

David W Fletcher, Ohio Valley History Conference, ETSU, Fall 2006

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EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA: A BRIEF EVALUATION OF HIS *ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY*
AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRENT CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN THE U.S.

Early Christian writers echoed little of their founding leader's ambivalence toward the power inherent in the *Pax Romana*: "Give Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's."¹ Conflictive attitudes of the first Christians toward the Roman state reflected an evolving religion in dissimilar circumstances. Christian leaders labored to achieve official sanction for the fledgling sect while at the same time they espoused both ideology and practice that implied radical subversion to the empire's authority structure and civic order.² Accordingly, the imminent threat of persecution prodded the author of the Apocalypse to decry Rome as "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth" who is "drunk from the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."³ But contrarily, the desire to sustain a stable political and social climate compelled the apostle Paul to stress the need for loyalty to the Roman authorities, because they were "servants of God" who readily executed the wrath of God "against the evildoers."⁴ For the seer John, the murderous rage of Rome required a reactionary

¹Richard Lattimore, trans., *The New Testament* (New York, NY: North Point Press, 1996), 97 [Matthew 22:21].

²See Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 137-143.

³Lattimore, *The New Testament*, 556 [Revelation 17:5-6].

⁴*Ibid.*, 351 [Romans 13:1-7]. Compare Clement of Rome who ends his epistle to the church at Corinth with an enjoiner to obey earthly rulers as well as a lengthy prayer on their behalf. Kirsopp Lake, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. I*, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912), 115 [1 Clement 60:4; 61:1-3].

and resistant “state of emergency,” but for Paul, the relative quietude of the *Pax Romana* called for Christian “legitimation to *de facto* political power.”⁵

In his two-volume Gospel and Acts, Luke took this positive approach to the reality of Rome’s powerful authority, when he developed, as argued by some, an apology for officials to exercise proper legal procedures with Christians, especially in the case of Paul.⁶ But this acquiescence of Christians to Roman hegemony did not prevent periodic widespread attempts toward Christian extermination by the state.⁷ A little more than two centuries after Luke, Paul, and the seer John, after many years of bitter enmity between church and state, the situation altered radically when Constantine issued the Edict of Milan (313), a manifesto of toleration and recognition for the Christians.⁸ In this new epoch for the Christian religion, Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea Maritima (ca. 314-340), published his *Ecclesiastical History* that became one of the most important attempts to preserve systematically the traditions of early Christian life and

⁵Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 137.

⁶See A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (1963; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 48-98, 144-171.

⁷See Philip Schaff, “Persecution of Christianity and Christian Martyrdom,” *History of the Christian Church, Vol. II: Ante-Nicene Christianity, A.D. 100-325*, 3rd ed. (1910; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 31-84.

⁸See “Constantine and the End of the Persecution” in J. Stevenson, ed., *A New Eusebius: Documents illustrating the history of the Church to AD 337*, rev. ed. (London, UK: SPCK, 1987), 282-289. The edict was issued by Constantine and Valerius Licinianus Licinius. Constantine ruled the Roman world from about 306 when the army declared him emperor on the occasion of the death of Constantius I, his father. Resistance in the West by Licinius temporarily divided the empire and led to a new outbreak of violence against the Christians until Constantine defeated Licinius (ca. 323).

thought. For this reason, Eusebius has been referred to frequently as “the Father of Church History.”

Ancient Christian tradition preserves little about the early days of Eusebius who was born the year 260 in Palestine perhaps in Caesarea. At an early age, he became a disciple of Pamphilus who was a student of the famous Origen in Alexandria. Pamphilus later directed the catechetical school in Caesarea and increased its sizeable library. During the persecution of Diocletian (ca. 304-314), both Eusebius and Pamphilus suffered imprisonment, and this resulted in martyrdom for Pamphilus but for Eusebius his release to Tyre (ca. 310). While in relative solitude at this coastal refuge, Eusebius completed the unfinished *Defence of Origen*, a work begun earlier by both Pamphilus and Eusebius, and he also composed a *Life of Pamphilus*, a tribute to his martyred mentor. After a brief visit to Egypt, where he again spent some time in prison, Eusebius returned to Palestine and was consecrated Bishop of Caesarea, a position he held until his death (ca. 340).⁹

These early works by Eusebius have been lost, but many other works of Christian apologetics, biblical exegesis, and theological treatises have survived. His *Against Hierocles* (a pagan governor of Bithynia) answered the attack on Christianity by Flavius Philostratus who compared the life of Jesus to Apolonius of Tyana. The *Preparation for the Gospel*, which included many quotes from classical authors, and the *Demonstration for the Gospel* vindicated the Christian faith as a continuation of Hebrew (Jewish) rather than Greek (Hellenistic) heritage.

