilizing this supposed ineffability as a means to explaining what they themselves are unwilling to articulate.[36] Yet we might ask if such approaches result from the fact that religion really is inarticulable, or because scholars have not thought it important to articulate a social theory of emotion?

To rectify this problem, we might begin with Evans-Pritchard's suggestion that we endeavour to explain social life in terms of "relations" rather than "origins and essences,"[37] to which I would add that we give serious consideration to the role of emotion in social formation. One scholar who has done so is Raymond Williams, who employed the term "structures of feeling" to address the "relations between the structuring constraints of institutional societal orders and the emergent structures of interpersonal, social and cultural formations" (Filmer 2003: 200). Largely in response to the determinative oversimplifications of base/superstructure models of the relationship between social formation and human consciousness, Williams seeks to "reconsider the idea of consciousness itself," since "what is ordinarily extracted as a world-view is, in practice, a summary of doctrines: more organized, more coherent, than most people of the time would have been able to make them" (1980: 24). By engaging in such a reconsideration, he attempts to capture the immediacy of

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[36] This is the argument against the valorization of the religious experience offered by Robert Sharf: "The fact that religious experience is often circumscribed in terms of its nondiscursive or nonconceptual character does not mitigate the problem: that nothing can be said of a particular experience—that is, its ineffability—cannot in and of itself constitute a delimiting characteristic, much less a phenomenal property. Thus, while experience—construed as that which is 'immediately present'—may indeed be both irrefutable and indubitable, we must remember that whatever epistemological certainty experience may offer is gained only at the expense of any possible discursive meaning or signification" (Sharf 1998: 113-114).

[37] Whether Evans-Pritchard is speaking of the "relations" between people or of the "manner in which a people conceives of reality and their relations to it" (1965: 121) is not clear, but probably refers to a measure of both. Also, given his distaste for the essentialism touted by others, it is odd that Evans-Pritchard finds himself "in agreement with [Wilhelm] Schmidt in his confutation of Renan: 'If religion is essentially of the inner life, it follows that it can be truly grasped only from within. But beyond a doubt, this can be better done by one in whose inward consciousness an experience of religion plays a part. There is but too much danger that the other [the non-believer] will talk of religion as a blind man might of colours, or one totally devoid of ear, of a beautiful musical composition" (Evans-Pritchard 1965: 121). Here we find echoes of the words of Rudolf Otto, who requests of his readers that whoever is unable to "direct his mind to a moment of deeply felt religious experience," who "knows no such moments in his experience" should "[read] no further," for it is difficult to "discuss questions of religious psychology with one who ... cannot recall any intrinsically religious feelings" (1928 [1917]: 8). On the claim to anti-essentialism, see Talal Asad's critique of the "rejection of essentialism" called for by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who ultimately undermines his own position by proposing that there is such a thing as the "religious condition" (Asad 2001: 206-207).

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individual experience in social formation. As Williams explains:

> what seems especially important in these changing structures of feeling is that they often
> precede those more recognizable changes of formal idea and belief which make up the
> ordinary history of consciousness, and that while they correspond very closely to a real
> social history, of men living in actual and changing social relations, they again often precede
> the more recognizable changes of formal institutions and relationship, which are the more
> accessible, indeed the more normal, history. (1980: 25)

It should be noted that Williams uses the concept with "empirical, historical specificity," in that it always refers to "a structure of actual feeling, tied to the particularity of collective historical experience and its real effects on actual individuals and groups" (Filmer 2003: 200). As such, it is largely reflexive and responsive in character, for structures of feeling arise most prominently out of the response of individuals to the creative manipulation of and imaginative reflection on lived experience, especially through literary and artistic production.[38] It speaks to the ability of certain persons to articulate or bring to consciousness, even if not in a systematic form, points of common experience which can act as triggers to social cohesion. This is most clearly expressed by Williams in his differentiation of "practical" from "official" consciousness, the former referring to "what is actually being lived, and not only what it is thought is being lived ... a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase," and which, "although they are emergent or pre-emergent, [do] not have to await definition, classification or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and

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[38] Bernard Sharratt provides a description of Williams' position on this point: "'experience' might better be thought of in terms of coming to a realization of the very nature of one's own particular culture and society. The 'experience' in question is more like living through a major historical change (and not, therefore, some specifically individual experience), and only realizing the nature and scope of that change by a difficult and fundamental recasting of categories. And those categories are in part given in the dominant form of drama, whether in the relation between chorus and protagonists in the drama of the city-state or in the theological patternings of medieval mystery plays. Yet those categories are not primarily intellectual, a matter of conscious beliefs, but a shaping of emotions and feelings, of responses to particularized actions, gestures and words. Only when we do not 'know' in a sense what our reaction to a significant gesture is, are we perhaps on the brink of that reformulation" (Sharratt 1989: 132). George Marcus comments on the convergence of Williams' structures of feeling with recent theoretical emphasis on the notion of "voice": "Voices are not seen as products of local structures, based on community and tradition, alone, or as privileged sources of perspective, but rather as products of the complex sets of associations and experiences which compose them" (1998: 66).

set effective limits on experience and on action" (cited in Filmer 2003: 208). In other words, structures of feeling refer to structures of relations between individuals that do not reside primarily in the systematization of shared thought but in the affective response of individuals in numbers to the effective articulation of shared experience. Williams thus argues for an understanding of social formation that recognizes the potential for feeling to stimulate and organize social groups.

Cognition

Coalitional Dynamics

The appeal to sentiment also garners support from the field of the cognitive sciences. Though social and religious theorists may find that it does not allow for the same "precision" (Lincoln 1989: 176 n. 9) we might expect to be able to achieve through the analysis and comparison of more "rational" thought (Durkheim and Mauss 1963 [1908]: 88), cognitive researchers are quick to point out that the affective and emotional remain an important aspect of human cognition. Humans, universally, are hard-wired to feel and express emotion, which, as cognitive researchers have noted, plays an important role for humans in their interaction with their world and with others around them.

According to Steven Pinker "our most ardent emotions are evoked... by other people. Some emotions, such as anger, make us want to harm people: others, such as love, sympathy and gratitude, make us want to help them" (1997: 396-97). That is, how we feel toward others will, in part, determine how we treat them. Pinker categorically opposes the common distinction made between emotions, which "come from nature and live in the body," and the intellect, which "comes from civilization and lives in the mind"—a false classification that he traces to the Romantic movement (1997: 369-70). In fact, he argues, both the intellect and the emotions are evolutionarily adapted features of human cognition, "indispensable to the functioning of the whole mind" (1997: 370),[39] and also, therefore, to the

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[39] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson make the same argument, though they trace a longer lineage for the notion of an autonomous reason, which they dispute on the grounds that thought is subject to all aspects of human cognitive function: "Real human reason is embodied, mostly imaginative and metaphorical, largely unconscious, and emotionally engaged" (1999: 536).

establishment and maintenance of social relationships.[40]

The credibility of this claim has been demonstrated in recent research concerning "coalitional psychology," which deals with the human tendency toward group behaviour. "Coalitions," writes Pascal Boyer, "are a very *special* form of association ... [that presuppose] an activity in which joining is (presumably) voluntary, defection is possible, benefits accrue with cooperation and there is a notable cost in being a cooperator when others defect" (2001: 126; emphasis original). Among the key features of coalitional behaviour are the following: member activity is directed toward the benefit of one's own group and not others; members will generalize about the characteristics and motives of their own (evaluated positively) and other (evaluated negatively) groups; extreme concern about the loyalty of fellow members (Boyer 2001: 126-127). The evidence of numerous laboratory experiments describes how subjects can be induced (with relatively little incentive) to cooperate with fellow group members and to compete with other groups. In these experiments, subjects are divided into groups according to divisions based on some "trivial criterion" (artistic preferences, for instance). What researchers have found is that subjects exhibit an "instant ethnocentrism"; members of "each group will instantly dislike and think worse of the people in the other group, and act to withhold rewards from them even if doing so is costly to their own group" (Pinker 1997: 513). Even when groups are chosen entirely at random (that is, when there is no criterion, and therefore no substantial "reason" for their distribution), and even when subjects are fully aware of this fact, they still will readily identify themselves with their own group and oppose the other. It seems that humans, under these experimental conditions at least, require very little reason to identify their own interests with that of a group.[41] "Jingoism is alarmingly easy to

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[40] Berger and Luckmann describe emotion as being especially significant to the "primary socialization" of children, which "involves more than purely cognitive learning. It takes place under circumstances that are highly charged emotionally. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that without such emotional attachment to the significant others the learning process would be difficult if not impossible. The child identifies with the significant others in a variety of emotional ways. Whatever they may be, internalization occurs only as identification occurs. The child takes on the significant others' roles and attitudes, that is, internalizes them and makes them his own. And by this identification with significant others the child becomes capable of identifying himself, of acquiring a subjectively coherent and plausible identity" (1967: 131-132).

[41] Similarly, Matt Ridley: "The fact that people form emotional attachments to groups, even arbitrary ones, such as randomly selected school sports teams ... proves that people have a very sensitive

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evoke," as Pinker puts it (1997: 513).

Boyer admits that "discussion in terms of cost and benefit, cooperation and defection, may seem very abstract" and claims that we "tend to think we just have 'feelings' about such situations." Having these feelings is important, however, as they are the "most salient reactions we are aware of," "the outcome of complex calculations that specialized systems in our minds carry out in precise terms" (2001: 128).[42] In other words, our response to others in the coalitional context—positive evaluation and favourable treatment of fellow group members, negative evaluation and treatment of other groups—is the automatic response of a mind adapted to the complex social behaviour of human beings.

To illustrate his point, Boyer points again to the experimental evidence, describing how fellow group members quickly develop an affinity for one another and form a set of shared group conceptions. Within a "very short time," he explains, "people are better disposed toward members of their group than towards others. They also begin to perceive a difference, naturally in their group's favor, in terms of attractiveness, honesty or intelligence" (2001: 287-88). What these findings suggest is not only that humans display a strong "propensity towards group solidarity," but also that such solidarities can easily "trigger essentialist understandings of groups, and even [cause] those understandings to translate into actual behavior in *the context of a coalition*" (2001: 288; emphasis original). Thus the concepts they come to use to describe themselves (essentialist qualities of the group) against others are secondary to the intuitive affinity that actually forms the basis for their solidarity. These concepts, therefore, can be employed to effect cooperative or competitive behaviour in others.

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awareness of where their individual interests lie—with which group" (1998: 188). Ridley uses the term "groupishness" to describe the human propensity for cooperative social behaviour, which is unequalled in the animal world. For more on the tendency toward essentialisms drawn according to social groupings and their consequences, see particularly his discussions on "tribal thinking" (1998: 151-169) and on the group prejudice and intergroup competition which constitute the "dark side of groupishness" (1998: 173-193).

[42] Again, Lakoff and Johnson's argument for the "embodied mind" supports the position that these "calculations" are largely unconscious: "Our unconscious conceptual system functions like a 'hidden hand' that shapes how we conceptualize all aspects of our experience. This hidden hand gives form to the metaphysics that is built into our ordinary conceptual systems. It creates the entities that inhabit the cognitive unconscious—abstract entities like friendships, bargains, failures, and lies—that we use in ordinary unconscious reasoning. It thus shapes how we automatically and unconsciously comprehend what we experience. It constitutes our unreflective common sense" (1999: 13).

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Harvey Whitehouse provides further support for the inclusion of the affective dimensions of social behaviour into social theory with his discussion of how emotion relates to human memory and to the codification and transmission of religion. His specific concern is to account for the formation of religious societies, a problem he states in this way: "If we are to understand the various ways in which people come to feel united or to regard themselves as sharing a common identity, we are obliged to make certain assumptions about human memory" (2000: 4-5). His approach, he suggests, inverts standard avenues of inquiry: instead of focusing on the question of "how political organization and ideology help to mould people's memories," he asks "whether universal features of human memory, activated in different ways, might be said to mould political organization and ideology" (2000: 5). For Whitehouse, the ideological content of social discourse gains much of its form, and its solidifying force, from the means of its transmission and codification.

Whitehouse distinguishes between two "modes of religiosity," which he calls the "imagistic" and "doctrinal." The key features of each mode are established according to cognitive principles of human memory, and thus "are not types of religion but organizing principles for religious experience and action" (2002: 309). The "doctrinal" mode of religiosity he ties to the employment of semantic memory, which depends on the development of cognitive "schemas" that establish patterns for thought and behaviour. These schemas, like Jay's logical structures, consist of generally applied and relatively stable patterns of thought that serve to organize information and standardize behaviour. Usually, they will display a certain degree of complexity and maintain rigid logical connections between ideas and practices.

This being the case, these patterns or structures require a relatively high degree of repetition and routinization to be established firmly enough for people to be able to remember them and recall their significance; literacy and the utilization of textual resources are often crucial to doctrinal stability and transmission. As Whitehouse asserts, "the implicational logic of doctrinal systems, expressed in language (sacred text, sermons, theological debates and so on), can only exercise a continuous and stable influence on people's attitudes, beliefs and actions if it is frequently reviewed" (2000: 9). Despite these difficulties, the fact that doctrinal

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systems are arranged according to a logical structure enables their broad application and can allow for a wide diversity of persons to subscribe to them. For this reason, the doctrinal mode is very effective in establishing "universal" types of religion, admitting innumerable individuals into its community.

