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**Religion and Competition
in Antiquity**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.	
<i>David Engels / Peter Van Nuffelen</i>	7
1. Religion and Competition in Antiquity. An Introduction.	
<i>David Engels / Peter Van Nuffelen</i>	9
2. Religious Rivalry in Seleucid Babylonia. Marduk of Babylon versus Anu of Uruk.	
<i>Tom Boiy</i>	45
3. Oracles and Oracle-Sellers. An Ancient Market in Futures.	
<i>Esther Eidinow</i>	55
4. Liberty versus Religious Tradition. Some ‘Impious’ Thinkers in Ancient Greece.	
<i>Aikaterini Lefka</i>	96
5. <i>Etrusca disciplina</i> and Roman Religion. From Initial Hesitation to a Privileged Place.	
<i>Dominique Briquel</i>	112
6. Cohabitation or Competition in Ostia under the Empire?	
<i>Françoise Van Haepere</i> n	133
7. The End of Open Competition? Religious Disputations in Late Antiquity.	
<i>Peter Van Nuffelen</i>	149
8. Competing Coenobites. Food and Drink in the Lives of Theodoretus of Cyrrhus.	
<i>Veit Rosenberger</i>	173
9. A Time for Prayer and a Time for Pleasure. Christianity’s Struggle with the Secular World.	
<i>Ine Jacobs</i>	192

TABLE OF CONTENTS

10. The Conquest of the Past. Christian Attitudes towards Civic History. <i>Aude Busine</i>	220
11. Historising Religion between Spiritual Continuity and Friendly Takeover. Salvation History and Religious Competition during the First Millenium AD. <i>David Engels</i>	237
12. Oriental Religions and the Conversion of the Roman Empire. The Views of Ernest Renan and of Franz Cumont on the Transition from Traditional Paganism to Christianity. <i>Danny Praet</i>	285

11. Historising Religion between Spiritual Continuity and Friendly Takeover. Salvation History and Religious Competition during the First Millenium AD

David Engels

For the Lord made known to us through the prophets things past and things present and has given us the firstfruits of the taste of things to come.

Epistle of Barnabas 1.7

1. Introduction

Classical scholarship has devoted much attention to the religious ideas of Antiquity. An older generation of scholars such as Warde-Fowler, Wissowa, Dumézil and Latte¹ studied the different layers of tradition and historical evolution in order to reconstruct a hypothetical ‘original’ form of Greek or Roman religion and cult and interpreted all subsequent evolutions as animated by decline or deformation. Recent research, represented by Beard, North, Cancik, Scheid, Rüpke² and many others has focused on long-term continuities and on the dynamics of syncretism. This is an understandable backlash which, however, may risk to overshoot the mark, as it tends to interpret archaic and classical religion – after the fashion of a *uaticinium ex euentu* – from the perspective of the Roman imperial ‘Reichsreligion’ and of late antique syncretism.³ At any rate, each attempt to acquire a deeper understanding of pagan religions has to consider the relationship between paganism and monotheism, and this for two essential reasons. First, the monotheistic approach to religion has deeply shaped our own, occidental world view, so that in order to access the religious sentiments of paganism one has to overcome one’s own viewpoint. As a consequence, we can never fully succeed in this respect.

¹ WARDE-FOWLER (1911), WISSOWA (1912), DUMÉZIL (1958), LATTE (1960).

² CANCEK / RÜPKE (1997), BEARD / NORTH / PRICE (1998), SCHEID (2001).

³ Cf. now for a critical evaluation of this school of thought ENGELS (2013a), 112-126.

Second, much of our source material derives from the late antique religious dialogues (or disputes) between pagans and Christians, who, moreover, are scarcely representative for the pre-Christian situation. Indeed, even authors such as Cicero, Dionysius and Livy declared that the religion of their age was very different from ancestral *religio*.

Given this particular interest in the religious situation of late Antiquity as inevitable key to our understanding of ancient religions, the missionary competition between the different faiths of this period has found abundant treatment, and so has the discussion of how these religions tried to propose a coherent theological view on history. Nevertheless, the interest in this issue has mostly been confined to one religion or a particular author. It has not yet been systematically shown, first, to what extent the interreligious competition of the first millennium AD and the establishment of competing histories of salvation were closely interrelated, and, second, that the construction of a coherent and all-embracing theological history (incorporating older, competing views, but giving them a new sense) was not only an intellectual challenge, but also a most important and useful tool in religious advertisement. Thus, I shall argue in this paper that the historicising of religion was not restricted to mere internal theological reflections, but always addressed possible converts and religious opponents and thus played a key role in the tension between spiritual continuity and religious 'friendly takeover'. Hence, the specific quality of one religion's history of salvation constituted a central and indispensable missionary argument in the definition of the truth of one's own faith and in the criticism of one's opponent's point of view. Accordingly, I shall attempt to sketch the broad outlines of this 'history of religious history' by presenting and discussing some selected passages from representative authors so as to demonstrate the effects of the formation of salvation history on the self-definition of each new religion. Moreover, I shall show that they occupied a central place in the missionary strategies of some of the most important late antique and early medieval Mediterranean religions, from Paganism and Judaism through Christianity, Manichaeism and Sunnite Islam up to Ismā'īlīsm.