⁹G. A. Williamson, trans., *Eusebius: The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975), 11-12.

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Following the tradition of Christian apologists like Justin Martyr, Aristides, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, Eusebius developed his christological views in two books against Marcellus of Ancyra and a work on the incarnation of Christ called *The Theophany*. As a biblical exegete, he wrote a work on Old Testament prophecies about the advent of Christ, commentaries on the Psalms and the book of Isaiah that used Origen's allegorical method of interpretation, a tract on difficulties in the synoptic gospels, a topography of Palestine called the *Onomasticon*, and a discourse about the Eucharistic rite of Easter titled *De solemnitate Paschali*.¹⁰

By means of a diverse literary output, the influence of Eusebius was felt and continues to be felt in many theological specialities—the canonization of the scriptures, biblical hermeneutics, textual criticism of the New Testament, study of the synoptic gospels, the Easter or Paschal

¹⁰“Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., eds. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1974), 481. See also Kirsopp Lake, trans., *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History, Vol. I*, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), xiii-xix.

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liturgy, and the great christological controversy of the fourth century.¹¹ But perhaps Eusebius made his greatest contribution not as an apologist, exegete, or theologian but as a practitioner of Hellenistic *biography* in his *Life of Constantine*, Christian *martyriology* in his *Martyrs of Palestine*, world *chronography* in his *Chronological Tables*, and church *history* in his work on *Ecclesiastical History*.¹² Of this latter work, Bruce Metzger notes:

¹¹See, for example, the “Eusebii Epistula ad Carpianum et Canones I-X” in Kurt Aland, et al., eds., *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed. (Stuttgart, Deutschland: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979), 73-78; Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 49, 66, 168; Craig A. Evans, *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 160-161; Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha: Volume One, Gospels and Related Writings*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. M. Wilson (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1963), 120-123; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1987), 201-207; and Bruce M. Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Greek Palaeography* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1981), 42.

¹²Williamson, *Eusebius: History of the Church*, 15-16. For a good treatment of the *Life of Constantine*, consult Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 261-271. On Hellenistic biography and aretology, see Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. I: History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 132-136. It is possible that Eusebius modifies the form of Hellenistic aretology in his *Life of Constantine*.

For a summary of the *Chronological Tables* in its Hellenistic context as well as Hellenistic chronography in general, see Hans Conzelmann, *Gentiles, Jews, Christians: Polemics and Apologetics in the Greco-Roman Era*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 51-55, 144-148. No doubt, this genre seems to be a feature of Greek rather than Latin historians. See Oswyn Murray, “Greek Historians,” *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, eds. John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, Oswyn Murray (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 191-192. On the importance of Eusebius’ work in fixing Seleucid chronology, see Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C. - A.D. 135)*, Vol. I, eds. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, Martin Goodman (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 126-128.

Although Eusebius leaves much to be desired as an exegete or an apologist for Christianity, he had, on the other hand, one quality that was lacking in all his predecessors as well as in all his contemporaries—the instinct for historical research. In the congenial setting offered by a well-stocked library in Caesarea, as well as visiting the Christian library at Jerusalem, founded in the previous century by Bishop Alexander . . . Eusebius indulged his appetite for Christian antiquities, and began the task of collecting and organizing material covering the history of the Church, chiefly in the East, during the preceding three centuries.¹³

To a certain degree, Eusebius followed the Hellenistic conventions that were observed by writers of Roman history (such as Polybius, Diodorus Siculus, Dionysius of Halicarnasus, Arrian, and Dio Cassius), but he used as his primary models the biblical narrative of Luke-Acts and the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.¹⁴ In ten books that span the time of Jesus to the time of

¹³Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament*, 201-202. However, for a more favorable view of Eusebius as apologist, see Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 164-188.

¹⁴On Hellenistic historiography, see Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. I*, 128-132. On the various forms of Hellenistic literature, see Robert H. Pfeiffer, *History of New Testament Times with an Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1949), 101-110.