The imagistic mode operates differently. Whitehouse connects it to certain aspects of the episodic memory, that part of human memory that deals with remembering unique, novel or unusual experiences. He is most interested in how memories are formed in contexts that are both novel and involve high emotional arousal—conditions that seem to foster exceptionally vivid forms of recall. Many rituals of initiation, for instance, fit this category, since they involve infrequent (often singular) events of high emotional arousal. Imagistic practices are also very localized: the number of participants is limited, and the ideological, symbolic and conceptual elements involved are often particular to the event of the ritual. Frequently there is little or no elaboration or explication of these elements. The intensity of the ritual ensures that its details will readily be remembered: the conjunction of symbolic elements and of other participants is powerfully recalled.

This, in fact, is one of the primary features of the imagistic mode, that it effects a powerful sense of solidarity among fellow participants. As Whitehouse explains,

> common identity among religious adherents ... is fundamentally particularistic, based on lasting episodic memories of undergoing the traumatic lows and ecstatic highs of sacred events together with a specifiable group of individuals. The longevity and intensity of such memories corresponds to the strength and inviolability of the cohesion which they engender. (2000: 10)

Imagistic practice, in other words, stimulates both a potent and enduring sense of social identity.

The doctrinal and imagistic modes, it should be noted, are in no way incompatible with each other; elements of both may be evident in any given tradition. Whitehouse separates them for theoretical and heuristic purposes, in order to show how they relate to aspects of human memory. But he is able to show how different sorts of practices can engender, by different means, feelings of social solidarity between individuals. The doctrinal mode allows for a broad sense of

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community since it engages a general set of logical principles that can be understood and shared by many. Imagistic modes, on the other hand, allow for a sense of solidarity and community without requiring that individuals consciously share explicit ideological principles.[43] It allows for a tightly-knit community to share meaning and identity without elaborate conceptual explication.

Cognition and Sentiment

The findings and conclusions of these cognitive researchers provide convincing support for the appeal to sentiment in describing the process of social formation.[44] In the first place, they demonstrate that emotional responses are an important factor in establishing social solidarity. They also show that this solidarity can be instilled with relatively little provocation, and suggest that the more intense the emotional response evoked when group members interact—from simple division into groups for Pinker, to collaborative work for Boyer, to imagistic ritual for Whitehouse—the more powerful and lasting will be their sentimental affinity for one another.

What is more, these findings suggest that the propositional, ideological or conceptual content of discourse employed by a social group is strongly tied to, perhaps even subordinate to, the affective connection felt between its members. Boyer even suggests that the concepts with which we characterize the essential features of our group are actually "*the concepts we spontaneously use to describe intuitions that are in fact not about categories but about coalitions*" (2001: 288; emphasis original).[45] In

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[43] As Whitehouse explains, "it is precisely within those populations that lack access to the authoritative corpus of religious teachings, and so cannot be motivated by those teachings, that we find the greatest profusion of imagistic practices. Elitist discourses would have us believe that the prominence of the imagistic mode among the uneducated and dispossessed is symptomatic of ignorance. Expressed more precisely, and less snobbishly, routinized religious rituals that lack a persuasive justification in dogma (i.e., learned via instruction) will die out unless they are motivated by forms of religious experience and understanding that are, at least to some significant extent, internally generated" (2002: 310).

[44] And also, perhaps, for Mack's complex "tautology" (see n. 25 above).

[45] Such concepts are perhaps most apparent in language about that which is "seen as the 'other' in religious practice and belief" (Tentler 1985: 254), where the ascription of otherness hinges on the suggestion of "an ontological cleavage rather than an anthropological distinction" (Smith 2004a: 241) between categories of persons. In terms of the present case, the "other" in question is predominantly the "pagan," "a derogatory term designating a person who is not a member of a dominant religion such as Christianity or Judaism, usually connoting negative personal and cultural qualities" (Smith 1995: 826), such that these negative qualities are held to be innate to the pagan "them" but not to the Christian "us." This classification relies on a supposition of difference more imagined, or supposed, than real, for the "pagan-Christian dichotomy was neither natural nor obvious." It did, however,

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other words, the categories by which we differentiate groups are convincing precisely because they refer to the affective connections felt between members, not because they refer to any real state of affairs in the world. Thus, people's adherence to a group may be motivated, in the first instance, by their sense of affinity for one another, rather than by their consent to ideological schemas.[46]

All of this fits well with what sociologist Rodney Stark has claimed about the means of the transmission and expansion of the Christian movement in the Roman Empire. In contradiction to a long tradition in the historiography of early Christianity which relied on notions of mass conversion effected by doctrinal persuasion or miraculous divine inspiration to explain Christian growth, Stark demonstrates how this growth can be accounted for through "social networking," or growth "through a structure of direct and intimate interpersonal attachments" (1996: 20).[47] What is more, Stark suggests, these interpersonal attachments are of primary importance to the establishment of social groups. Most critical to the conversion of most individuals is not their theological persuasion or doctrinal conviction, but the development of interpersonal attachments with members of the group. In fact, the persuasiveness of a group's doctrine followed from its converts having established relationships with members of the group.[48] Overall, Stark states, this position is consistent with the findings of "modern social science," which "relegates doctrinal

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allow "the creation of a cognitive frontier in which the unacceptable other and thus acceptable Christianity could be defined" (Rothaus 1996: 305). A similar example is that provided by Gregory of Tours' *reverentia/rusticitas* classification (Brown 1982; Wallace-Hadrill 1962).

[46] In this regard, the argument of John Van Engen that "the inner dynamic" of medieval Christianization "sprang from a commitment to Christendom" (1986: 552) is moving in the right direction, though his suggestion that we attribute this commitment to the innate convictional predispositions of *homo religiosus* (1986: 544) misplaces its source.

[47] The first chapter of Stark's *The Rise of Christianity* is devoted to the question, "Did Christianity grow so rapidly that mass conversions must have taken place—as Acts attests and every historian from Eusebius to Ramsay MacMullen has believed?" (1996: 3). He demonstrates that assuming a standard arithmetical growth of 40 percent per decade (roughly the same rate of growth recorded for the Mormon movement) is enough to account for Christianity's growth in its first three centuries (1996: 4-13).

[48] Evidence for this argument is drawn from his own fieldwork (with fellow sociologist John Lofland) with the Unification Church. In the course of interviewing converts to the movement, the researchers found that when these members "retrospectively describe[d] their conversions, they tend[ed] to put stress on theology," by which they "implied (and often stated) that their path to conversion was the end product of a search for faith" (1996: 19). Having known these individuals beforehand, however, Stark and Lofland knew that this was not the case, and that these same individuals had previously expressed little or no interest in doctrines or in a quest for faith, and had even "regarded the religious beliefs of their new set of friends as quite odd" (1996: 19).

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appeal to a very secondary role, claiming that most people do not really become very attached to the doctrines of their new faith until *after* their conversion" (1996: 14-15; emphasis original).[49]

Use of the term "sentiment" thus deserves a place in theorizing group formation, for it allows us to imagine the process of Christianization as something other than a program of (first, foremost or only) theological persuasion. It also, thereby, allows us to begin to account for the diversity of Christian practice in the ancient world without having to resort to notions of miscarried mission strategies of accommodation or of varied religious practice being an exercise in contradiction.

Conclusions

To insist on a definition of Christianity in terms of its "essential" characteristics, located primarily in belief, requires us think of Christianization as a movement toward such a presumed essence and that we relegate individual historical peculiarities of particular Christian practices to the periphery of analysis. Such designations also constrain our imagination of the process of religious change, such that a person's affiliation with a Christian religious formation is thought of primarily in terms of individual assent to principles of belief that require exclusive devotional commitment to the new religion. Given the deep interdependency between these

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[49] In spite of his early emphasis on social networking and the "very secondary role" of doctrine, there remain certain "ambiguities and unclarities in Stark's position on the ideational dimensions in the formation and attractiveness of the early Christian movement" (Braun 1999: 131 n.3). In his concluding chapter, for instance, he reaffirms the primacy of Christian doctrine in accounting for Christianity's expansion when he "confront[s] what appears ... to be *the ultimate factor* in the rise of Christianity," namely, that the "*central doctrines of Christianity prompted and sustained attractive, liberating, and effective social relations and organizations*" (Stark 1996: 211; emphasis original). The success of Christianity, then, is best understood as the end result of a doctrine that motivated adherents to seek out more positive and productive relationships. All told, Stark seems unable to locate precisely how these doctrinal elements function. Braun continues: "On the one hand, he claims they are 'very secondary' and functional only as retrospective rationalizations of an individual's conversion (14-15). On the other, he tries to demonstrate 'that ideas are often critical factors in determining not only individual behavior but, indeed, the path of history' (79), that 'the *contents* of Christian and pagan beliefs were *different* in ways that greatly determined not only their explanatory capacities but also their relative capacities to mobilize human resources' (79), and that, therefore, 'issues of doctrine must be addressed' (86). Stark goes so far as to state a 'thesis' that the 'ultimate factor' in Christianity's success 'was the religion's particular doctrines' (211), although in this statement 'doctrine' appears to be synonymous with 'virtue' (212). My purpose is not to point out an unresolved logical inconsistency, for I suspect that *both* statements on the 'doctrine' factor are right; rather, it is that each statement does not get much beyond explaining *obscurum per obcurius*" (1999: 131 n.3; emphasis original).

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conceptions of Christianity and of religious change, a rethinking of the theoretical footings for the process of Christianization is in order. Such a move requires that we move away from thinking about "Christianization" according to its adjectival root (i.e., becoming Christian) toward thinking about it according to its nominal root (i.e., becoming *a* Christian). In this sense, our conception of the process of Christianization must be less concerned with essentialist religious classification and have more to do with the means and modes whereby relationships are established and maintained between individuals. This means that we step away from conceptualizations of Christianity as an entity, complete with the customary set of assumptions about belief and conversion this entails, and look at Christian formations as historical, human enterprises in terms congruent with those we use to describe the formation of social units of all kinds. It will also mean moving beyond the kinds of evolutionary schemes which posit emotion simply as a sort of remnant or survival from more "primitive" ages (Durkheim and Mauss 1963 [1908]: 88), and recognizing that emotion is an important aspect of human activity in all times and all places. Emotion and sentiment produce a powerful social effect, establishing social relations in the immediacy and intimacy of shared practice, even in the absence of explicit, articulate, systematic bodies of doctrine. To this end, I will attempt a reconsideration of the place of thought and practice and of sentiment and emotion in processes of social formation, by looking at communities as they are formed in the relations of and between people which are established through direct, shared practice.

In the chapters that follow, attention will be paid to instances of Christian practice as sites at which people form into Christian groups. The first example looks at Christian exorcism and involves a reformulation of a practice that has traditionally been viewed in terms of an "ideological" confrontation that engendered ideological modes of persuasion. Alternatively, exorcism will be explored as a site for the cooperative participation of individuals in an identifiably "Christian" practice, where individuals are introduced to Christian communities through the shared experience of highly dramatic and emotionally charged rituals, leading to the consolidation of relational identities between (especially) the already-Christian, but also those not yet Christian.

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The second example focuses on the processes of social formation of a first-century Christian association in Corinth, where we glimpse a group that shows a high degree of ideological nonconformity and variation and yet also shows itself to be robustly dedicated to its existence as a group. Here, it will be argued, modern scholarship has been too willing to adopt the perspective of Paul, author of the New Testament letters to the Corinthians, and so has assumed that the Corinthians are a group teetering on the edge whose problems have arisen due to their unwillingness or inability to maintain practical consistency with Paul's teachings. On the contrary, I show that the Corinthians are deeply interested in their common association, in spite of their differences of opinion, and that their unity is grounded in the ecstatic practices that form the substance of their common practice.

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Chapter 3

Exorcism

If we are to imagine Christianization as a process of social formation, conducted along the conduits of numerous social networks and shared practice, by which discourse and custom are transmitted and sentiments of affinity are wrought, it will be gainful to isolate certain sites where we might see this process at work. Among the many early Christian practices that might be selected, I will concentrate here on one of those most commonly mentioned in the ancient sources. Exorcism, according to Peter Brown, was "possibly the most highly rated activity of the early Christian church" (1981: 108). It is most often mentioned in relation to its application as a cure for the ills and ails associated with possession by maleficent spirits (Frankfurter 1999).[50] Exorcism was thought to do more than that, however, for it was also held to be an effective means of gaining adherents to Christian associations.[51]

From the very start, exorcism was a vital aspect of Christian practice. It figures prominently in the canonical gospel accounts of the deeds of Jesus, as a key point of Christian pride in the apologetic literature, and as a central element in the baptismal procedure of some of the earliest Christian groups. It was also among the most visible of Christian practices. Its public performance had garnered Christians a certain measure of renown and notoriety, becoming, along with other marvels and miracles, what MacMullen describes as the chief "points of contact" and "modes of

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[50] Horden (1993) qualifies exorcism as being only one (and not the most common) strategy among many for the cure of insanity and possession in the early Byzantine world.

