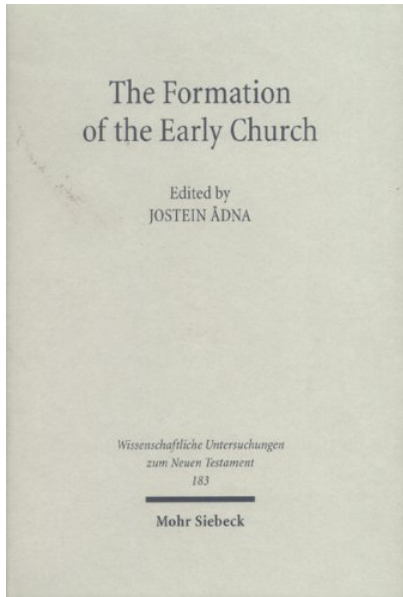


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The Formation of the Early Church

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In this volume papers from a 2003 conference of Scandinavian New Testament scholars are presented. Its main topic is the history of the early church, that is, the period of the later New Testament writings and the second century. The collection is divided into four parts, which deal with the relationship of Jews and Christians, the developments in early Christian communities, the New Testament canon, and matters concerning the second century. A comprehensive set of indices is added.

Three scholars contributed to the first part with rather different papers. Mikael Tellbe presents his thoughts on “The Temple Tax as a Pre-70 Identity Marker” (19–44), taking a stand in the discussion on the New Perspective on Paul. He regards the temple tax as an additional identity marker in Diaspora Judaism, which is surely plausible. I doubt, however, that by delivering one’s part to the local collection for the temple in Jerusalem one not only declared oneself as a Jew but was also “reckoned as one by one’s neighbors” (24). Tellbe obviously thinks that the tax was paid in public, but this is not sure. In his application of the importance of the temple tax for Diaspora Judaism to the discussion of New Testament texts (Matt 17:24–27; Rom 13:1–10; 1 Pet 2:14–17), Tellbe comes to interesting conclusions. (1) The Matthean community did not pay the temple tax because it regarded the cult itself as irrelevant. (2) Paul implied in his exhortation to pay taxes

(Rom 13:6–7) that the temple tax was no longer an obligation for the Jewish Christians in Rome; instead, they should contribute to Paul’s collection for the poor in Jerusalem. “Paul thus establishes the identity of God’s people independent of Jewish boundary markers” (36). (3) Not convincing to me was the way Tellbe handled 1 Pet 2 as part of a pre-70 tradition implicitly abolishing the temple tax. However, on the whole this essay is inspiring for more detailed studies on the topic.

Anders Klostergaard Petersen provides a more theoretical paper dealing with the metaphor of the way(s) in the discussion about the development of Judaism and Christianity in the first and second centuries (45–72), an often-discussed problem. He regards the metaphor as highly problematic because it works with a narrow definition of Judaism. Instead, Petersen thinks, that “all the groups that invoke the Hebrew Bible as authoritative and revelatory Scriptures embody different forms of Judaism” (58). Excluding Gentile Christianity from Judaism works with “an analytic and not an indigenous category” (58). A general separation between Judaism and Christianity did take place before the fifth or sixth century, which can be shown by the struggle of Christian authors with Christians adopting Jewish practices (65–71). So, if one is still inclined to use the “way” metaphor, it must be used with the acknowledgement that there were many ways and many partings during the first centuries and at different places.

In “New Voices in Biblical Exegesis—New Views on the Formation of the Church,” Hanna Stenström tries to show how feminist scholarship can contribute to the issue of the book (73–90). After a short overview of feminist exegesis, which is rather conventional, Stenström shows how the construction of a Christian identity in Rev 14:1–5 has gender-sensitive aspects. The ideal of 144,000 male virgins, which stands behind this text, leads Stenström to the conclusion that the book of Revelation with its negative view on women has no relevance for today’s churches. It would have been interesting to read more about the communities behind the apocalyptic and ascetic traditions of Revelation, but Stenström seems to be satisfied with a negative solution.

The second part of the book focuses on the development of early Christian communities. Jon Ma. Asgeirson gives a fine overview on the discussion about Q, the Gospel of Matthew, and the origins of both (93–122). He points to the circles of scribes and prophets and to voluntary associations as the group paradigms for the communities.

The communication between the communities is discussed in an essay by Reidar Hvalik (123–43) in which he accentuates the unity of the Pauline churches. He even thinks that there was an ecumenical concept and finds it in three elements in the Pauline letters: references to other churches (e.g., Rom 1:8; 1 Thess 1:7–8); references to an ecumenical tradition (1 Cor 4:16–17; 7:17); and the greetings between churches in Paul’s letters (1 Cor

16:19). Hvalik knows that these points could be interpreted in a different way, but he presents his arguments convincingly. There are three points, however, that deserve further consideration: (1) the impact of the Jewish synagogues for the contacts between Christian communities and a corresponding concept; (2) Hvalik also withholds the problems Paul had in establishing or maintaining a unity of his communities; for example, the Pauline collection shows not only a common effort of Christians in the Mediterranean world but also that there was a considerable opposition to it; (3) finally, one must ask if the terminology of an “ecumenical concept” is not an anachronistic one.