Many New Testament scholars minimize the significance of Eusebius in that he borrowed from the genre of Luke-Acts. “From Christianity’s beginnings until ca. A.D. 325, when Eusebius of Caesarea supposedly created the ‘new’ genre of church history (*Church History* 1.1.30), no literary work had appeared that attempted to narrate the origins and development of early Christianity, with the exception of Luke-Acts. Eusebius’ main achievements, besides rectifying some of Luke’s omissions (*Church History* 2), were to emphasize the purity of the church until the time of Trajan (A.D. 98-117), when various heresies began to emerge with the absence of the apostles (*Church History* 3.32.7-8), and to extend Christian history down to his own day. Luke, rather than Eusebius, should be credited with creating the ‘new’ genre of church history. His achievement is remarkable in view of the early date of his work (ca. A.D. 90) and the long period that elapsed before he found an imitator and continuator in Eusebius.” David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, Library of Early Christianity, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1987), 139. But Aune with this rather emphatic assertion fails to take into consideration each author’s distinct rationale for writing as well as his milieu.

Constantine, Eusebius surveyed the apostolic succession, the church's heretics, calamities suffered by the Jews, and the church's persecutors with a special emphasis on martyrdom.¹⁵

Like a good classical historian, Eusebius sets his parameters and tells his purpose at the beginning. He notes his limitations: "I confess that my powers are inadequate to do full justice to so ambitious an undertaking." He plays down his resources: "I am the first to venture on such a project . . . a lonely and untrodden path . . . I have failed to find any clear footprints of those who have gone this way before me." He clarifies his method: "I have picked out whatever seems relevant to the task I have undertaken, plucking like flowers in literary pastures the helpful contributions of earlier writers, to be embodied in the continuous narrative I have in mind." For Eusebius, his work is novel, and this is his rationale for writing: "It is most necessary that I should devote myself to this project, for as far as I am aware no previous church historian has been interested in records of this kind."¹⁶ To the modern reader, these claims may seem little more than a haphazard approach with self-effacement, overstatement, and a lack of critical

¹⁵For details on primary and secondary manuscripts, printed Greek texts, and a thorough evaluation of the plan and sources of the first five books, see Lake, *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History, Vol. I*, xxvii-lvi.

¹⁶Williamson, *Eusebius: History of the Church*, 32.

judgment. But Eusebius is true to his Hellenistic genre, since he writes not just as historian but as adviser and courtier to the emperor.¹⁷

Eusebius writes out of his devotion to the church with fervent zeal against those who injured his fellow believers. His perspective is that of an experienced sufferer rather than a dispassionate observer. Most naturally, Eusebius defends “the faith” against anti-Christian attack in his defense of Christian dogma and the recent victory of God’s people. Jesus was not man only, a created being (a reflection of the Arian controversy). “By his devotees throughout the world . . . he is adored as God.” Christianity is not a new and strange religion; it is the fulfillment and continuation of the religion of the Jewish patriarchs (an important affirmation of historic continuity in light of the emphasis in Greek and Roman religion on ancient roots). Eusebius affirms, “Although we certainly are a youthful people and this undeniably new name of Christian has only lately become known among all nations, nevertheless our life and mode of conduct, together with our religious principles, have not been recently invented by us, but from almost the beginnings of man were built on the natural concepts of those whom God loved in the distant past.”¹⁸

¹⁷Michael J. Hollerich, “Religion and Politics in the Writings of Eusebius: Reassessing the First ‘Court Theologian,’” *Church History* 59 (September 1990): 311, 317, plays down the role of Eusebius as courtier to the emperor. He argues that “the conventional image of Eusebius has overestimated the priority of politics in his life and writings” and proposes that “a defect of older scholarship is its insufficient attention to Eusebius’s interpretation of the Bible.”

¹⁸Williamson, *Eusebius: History of the Church*, 45, 46.

The enemies of the church, such as the Jews, appropriately experience tremendous calamity “in consequence of their crimes against Christ.” When Jerusalem is ravaged by the Romans, this is “divine justice,” “the judgment of God,” and “God’s vengeance” upon them. “Such was the reward of the Jews’ iniquitous and wicked treatment of God’s Christ.”¹⁹ Apostates (especially in times of martyrdom) suffer ill fate for their renouncing of Christ, and they are “punished twice as much as the rest.”²⁰ In times of disease and suffering, the pagans suffer additional misery because of their cruelty and selfishness. By way of contrast, Eusebius notes the love and helpfulness of the Christians: “It is impossible to enumerate the gifts which throughout the world the church . . . every day puts to effectual use for the benefit of the heathen.”²¹ Roman authorities deprive themselves of needful supplications on their behalf by banishing and persecuting the Christians. The ill-fated death of the warlike Aurelian (ca. 275)—“divine justice struck” as he planned to renew persecution against the Christians—was “clear proof for all to see that it would never be easy for the rulers of this world to resist the churches of Christ, unless the protecting hand, as a divine and heavenly judgment to chasten and reform us, should at times of its own choosing allow this to be done.”²² For Eusebius, God and the Christians will conquer all opposition.