[51] "It was as exorcisers," writes Adolf Harnack, "that Christians went out into the great world, and exorcism formed one very powerful method of their mission and propaganda" (Harnack 1962 [1902]: 131). T. K. Oesterreich suggests that exorcism was especially powerful in the earliest years of Christian growth, given the acute intensity of faith of the early Christians, "to whom the memory of Christ was still a living thing." By this supposition "the great success of the Christian exorcists is therefore readily understood" (1966 [1921]: 165).

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persuasion" for the process of Christianization (1984: 25-42).

The Divine Contest

In the ancient sources exorcism is formulated as a contest, if often one-sided, between celestial adversaries, played out on earth. Through public displays of exorcism, observers of the ritual were treated to a demonstration of the potent reality of the Christian god—providing, it was said, a confirmation for those who believed, and convincing those who did not, of Christian claims about the real presence and power of the supernatural characters involved. Within this construction, "the manhandling of demons—humiliating them, making them howl, beg for mercy, tell their secrets, and depart in a hurry—served a purpose quite essential to the Christian definition of monotheism: it made physically (or dramatically) visible the superiority of the Christian's patron Power over all others" (MacMullen 1984: 28). Observers of these displays, such as those mentioned in the gospel accounts, were often said to have "marveled" (Matt 9:33; Luke 11:14), or to have been "amazed" (Mark 1:27; Matt 12:23; Luke 4:36), or to have been "astonished at the majesty of God" (Luke 9:78). Word of these deeds spread and spectators journeyed to observe the business in action, sometimes as a consequence becoming Christians themselves—through their having directly witnessed the spectacle or, possibly, through its retelling by word-of-mouth, as in the account of the seven sons of Sceva described in Acts 19.[52]

Sometimes, as in Sulpicius Severus' account of an exorcism performed by St. Martin over a slave of a proconsul named Taetradius, people were required to convert as a prior condition to the performance and successful outcome of an exorcism:

Taetradius threw himself at the knees of the blessed man and begged him to go down to the

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[52] In this instance, conversion is said to have resulted from the spectacular failure of the seven Jewish exorcists to expel an "evil spirit" through the invocation of the names of Jesus and Paul: "But the evil spirit answered the, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks; and fear fell upon them all; and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Many also of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ...So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily" (Acts 19:15-18, 20).

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house where the possessed man was. At this Martin said that he could not come to the house of a profane and pagan person (for Taetradius was at the same time still entangled in the error of paganism). So, Taetradius promised to become a Christian if the demon should be driven out of the boy. Martin then laid his hand upon the boy and expelled the unclean spirit. When Taetradius saw this, he believed in the Lord Jesus. (*Life of St. Martin* 17; 1949: 125)

Jerome has Hilarion make the same requirement of a charioteer who had been struck with demonic paralysis (*Life of Hilarion of Gaza* 16; 1952: 255). These signs of God's power, then, were not mere eye-catching media stunts designed to draw the curious to within hearing distance of the Christian message. On the contrary, they were essential elements of the Christian proselytizing apparatus. Paul professes that he came to the Corinthians "in demonstrations of the Spirit and power," so that their "faith might rest not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4-5). Origen claims that "without miracles and wonders they would not have persuaded those who heard new doctrines and new teachings to leave their traditional religion and to accept the apostles' teachings at the risk of their lives" (*Contra Celsum* I.46; 1980: 42). Signs and wonders such as exorcism were exhibitions that gave weight to the contentious declarations of their Christian promoters. The general thrust of such descriptions certainly gives the impression that "to the late-Roman man the drama of exorcism was the one demonstration of the power of God that carried unanswerable authority" (Brown 1981: 107).

There is at least some question, though, as to how useful exorcism was as a means to win adherents. On the one hand, it does appear that Christian "ideological focus on the ritual expulsion of demons ... made Christianity attractive to many peoples as its missionaries moved into new regions" (Frankfurter 1999: 440). On the other hand, believing that "Christians were fully won by the sight of a wonder or an exorcism is to shorten a long process and ultimately to misjudge the extreme canniness of Mediterranean men. These events might awaken their interest, but why should they accept that the God behind them was the only god and that all their previous gods were false?" (Fox 1986: 330). There always remained the basic question of the authenticity of these acts, which could be subject to accusations of charlatanism and fakery and rejected outright.

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Howard Clark Kee has observed recurrent disputes over the legitimacy of miracle-workers in the ancient sources, both pagan and Christian. Examining in particular works by Lucian, Origen and Eusebius, he comments on how, "in this epoch, both champions and critics of miracle-workers are agreed as to what the basic issues are: are miracles evidence of divine wisdom and power, of demonic power and wizardry, or of fraud and chicanery?" (Kee 1983: 273).[53] Such "signs" could, in general, be produced by the wicked as well as the godly—by, for example, false prophets (Mark 13:22), or even the devil himself (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1980 VI.45: 362-363). In the synoptic gospels, there are some who allege that Jesus "casts out demons" not by the power of God but "by the prince of demons" (Mark 3:22; Matt 9:34, 12:24; Luke 11:15). Evidently, there was more than one way of interpreting the spectacle. If the drama of exorcism "carried unanswerable authority" for certain late-Roman people (Brown 1981: 107), others could still respond to what they had witnessed with rejection or indifference. Christian writers, however, were insistent that Christian exorcists were always successful where others failed and that such an accomplishment provided unmistakable proof of the divine power of their founding figure.[54]

Given the controversial nature of exorcism, most accounts of exorcism seem to want to make the process appear as effortless as possible: so compelling were the Christian exorcists that demons would depart at a word; even the humblest Christian through the simplest of words could, according to Origen, effect demonic deliverance, so worthless were the demons and so potent and true was God's power

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[53] Kee also examines the treatment of Simon Magus, who attempts to purchase from the apostles the power of the Spirit (Acts 8:14-24), and who was later to become the "infamous charlatan of the patristic period" (Kee 1983: 216). The *Acts of Peter* pits Simon against Peter in a battle of powers, by which Simon is proven a fraud. In the *Clementine Homilies*, Simon's powers are denigrated as mere sorcery, since they do not flow from the legitimate divine source (see Kee 1983: 282-285).

[54] For instance, Justin Martyr: "For many demoniacs throughout the entire world, and even in your own city, were exorcised by many of our Christians in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate; and our men cured them, and they still cure others by rendering helpless and dispelling the demons who had taken possession of these men, even when they could not be cured by all the other exorcists, and exploiters of incantations and drugs" (*Second Apology* 6; 1948: 125-126). While "every demon is vanquished and subdued when exorcised in the name of this true Son of God," Justin informs Trypho the Jew, when "you attempt to exorcise them in the name of any man born among you... not one of the demons will be subject to you." At best, they will, "perhaps", become subject when adjured in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Justin criticizes Jewish exorcists for resorting to "the magical art of the Gentiles, using fumigations and amulets" (*Dialogue with Trypho* 85; 1948: 283).

(Origen, *Contra Celsum* VII.4; 1980: 397-98).[55] Exorcisms could be successfully performed even from a distance, as when the absent daughter of the Syrophoenician woman is delivered of a possessing spirit when Jesus says simply that "the demon has left your daughter" (Mark 7:29), or when "handkerchiefs or aprons" were carried from Paul to the sick so that their "diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them" (Acts 19:12). The canonical gospel accounts stand as the prime exempla of this motif of uncomplicated victory, placing Jesus up against various evil spirits in face-to-face confrontations from which he walked an easy victor (Mark 1:23-28, 7:24-30; Matt 9:32-34, 12:22-24, 17:14-20; Luke 4:33-37, 9:37-43).

The trope of effortless exorcism continues on through centuries of Christian description. Deep into the Middle Ages, Oesterreich notes, we "find the same stories of cures, which are already known to us from the New Testament and patristic literature, constantly repeated in the biographies and legends of the saints with a wearisome sameness" (1966 [1921]: 176).[56] In the end, it becomes difficult to establish how much of any particular description of exorcism is drawn from direct ethnographic observation and how much is provided by the conventions of the exorcistic narrative. Generally speaking, detailed, dispassionate descriptions of the display and mechanics of exorcism are relatively rare.[57]

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[55] Paulinus records an event in which St. Ambrose "hands over" to Satan a certain servant, previously cured of demonic affliction, for a great crime he had committed. In this instance, the power of the saint is demonstrated in his ability to permit the demon, at a word, to return his torment upon the man: "And at the very moment before the bishop had completed the statement, the unclean spirit seized upon the man and began to tear him to pieces, so that we were filled with fear and wonderment at the sight, and in no small measure. Indeed, we saw that many in those days were cleansed of the unclean spirits by laying on of his hands and at his word" (*Life of St. Ambrose* 43; 1952: 59-60). In another case, Ambrose is not required to do anything at all to accomplish an exorcism. Here, a demon withdraws for a time from the man he had been troubling because the man is on his way to visit Ambrose. Out of fear of the bishop, he simply decides to leave the man alone until he can safely return to his malefaction (*Life of St. Ambrose* 21; 1952: 45-46).

[56] Oesterreich concludes that the later accounts cannot be mere imitations of earlier ones, given the unlikelihood that the possessed themselves were trying to reproduce earlier models of possession. Rather, the volume of similar accounts and their "somewhat wearisome monotony [offer] striking proof of the stability of these phenomena in the Christian era" (1966 [1921]: 176-177). Erica Bourguignon disagrees with this assessment, proposing that "the similarity is undoubtedly in part due to the fact that subsequent cases of possession were indeed modeled on these earlier ones" (Bourguignon 1976: 3).

[57] The question of whether or not specific accounts of exorcism are events that "really happened," or that there are "real" events hidden behind the embellishments of the literature, is important. For the purposes of this chapter, I do call into question the historical veracity of individual accounts, while allowing for descriptions of the manner and form of exorcistic practice in general, since there are analogies to contemporary exorcism. There is warrant, given the seeming importance of exorcism to

The Divine Drama

As far as we can rely on them, the sources maintain unfailingly that exorcism was an impressive rite, and that, for onlookers, the contest of exorcism was terrifically exciting. Exorcism was "a noisy and disturbing phenomenon," "mysterious and terrifying" (Brown 1981: 107), a "drama," "spasmodic" and "flamboyant" (Brown 1981: 110), all of these terms which are consistent with descriptions of certain exorcistic performances—especially those that demanded "some dramatic action at the demon's departure (a motif of the literary accounts and certainly a technique in effective performance)" (Frankfurter 1999: 439). The exorcist's reputation depended in part on his ability to demonstrate his effectiveness.

Campbell Bonner provides an examination of how this demonstration was accomplished, identifying three characteristics of a successful exorcism. Most important was that the performance should include some indication from the invading spirit that it is present and is under the compulsion of the exorcist's command. Sometimes, all that is required is that the demon "speak in answer to the operator's conjurations," or that he "tell his name or at least his nature, i.e., the class of demons to which he belongs, and to describe the kind of mischief that he is wont to do." Often, there is also required a "visible proof, in the form of some violent action, that the possessing force was actually a demon, and that he has left his former abode in the body of his victim" (1943: 41). It is this latter proof which is really the most common element of exorcism and possession in the literary accounts.

Tertullian, for instance, declares that unclean spirits are caused to suffer at the hands of Christians: "at the touch, a breath from us, they are seized by the thought, by the foretaste of that fire [of Judgement Day], and they leave the bodies of men at our command, all against their will, in pain, blushing to have you witness it" (*Apology* XXIII.16-17; 1931: 129-131). Similarly, Minucius Felix describes how the suffering of demons is made evident in the physical reactions of the possessed: "when adjured in the name of the one true God, reluctantly, in misery, they quail and quake, and either suddenly leap forth at once, or vanish gradually, according to the faith

the early Christian movement, for a detailed and concentrated study of the actual mechanics of early Christian exorcism and of the gap between ethnography and convention in the literary accounts.

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exercised by the sufferer or the grace imparted by the healer" (*Octavius* XXVII.1-8; 1931: 397-401). Athanasius relates the story of a demon-possessed young nobleman who was brought to St. Antony and who, after an overnight vigil observed by the saint, "suddenly sprang on Antony, pushing him." At this, Antony expressed his delight to the young man's friends, for it was "a sign to you of the demon's going" (Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony* 17; in Stouck 1999: 77-78). Finally, Sulpicius Severus tells the vivid and violently scatological tale of one exorcism performed by St. Martin of Tours:

> Martin, on entering the dwelling of a certain householder, halted at the very threshold, saying that he saw a horrible demon in the vestibule of the house. When Martin ordered him to depart, he took possession of the householder's cook, who stayed in the inner part of the house. The wretched man madly began to bite and lacerate whoever confronted him. The household was alarmed, the slaves thrown into confusion, the people reduced to flight. Martin threw himself before the maniac and, first, ordered him to stand still. When the other gnashed his teeth and, with mouth agape, threatened to bite him, Martin thrust his fingers into his mouth. "If you have any power," he said, "bite these." Then, as if he had taken a white-hot iron in his throat, the possessed man drew back his teeth so as to avoid touching the fingers of the blessed man. The pains and tortures he was suffering were forcing the demon to leave the possessed body, yet he could not get out through the mouth. So, leaving behind a track of filth, he was expelled in a discharge from the bowels. (*Life of St. Martin* 17; 1949: 126)

Though differing in the type and intensity of behaviour, this sampling from the literature indicates that exorcism was seen to be dramatic and even violent, characteristics often deemed necessary if the power of God was to be convincingly demonstrated.