In the center of modern ecumenical problems lies Matt 16:17–19, which Hans Kvalbein examines in his essay (145–74). In his view, Peter is portrayed as a foundation not for a group of ministers but for the whole church and its “Priestertum aller Gläubigen.” This is a distinctly Lutheran perspective.

Lone Fatum’s article bears a rather provoking title: “Christ Domesticated: The Household Theology of the Pastorals as Political Strategy” (175–207). The Pastorals “as a politically corrected version of Paul” (178) are interpreted as an attempt to adjust Christianity to the pagan community and its social construction (“assimilation,” 192). Especially the orientation to the household model with its male-centered and patriarchal basis is understood by Fatum as a high price for the institutionalization of Christianity. From a feminist-theological perspective, this view is not new, but Fatum presents it with verve, revealing herself not as a friend of the Pastorals. One might ask if this is not due to a schematism of decline, although it is certainly true that the interpretation of the Pastorals as well as of other New Testament writings contributed to a long history of male dominance in the church.

Discussions about the New Testament canon constitute the third part of the book. Outi Leppä addresses some interesting differences between New Testament writings and tries to reconstruct the groups behind them (211–37). She points especially to purity rules that were abolished by Paul and in the Gospel of Mark and held in great esteem by the authors of Revelation and the Letter of Jude. Leppä even thinks that the Apostolic Decree or a similar tradition stood behind the latter and that Ephesians tried to reconcile these groups. She regards it as possible “that after Paul’s death two opposing streams of Christianity emerged” (237) and that these groups regarded each other as heretics. One might ask why this should have happened only after Paul, but this revival of F. C. Baur seems promising to me.

Antti Marjanen’s essay goes beyond the New Testament times and deals with the impact of Montanism on the formation of the canon (239–63). After a thorough examination of the sources, the author concludes that the anti-Montanist polemic was not as influential

as previously assumed. The high esteem of the Gospel of John, Hebrews, and Revelation in some Montanist circles was less important for the process of canonization than the questions of apostolic origin and the *regula fidei*.

A fine article by Petri Luomanen deals with the “Gospel of the Hebrews” and Eusebius’s knowledge of it (265–81). He thinks that Eusebius did not have a copy of the Gospel but only quotations. Although earlier authors such as Papias knew it, by Eusebius’s time it was no longer available (280). An Egyptian origin or a separate Egyptian “Gospel of the Hebrews” also seems unlikely because of Papias’s much earlier knowledge (compared to Clement or Origen). In later times, Jewish-Christian Gospels were generally dismissed because the four Gospels became standard.

The last part of this collection contains essays that deal mostly with texts outside the New Testament. Reidar Aasgaard presents a summary of his 2004 monograph on Christian siblingship (285–316). He distinguishes three chronological phases. In the first (30–80), sibling language is significant in the letters of Paul and in Q, whereas in Mark it is less prominent. Aasgaard attributes this to the form of the communities these texts were written for. In the second phase (80–120), “three tendencies emerge” (306): in Matthew, Hebrews, James, and 1 John the sibling language is frequently used and explicitly justified. In Luke-Acts and 2 Peter the sibling idea is continued as a tradition but not so intensively, and in the deutero-Pauline Letters and the Gospel of John it is “toned down, since it was felt to contrast with other ideas about the church” (307). During the third phase (120–200), the sibling idea is intensified and “seems to reflect central understandings of what it means to be the ‘church’” (313).

The letters of Ignatius of Antioch are examined in two essays. Mikael Isacson presents an overview of Ignatius’s statements about the position of the bishop and the rhetorical strategy behind them (317–40). After a thorough analysis of the relevant passages from the letters, Isacson concludes that even before Ignatius the monepiscopacy was already established in the communities in Asia Minor as well as in Antioch (336–37).

Matty Myllykoski offers his views on the adversaries in the letters of Ignatius (341–77). After an interesting history of interpretation, which makes the very different views quite clear, Myllykoski concludes that there were two different groups Ignatius opposed: in the letters to Philadelphia and Magnesia proponents of a Judaizing view are fought; in the communities in Ephesus, Tralleis, and Smyrna the heretics had a position that came close to the one of Cerinthus; it was not a docetistic heresy but a separation between the earthly Jesus and the heavenly Christ.

Last but not least is an essay by Odd Magne Bakke presenting an overview of the episcopal ministry according to Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Cyprian (379–408). Whereas Ignatius and Cyprian were very much concerned with the question of the unity of the church, which could in their view only be protected by the bishop “as the guarantor of right doctrine, of the celebration of worship, and of right practice” (407), Irenaeus emphasized the function of the bishop as the one who hands down the apostolic tradition.

Although the topics of these essays seem to span a wide range, from identity markers of early Judaism to the function of the bishop in patristic times, this is a highly recommendable collection. It stimulates one’s appetite for further enquiries about the formation of the early church.