¹⁹Ibid., 79-82, 111-117.

²⁰Ibid., 199.

²¹Ibid., 210, 305-306.

²²Ibid., 319.

This is illustrated no better than in Eusebius' treatment of events contemporary to himself (in books 8, 9, and 10). Persecution of Christians by Maximian is met by famine, pestilence, and war: "The divine justice followed hard on his heels with its unsleeping detestation of evil in the wicked." Changes for the better in the Christians' condition indicate that "God, the great and heavenly defender of Christians, had by such means displayed his wrath as a warning to all men in return for the cruel wrongs they had done to us." Such changes also made "it plain to all that God himself had been watching over us throughout." Constantine, who with his God-given might is proclaimed absolute ruler by the legions, defeats Maxentius and Maximian. Maximian, who is "deprived of God's assistance," receives his just reward: "He was struck all at once by God's scourge." By their decree, Constantine and Licinius, who show "high purpose and love of God," favor the Christians. Eusebius rejoices because the peace promised to God's people in scripture "has been clearly fulfilled in my own time."²³

Eusebius perceived rightly that he stood in a unique position—a favored position between an old world order and a new world order for the church in its relationship to the state. The church that was the enemy became a friend to the emperors, and Eusebius fully exploited his important place as an ecclesiastical link between an era of antagonistic versus an era of amiable church-state relations. This rested in no small measure on the fact that Emperor Constantine highly favored Bishop Eusebius.

They had first become acquainted when as a youth of eighteen Constantine had been invited to assume the imperial purple: from then until death parted them the bishop

²³Ibid., 347, 362, 367-370, 374, 379-381.

enjoyed the emperor's confidence and protection. . . . Eusebius led the central group at the Council of Nicaea, over which the emperor himself presided in 325. . . . [He was] a leading figure at the Synod of Jerusalem (held in 335), [and] at Constantinople a year later Eusebius was called on to deliver a panegyric on the emperor who had built this new capital of the Empire, and whom he so profoundly admired. The admiration was mutual; for Constantine had called on him to deliver the opening address at Nicaea, and six years later, declaring that he was fitted to become bishop of the whole world, he had desired to translate him from Caesarea to the much more important see of Antioch, an offer which Eusebius was humble enough to decline. Moreover, it was to Eusebius that Constantine had confided the story of the heavenly vision which had inspired him to throw off his habitual caution and take the dangerous step from which there was no turning back.²⁴

Eusebius had only praise for his imperial benefactor, as he referred to Constantine in quite laudatory terms—"a powerful herald of God," "a pious emperor," and "the divinely favored emperor."²⁵ Eusebius recognized in Constantine the beginning of a new era—"a new and fresh era of existence had begun to appear, and a light heretofore unknown suddenly [brought forth the church] to the dawn from the midst of darkness on the human race."²⁶ Eusebius certainly played the part of court favorite and the role of what one author dubbed "the first of a long succession of ecclesiastical politicians to pass across the European stage."²⁷ But Eusebius worked from a

²⁴Ibid., 12-13.

²⁵*Life of Constantine* (2:61; 2:73; 3:1), quoted in Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988), 111. For a treatment of Eusebius' application of sacerdotal terminology to the official position of Constantine, see Claudia Rapp, "Imperial Ideology in the Making: Eusebius of Caesarea on Constantine as 'Bishop,'" *The Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (October 1998): 685-695.

²⁶*Life of Constantine* (3:1), quoted in McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, 112.

²⁷Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (1939; reprint, London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1957), 183.

perspective that transcended his own personal goals and interests, and he correctly perceived something more universal.