If, in the interest of achieving a fuller picture of the process, we add to the descriptions of exorcism proper depictions of the preliminary possession and of the actions of the possessed, the picture of the whole procedure becomes even more arresting. The slave of Taetradius suffered "terrible torture" and "raged and bared his teeth" at those who came near to him (Severus, *Life of St. Martin* 17; 1949: 125); another man, Brictio, "was so far engulfed by the Evil Spirit as even to have lost control of his mind, weak as it was. His lips trembled, his features quivered, his face

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was pale from frenzy" (Severus, *Third Dialogue* 15; 1949: 246-247); the noble youth brought to St. Antony used to "eat the filth of his own body" (Athanasius, *Life of St. Antony* 17; in Stouck 1999: 77). Minucius Felix provides a general description of the appalling deeds enacted by the demons and of the disturbing things they cause humans to do:

> Thus they drag men downwards from Heaven, call them away from the true God to material things, perturb their life, disquiet their slumbers, creep into their bodies covertly, as impalpable spirits, produce diseases, strike terror into minds, distort the limbs, thus driving men to do them worship, in order that, when glutted with the reek of altars or with victim beasts, they may loosen the tightened bonds and claim to have effected a cure. From them too come the maniacs whom you see running into the street, soothsayers without a temple, raving, possessed, and whirling round. There is the same demoniac possession, though the guise of frenzy is different. (*Octavius* XXVII.1-8; 1931: 397-401)

However simple and uncomplicated the actual exorcistic procedure turned out to be, behaviour exhibiting demon possession would have been integral to the spectacle as a whole. Perhaps even the contrast between the possessed's erratic and violent behaviour and the deep sense of relief, joy and thanksgiving that was said to follow a successful exorcism would have emphasized the magnitude of the event. At any rate, in such cases as these, in which the contest is somewhat prolonged and the process is described in some detail, we will find that authors depict possession and exorcism in similar terms.[58] Terror, pain, anguish, suffering and agony; rage,

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[58] Numerous other examples could be used. Gregory of Tours, for instance, describes possessed persons "who are often bruising themselves," and a servant who "suffered from a terrible calamity, with the result that he often bit himself with his own teeth" (*Glory of the Martyrs* 76: 1988b: 99). He describes other possessed persons who "dance throughout the entire church [of St. Eusebius, bishop of Vercelli] in violent spins and believe that they are afflicted with powerful torments," and who "leap in the air and with their hands strike and break the lamps that are burning as lights" (*Glory of the Confessors* 3: 1988a: 20). One man possessed a "hideous demon" which he expelled "in a blast of air from his bowels," and another had a demon reside in "the nail of his thumb," which began to bleed upon an anointing by oil from the tomb of St. Martin (*Glory of the Confessors* 9: 1988a: 26-27). One demon, who had taken possession of a certain deacon, was addressed by St. Nicetius and "began to cry out and say that the holy man was putting him into great torments (*Life of the Fathers* VIII.4; 1985: 69). Also: a man who "bruised himself" who was finally freed through a flow of blood from his mouth (*The Suffering and Miracles of the Martyr St. Julian* 35, 1993b: 186); a man named Desiderius who "raved madly for an entire night" until dawn, when he "coughed up an unfamiliar pus and blood" and the demon left him (*The Miracles of the Bishop St. Martin* 2.20, 1993a: 238); a man delivered of a demon who was "thrown to the ground and began to vomit putrid blood from his mouth (*The Miracles of the Bishop St. Martin* 2.37, 1993a: 247); a madman named Landulf who "spewed bloody

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madness and mania; shouts, growls, cursing and physical violence; tears, blood, froth, sweat, vomit and excrement: the drama and contest of exorcism is loaded with such explicit imagery and language.

A Drama of Integration

Though scholars of an historical-critical bent might be uninterested in or put off by the bald supernaturalism of these exorcism accounts,[59] exorcistic performances would have been very much in keeping with the nature of ancient religion in general. As Richard Rothaus describes it, ancient religion

> was not of texts, sermons and verbal conversation, it was a fully sensory experience: the smell of incense, blood and humans; the sounds of hymns, chanters, bells, drums and cymbals; the sight of the temples, the churches, the costumes, ostentatious decoration; the feeling of the press of the crowd, the vibration of shared experience, and breezes of the

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spittle from his mouth" and, when he "knelt on the ground, a dreadful swarm of frogs seemed to hop over him, and he also heard voices that clearly criticized him" (*The Miracles of the Bishop St. Martin* 2.18, 1993a: 237-238). A number of examples are also to be found in Jerome's *Life of St. Hilarion of Gaza* (21; 1952: 259-260, 22; 1952: 260-261 42; 1952: 277).

Finally, observe also the explicit language and graphic imagery of the following excerpt, drawn from a much longer exorcistic prayer composed by Basil the Great: "Fear! Flee! Be banished! Depart, unclean and abominable demon! Infernal, abysmal, deceptive, shapeless, visible because of your shamelessness, invisible because of your hypocrisy—wherever you happen to leave or to exist or if you are the same Beelzebub, a demon that shakes, or one that is dragon-like, or one with a face of a beast, or one as vapor or appearing as smoke, or as a male or as a female, or as a creeping thing, or appearing as a fowl. Or as one speaking by night, or one that is deaf or dumb, or as one that frightens by invasion or that convulses or attacks or exists in deep slumber or sickness or in disease or rolling about in laughter, or inciting sensuous tears, or as a lewd spirit or foulsmelling, or covetous, or lustful, or sorcerous, or erotic, or horoscopic, or dwelling in a house, or one that is shameless, or contentious, or unstable, or changing according to the phases of the moon or one that flees at a certain time," and so on (cited in Nauman 1974: 63-64).

Observations on exorcism made by modern commentators give some corroboration, if less sensationally described, to the ancient depictions. Felicitas Goodman has made a cross-cultural study of possession and exorcism, always attempting to explicate the phenomena according to human psychological and cognitive function. Possession, she explains, is most readily understood as a trance state. Changes in "appearance or functioning" observed among the possessed (Goodman 1988: 12) are also key features of trance behaviour, which she describes in more clinical terms: "Along with hyperarousal, facial expression alters radically, and there is a change in muscle tension" (Goodman 1988: 20). Overall, "rather astounding things begin to occur" (Goodman 1988: 12). Rodewyk (1975: 170-175) and Rosen (1992 [1962]) provide some examples of the signs of demonic departure for the medieval period, and Oesterreich (1966 [1921]: 199-235) provides a survey of accounts drawn from more recent periods.

[59] See Brown 1981: 107-108. Earlier modern students showed a concern for providing "rational" explanations of possession and exorcism. These scientifically-oriented studies attempt to account for the phenomena in psychological and physiological terms, some, "especially of the Freudian school, speak[ing] of auto-suggestion and self-hypnosis, aided by a willing audience, or of downright faking" (Goodman 1988: 14). Spanos and Gottlieb (1992 [1979]) provide a critique of "hysteria" and its role as an explanatory device in the history of demonic possession and mesmerism.

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carefully chosen locations of sacred structures. (Rothaus 2000: 101)

In making this observation, Rothaus is speaking of the context of late antique Corinth and the establishment of Christianity as physical, architectural presence in the city. The construction of the great basilicas, he argues, created highly visible and material centres for the demonstration of Christian influence and authority. As such, they could function as a "nexus" at which the "tangled message" of Christian signifiers was directed and contained. But, while it has long been recognized that urban centres were the seedbed of early Christianity,[60] Christian "monumentalization" was an achievement of later centuries, and there were no such grand architectural "sacred structures" that could operate as a nexus of this nature. What we do have are the local Christian communities themselves. If we are to locate Christianity, even into the age of Christian urban centres and the great basilicas, in the geography of ancient religion, we might look to the particular practices of these local communities as points at which the "tangled message" of Christian signifiers might have converged.

Exorcism was, by all accounts, an important Christian observance. It certainly provided Christian authors with a powerful illustration of the power of their god and saints, and with a demonstration of the truth of their theological assertions. But to think of exorcism only as an enactment of an ideological schema puts it at a remove from the social relationships on which communities are built. If, instead of thinking of the spread of Christianity in terms of traveling missionaries moving anonymously from city to city, gathering in the lonely and dispossessed through impersonal oratory and spectacle, we think of Christianization as social formation, we must look to the various locations at which social relationships are built. In each city, there were networks of relationships, some long-established, running along lines of family, friendship, patronage, trade and voluntary association of which Christians were already a part or into which they ("professional"

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[60] Wayne Meeks makes a study of this feature of early Christianities in his *The First Urban Christians* (1983). See also Ian Wood's study on the cities of late antiquity as "foci of devotion" and as "bastion[s] of true religion" (Wood 1979: 65-76); and Dennis Trout (1996) on Paulinus of Nola and the activities surrounding the feast day of St. Felix for a discussion on how such activities contributed to the formation of a Christian community at Nola.

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missionaries or otherwise) could insinuate themselves and become acknowledged members of these networks.

As Felicitas Goodman notes of exorcistic practice in general, exorcism did not and does not take place in a social vacuum, for "no matter where this ritual is practiced, there will always be the same set of actors: the victim, the exorcist, and the supporting community" (1988: 24). Whether or not the exorcist was locally known, the possessed almost invariably would be. And the performance of exorcism would take place among family, friends, acquaintances, and other familiar, possibly concerned and personally committed, persons. Moreover, public displays such as exorcism were sites at which Christians could engage spectators in their own common practice. Through their performances, they could not only act out the cosmic confrontation they envisioned the practice of exorcism to be, but could also demand attention, spark curiosity, encourage question and debate, and generate invitations toward the further participation of those interested. The exorcism was thus a shared, communal experience.

The social nature of exorcism forms the basic premise of Peter Brown's examination of the phenomenon in the late antique context. Utilizing both primary sources and contemporary sociological studies, he looks first at the imaginative impact of this performative contest, then goes on to suggest that exorcism might have served as more than a curative therapeutic procedure or sheer spectacle. He discerns the possibility that exorcism could have important social implications. Brown's suggestion follows from his observation of "evidence from sixth-century Gaul" which "suggests that not all the possessed came to the shrines already in a state of extreme disturbance" (1981: 111). Their erratic behaviour, in other words, started only after their arrival—an indication that their possession was voluntary, that they may have "come in order to be possessed" and be "implicated" in the drama of exorcism (Brown 1981: 111),[61] and that the dramatic, emotional, possibly

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[61] I. M. Lewis observes that possession need not be in effect prior to its treatment: "Indeed it is regularly only in the actual treatment of possession, either by exorcism, or by a procedure which aims at achieving a viable accommodation between victim and possessing agency, that trance in the full sense is induced" (1989 [1971]: 40). Goodman provides an analysis of Vodun (Voodoo) possession trances, which she compares to manifestations of multiple personality disorder. The difference between the two is that the former can be characterized by an element of "ritual control": "nothing happens haphazardly in a ritual. *Vodun*...is not simply a chaotic possession event. People assemble

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traumatic experience of possession and the subsequent exorcism were something to be sought after. Key to Brown's analysis is the fact that the ritual of exorcism was carried out in the presence and with the participation of others. For this reason, he describes exorcism as "a drama of reintegration," in which the possessed (and therefore liminal) "human being who had been swept far away from the human community was solemnly reinstated among the warm mass of his fellows" (Brown 1981: 112).[62]

Looked at differently, the ritual could serve as a drama of *integration* whereby both the possessed and those who took part in the ritual gained a sense of their solidarity. We will note that the terms Brown (and our sources) use to describe exorcism are consistent with those characteristic of Whitehouse's imagistic mode of religiosity: it is dramatic, intense, emotional, vivid, thrilling, terrifying. Rather than emphasizing the "imaginative importance of the great prayers of exorcism that *maintained and articulated, in liturgical form, the expectations* of the group at the shrine" (Brown 1981: 112; emphasis added), we might instead emphasize the practical importance—to the formation of a Christian society—of individuals participating together in an emotionally evocative ritual. In this way, exorcism might have been "a missionary instrument" that "made converts" not because it "was a demonstration of a theological position" (MacMullen 1993: 32-33), but because it effectively created the sort of participatory social environment that is favourable to the formation of sentimental bonds between people. Participation in rituals of exorcism might require little prior explicit knowledge of Christian doctrine, yet could still pay dividends for social attraction and cohesion. It could serve to introduce individuals to elements of a Christian discourse (concepts, characters, stories, songs, images) in a context that would foster powerful memories of and identification with those elements.

It would also, especially, foster powerful identification with the other

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at a certain spot; external preparations have to be completed; the appropriate point in time for the possession to start is marked by certain unmistakable signals in the ceremony ... [and] on ritual cue, the possession will unfailingly dissolve" (Goodman 1988: 17).