2. Salvation histories and the power of the 'Altersbeweis'

It is tempting to consider, at least from a Jewish or Christian point of view, polytheistic cults as mainly a-historical or at least devoid of any specific theological perspective on history. It remains true that the pre-Hellenistic religious beliefs of the Greeks and Romans were essentially timeless or generally did not refer to a religious time beyond the notion of history in a

narrower sense.⁴ Indeed, the main theological moments of the world as expressed in classical cosmogony, theogony, mythology and aetiology, were located in a mythical, pre-historical age, and even if historians since Herodotus and the Atthidographers tried to connect these bygone times with the historical present through lengthy genealogies, it cannot be dismissed that the gods' past activities were perceived as having happened mainly beyond the personal, biographical horizon of the faithful. This can be clearly contrasted with the very historical contextualisation of the diverse monotheistic prophets. Of course, the annals of the diverse city-states were full of accounts of more or less wondrous events, prodigies or epiphanies happening even in historical times. Notwithstanding this, it can rightly be doubted if the ancients had the same belief in these 'historical' religious events as they had in their traditional mythology:⁵ few will have questioned, at least officially, the possibility of the gods to father heroes in ancient times,⁶ but who will seriously have believed that Scipio was fathered by Jupiter Capitolinus, and Seleucus by Apollo?⁷ Moreover, whereas the beginning of the world and the gods' adventures seemed to have happened in a distant mythological past, the world's future did not seem, to the ancients' mind, theologically predetermined and historically imminent (if we except the Etruscan belief in the *saeculae*).⁸ Thus, the immediate historical past, present and future had no specific teleological value, at least in traditional pagan religiosity, and even the few instances where the godly and the historical spheres seem to have interacted were reduced to the gods' rather indirect influence through miracles, divination and the gracious fulfilment of vows – three domains that generally pertain to private individuals and single *poleis*, but largely without supraregional or even oikoumene-wide importance.

The only exceptions to these statements were, on the one hand, the Hellenistic ruler cult, which may be considered more as a token of colonial loyalty in an Oriental context than as a deep religious feeling⁹ and can thus be

⁴ Concerning the problem of 'time' in pagan culture cf. the studies presented in BOL (2003) or in L'AVENIR (1987); see also GARCÍA NOVO (2002), KRAVARITROU (2004), WIDZISZ (2005).

⁵ The issue is a notoriously difficult one, and the best answer hitherto has been given by VEYNE (1983).

⁶ Compare e.g. the very telling *Datur haec uenia antiquitati ut miscendo humana diuinis primordia urbium augustiora faciat* from Livy's *praefatio*, or the even more interesting assertions from Duris of Samos quoted in ATHENAEUS 6.253. (*FHG* II 476; *PL* III 674 B 4).

⁷ Cf. ENGELS (2010a).

⁸ Concerning the *saecula* (main source: Cens. 17) cf. THULIN (1909), 63-75, HALL (1986), BRIQUEL (1990), ENGELS (2008), 407-413.

⁹ FUNCK (1991), VAN NUFFELEN (2004). Concerning the Roman ruler-cult cf. also ENGELS (2010b).

neglected here, and, on the other hand, the Romans' deep conviction that their astonishing expansion and long-lasting hegemony were rewards for their extraordinary *pietas*¹⁰ as *religiosissimi mortales*.¹¹ Evidence for the belief that Rome's political evolution was divinely ordained is, however, scarce before the Augustan age and poets such as Virgil and Silius Italicus, and resembles more wishful thinking than firm belief: in fact, our sources illustrate the contemporaries' constant fear of the dire consequences a possible breach of the *pax deorum* might provoke,¹² and even the civil wars appear as an immediate result of human *impietas* and hence proof of the gods' impartiality¹³ and Rome's vulnerability. It might thus be claimed that, at least in pre-Augustan time, the material omnipresence and conceptual diversity of the divine in classical religion was the very obstacle to a construction of a universally valid, teleological and theological view of history, presenting historical past, present and future as necessary and preordained steps.¹⁴

This tendency was enhanced by classical Antiquity's nearly pathological suspicion of anything 'novel' and not legitimated by the *patrios nomos* and the *mos maiorum*.¹⁵ Thus, even those who wanted to introduce religious reforms or advertise specific cults took care not to stress their novelty or modernity, but, to the contrary, tended to underline their (often fictitious) old age and venerability, following the maxim *ne quid novi fiat contra exempla atque instituta maiorum*,¹⁶ base of the famous 'Altersbeweis' (argument from antiquity) which amplified still the tendency of interpreting cult and religion as grounded in an immemorial and morally superior past age.¹⁷ This is shown for instance in the history concerning the books of Numa,¹⁸ one of the most curious examples of an obviously conscious attempt of enforcing religious reforms inspired by Neo-Pythagoreanism through the fiction of a 'restauration' of past customs going back to the period of the mythical kings. The most complete version is conserved in Livy and based on the annalist Valerius Antias:

During this year while labourers were digging at some depth on land belonging to L. Petilius, a scrivener who lived at the foot of the Janiculum, two stone chests were discovered about eight feet long and four wide, the lids being fastened down

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. CIC., *Rep.* 2.9-10; *Har.* 19; *Nat. deor.* 2.8; MIN. FEL. 6.2-3.