To Eusebius the glorious and unexpected triumph of the Church constituted decisive evidence of the *operatio Dei*, the hand of God in human history. . . . The triumphs, which everywhere attended the standard of the cross, gave promise of a day when the Christian sovereign should hold dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

. . . What Eusebius looked for in the age of Constantine was nothing less than a realization of the secular hope of men, the dream of universal and perpetual peace which classical Rome had made her own, but of which the *Pax Romana* was merely a faint and imperfect anticipation; and it is important to note the grounds of his conviction. These lie in the fact that Christianity provides a basis, hitherto lacking, for human solidarity. With something less than justice to the syncretistic movements of the Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman world, Eusebius ascribes the persistence of competition among peoples to their belief in the existence of national and local deities which serve as focal points for particularist ideals. But, through the revelation in Christ of the one true God, creator and preserver of all mankind, the many deities of paganism are overthrown and the supremacy of Jehovah is proclaimed to all, both rude and civilized, to the ends of the habitable earth.²⁸

²⁸Ibid., 184-185.

While prone to exaggerate,²⁹ Eusebius reworked his historical data according to beliefs cherished and popularized by several previous Christian writers.³⁰ To Eusebius' credit, he consistently applied these tenets, his "characteristics of Christian historiography,"³¹ to an anticipated and persistent new world order ushered in by Constantine.³² This providential turn of the state to favor Christians, explained by Eusebius according to the circumstances of his own day, greatly appealed to later generations of Christian interpreters. Eusebius thus influenced

²⁹Often the prejudice of Eusebius warps his sense of history. Apart from his almost deification of Constantine, he exaggerates heathen respect for the Christian faith, overstates the benefits of martyrdom, and inflates the growth of the church. According to the good bishop, "Opponents of Christianity are quite unscrupulous," but not as unscrupulous sometimes as Eusebius himself. See Williamson, *Eusebius: History of the Church*, 154, 158, 165, 259, 351, 358, 367.

³⁰Eusebius apparently revised and expanded his *Ecclesiastical History* over the course of about twenty years between 305 and 325. In this way he was able to align his work with the "political correctness" of the day, for example, he "deleted or rewrote every passage where earlier he had named the defeated and discredited Licinius as a champion of religion and virtue." See Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 148-150, and "Editions of the Church History," in Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1980), 10-21. See also Andrew Louth, "The Date of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (April 1990): 111-123.

For a provocative approach that highlights Eusebius' personal evolution during this editorial process, see "From Youthful Defender of Religious Liberty to Spokesman for the Constantinian Imperial Church" in Glenn F. Chestnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius*, 2nd ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 111-140.

³¹See the development in R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 49-52. He notes, "Any history written on Christian principles will be of necessity universal, providential, apocalyptic, and periodized." For a discussion of Eusebius' conceptualization of time based on "nonlinear" or "circular" elements, see John C. English, "Nonlinear Elements in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*," *Social Science* 49 (Winter 1974): 3-10.

³²See "The New Monarchy" in Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 245-260.

specific areas of concern for medieval apologetics³³—the relationship between Christians and Jews in society, the problem of anti-Semitism, caesaropapism, the divine right of rulers—and the *Weltanschauung* or world view of Byzantine and Medieval cultures.³⁴

³³Like many interpreters who approach Eusebius from a theological perspective, J. Rebecca Lyman subordinates his historical sense to his role as a Christian apologist. See her *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius*, Oxford Theological Monographs, eds., J. Day, et al. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1993), 83-90. R. W. Burgess, “The Dates and Editions of Eusebius’ ‘Chronici Canones’ and ‘Historia Ecclesiastica,’” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 48 (October 1997): 16, concurs that Eusebius’ main objective is to defend Christianity, but he also notes the important pivotal role that Eusebius plays in the development of Christian historiography. He summarizes: “That some of Eusebius’ methods and conclusions should prove him to be more than a mere apologist, but a scholar and historian unique to his age, in no way diminishes [his] apologetic purpose . . . or the fact that [he] saw history and chronology chiefly as weapons for defending the faith during and after the Great Persecution. The difficulty in interpretation arises from the fact that Eusebius is the watershed between the strictly apologetic chronography of the past and the more scholarly and providentialist history of the future that he himself helped to usher in.”