[62] In recent decades, exorcism and possession have been analyzed as a response to social dislocation, deprivation and oppression, based on observations that demonic episodes are more prevalent among the socially marginalized and occur more often in times of societal stress (Lewis 1989 [1971], 1992 [1966]; Pattison 1992 [1977]).

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individuals who shared in the ritual—particularly when those individuals were not strangers, but personally known and cherished members of one's immediate social networks. The significance and meaning of the event would be remembered, recounted and analyzed in the intimacy of later social encounters at meals, in taverns, on long journeys. However much or little participants understood the theological or ideological implications of the practice, the fact of their association could establish a bond of sentimental affinity that might, given the occasion, be invoked toward the construction of a Christian society. At the same time, we might also emphasize, as Horden (1993) and Brown (1981: 113-118) do in the context of "therapeutic systems," that people of late antiquity were making choices between alternatives, none of which constituted the "final authority" in religious matters. Those who witnessed the drama of exorcism need not be forced to finally decide that "the God behind [it] was the only god and that all their previous gods were false" (Fox 1986: 330). For there were always other gods and powers, and their human representatives, whose services could be engaged for assistance in different situations and at different times.

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Chapter 4

Corinthians

I turn in this chapter to a study of Christianization at work within a particular Christian community. The Christian association at Corinth, for which Paul's letters provide some of the earliest evidence we have of a Christian community, offers an excellent site for the examination of Christianization and some of its attendant concepts. Though drawn from the earliest period of Christian history (the so-called "apostolic age") and possibly, therefore, a problematic sample, its selection is deliberate. For, given its place at the beginning of the traditional grand narrative, Corinth is an historical instance that troubles the notion of a pristine and original Christianity—both as the paradigm for "true" and essential Christianity and as the proper end of the process of Christianization.

In contrast to the traditional narrative, the Corinthians show themselves to be neither exclusively devoted to their Christian religion nor sharply distinguished from their Graeco-Roman social environment, but rather full participants in both. Indeed, they are a community "pulled this way and that" (Conzelmann 1973: 102) by the play of various interests as its members, in dialogue with Paul and other Christian teachers, contest and negotiate the very terms of their ideology, practice and group boundaries. At the same time, the Corinthians have devised a set of ecstatic ritual practices that allow for variegated and contesting forms of knowledge even as they try to consolidate themselves as a group.

The Rise and Fall of Corinthian Christianity

There are a number of features that are central to the most common and longstanding account of the emergent Christian community at Corinth. The basic narrative scheme of this view has it that Paul went to Corinth and gained a

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substantial though indefinite number of members, remaining in the city for some time before leaving to continue his missionary travels.[63] After he left, however, the Corinthian association fell into trouble. The Corinthians supposedly had moved away from the foundation established by Paul and quickly slid into unorthodox beliefs and un-Christian behaviour. Apparently, Paul's message had not been properly understood, or other missionaries had introduced disruptive ideas to the group, or members had simply reverted to old patterns of life. Most often, the cause of this shift is located in the influence of secular, pagan, non-Christian culture of Corinth itself. A. C. Thistleton states the typical view when he suggests that the Corinthians' problem is a "theological misperception combined with the seductive infiltration into the Christian church of cultural attitudes derived from secular or non-Christian Corinth as a city" (cited in Horrell and Adams 2004: 26). Similarly, and more recently, Bruce Winter has proposed that,

> in 1 Corinthians, Paul was responding to problems which were created by the influence of secular ethics or social conventions on this nascent Christian community. These may have crept into the church imperceptibly and grown with the passage of time. Some were already there just below the surface (e.g., 3:1). Others were a rapid reaction to a problem which arose unexpectedly and were resolved almost unthinkingly on the basis of the cultural or legal mores of this Roman colony. These were judged sometimes to have required no specifically "Christian" answer. (Winter 2001: 4)

The Corinthians had been won to the Christian message by Paul, but once Paul had departed, they began to think in ways at odds with their status as Christians, which led, predictably, to inappropriate behaviours more characteristic of the surrounding culture of Hellenistic pagan religion and Corinthian society.

Indeed, one commentator declares that, given the number of such influences in Corinth, "it is no wonder there was a blaze; no wonder the city could add to its trade fairs as fine an exhibition of Christian deviations as was to be seen anywhere in

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[63] See Winter (2001) on the length of Paul's stay at Corinth, possibly as long as 18 months. Winter observes that Paul's letters give the impression that the issues considered within are ones that did not arise until after his departure, and yet also of being "very basic issues which a person would have faced soon after conversion" (2001: 2). So he asks why Paul did not deal "with some, if not all, of the problems he addressed in 1 Corinthians while he was in Corinth" (2001: 1).

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the world" (Barrett 1964: 273). When we add to this the suggestion that the
Corinthians, "of all the Pauline churches, were the most intellectually active, and
therefore especially vulnerable" to deviant modes of thinking (Conzelmann 1973:
98), the conditions are made ripe for the "weeds of the 'secular' Corinthian garden"
to begin to overwhelm the "'Christian' bed of flowers" planted by Paul (Braun 2002:
595). The overall picture is one of initial conversion to "Christianity" by the
persuasiveness of Paul's message, accompanied by "demonstration of the Spirit and
power" (1 Cor 2:4), followed by a reversion or return to old ways. As W. Braun
points out, this view turns on a "creation-fall plot structure" (Braun 2002: 595) that
follows what J. Z. Smith calls an "historical schema of origins and corruptions"
(Smith 1994: 114). The letters written by Paul to the Corinthians are thus viewed as
an attempt to bring wayward Corinthian Christians back onto the right path from
which they had strayed.

Paul as Informant and Model "Christian"

The extent to which scholarly attention focuses on Paul—and "the subtle, many-
pronged campaign he waged to bring the community back on an even keel"
(Murphy-O'Connor 1979: xiv)—is perhaps the most striking aspect of the literature
on the Corinthians. Paul, his theological position, his judgment on points of
controversy and his privileged status as the authority in the Corinthian community
are not only assumed in describing the form of the Christian association at Corinth,
but this assumption is further linked to Paul's presumed ethnographic reliability in
describing the state of affairs in Corinth and to the view that Paul's position
represents a normative Christianity. Hence Paul is portrayed as the "guardian of
theological, social, or political correctness in the face of the Corinthians' obduracy
and error" (Horrell and Adams 2004: 33), engaged in a "conflict of superior
understanding and legitimate authority against ignorance and recalcitrance" (Engels
1990: 110). The Corinthians, with their penchant for aberrant thinking and
regressive behaviour, play the dubiously "Christian" antagonists to the "genuinely"
Christian leading man, Paul:

> Conceited, stubborn, over-sensitive, argumentative, infantile, pushy. All these adjectives

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> have their place in a description of the Corinthian Christians for whom Paul was
> responsible. They were the most exasperating community that he had to deal with, for they
> displayed a positive genius for misunderstanding him. Virtually every statement he made
> took root in their minds in a slightly distorted form, and from this defective seed came
> some of the most weird and wonderful ideas ever to dismay a preacher. With very little
> experience the Corinthians devised and justified (to their own satisfaction, if not that of
> Paul) a number of highly recreative heresies. From their fertile minds sprang webs of
> sophistry that challenged Paul's subtle spirit. (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: ix)

At work here is a basic outline, articulated by Paul himself, which assumes that, "whether through theological error or secular influence, the Corinthians are misguided and mistaken, and that Paul's voice offers a right and necessary corrective" (Horrell and Adams 2004: 26).

In all of this, Paul is taken at his word as a reliable informant on the Corinthian situation. It is true that "there was often a wide divergence between what happened at Corinth and what Paul thought ought to happen" (Barrett 1964: 269), and that "Paul and his converts did not always see eye to eye" (Sanders 1991: 103). But the recognition of this fact does not require that we accept Paul's description of the situation at Corinth as correct, nor that we place the blame for whatever problems were present at Corinth entirely on the Corinthians. Converting a "wide divergence" between Paul and the Corinthians into a distinction between right- and wrong-thinking or moral reasoning is a move driven by theological judgment, not sound historical and historiographical practice. To argue that it is the Corinthians themselves who are in the wrong either in thinking or in their approach to being "Christian" is thus a bit of sleight of hand. Where we do find, in general, that "those studying the Corinthians literature have been overconcerned with the examination of the formal, official, and sanctioned in interpreting the beliefs and practices of the Pauline churches" (Meggitt 2004: 246-247), this has meant the privileging of Paul at the expense of the Corinthians, which serves only to oversimplify a complex case of competing interests. His position, though it has the advantage of having been preserved for us in text, is nevertheless only one facet of the whole Corinthian affair.

Paul's letters to the Corinthians were composed to address a number of

issues on which he thought they were in need of advice, correction and rebuke, and his judgment of their situation is tailored to fit the argument he was pressing. Viewed in this way, we will find that they do not present "a dispassionate description of that situation. On the contrary, the intention in writing was to influence the situation," and so Paul may have "found it necessary to turn a blind eye here, focus on a point amenable to his case there, and in some degree manipulate the perception of the situation to his own ends" (Dunn 2004: 307). If we accept that this is the case, we will also, as Justin Meggitt suggests, "have to admit that some of the things that have so preoccupied and dominated interpretation of the letters may not have actually been significant components of the lives of most Corinthians" (Meggitt 2004: 247). So, while it is clear that "Paul has been engaged in the task of presenting and representing what it means to be Christian, in the light of the reactions and (sometimes unintended) consequences which his original message drew forth," it is not clear to what extent he has been able to "[shape] the Corinthians 'world view' and their 'ethos,' their beliefs and their actions and relationships" (Horrell 1996: 91). There are indications, after all, that the Corinthians did not take Paul at his word.

Indeed, there seems to be a wide disparity between the expectations and understandings of Paul and those of the Corinthians concerning the identity and benefits of their patron, the Christ figure, as well as the collective purposes and protocols of the association that gathered in his name. It has been suggested, in this regard, that the conflicts described in the letters "are in large measure directly *about* authority; they are questions about who makes decisions, who has to obey, and why" (Meeks 1983: 117). If the Corinthian group was having problems—and it is clear that they are—there seems to be little agreement on both the nature of those problems and on the best course for their resolution. It is likely that Paul "would have understood one thing, some groups of Corinthians another" (Smith 2004b: 349) and that, from the start, Corinthian attraction and adherence to Paul's Christ fit their own interests and not those of Paul (cf. Mack 1995: 125-137).

Through the course of the first letter Paul addresses a variety of issues on which there were differences of opinion. In turn he treats: the Corinthian 'factions' (1 Cor 1-4); the incestuous man (5); litigation between members (6.1-7); *porneia*, or

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immorality (6:8-20); celibacy, marriage and divorce (7); the consumption of food offered to idols (8-10); comportment of men and women during prayer (11:2-16); behaviour during the Lord's supper (11:17-33); spiritual gifts and conduct at ecstatic ritual (12-14); and facts concerning resurrection (15). In each situation Paul attempts to persuade the Corinthians of their error and malpractice through theological rationalization (Barrett 1964: 269). At the same time, he allies his theological arguments with an appeal to the Corinthians' sense of community, framing his solutions according to "anti-sophistic, non-discipleship, and familial categories" (Winter 2001: 43). He attempts to create group unity by evoking "a heightened group consciousness which regards the social unit (here named variously as the lump of dough, the body of Christ and the temple of the holy spirit) as the fundamental context of decision making, not the individual or any factions which serve the needs and interests of only some members to the detriment of the social whole" (Mitchell 1993: 228). In addition, Paul attempts to bolster the Corinthians' sense of group solidarity by erecting, again with an appeal to theological principles, sharp boundaries between the Corinthian Christian community and the outside world.

This dual construction makes an immediate appearance in the first chapters of 1 Corinthians, where Paul begins to address the matter of "divisions" among the Corinthians (1 Cor 1-4). Paul provides a theological rationale for the fruitlessness of factionalism in a Christian community by arguing that their unity is already made a fact by their possession of a special "wisdom of God" (1:21). This wisdom, granted by God, makes "foolish the wisdom of the world" (1:20), which leads only to jealousy and strife (3:3). By this "secret and hidden wisdom" (2:7), the Corinthians have been transformed from "ordinary" (3:3) and "unspiritual" (2:14) into "spiritual" (2:15) persons, though in their dissension they show that they are "as men of the flesh" (3:1). The problem with the Corinthians is that they seem not to have followed their transformation through to its end but cling to old habits of thought and behaviour, remaining, it is suggested, only "half-converted" (Witherington 1995: 201). It remains for Paul, then, "to wean the Corinthians from the besetting fault of new converts (and the perennial temptation of believers), i.e. the tendency to understand the structures of christian experience in terms of models

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drawn from a fallen world" (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 9). As Paul's letter proceeds, he explicates the numerous instances in which the Corinthians have conducted themselves according to the latter mode.