¹¹ SALL., *Cat.* 12.3.

¹² For the *pax deorum*, cf. SORDI (1985), ENGELS (2008), 15f.

¹³ For civil wars as results of impiety, see the numerous examples in ENGELS (2008).

¹⁴ Cf. aussi ENGELS (2013b).

¹⁵ For an introduction to the *mos maiorum*, cf. e.g. HÖLKESKAMP (1996).

¹⁶ CIC., *Imp. Cn. Pomp.* 60.

¹⁷ Concerning the pagan roots of the 'Altersbeweis', cf. PILHOFER 1990, 17-142 and GNILKA (2005).

¹⁸ DELATTE (1936), HERRMANN (1946), PENA (1979), WILLI (1998) and the commentary in *FRH* 15 F 9-10.

with lead. Each bore an inscription in Latin and Greek; one stating that Numa Pompilius, son of Pompo and king of the Romans, was buried there, and the other saying that it contained his books. When the owner at the suggestion of his friends had opened them, the one which bore the inscription of the buried king was found to be empty, with no vestige of a human body or of anything else, so completely had everything disappeared after such a lapse of time. In the other there were two bundles tied round with cords steeped in wax, each containing seven books, not only intact but to all appearance new. There were seven in Latin on pontifical law, and seven in Greek dealing with the study of philosophy so far as was possible in that age. Valerius Antias says further that they were Pythagorean books, thus shaping his belief to the common opinion that Numa was a disciple of Pythagoras, and trying to give probability to a fiction. The books were first examined by the friends who were present. As the number of those who read them grew, and they became widely known, Q. Petilius, the City praetor, was anxious to read them and took them from Lucius. They were on very friendly terms; when Q. Petilius was quaestor he had given Lucius Petilius a place on the decury. After perusing the most important passages he perceived that most of them would lead to the break-up of the national religion.¹⁹

It is difficult to interpret these events – related also by Cassius Hemina, Varro, Plutarch and others²⁰ – with any certainty. If one accepts the historicity of these accounts, it seems quite obvious that the legibility of these books after all these alleged centuries implies that they must have just been written down, possibly through L. Petillius himself (called Cn. Terentius in another version), who probably acted for his *patronus* L. Petilius Spurius, *praetor urbanus* of the year 181 BC. If one considers the crisis of Roman public religion at the beginning of the second century – exemplified by the introduction of the Punic goddess Venus Erycina in 215, by the acceptance of the *Carmina Marciana* around 208, the introduction of the oriental Magna Mater in 204, the scandal of the Bacchanals in 186 and the expulsion of philosophers in 161 and 155 – it seems obvious that the religious reforms advocated by the books of Numa have to be interpreted as a response to this situation. It is generally held that some Hellenised parts of the Roman elite endeavoured to reform the state religion, obviously gradually losing its popular support, by reassessing its institution through the reform of pontifical law and by its harmonisation with contemporary Greek thought. It is interesting to see that this reform was attributed to Numa Pompilius, the mythical founder of most Roman cultic institutions, and moreover an alleged pupil of Pythagoras,²¹ instead of passing

¹⁹ VALERIUS ANTIAS, *FRH* 15 F 9-10, in: LIV. 40.29.1-13 (Transl. C. Roberts).

²⁰ CASS. HEMIA, *FRH* 6 F 40 in: PLIN., *Nat.* 13.84-86 and 88; CALPURNIUS PISO, *FRH* 7 F 13; SEMPRONIUS TUDITANUS, *FRH* 8 F 7; VAL. MAX. 1.1.12; PLUT., *Numa* 22.2-8; FEST. p. 178, 19-22 L., LACT., *Inst.* 1.22.5; *Vir. ill.* 3.2; VARRO, in: AUG., *Civ. Dei* 7.34

²¹ Very curiously, this tradition seems to have been considered as strong by contemporary politicians that its obvious chronological impossibility was not taken into account as a factor which might have invalidated the authenticity of the 'books of Numa'.

through an appropriate official channel like the Senate or the pontifical college. Obviously, the weight of tradition was so strong that it was considered impossible that long-established religious institutions could be replaced by others or even improved: in order to compete with the tradition, new religious ideas had to appear even older,²² thus making appear, in complete reversion of the actual chronology, what was to be overcome as a mere later development, blurring original purity.

Though the example of the books of Numa is particularly illuminating, it would be possible to advance numerous other instances, for example, the many archaising features of the Augustan religious reforms, re-interpreting, even re-inventing the older institutions they claimed to 'restore', such as the *fratres aruales* or the *septemviri epulonum*. Another example is the particularly complex chronological anchorage of what appeared to be concrete divine favours accorded to individuals or states, whose credibility was usually proven by the invention of ever older historical doublets and thus the gradual dislocation of the historical towards mythical past, as shown for instance by the reduplications of the *deuotiones* of the *gens Decia*²³ and the projection into the remotest past of the *ludi saeculares*.²⁴ In short: religious competition in pagan Antiquity was characterised by the attempt to prove that one's own cult was of greater antiquity than that of one's competitors, and this feature was to be an important element in the further history of religious competition during the first millennium.