Some interpreters see this priority for apologetics as detrimental to Eusebius’ veracity. Robert M. Grant, “Eusebius and His Church History,” *Understanding the Sacred Text: Essays in honor of Morton S. Enslin on the Hebrew Bible and Christian Beginnings*, ed. John Reumann (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1972), 235, 241, claims that critics of the historical reliability of Eusebius have not gone far enough. “It seems highly probable,” he remarks, “that under the influence of his apologetic purposes Eusebius suppressed, neglected, or falsified a good deal of the historical information available to him. Sometimes he made mistakes which can be explained as due to simple ignorance. There are key points, however, in regard to which a pattern or a group of patterns emerges and suggests that what looked like ignorance is due to intention.” Grant boldly accuses Eusebius of fiction writing on two counts: his picture of early Christian apocalyptic eschatology and his portrayal of the Antonine emperors and their interaction with Christianity.

³⁴For a good summary on this cultural transformation, see D. Brendan Nagle, *The Ancient World: A Social and Cultural History*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 397-424. Chestnut, *The First Christian Historians*, 253, highlights the work of Eusebius and others toward a tradition and theology of Christian history in the medieval and early modern periods. He states, “In the Byzantine world their influence was direct, in Western Europe their histories and the products of their research were made known through the translations and adaptations of Rufinus, Jerome, and Cassiodorus.” Ake Bergvall, “Between Eusebius and

Because of this widespread influence, Eusebius, even though his historical writings remained primarily within the limits of church doctrine, provided one possible solution to a couple of thorny, yet very pragmatic, historical questions. First, how should a major world religion be treated by ruling authorities? Second, how closely should a major world religion be aligned with the ruling authorities?

For Bishop Eusebius, who suffered severe persecution himself by the Roman state, the answer was clear as long as the world religion was Christianity. Eusebius snubbed the view elaborated by the seer John in his message of encouragement to early Christian martyrs: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall be king forever and ever.”³⁵ Rather than complete assimilation of state by church and thereby a radical disintegration of the empire, the Romans, thought Eusebius, should favor the church with as full an alignment of state and church as possible. This was the direction Constantine moved in

Augustine: Una and the Cult of Elizabeth,” *English Literary Renaissance* 27 (Winter 1997): 3-30, traces the influence of Eusebius on Christian imperialism in the East and contrasts this with the influence of Augustine in the West, especially as regards the implications for the cult of Queen Elizabeth I of England.

Kenneth G. Holum and Robert L. Hohlfelder, eds., *King Herod’s Dream: Caesarea on the Sea* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1988), 164, argue that the use of the term “Byzantine” for 324 to 640 C.E. is misleading, since it evokes ideas of “cultural impoverishment, religious intolerance, declining city life, and the collapse of frontier defenses before the onslaught of foreign barbarians—developments that brought a precipitous end to ancient Mediterranean civilization.” They blame this “conventional wisdom” on British historian Edward Gibbon and the Russian historian Michael Rostovtzeff. They assert that the Byzantines referred to themselves as Romans until the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 and that urbanized areas like Caesarea flourished rather than declined throughout the period in question.

³⁵Lattimore, *The New Testament*, 547 [Revelation 11:15]. See Grant, “Eusebius and His Church History” in Reumann, *Understanding the Sacred Text*, 236-237.

his remaining years as emperor, and the effects were dramatic and revolutionary for the classical world.³⁶

By way of comparison, I would like to suggest possible implications for church-state relations in the United States today. Eusebius wrote from the perspective of the church. The church experienced a shift from being persecuted to being favored. The church benefitted from the advantages of legitimacy (i.e., a legal religion). The church exploited this situation. And in this favored status the church supported the state's objectives and methods. In some instances, the church had enough power to control the state's mechanisms for its own goals.

Obviously, the situation in the United States is not exactly parallel. In many ways, it is impossible to compare the two. Europeans brought state/church Christianity with them when they settled the North American continent and pushed aside the non-Christian natives. But a

³⁶McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, 110-114, notes that Diocletian, prior to Constantine, tried to bring about religious harmony and conformity in pagan ritual in the empire. Constantine merely transferred this habitual trait of Roman society to the church with the effect being a "Christianizing" of the Roman empire. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 275, concurs: "From the days of his youth Constantine had probably been sympathetic to Christianity, and in 312 he experienced a religious conversion which profoundly affected his conception of himself. After 312 Constantine considered that his main duty as emperor was to inculcate virtue in his subjects and to persuade them to worship God. Constantine's character is not wholly enigmatic; with all his faults and despite an intense personal ambition for personal power, he nevertheless believed sincerely that God had given him a special mission to convert the Roman Empire to Christianity." See also "The Conflict of Religions and the Triumph of Christianity" in Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, eds., *Roman Civilization, Sourcebook II: The Empire* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1966), 552-610.