For his part, Paul attempts to draw a fairly distinct boundary between the Christian community and the greater world. Through the whole of the letter, "'this world' and the 'present age' are spoken of in consistently derogatory terms" (Barclay 1992: 59). For those who dwell in "the world," "jealousy, strife, and party factions were part and parcel of everyday existence, and to those who accepted the common estimation of what was possible to humanity it seemed entirely natural that they should be found within the community of believers. For Paul this was clear evidence of their immaturity" (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 20). Unless they were careful, unless they ceased their rivalry and remedied their error, the Corinthians would be "running the risk of defining themselves among those for whom the gospel is hidden and thus forfeiting the divine gift" (Grindheim 2002: 709). It becomes clear that, "for Paul, sociology is indicative of theology" (Grindheim 2002: 690): how they live is indicative of their spiritual status, of who they are "in Christ." At least some of the Corinthian Christians, it seems, have neglected this first truth.

Yet Paul has so persuasively framed the Corinthian predicament according to his own terms that it becomes difficult to discern the distinction between theology and sociology. The Corinthian letters certainly leave the impression that "the root of all the problems at Corinth was a misunderstanding regarding christian identity" and that "Paul provides a rather subtle reminder of *who* they are" (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 2). Again, however, this is Paul speaking. And on this count his words, as is often the case, have proven very influential. As Margaret MacDonald observes, "when Paul's thought emerges as the most important feature of his letters and the central determining factor for community developments in scholarship on the Corinthian epistles, we frequently find the closely related interest in the shape of Christianity as a distinct religion" (MacDonald 2004: 285). Whether the scholarly debate concerns the distinction between Christian and non-Christian, the exclusivity of the cult, the distinctiveness of the Christian belief and the separation of the Corinthian Christians from "the world," the Corinthian "misunderstanding" of Paul's message, or the proper course of action for the Corinthians to have taken,

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Paul's views on these matters have been taken as normative of real or true Christianity at this very early period of its formation. Scholarship on the Corinthians in general has followed too closely Paul's "dualistic rhetorical strategy without questioning or evaluating it." If he had difficulty in winning over the Corinthians wholesale, Paul has nevertheless proven himself "a skilled rhetorician, who, throughout the centuries, has reached his goal of persuading his audience that he is right and the 'others' are wrong" (Fiorenza 1987: 390).

It is clear that 1 Corinthians offers a number of instances in which the views and interests of the Corinthians appear not to have corresponded with those of Paul. Here I will focus on two only, namely, the matter of the eating of so-called "idol food" (1 Cor 8-10), and issues surrounding ecstatic practice at the Corinthian meetings (1 Cor 12-14).[64] These issues are particularly rich sites at which to examine

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[64] The debate over the fact and nature of resurrection (1 Cor 15) is another interesting possibility, especially for its potential to disrupt both the general notion of ideology as the key and primary organizing factor in social organization, and the particular case of "the soteriological-eschatological" as the central and essential Christian ideological element. That the idea of salvation through the resurrection of the Christ, and the resurrection of all Christians in the future, are taken as given in most conceptualizations of Christianity is made clear in much of the scholarship on the Corinthians: "Nobody doubts the centrality of the cross to Christianity and its importance for Christian doctrine" (Williams 2003: 117). The position of the cross, however, was not without its difficulties. Sanders parses the central "emphasis of the Christian message" as follows: "(1) God had sent his Son; (2) he was crucified, but for the benefit of humanity; (3) he was raised from the dead and exalted to heaven; (4) he would soon return, and those who belonged to him would live with him forever. Paul's gospel, like that of others, also included (5) admonition to live by the highest ethical and moral standard" (1991: 22). Yet he also observes that of these "five fundamental convictions ... all but the first two (God sent Christ to save the world, and he was crucified) became the subject of debate or even hostile controversy among Christians" (1991: 26). 1 Corinthians is the key example of this tendency, since their misunderstanding of the resurrection is taken to be a key difficulty of the Corinthians. As Wayne Meeks observes, "the *communis opinio* among New Testament scholars is that all the problems addressed in 1 Cor are somehow connected with the beliefs about the resurrection addressed in chapter 15" (1983: 121; see also Conzelmann 1975: 11, 249; Thistleton 1978). The Corinthians' misapprehension and modification of the central idea of the resurrection has become the principal explanation for the problems that surfaced in the Corinthian church. So if the Corinthians are "foolish, immature, arrogant, divisive, individualistic, unrealistic illusionists, libertine enthusiasts, or boasting spiritualists" it is because they have "misunderstood the preaching of Paul in terms of 'realized eschatology'" (Fiorenza 1987: 389). Most problematic is, first, Paul's claim that there are some Corinthians who "say that there is no resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor 15:12) and also his somewhat enigmatic reference to people "being baptized on behalf of the dead" (15:29). The first is problematic precisely because it is so contrary to what we might expect: "the problem that strikes every modern reader is how any Christian could fail to believe in so central an element of the creed as the resurrection of the dead" (Goulder 2001: 177). That the idea of bodily resurrection would have been puzzling to most people in the Graeco-Roman world is a point frequently made, but authors are reticent to allow for the possibility that some of the Corinthians wholly denied the possibility of resurrection. One of the more common explanations has the Corinthians conceding the possibility for the unique case of Jesus, but not as a general possibility for all other humans (see Winter 2001: 104-105). Part of the challenge presented by this passage is the fact that we must rely on Paul to

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first the relationship between Christian ideology and group boundaries, and then the process of social formation through common practice.

Boundaries: On the Eating of Food Offered to Idols[65]

In surveying the social-historical study of early Christianity, Wayne Meeks has observed that the notion of "the social world of the early Christians" has acquired a sort of "double meaning": "One is the world they [Christians] shared with other people who lived in the Roman Empire; the other, the world they constructed" (Meeks 1983: 8). More often than not, this recognition of "two worlds" has meant that, although they share some features, there is an assumption of a categorical difference between Christianity and all other religions of the Graeco-Roman world. "The Christian faith is exclusive," asserts Hans Conzelmann (1973: 70). Each Corinthian, having become Christian, has "transferred allegiance either from the traditional Jewish community or from the looser and more multiplex associations of pagan society to a new, tightly bonded, exclusive cultic community" (Meeks 1983: 190), and it is thereby expected that each will willingly and purposefully exclude him- or herself from the affairs of the outside world, especially from other forms of cultic practice. At Corinth, however, this seemingly vital requirement appears not to have caught on, and at several points in the letter, Paul voices his concerns about the Corinthians and their interaction with "the world." Nowhere is this so plainly at issue as in his treatment of the matter of the eating of food offered to idols (1 Cor 8-10). Here we find not simply a case of the subtle infiltration of Corinthian culture, but also of direct participation in other Graeco-Roman cult.

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inform us of the Corinthian position; as Barclay notes, "Paul uses such a variety of counter-arguments in ch. 15 that it is not easy to identify his target, and it remains possible that he partially misrepresents or misunderstands the Corinthian position" (Barclay 1992: 63). The mention of baptism on behalf of the dead has been treated in a number of ways, ranging from a simple reading that takes the remark as a reference to a vicarious baptism, to more intricate textual and theological analyses (see White 1997). If the former is the correct reading, then it stands as a distinctively Corinthian rite. Coupled with ambiguities over the idea of resurrection, such a practice may be a case of "ritual experimentation on new modes of relations to the dead" (Smith 2004b: 351) and/or a sort of "rite of passage" performed for the Corinthian dead (DeMaris 1995).

[65] The consensus position seems to be that "*food* offered to idols" refers primarily to sacrificial *meats* (see Paul's use of both terms in 1 Cor 8:13), though Peter D. Gooch concludes that there is little ground for assuming that the term *eidōlothyta* should be limited to meat alone (1993: 53-59). Following Gooch, I use the more general term "food." In addition, though I reject the usual pejorative connotations intrinsic to Paul's use of the term "idol," I do, again following Gooch, make use of the terms "idol-food" and "food offered to idols" as translations of *eidōlothyta*.

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Traditionally, 1 Cor 8-10 has been a difficult section for scholars. For the most part, this comes as a result of trying to understand Paul's own strategy in responding to the matter, for in 1 Cor 8 and 1 Cor 10 he comes to slightly different conclusions. In 1 Cor 8, he seems to accede to a Corinthian argument which says that "an idol has no real existence" (8:4) and so to eat food previously offered to idols is of no consequence. Paul insists, however, that certain members—those who "possess this knowledge" (8:7) concerning the true nature of the idols—should forego their "liberty" (8:9) and not eat idol food out of concern for their "weak" associates.[66] In 1 Cor 10 Paul modifies his initial position. While reaffirming that the idols themselves are nothing, he now says that "what the pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God" (10:20). Since a Christian cannot serve both God and demons (10:21), the Corinthians are told to avoid becoming "partners with demons" (10:20) by avoiding the consumption of idol food. [67] In the course of the whole discussion, Paul introduces into both arguments such caveats and conditions as make it difficult to decipher his position unequivocally. [68]

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[66] Note Paul's extensive tangential elaboration in 1 Cor 9 and 10:31-11:1 on his own aptitude for self-sacrifice and his recommendation that the Corinthians follow his example, beginning at 8:13 with his claim that "if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall."

[67] Interpretations of these passages have largely focused on what Paul thought about idol-food. There are many different takes on the issue, some quite intriguing, including: Thrall's suggestion that idol-food was dangerous because it brought Christians directly into dangerous contact with demons (1965: 76-77); Theissen's suggestion that Paul was trying to rectify an imbalance between the "strong" (those higher status members who could both afford and had occasion to partake of idol eat) and the disgruntled and less privileged "weak" members (1982: 121-143); Willis' proposal that, for Paul, the matter is one of establishing divine allegiance, which is demonstrated (even if unwittingly) through practice: "these occasions of worship, Christian and pagan, are mutually exclusive. Just as one shows his master by whom he serves (Rom 6:16ff.), so one also shows his allegiance by the worship in which he participates" (1985: 191-192; see also Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 97-98); Winter's argument that "Paul was concerned that 'weak' Christians would be drawn back into the world of paganism and finally become apostate" (2001: 286); Meeks' suggestion that while Paul "absolutely excludes as idolatrous any participation in a pagan cultic meal," he is also "at pains to show that nonsymbolic eating of pagan-butchered meat is a matter of indifference (10:25-27) ... It is only when the meat is deliberately made a symbol ... that it is forbidden for the Christian" (1983: 160); similarly, Horrell (1997) and Still (2002) discuss the possibility that Paul discerns a difference between certain (semi-) cultic occasions at which it is acceptable for the Corinthians to participate and those which categorically are not; and finally, Dunn's proposition which says that the issue is not simply "an ideological clash between Jewish inhibition before idolatry and Gentile tolerance of it," but that Paul's reference to "discerning the body" (11:29) shows that he was concerned "more about social sensitivity than theological acumen" (2004: 303). This is only a selection, but it does indicate, I think, some of the difficulty in pinpointing precisely what was going on, since it is all filtered through Paul's estimation of the matter.

[68] Margaret Mitchell makes the compelling argument that Paul's treatment of the issue follows the pattern of his "reconciliatory strategy" of the whole of the letter, which aims at restoring unity among

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Though Paul does not voice a round condemnation of the eating of food offered to idols, his overarching message is that it would be better for everyone if the Corinthian Christians did not partake of such foods (Gooch 1993: 84). In his equivocation we discern Paul's discomfort with the practice, perhaps because it raised for him, as for us, "the problem of the relationship of Christians to the society of the ancient world" (Theissen 1982: 130). And this includes not only their relationship to an abstract "world," but also their involvement in other Graeco-Roman cultic practices. By making the distinction, Paul confronts us with that fundamental notion of Christian exclusivism and its assumption that, while membership in other Graeco-Roman cults did not require disengagement from other religious affiliations, "to be fully involved in the Christian *ekklesia* it would surely have been necessary to give up whatever roles one had in other religious assemblies" (Witherington 1995: 18). Paul discerns an obvious and impassable divide between the Christian and the pagan.

This judgment comes across most clearly in 1 Cor 10, when Paul claims first that "what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God," and then that "you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons" (1 Cor 10:20-21). In principle, his point is clearly made, but he has trouble articulating how the principle should work in practice. For, while "he 'draws the line' around the limits of acceptable involvement in pagan life and cults," Paul does not "define clearly which occasions he means. When is eating εἰδωλόθυτα εἰδωλολατρία?" (Horrell 1997: 100). It is a well-known fact that religious and cultic practice was very much a part of everyday life in ancient society. "Temples and their precincts," for instance, "were extensively used for a wide range of purposes and gatherings in the Roman

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the Corinthians. In this particular instance, "Paul tried (perhaps unsuccessfully) to hold two balls in the air by allowing the eating of idol meats (unless in a particular situation it hurts the fellow Christian) but condemning idolatry. This is because Paul's overriding concern is not idol meats in themselves, but the impact of conflicts over idol meats on the concord of the church community" (1993: 238). In the move to the second argument in chapter 10, Paul is forced to extract himself from a difficult position: "Countering the possible objection of self-contradiction in his treatment of idolatry, Paul remains consistent in his denial of the existence of idols, but shows the danger of cult meal participation by recourse to 'demons.' This compromise position allows Paul to urge the Corinthians to avoid any other cultic associations without theologically having to encroach upon his radical monotheism. By reference to the demons (in whom he no doubt believed) Paul can warn the Corinthians against cult meal participation, which divides the church by luring some Corinthians into competing κοινωνίαι, without giving an outright prohibition" (1993: 255-256).