3. Judaism and Messianism

Indeed, at first view, the construction and interpretation of the past in Hellenistic Judaism closely resembles the pagan view, and there are many examples of the use of the 'Altersbeweis' as an important argument in the polemics and competition between Hellenistic cults and Judaism. Whilst Judaism abstained from proselytism, it seems obvious that the theological discourse of Judaism and

²² However, it could be yet another possibility to think that the parties behind this 'mise en scène' wanted to suggest, on the contrary, that already Numa considered these books as too dangerous to be made public; the finding and burning of these books thus would be meant as a symbolic repetition of an anti-philosophical religious decision allegedly going back to Numa itself. However, both hypotheses have in common to be based not the wish to evidence the objective improvement caused by the reform, but to simply suggest that these reforms were, in fact, a return to an even older religious state.

²³ Concerning the devotional tradition of the *Gens Decia* (e.g. LIV. 8.6.8-14; 9.1-14; 10.11-14;), see STÜBLER (1941), 173-204, VERSNEL (1976), VERSNEL (1981), ENGELS (2008), 385-390.

²⁴ See above.

its religious competitors was primarily apologetic and only secondarily missionary. This is easily understood given the importance of contemporary antisemitism, fuelled, at the latest since the Maccabean revolt, by issues such as the alleged atheism of the JHWH-cult, the hostility towards the body shown through the circumcision, the allegedly xenophobic separation from other nations by complicated dietary, commensal and purificational prescription, etc.²⁵ The discussion generally concentrated on the very ambivalent evaluation of Moses, interpreted, on the one hand, as some sort of machiavellistic anti-Lycurgus, whose reforms were aimed at separating Judaism from traditional pagan cults²⁶ and thus chronologically secondary, and, on the other, as one of the first transmitters of divine truth and therefore predecessor of philosophical thought. One of the best and most well-known examples is provided by Flavius Josephus' work *contra Apionem* (end of the first c. AD). Josephus counteracted Apion's rationalist mockery of Jewish laws by stressing the high age of the Mosaic Laws, and as it would have been difficult to defend monotheism by suggesting e.g. that pagan polytheism may have been ultimately derived from Moses' monotheism, Josephus rather concentrated on the obvious similarities between monotheism and some tendencies in Greek philosophy and tried to assert the latter's causal dependence from the former:²⁷

That the wisest among the Greeks were taught these ideas about God, after he [Moses] provided their original expression, I refrain from speaking about now; but that they are excellent and fitting in relation to the nature and majesty of God they have abundantly testified. For Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato, and, after him, the Stoic philosophers practically all seem to have thought in this way about the nature of God.²⁸

Josephus, heavily influenced by Hellenistic literature and philosophy and writing for a Greek-speaking audience, not only tried to prove the superiority of his own faith by stressing its chronological anteriority, but also constructed an argumentation in which contemporary Greek thought seemed only a derivative

²⁵ On ancient antisemitism see YAVETZ (1997), SCHÄFER (1998), THIEDE / STINGELIN (2002).

²⁶ A representative compilation of most antisemitic prejudices in TAC., *Ann.* 5.4f., interestingly insisting, on the one hand, on the 'novelty' of the laws of Moses (*Moyses quo sibi in posterum gentem firmaret, novos ritus contrariosque ceteris mortalibus indidit*) in order to suggest their artificial and thus dubious nature (*Profana illic omnia quae apud nos sacra, rursum concessa apud illos quae nobis incesta.*), but accepting on the other hand, quite curiously and not without contradiction, its (current) antiquity and thus legitimacy (*Hi ritus quoquo modo inducti antiquitate defenduntur*).

²⁷ Concerning Josephus' *Contra Apionem*, cf. FELDMAN / LEVISON (1996), GERBER (1997) and the commentary BARCLAY (2007). Concerning Josephus' attitude towards the notion of 'redemption', cf. ALBRECHT (1989).

²⁸ JOS., *C. Ap.* 2.168 (Transl. J. Barclay). Cf. simil. JOS., *C. Ap.* 1.161-162.

of convictions practised since immemorial times by the totality of the Jewish people. Thus, Jewish religious competition focussed, like the pagan tradition, mainly on questions of chronological anteriority, obviously interpreted as indicator of superior theological purity – a vision of history which has the tactical benefit of not rejecting, but assimilating the opponent's beliefs. Moreover, once such a vision of religious history is accepted, formal conversion must inevitably follow.