This process of "Christianization" that Constantine began in earnest suggests one possible answer to a disputed and problematic historical query about the causes of the collapse of the Roman empire. See the brief treatment of Gibbon's classic work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and alternative theses in Arther Ferrill, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: The Military Explanation* (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 13-22.

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dramatic shift took place during and after the American Revolution. From this experience, we have a revered tradition of state/church separation. It is written in our Constitution, and it developed over time by a process of disestablishment. But “separation” came in stages; there was resistance; and it was uneven. As a result, we live in this country, or state, in a context of religious pluralism as well as a context of politico-religious pluralism.

Note the comments of Walter Russell Mead, Senior Fellow for U.S. Foreign Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*. He writes:

Religion has always been a major force in U.S. politics, policy, identity, and culture. Religion shapes the nation’s character, helps form Americans’ ideas about the world, and influences the ways Americans respond to events beyond their borders. Religion explains both Americans’ sense of themselves as a chosen people and their belief that they have a duty to spread their values throughout the world. Of course, not all Americans believe such things—and those who do often bitterly disagree over exactly what they mean. But enough believe them that the ideas exercise profound influence over the country’s behavior abroad and at home.³⁷

Mead goes on to suggest, “The balance of power among the different religious strands shifts over time; in the last generation, this balance has shifted significantly.”³⁸

I would propose that—with the empowerment of “conservative” Republicans, resurrection of a neo-conservative or even a neo-imperial agenda, and promotion of faith-based initiatives at the turn of the new century—a movement toward “merging” or “confusion” of state/church ambitions occurred, not unlike that described by Eusebius during the reign of Constantine. This

³⁷Walter Russell Mead, “God’s Country?” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 5 (September/October 2006): 24.

³⁸*Ibid.*

“re-establishment” of state interest in the church and visa versa should be seen against the broader backdrop of the demise of fundamentalism, beginning in the late 1920s, and the rise of secularism in the postmodern world. The pattern is clear. From the perspective of the conservative “Church,” what was gained during the politico-religious establishment years of Ronald Reagan was lost during the politico-religious disestablishment years of Bill Clinton. The backlash, or politico-religious reestablishment, came with the “election” of “conservatives” to power. Just as for Eusebius, this was for conservatives a shift from being persecuted (i.e., under Clinton) to being favored (i.e., under Bush). This favored position carried with it advantages of legitimacy whereby “conservatives” have exploited the situation. And the conservative “Church” zealously supports the state’s objectives and methods. This neo-entanglement of state and church, in my mind, seems very dangerous.

Robert Higgs highlights this current problematic trend when he says:

In public statements, President George W. Bush has often avowed his personal religious faith, and from the very beginning of his administration he has sought to draw churches and other religious organizations into the orbit of the government’s provision of goods and services—thus, the so-called faith-based initiatives. . . . Although the president has yet to announce formally that his foreign policy also relies heavily on faith, this reality has become increasingly clear. . . . In the administration’s “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” his introduction uses “religious metaphor” and calls his foreign policy “this great mission.”³⁹

This close alignment of deity or God with American values seems problematic. From a biblical perspective, God is sovereign over all the nations and not just the United States. Conversely,

³⁹Robert Higgs, *Resurgence of the Warfare State: The Crisis Since 9/11* (Oakland, CA: Independent Institute, 2005), 103.

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from our state's viewpoint it appears that "to spread American values [is] to be on the side of God [and] to resist them [is] to oppose God."⁴⁰ This apparent acceptance of a clash of civilizations and of wars to promote moral truth sounds very much like crusade or jihad than the rational foreign policy of a modern nation. The remarks of the President on the first anniversary of 9/11 illustrate well this exclusive, religious ideology.

Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom—the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time—now depends on us. . . . The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.⁴¹

I would suggest that the strict dichotomy—"God is not neutral between them"—that depends on invoking deity for its legitimation is a dangerous trend for both state and church. The tendency of the church toward corruption when aligned with "powers that be" supports the view that Eusebius' solution, and the current trend in the United States, is not the best one. Maybe the best attitude for ruling authorities to take toward a major world religion comes from the ambivalence about state/church relations embraced by the founder of Christianity: Give Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's.

⁴⁰Claes G. Ryn, *America the Virtuous* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003), 352.

⁴¹George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," September 20, 2001, see <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/> (assessed July 15, 2010).

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