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empire—religious, political, social and economic" (Horrell 1997: 101). Meals of all kinds, from those directly connected to the formal cults and high festivals to common domestic meals, involved attention to, and usually attendance of, the gods or to ancestral or familiar spirits (Horrell 1997: 101). The problem is especially acute when it comes to the eating of meat. Meat itself was relatively difficult to come by and could often only be obtained as the leftovers of sacrificial practice (Stowers 1995: 294). All told, sacrificial foods and the occasions at which such foods were eaten were so extensively connected to cultic practice that to suggest a neat compartmentalization of these foods from cult is to impose a division that did not exist in actual Graeco-Roman cultic practice. This may be why Paul finds it so difficult to defend the acceptability of eating food offered to idols and, at the same time, to proscribe attendance at or observance of most of the occasions when such food would be eaten.[69]

Paul is reaching for a way to persuade the Corinthians to adopt his own position on avoiding participation in (even contact with?) pagan cult. He has been forced to choose his words carefully, engaging in a convoluted logic engineered not to alienate (Gooch 1993: 83-84). But some of the Corinthians seem to have found issue neither with the eating of idol-food nor with participation in the associated cults. In this sense, Paul's approach may be more necessary as a means to reconcile his own openness to the one without compromising his opposition to the other.

A number of factors recoil against the plausibility of Paul's directives to the Corinthians, giving us cause to reconsider the idea that "the meal of Christians is exclusive in its loyalty" (Willis 1985: 212) and not to exaggerate "Christianity's difference from other cults" (Meeks 1983: 140). To begin with, we must recognize

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[69] Still argues that Paul, by adopting his two-pronged approach to the matter, effectively removes any "need to mark clearly the line for actual practice. In 1 Corinthians 8-9 Paul argues for the complete non-use of an authentic right (= abstention from temple meal participation). In 1 Cor 10:1-22 Paul argues for utter dissociation from idolatry (= prohibition of participation in idolatrous feasts). Therefore, all temple meals are unacceptable, but not all for the same reason. Some are acceptable 'theologically,' but unacceptable because of the danger to a brother (1 Cor 8-9). Others are simply unacceptable theologically (1 Cor 10:1-22). Paul's argument has, therefore dealt decisively with all temple events. There is no temple event in which the Corinthian who is compliant with the apostle's instructions will participate. Thus, although the line exists theoretically somewhere along the spectrum, the question, 'Where is the line?,' is irrelevant to Corinthian practice. Discussion of the line's location is a quagmire Paul's argument avoids" (Still 2002: 342).

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On the whole this has not been a shortcoming of scholars, who have readily assumed in most instances that members did endure significant social displacement in joining the Christian association. Commentators often presume that "conversion must have led to upheavals in the family and in the social milieu" (Conzelmann 1973: 108), and that "the decision to embrace the faith in the first decades often entailed the irrevocable loss of family, friends and social status" (Gager 1975: 40)—a possibility most keenly felt, it would seem, by those Corinthians of higher social status (Theissen 1982: 131; Meeks 1983: 118-119; Winter 2001: 283). Adopting such a model of conversion might overestimate the sensibility of such "demands of membership" to people of the ancient world. The Corinthians, at least, appear not to have "underestimated the potential impact of Paul's instruction" but plainly recognized it and chose not to follow. Maybe it is implausible for Paul to suggest that they endanger, compromise, or even terminate relationships of family, friendship, cult or commerce. Should they have wanted to, it would have been difficult for Christians to detach themselves from all social engagements involving cultic observances (Thrall 1965: 61; Stowers 1995: 308). Indeed, "to demand of converts that they withdraw from this commensuality is to threaten their participation in society altogether" (Webb Keane, quoted in Smith 2004b: 341). If it was "impracticable to require these links to be severed overnight" (Goulder 2001: 153), it may ultimately be unnecessary to require that they be severed at all.

To accept this position will require our own severance with Paul as the privileged authority on Corinthian Christianity. As John Barclay observes, "Paul's vision is of a church community, where members are open to the world but

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nonetheless forever conscious of the difference between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and where the intense relationships among members of the family make belonging to the church the core of their existence" (Barclay 1992: 60). The Corinthians, on the other hand, "do not see themselves in this light; and their different self-perception is surely not unconnected to the harmony they enjoy in their relationships with non-Christians" (Barclay 1992: 60).[70] If it is the case that "what problems arose for those who entered the church can be gathered from the exclusivist claims of the faith" (Conzelmann 1973: 108), then it may be that the problem is Paul's and not the Corinthians'. They see no such contradiction as exists in Paul's mind between their engagement with their normal social routine and their involvement in the Christian association. We need not soften the implication of the Corinthians' full engagement in other cultic practice by suggesting that the Corinthians did not view such meals as "religious" but as merely "social, non-worshipful occasions" (Willis 1985: 212; also 48, 265-267).[71] It may be enough to say that "the exclusivism demanded by allegiance to Christ was obvious to Paul (10:21) but not to the Corinthians" (Willis 1985: 285). They likely understood his notion of exclusivism, and knew full well the "religious" implications of their participation in other cults,[72] but simply did not agree with Paul's construal of the way things should be done—as might have been in keeping in a polytheistic ancient

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[70] Willis makes note of scholarly interpretation of the term *koinonia* and of how it often takes on a special sense when applied to Christian associations. On the variation in its usage in ancient sources, he observes that it is "used to describe business partnerships, various associations, joint enterprises, social relationships, marriage, and the sexual relationship. In other references κοινωνία points to the common political life of citizens and, in Stoicism especially, to the common life of 'world citizens'" (1985: 168). As it is used in relation to Christian communities he cautions that "although various students have suggested a necessary 'inner relationship' or 'intimate friendship' the wide-ranging use—from conjugal relations to business pacts—warns against such a necessary implication of intimacy" (1985: 168-169).

[71] If we think of the phrase "idols are nothing" as a Corinthian "slogan," as most scholars do, does this mean that we must also think of the Corinthians as attempting to "rationalize" their eating of idol meat, as if they suffered from a guilty conscience? Rather than forming the basis of a theological position, recourse to the phrase might have worked just as well if used to respond to the accusations of others: "We see nothing the matter with our observing ancestral rites. And why should it even matter to you, if, as you say, 'idols are nothing'?" Willis observes: "They may have given their reasons because they anticipated criticism from Paul, or simply because they had themselves (as 'wise' people) developed a rationale and expected Paul to share it. ... Their questions have a defensive tone, but are they defensive toward Paul or toward other Christians in Corinth?" (1985: 267).

[72] If such an idea of "the religious" would have made much sense to them at all: "The constant refrain that 'Greeks and Romans seem more interested in feasting than religion' simply misses the significance of their religion" (Stowers 1995: 299).

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Bonding: On the Practice of Ecstasy

Given the number of difficulties at Corinth, the question must be, "what was it that held the community together and kept them meeting as a group?" I suggest that we look to the ritual practice in which the group participated rather than to its ideology for an answer. We find at Corinth not a group organized around rigid central doctrinal tenets, such as the resurrection, monotheism and cultic exclusivism, but instead around a tradition of ecstatic practice that encouraged the acquisition of variegated forms of knowledge—authorized not by tradition or teaching but by the force of ecstatic experience—even as it established personal knowledge of the shared membership of its practitioners.

Most commonly, ecstatic practice at Corinth is understood as a contributing source of Corinthian divisiveness and factionalism. It was chaotic and showy, evidencing a disorder in the Corinthian assembly born of their overemphasis on the power and activity of the "spirit." None of these characteristics were advantageous to the construction of an orderly and stable group structure.[73] Indeed, the Corinthian emphasis on ecstasy had led to the formation of a hierarchy based on their relative ecstatic abilities. Some, apparently, had shown a greater facility for prophetic utterance and, especially, "speaking in tongues," skills which had become marks of distinction within the community. In time, this imbalance had come to inspire a general atmosphere of "pride and rivalry" (Thrall 1965: 86). Ecstatic practice, Paul suggests, was causing divisiveness within the Corinthian community (Mitchell 1993: 266-283; Wanamaker 2003: 135).

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[73] This point brings to mind another common assertion about Corinthian ecstasy, namely its comparison to the mystery religions, to which "devotees were more likely to turn" for excitement (Chadwick 1967: 152-153). Lang (1997: 364-368) recounts some of the ritual features of these groups, particularly the Dionysiac associations: "In a state of frenzy or possession, not only women, but also some of the 'men, as if insane, with fanatical tossings of their bodies, would utter prophecies (*vaticinari*).' A 'maenadic' symposium would fill much of the night, entertaining its guests with wine, women, music, and prophetic voices" (Lang 1997: 376). Thus Murphy-O'Connor's comment on Paul's caution to the Corinthians that they constrain the enthusiasm of their meetings in light of what outsiders might think of them: "were an unbelieving outsider to walk into an assembly where all were speaking in tongues, his inevitable reaction would be 'You are raving!' (v. 24), a judgment that would put the christian assembly on the same level as the pagan mystery religions" (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 130).

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As is often the case in the letter, Paul's words of chastisement, advice, correction or encouragement on this subject are directed towards fostering greater unity among its members, which they are to achieve by regulating common practice and by confining doctrinal speculation. He shows concern for this "local visionary movement" for the reason, perhaps, that "there was no ethical control over it" (Goulder 2001: 99). So he charges the Corinthians with "living by the Spirit in an exaggerated and unfortunate way, but not loving one another well enough" (Sanders 1991: 104), and encourages them to adopt a more controlled style of ritual practice and a more inclusive, constructive evaluation of their various "gifts." The Corinthians thought that

> a spiritual church did not need to think about organization, and the result of this neglect is the chaos of church worship revealed in chs. 11-14—women praying and prophesying barefaced, cliques at the supper, greed, drunkenness, blasphemous shouting, several people trying to speak simultaneously. With a bit of teaching and proper administration and a fund, things would run better. (Goulder 2001: 249)

Much as he did with the matter of idol-food, Paul turns the issue into one of collective responsibility. Too many individuals were doing their own thing and the Corinthians needed to show more concern for their "brothers" and "sisters" than they had been. "One who speaks in a tongue," says Paul, "speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit" (1 Cor 14:2). Ecstatic speech is

> merely a private, individual religious experience which does not *help to build up the community* ... Even from the point of view of the ecstatic person himself the experience leaves something to be desired. *If I use such language in my prayer, the Spirit in me prays, but my intellect lies fallow.* The ideal form of communion with God is not a state of emotional ecstasy in which the Christian is not aware of what is happening. It is a form of prayer which may certainly be inspired yet which is at the same time a conscious and intelligent activity. It is a process which demands the use of one's mind. (Thrall 1965: 99; emphasis original)

Ecstatic speech and performance, the argument runs, is of little communal value unless it is expressed and framed in rational, intelligible terms.

Not only is it unintelligible, but Corinthian preference for ecstatic flair has

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also led to socially destructive stratification of the Corinthian body. It is quite possible that the "gift of tongues proliferated at Corinth because the mysterious sound of tongues meant enhanced social prestige" (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 128), that such visible demonstrations could hold "some currency of social power" and that "different modes of power had come into direct conflict" (Meeks 1983: 119-120) in the Corinthian community. Yet it may also be that Paul is embellishing the connection between the disorder of Corinthian ritual practice and discord in the community. All "gifts" are integral to the life of the community, he says, and each member, with his or her distinct gift, has an important role to play, just as each body part has a particular function in the operation of the whole human body (1 Cor 12:12-26); none should be preferred above any other. Yet he also introduces his own hierarchy of gifts, arguing not that *any* social distinction drawn according to gifts will serve to create divisiveness, but that divisiveness arises from the privileging of the *wrong kinds* of gifts. Rather than being the most valued of gifts, ecstatic abilities should be diminished in favour of the "higher" gifts (i.e., leadership, administration, teaching; 1 Cor 12:28).

Even among the ecstatic gifts, Paul shows a clear preference for the more 'rational' acts of prophecy over speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:1-5). The latter he describes as merely a personal, individual act (14:2), self-edifying (14:4), unintelligible (14:9), intellectually unfruitful (14:14), and a "sign" only for "unbelievers" (14:22). What is more, he places judicial constraints even on prophecy with his demand that prophetic utterances be limited to "two or three" per meeting (14:29) and that each prophecy be subject to the scrutiny and evaluation of other members. By their preference for "what glitters and makes a show" over "what is intrinsically more valuable," the Corinthians show themselves to be like "children" (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 130). Such knowledge as they acquire through ecstatic practice is only "infantile and transitory" (Goulder 2001: 103), having "no genuine value" (Thrall 1965: 92), unless it is made rationally intelligible to others and authorized by consensus. Paul makes his plea for unity by allying it with ritual control and by privileging the more functional and intellectual gifts over ecstatic expression.