Judaism also introduced the possibility of a radical re-evaluation of present and future, categories hitherto largely devoid of religious meaning.²⁹ Indeed, still more important than these re-interpretations of chronology and causality, post-exilic Judaism was characterised, as many other oriental religions, by a further important element: the awaiting of a Messiah who directly linked the past, marked by the creation of the world and the revelation of prophets like Moses, with the future, interpreted as an age of moral perfection and political greatness and inaugurated by the coming of a saviour³⁰ who combined political and eschatological elements. Though the word 'Messiah' already appears in pre-exilic and exilic terminology in order to designate the executor of the divine will (the Israelite and the Persian king³¹ as well as the high-priest) the notion was gradually linked, since 722, with the idea of an eschatological saviour, first announced by the prophet Isaiah:³²

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.³³

Since 200 BC, the expression 'Messiah' is completely absorbed by this eschatological perspective³⁴ and, though initially a rather subordinate aspect of the Jewish faith, gradually gained theological importance as the Qumran scrolls testify.³⁵ Finally it became a central element of first and second century Judaism, as shown by the appearance of numerous alleged saviours and the inclusion of Messianic hopes into the Amidah, where it is attested since the

²⁹ Concerning 'time' and redemption in the Old Testament, cf. VOLLBORN (1951), EICHRODT (1956), RÉTIF / LAMARCHE (1960), SCHLOSSER (1989).

³⁰ Concerning the genesis and the pre-Christian evolution of Jewish Messianism and apocalypticism: GODARD (1930), SCHMIDT (1969), COPPENS (1989), GRUENDWALD *et al.* (1992), EVANS / FLINT (1997).

³¹ *Is* 45.1. for a commentary, see HERBERT (1975).

³² Concerning the importance of the book of Isaiah for Christianity, cf. SAWYER (1996),

³³ *Is* 9.5 (Transl. 21st century King James Bible). Cf. simil. *Is* 11.1-10; *Mi* 5.1-5; *Hos* 2.2f.; *Jer* 23.5f.; *Hes* 34.23f. and 37.22ff.; *Hag* 2.22f.; *Sach* 3.8ff.; 6,12; 9,9f.

³⁴ Cf. the use of the word in the Qumran-rolls – see ABEGG (1995), p. 125-144 –, psalms 17f., the Aethiopian book of Henoch, *Ezra* 4.

³⁵ KUHN (1966), ALMIÑANA LLORET (1970).

second century.³⁶ Given the geographical situation, Messianism also became linked, in its concrete intellectual expression, with the growing popular resistance against Greek, later Roman rule over the Eastern Mediterranean.³⁷ The genesis of Jewish Messianism has thus to be interpreted in the context of Near-Eastern conception of cyclical history,³⁸ characterised by the idealisation of the past, the criticism of the present and the hope for the future restitution of divine favour,³⁹ as shown by the Babylonian dynastic prophecy,⁴⁰ the Egyptian potter's oracle,⁴¹ the Hellenistic Sibylls⁴² and the apocalypse of Hystaspes.⁴³ It thus formed an ideal starting basis for the spreading of Messianic hopes throughout the whole Mediterranean basin and the introduction into the history of classical thought of an intense belief in the imminent coming of a Messiah and the certainty of the subsequent salvation, which not only launched a new historical cycle, but definitely put an end to the past and thus separated history into a 'before' and an 'after'.

4. Judaism in Christian Salvation-History

Jewish Messianism with its intense eschatology would thus become an essential religious and political factor of the Roman world when the rise of political reformers such as Jesus of Nazareth⁴⁴ and Simon bar Kochva⁴⁵ activated the rich subliminal potentialities of Messianic hopes. It thus announced the beginning of a new era, initiated with the appearance of the Saviour, affirmed by his expected return,⁴⁶ and promising, contrarily to the somewhat similar official Roman

³⁶ *Amidah 15: Speedily cause the scion of David Your servant to flourish, and increase his power by Your salvation, for we hope for Your salvation all day.*

³⁷ Cf. e.g. EDDY (1961), MOMIGLIANO (1975).

³⁸ Cf. COLLINS (1975), COHN (1993).

³⁹ One could easily include the Roman ideal of the *aurea aetas* and the birth of the boy, which, at first apolitical, became intimately linked to the Augustan restoration. For the ideology of the Augustan *aurea aetas*, cf. BALDRY (1952), GATZ (1967), KUBUSCH (1986), ENGELS (2009a).

⁴⁰ Cf. VAN DER SPEK (2003), 311-342.

⁴¹ For the prophecy of the potter, see KOENEN (1968), LLOYD (1982), KOENEN (2002).

⁴² Concerning the oldest parts of the oracles, book 3, cf. BUITENWERF (2003).

⁴³ Cf. WINDISCH (1929), BIDEZ / CUMONT (1938), 359ff.

⁴⁴ Cf. RIESER (1973), HORNBURY (1998), GUYON (1999), HORNBURY (2003), RAMBAUX (2011).

⁴⁵ For Bar Kochva's Messianic claim, cf. e.g. MARKS (1994).

⁴⁶ Concerning the place of temporality and redemption in the New Testament, cf. DELLING (1940), CULLMANN (1946), BARNIKOL (1958), CULLMANN (1965), Schnackenburg (1966), DELLIN (1970), SCHUBERT (1973), WEDER (1993), BAARLINK (2004). We cannot discuss the question to what extent the Messianic claims of early

propaganda of the Augustan *aurea aetas*, not the secular well-being of the ruling nation, but the spiritual salvation first of the elected nation, than of all mankind, beyond differences of nation, class or gender. However, Christianity's revolutionary claim, that a new era had just begun – largely without being noticed by its contemporaries –, and that a recently crucified religious reformer was in fact the saviour of humanity, constituted both its main emotional attractivity and its central logical problem, for considerable theological flexibility was needed in order to adapt these two elements to the cultural visions of the different groups of future proselytes, as clearly shown by Paul⁴⁷ in his *First Letter to the Corinthians* (AD 53-57):