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A Corinthian *raison d'être*

In the contrast between Paul's preference for order, regulation of knowledge and ritual control, and the ecstatic practices of the Corinthians, we find a striking example of Harvey Whitehouse's contrastive modes of religiosity (Martin 2005: 198-200). The Corinthians show a preference for the imagistic mode in their highly emotive, energetic, dramatic and noisy ecstatic rituals, which circulated around the figure of Christ and the activity of "spirit." Such practices prompted the expression of variegated forms of knowledge and interpretation through glossolalic (or xenoglossic) speech and inspired prophecy, and generated unconventional behaviours in and among men and women (Barclay 1992: 62). All of this was perhaps accompanied by the use of musical instruments (1 Cor 13:1, 14:7), and "facilitated if not induced" by the consumption of wine (Lang 1997: 376).[74] Paul, on the other hand, though he also prizes the activity of the spirit, clearly prefers a more

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[74] Until fairly recently, the ecstatic nature of ritual practice at Corinth was considered "something of an embarrassment," thought the various charismatic movements of the twentieth century have "removed much of the exotic strangeness from the phenomenon of glossolalia" (Dunn 2004: 302). Familiarity, and scholarly attention to the phenomena of religious ecstasy in general, have made the practices at Corinth much more accessible. Modern studies of ecstatic behaviour in general and of glossolalia in particular give us some indication of what was going on at the Corinthian meetings. Wayne Meeks and Bernhard Lang have utilized some of this material in their own studies of the situation at Corinth. Lang summarizes some of the characteristics of ecstatic behaviour, which,

> in its most pronounced form, typically involves: (1) mild body convulsions (jerking of the neck, bending of the trunk and legs); (2) prolonged dancing, usually to music, in what appears to be a semi-stuporous state; and (3) falling to the floor, either with body contractions or remaining still as in a faint. Convulsions, dancing, and fainting may also occur independently, without being linked to the other features. Often tears flow. Sometimes strange words are uttered, incomprehensible to outsiders. During such rituals or at their high points, according to a standard religious interpretation, a supernatural being is felt to be present. (Lang 1997: 368-369)

In addition, he mentions that ecstatic worship can effect "elementary bonds of friendship and sharing," and that "the very performance of ritual promotes group solidarity" (Lang 1997: 370). Based on the work of Felicitas Goodman, Meeks describes key features of glossalic practice: "Glossolalia occurs in a trance that exhibits most fully the loss of conscious control and at the same time extraordinary levels of energy, poured out in involuntary utterances and in rapid or sudden bodily movements, profuse sweating, salivation, and so on. The organs of speech seem to be activated, with enormous power, by something beyond the subject's will" (Meeks 1983: 119). This subjective sense of a "something" at work behind the behaviour is a constant aspect of "ecstatic encounters" generally. I. M. Lewis relates the common assertion that such encounters "have given the mystic a unique claim to direct experiential knowledge of the divine and, where this is acknowledged by others, the authority to act as a privileged channel of communication between man and the supernatural" (Lewis 1989 [1971]: 15). Glossolalia may be largely an individual practice, and "relatively little communication with their fellows is involved," but in a context like that found at Corinth, "where ecstatic prophecy is practiced or where glossolalia is conceived of as containing a message to be translated, attention by the group is forthcoming" (Bourguignon 1976: 57).

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orderly and systematic ritual style, indicative of Whitehouse's doctrinal mode. In his explication of the charismatic gifts, for instance, we "can perceive a certain antagonism between the two main types of ecstatic expression: glossolalia and prophecy" (Lang 1997: 377). Glossolalia, unless made intelligible through interpretation, creates only a "disedifying turbulence" (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 132) and is of little use to building up the group. Paul attempts to "focus their concentration on the speech gift that, because it uses intelligible language, has the greater potential to unify the congregation: prophecy" (Witherington 1995: 275). The building of a community, he argues, occurs "through rational means" (Meeks 1983: 123) since people "can profit from something appealing to reason" (Goulder 2001: 253). In this, Paul makes a "concerted effort to restrict the quantity and simultaneity of such expressive speech and to privilege its interpretation and discernment" (Wire 1990: 126). Indeed, he ends his discussion of the subject by encouraging the Corinthians to "earnestly desire to prophesy" and, though he does not "forbid speaking in tongues," he refrains from doing so only on the condition that "all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:39-40).[75] Far from "fostering independence, freedom, and consensus," Paul "stresses dependence on his model, order and decency, as well as subordination and silence" (Fiorenza 1987: 398), all, purportedly, in the interest of preserving unity among the Christians at Corinth.

In this divergence between the two modes of religiosity exhibited at Corinth we might discern a possible justification for the Corinthian association. It may be the case that "Paul, himself, is straining to understand the phenomenon that he encounters in Corinth" and that he has "misunderstood the practice" (Smith 2004b: 350).[76] Where he takes their regard for ecstasy to be a cause of Corinthian divisiveness, it could have been that "the church's ecstatic celebrations were the

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[75] Accompanied by the threat that if readers do not "recognize" that "what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord," they will themselves "not be recognized" (1 Cor 14:37-38).

[76] Smith makes this observation in support of his proposition that "Paul has taken xenoglossia (the *lalein heterais glossais* of Acts 2:4) to be glossolalia" (2004b: 350), and that the Corinthians (very likely being recent immigrants to Corinth) were, in fact, addressing the spirits of their ancestral dead in their native tongues. This is all part of his greater "experiment in redescription" in which he "suggests that a Christ-myth, as represented by Paul in the course of his intrusion on the Corinthians, would have been uninteresting to some Corinthians, and that a spirit-myth, as they appear to have understood it, might have been interesting to some in that it was 'good to think'" (2004b: 351-352).

peak of its experience" and had "become its sole focus of interest" (Barclay 1992: 70). Their ecstatic practices—despite their apparent disorder, chaos, lack of ethical control and doctrinal consistency—may have been key to their initial interest and continued participation in the Christian community. For it is possible, if not probable, that Paul himself was to blame for such practices at Corinth (Meeks 1983: 121; Lang 1997: 377). Although he does much in 1 Corinthians to constrain their charismatic practices, he does not condemn them outright, and there are signs that such practices were central to Paul's missionary success at Corinth. Of his first dealings with the group he says, "my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4).[77] Later on, to prove that his preference for prophecy does not result from a lack of competence at tongues, he writes, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all" (14:18), indicating that he himself is an experienced glossalalist.

It may be, then, that the earliest meetings revolved around such ecstatic practices as the Corinthians continued to practice. They may have taken "spirit" in their own direction and engaged in practices for which "the mode of revelation was the all-important fact for the Corinthians (not least because it was re-enacted in miraculous ways at each gathering)," and so "the content of the message could be either ignored or reinterpreted" (Barclay 1992: 67). Further, the "'knowledge' provided by the Spirit" seems also to have "provided a sense of immunity and of indifference to apostolic warnings" (Barclay 1992: 62), so that some might not have felt that they needed to "accept and obey such advice without critical evaluation and judgment in terms of their own pneumatic self-understanding" (Fiorenza 1987: 398). Though Paul continued to be a figure of authority and sound judgment for some in the Corinthian community, not all in the group felt it necessary or advantageous to comply with all of the apostle's demands. Their interest in the "spirit" differed from Paul's own.

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[77] Some take this claim as a sort of proof, by which Paul "works from effect to cause" to argue that "the fact that some Corinthians responded to the 'call' which he mediated proved that his words were carried by the power of the spirit'" (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 17; also Witherington 2001: 124). But I see no reason to attribute this power to some sort of private internal inspiration on the part of the Corinthians rather than to the visible public demonstrations of Paul.

Looking back, for instance, to the difficulties surrounding the idol meat issue, we find that the Corinthians, fully accustomed to and satisfied with operating in a polytheistic religious environment, "had accepted the worship of idols as entirely natural" and had found that this position "was confirmed by the moments of ecstasy" (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 116). But we need not also assume that they did so simply because they were being "swept along by the attitudes of the society in which they then lived" (Murphy-O'Connor 1979: 116), as though they should have acted otherwise and had resorted to flimsy rationalizations that would justify their having things both ways. The Corinthians' "own pneumatic understanding" had become "an equal conversation partner with Paul's theological understanding of the cross and resurrection" (MacDonald 2004: 281) in their commitment to creating a community that fit their own interests. They were Christians, but they were also Corinthians and full members of a wider Graeco-Roman society:

> The church is not a cohesive community but a club, whose meetings provide important moments of spiritual insight and exaltation, but do not have global implications of moral or social change. The Corinthians could gladly participate in this church as one segment of their lives. But the segment, however important, is not the whole and not the centre. Their perception of their church and of the significance of their faith could correlate well with a life-style which remained fully integrated in Corinthian society. (Barclay 1992: 71)

In the Corinthians we find, thus, one example among the many local "experiments" of first-century communities attempting to establish the terms, conditions and boundaries of their social reality with reference to the Christ figure (Smith 2004b: 347). If we allow that "participation [in sacrificial polytheism] did not require or produce consensus of belief or common symbolization" (Stowers 1995: 308), we must allow that such a state of affairs would obtain for the Corinthian Christians as much as for their Graeco-Roman neighbours. In the practice of ecstasy they had found something that, while not lending itself to the doctrinal uniformity and cultic exclusivism authorized and advocated by Paul, did provoke intense emotional experience (including the perception of contact with the divine and of personal revealed knowledge) even as it generated a strong sense of communal solidarity and affection. Though they may not have become Christians in accordance with what

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both Paul and many scholarly commentators appear to understand by that term, the Corinthians, conducting their revels with Christ as the honoured guest, must certainly be considered, without qualification, Christians.

Conclusions

By way of conclusion to this study, I recount the words of Edward Gibbon, who articulated in brilliant terms the traditional position on the means and manner of the spread of Christianity through the early centuries:

> Our curiosity is naturally prompted to inquire by what means the Christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth. To this inquiry an obvious but satisfactory answer may be returned; that it was owing to the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself and to the ruling providence of its great Author. But as truth and reason seldom find so favourable a reception in this world, and as the wisdom of Providence frequently condescends to use the passions of the human heart, and the general circumstances of mankind, as instruments to execute its purpose, we may still be permitted, though with becoming submission, to ask, not indeed what were the first, but what were the secondary causes of the rapid growth of the Christian church? (Gibbon 1984 [1776-1788]: 92-93)

For contained within this quotation we find an expression both of the partiality of scholars toward the primacy of doctrine and of the principal strategy adopted by such scholars when the appeal to doctrine and the influence of doctrine fails adequately to account for the actual directions and eventualities of history. The doctrine of "the Christian faith" and its transcendent inspiration, from the start deemed the prime movers of Christianization, are isolated and elevated beyond question, while lesser elements, "the passions of the human heart" and "the general circumstances of mankind," are injected into the formula as supplements to what is essential and primary to the growth of a Christian society. Such approaches, however, fail to do justice to the complexities everywhere involved in the formation of human societies and identities.

Directing our attention to processes of social formation allows an alternative means of imagining the process of Christianization. In the first place it recognizes, however imprecise the term "social formation" may be (Mack 2000: 288), that social

living always entails an array of (sometimes competing, sometimes compatible) *interests* in and for society. Acknowledging this push-and-pull of interests, and the often tenuous relationship between thought and practice that result, social formation theory emphasizes the provisional and experimental nature of the social arrangements in which these interests are negotiated, and directs our attention to the effective consequences of thought and discourse when they are employed in the interests of social change or continuity.

In this, the social formations approach suggests a means to reconcile the often-explicit opposition of church leaders to paganisms of all sorts, and their seeming "accommodation" of those same elements. As Peter Brown suggests, "far from describing a grudging or politic concession to the mindless force of habits formed among the 'common herd,' we have met a group of *impresarios*, taking initiatives, making choices, and, in so doing, coining a public language that would last through western Europe deep into the middle ages" (1981: 48-49). We see them wrestling with the ambiguities of their world, marshalling the materials at hand, drawing their own conclusions, and constructing narratives and arguments for how others should respond. This, in turn, allows us to imagine early Christianities as something other than a combination of distinctly "Christian" ideological and symbolic elements with superstitious, ritualistic "pagan" elements, or as an essentially doctrinal Christianity encrusted with ritualistic pagan survivals.

On the contrary, such ritual practices, rather than being corrosive, corruptive, or even peripheral to the formation of Christian societies, were integral sites for establishing the sentiments of affinity on which Christian societies (such a collection of Christian societies as we are accustomed to thinking of as a single, great Christian society) were built. For when it comes to the formation of actual relationships between actual persons, which is the prerequisite to any social order, the affective responses engendered and engineered between persons are vital to the construction of such relationships. Doctrines, ideologies and myths are, in this sense, cognitive tools put to the service of conceptualizing, arranging, coordinating relationships between persons and groups of persons.

Thus, thinking of Christianization as a process of social formation enables us to account for the growing number of people who simultaneously identified

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themselves with Christianity and with other religious alternatives without minding things that worry modern scholars, that is, notions of intellectual persuasion, cogency or inconsistency, or "reversion" to paganisms. It allows avenues for conceiving of the process of Christianization other than as a process of partial or failed attempts at ideological persuasion, or of "nominal" or "superficial" conversion, by recognizing the broad range of interests that could draw a person to Christianity and providing a basis for understanding its continued appeal, without depending on the success of explicit, ongoing educational strategies. For Christianization is a process of constructing not a concept—"Christianity"—but of communities, that is Christians.

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