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.⁴⁸

Thus, the missionary history of Christianity between the death of Jesus and the Edict of Milan is mainly characterised by the attempt to construct a coherent narrative of salvation history, accessible to Jews as well as to pagans. This narrative aimed, on the one hand, at justifying the claim to absolute truth and to theological incompatibility with other faiths, and, on the other, at establishing a teleological link between contemporary culture and society and the future coming of the saviour in order to gain legitimacy, arouse sympathy and ease conversion. Other religious competitors such as mithraicism did not possess these argumentary features as their syncretistic and universally compatible convictions necessitated neither strict outer delimitation nor precise definition of its current historical position.

In a first phase of the mission, Christ's Jewish origins, his claim of being the Messiah and his ethnic sense of mission⁴⁹ naturally compelled Christianity to maintain close historical and missionary bonds with Judaism, demonstrating that the new faith only fulfilled classic Jewish prophecies and therefore completed

Christianity are a non-biased reflection of its founder's self-representation. Already the gospels are divided. On the one hand, it seems clear that Jesus was expected to be the Messiah (*Matth* 11.3; *Mk* 8.29, 10.47, 11.10, 14.61, 15.26; *John* 19.19). On the other hand, Jesus refused the status of a political Messiah (*Mk* 8.29ff., 11.1-10, *Lk* 24.21) and assumed the title only indirectly (*Mk* 9.41, *Matth* 16.20, *Lk* 4.41) and asked his apostles to keep his identity secret until his resurrection (*Mk* 8.30, 9.9). Only during the nightly questioning is he said to have assumed his Messianic status (*Mk* 14.62), but with a clear eschatological connotation.

⁴⁷ Concerning the notion of time and the history of redemption in Paul, cf. HOPPE (1926), MUNCK (1954), BRONSON (1964), HESTER (1968), STRECKER (1997), CUVILLIER (2004).

⁴⁸ *I Cor* 1.22-23.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Matth* 15.24; see also 10.5-7.

traditional salvation history, as suggested by John⁵⁰ and shown in Paul's homily in Antioch-Pisidia around 50 AD⁵¹ following to *Acts*:

Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said: "Men of Israel and ye that fear God, give audience! The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm He brought them out of it. And for about forty years, He suffered their ways in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He divided their land among them by lot. And after that, He gave unto them judges for about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king, and God gave unto them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for the space of forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up unto them David to be their king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, who shall fulfill all My will.' Of this man's seed hath God, according to His promise, raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus. John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. [...] And we declare unto you glad tidings of the promise which was made unto the fathers: God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again, as it is also written in the second Psalm: 'Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee.'⁵²

Here Paul integrates Christ into a long line of continuity, equating him with classic forerunners such as Moses, Saul, David and John and hence simply lengthening the list of Jewish prophets by one further item, whilst also presenting Jesus as a Messianic figure, who redeems the Davidic promises and inaugurates a completely new, albeit prophetised, era.

Nevertheless, despite these attempts of harmonising the traditional Jewish religious history and the slowly evolving Christian understanding of the history of salvation and thus creating a common understanding, the friendly takeover of Judaism by Christianity quickly appeared impossible. This was not in the least the case because of the politically threatening anti-Jewish and anti-Roman character of the biography of Christ⁵³ and because of the debate about the necessity for former pagans to adopt the ritual laws of Judaism. Christianity risked to endanger the political status of Judaism and its ritual traditions, and a number of Jewish communities therefore tried to defend their religious integrity by informing the Roman civic institutions that Christians should not be considered as Jews nor benefit from Jewish religious privileges⁵⁴ because its

⁵⁰ *John* 4.22; cf. LA POTTERIE (1983), OEGEMA (2001), KUTSCHERA (2003).

⁵¹ Concerning early Paulinic chronology and theology, cf. RIESNER (1994).

⁵² *Acts* 13.16-24 and 32-33.

⁵³ Cf. e.g. GOLLINGER (1991).

⁵⁴ Probably, the Jewish authorities inside as well as outside of Palestine apprehended possible conflicts with the Roman state which, despite the privileges granted by Caesar, always mistrusted the Jewish refusal to sacrifice to the Gods for the benefice of the

new Messianic ideology seemed opposed to imperial loyalty. Gradual takeover thus was replaced by outright competition whose arbiter was to be the pagan empire, and though the Jewish communities will hardly have agreed to accept these allegations, the Christian writers ascribed this new situation to the Jews being simply jealous of the Christians' missionary successes, suggesting the existence of a contemporary interreligious competitive awareness at least from the side of early Christians. Thus, *Acts* describe the behaviour of the Jews of Thessalonian in the following terms:

But the Jews who believed not, moved with envy, engaged certain wicked fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a crowd and set all the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they dragged Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, "These that have turned the world upside down have come hither also, and Jason hath received them; and they all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city when they heard these things."⁵⁵

The defensive position of Judaism and the necessity of adapting the new Christian faith to meet the social reluctance of the Hellenistic world towards Jewish ritual laws⁵⁶ inevitably provoked a radical shift not only in missionary strategy,⁵⁷ but also in the Christian interpretation of salvation history. Whereas the Jews were able to sever all links with the Christian sect⁵⁸ without endangering their own religious identity – though it is no longer considered as plausible that this evolution was the result of a formal decision during the (hypothetical) council of Jamnia around 85⁵⁹ – the Christians themselves continued to depend on Judaism as a legitimatory instance. Indeed, the latter's prophecies were declared fulfilled by the former's historical present and hence constituted the theological connection point for the new faith. This was the crucial moment in the genesis of two mutually exclusive religions out of the spiritual background of a single one. A typical example for the adaptation of

emperor and might have dreaded the political consequences of a friendly take-over of Judaism by a movement considering Jesus of Nazareth, executed as usurper with the confirmation of the Roman governor, as its Messiah; cf. also SEGAL (1986) and the papers in DUNN (1999).

⁵⁵ *Acts* 17.5-8.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Acts* 10 or the justification of Peter in 11.1-18. Concerning the actual practice of Paul, see *Acts* 13.39; *Gal* 5.6. For a description of the concile of Jerusalem, abolishing the necessity of respecting the Jewish ritual laws, see *Acts* 15.1-21.

⁵⁷ See *Acts* 13.46.

⁵⁸ Cf. NOACK (1971).

⁵⁹ The thesis of a council of Jamnia linked to a formal condemnation of Christianity and the inclusion into the Amidah of a curse on the *Minim*, which probably included Jewish Christians, goes back to GRAETZ (1871); for criticism, cf. now e.g. the papers in McDONALD / SANDERS (2002).

salvation history to the new attitude towards Judaism and thus the re-organisation of missionary competition can be found in the *epistle of Barnabas*, written between 70 and 132.⁶⁰

For the Lord made known to us through the prophets things past and things present and has given us the firstfruits of the taste of things to come; and when we see these things coming to pass one by one, as he said, we ought to make a richer and deeper offering for fear of him. [...] You ought then to understand. And this also I ask you, as being one of yourselves, and especially as loving you all above my own life; take heed to yourselves now, and be not made like unto some, heaping up your sins and saying that the covenant is both theirs and ours. It is ours: but in this way did they finally lose it when Moses had just received it. [...] Now let us see whether this people or the former people is the heir, and whether the covenant is for us or for them. Hear then what the Scripture says concerning the people: "And Isaac prayed concerning Rebecca his wife, because she was barren, and she conceived. Then Rebecca went forth to enquire of the Lord and the Lord said to her: two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples in thy belly, and one people shall overcome a people, and the greater shall serve the less." You ought to understand who is Isaac and who is Rebecca, and of whom he has shown that this people is greater than that people.⁶¹

Though the *epistle of Barnabas* is scarcely representative for the general orientation of Christianity towards the end of the first century, its turning away from Judaism can be seen as a typical reaction faced with the sudden need to define a new Christian identity outside Judaism and clear evidence for the central part played by historical argumentation. Judaism, despite being Christianity's origin, is stylised as its eschatological antagonist, and its misunderstanding of the Holy Writings and its opposition to Christ become the reason for its rejection as chosen people and thus the dissolution by God of the old alliance. Continuity is thus replaced by a clear break, a position rejected by many early theologians, but nevertheless significant for the importance of historical reasoning for the genesis of Christian thought. Hence, the text stresses the transcendent importance of time and history and tries thus to prove, through allegorical interpretation of old-testamentary and apocryphal writings, that the belief in the coming of Christ and thus Christianity itself ante-dated in fact Judaism in its present form, whose ignorance of the true meaning of the scriptures provoked its own demise and subsequent downfall – an argumentative strategy influential with later patristic authors like Eusebius and his distinction between Hebrews and Jews⁶² and also taken over, later on, by Islam.

⁶⁰ Cf. in general PROSTMEIER (2002), RHODES (2004).

⁶¹ *Epistle of Barnabas* 1.7; 4.6-7; 13.1-3 (Transl. K. Lake).

⁶² Cf. ULRICH 1999.

5. Christianity and Greek philosophy

The same ambivalence between historical as well as theological continuity and rejection can be noticed in the missionary discussion and competition between philosophy and early Christian theology.⁶³ In the beginning, pagans such as the people of Philippi thought it obvious that Christianity was an offspring of Judaism and that conversion to Christianity also meant the acceptance of Judaism and its ritual precepts, as becomes clear when considering the following reproaches conserved in *Acts*:

These men, being Jews, trouble our city exceedingly, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive nor to observe, being Romans.⁶⁴

In the face of such allegations of being Jews and trying to making proselytes to Judaism, Christians quite logically reacted by adopting traditional Jewish forms of apology. As Jewish apologists, Christian writers were compelled by their radical monotheism to decline any possible compromises with pagan polytheism, whose gods were, at best, identified with demons and devils and thus at least somehow, though negatively, accepted in their material existence and hence integrated in the new Christian faith.⁶⁵ But whereas a non-conflictual, assimilative ‘friendly takeover’ of the polytheistic system seemed difficult and thus somewhat reduced the prospects of easy conversion, classical philosophy seemed much more compatible with the new faith and might prove, as already stressed by Josephus, a promising missionary pivotal point. Many Christian apologists thus simply adopted the classical Jewish form of the ‘Altersbeweis’⁶⁶ and stressed the anteriority of the Jewish prophets before the Greek philosophers and thus subsequently the spiritual superiority of Christianity as fulfilment of Jewish prophecies. Already Justin (100-165) claimed in his *First Apology*:⁶⁷

And that this may now become evident to you – (firstly) that whatever we assert in conformity with what has been taught us by Christ, and by the prophets who preceded Him, are alone true, and are older than all the writers who have existed.⁶⁸

⁶³ Concerning the genesis of salvation history in early Christian thought, cf. generally von REUMANN (1959), LUNEAU (1964), CAMPENHAUSEN (1970), WILKIN (1986), PFLIGERSDORFFER (1987).

⁶⁴ *Acts* 16.20f.

⁶⁵ One might exclude from these assertions the ambivalent position of Christian authors toward ancient divination and, most of all, the Sibylls; cf. e.g., despite its numerous problems (see my review in *Le Muséon* 2012) the compilation by NIEO IBÁNEZ (2010).

⁶⁶ Cf. e.g. GNILKA (2005).

⁶⁷ Concerning Justin’s argumentation from prophecy, cf. SKARSAUNE (1987).

⁶⁸ JUST., *1 Apol* 23 (transl. M. Dods / G. Reith, B. P. Pratten).

Thus, Justin, as well as many other early writers, insisted that most Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras, Plato, Aratus and even the Sibyll and many others, only rendered, though sometimes erroneously, Jewish beliefs and thus rather confirmed than contradicted Christian teachings. Very similarly, Theophilus of Antioch (d. 183) referred in his three books *Ad Autolyicum* to the chronological precedence of Mosaic Law over pagan philosophers.⁶⁹ Not surprisingly, he extensively cited Josephus' writing against Apion and the thesis of Moses as the anonymous inspirator of Greek philosophy, but included the notion that the divine truths found in Greek philosophical or prophetic traditions had been fundamentally deformed by their new polytheistic context.⁷⁰ Persistence to cling to these texts, however valuable they may be, hence signifies to grasp only small parts of the truth, as only the embracing of Christianity can guarantee a return to the unspoiled and oldest sources of wisdom; an argumentation also to be found somewhat later in Tertullian (150-230),⁷¹ who, in his *Apologeticum* (197), referred to the old age of paleotestamentary revelation as evidence for their truthfulness by stating 'Their high antiquity, first of all, claims authority for these writings',⁷² but also included the Jews themselves into the list of the peoples in possession of parts of the divine revelation, but unable to grasp their complete meaning:

Unless I am utterly mistaken, there is nothing so old as the truth; and the already proved antiquity of the divine writings is so far of use to me, that it leads men more easily to take it in that they are the treasure-source whence all later wisdom has been taken. And were it not necessary to keep my work to a moderate size, I might launch forth also into the proof of this. What poet or sophist has not drunk at the fountain of the prophets? Thence, accordingly, the philosophers watered their arid minds, so that it is the things they have from us which bring us into comparison with them. For this reason, I imagine, philosophy was banished by certain states – I mean by the Thebans, by the Spartans also, and the Argives – its disciples sought to imitate our doctrines; and ambitious, as I have said, of glory and eloquence alone, if they fell upon anything in the collection of sacred Scriptures which displeased them, in their own peculiar style of research, they perverted it to serve

⁶⁹ Cf. in general ROGERS (2000) and now PROSTMEIER (2007).

⁷⁰ THEOPH., *Ad Autolyc.* 3.30.

⁷¹ Concerning the biographical and theological context, cf. BARNES (1985) and now ZILLING (2004).

⁷² TERT., *Apol.* 19.2 (Transl. S. Thelwall): *Their high antiquity, first of all, claims authority for these writings. With you, too, it is a kind of religion to demand belief on this very ground. Well, all the substances, all the materials, the origins, classes, contents of your most ancient writings, even most nations and cities illustrious in the records of the past and noted for their antiquity in books of annals, – the very forms of your letters, those revealers and custodiers of events, nay (I think I speak still within the mark), your very gods themselves, your very temples and oracles, and sacred rites, are less ancient than the work of a single prophet, in whom you have the thesaurus of the entire Jewish religion, and therefore too of ours.*

their purpose: for they had no adequate faith in their divinity to keep them from changing them, nor had they any sufficient understanding of them, either, as being still at the time under veil – even obscure to the Jews themselves, whose peculiar possession they seemed to be.⁷³

Quite similarly, one could cite Origenes' (185-253/4) polemical essay against Celsus, a Platonic philosopher who wrote the first attested polemic paper against Christianity around 178.⁷⁴ Origenes replied to these reproaches by adopting the usual argumentation about the Jewish roots of Greek philosophy and underlining the Jewish descent of Christianity as a strength in view of the argument *presbyteron kreitton*.⁷⁵

How much more impartial than Celsus is Numenius the Pythagorean, who has given many proofs of being a very eloquent man, and who has carefully tested many opinions, and collected together from many sources what had the appearance of truth; for, in the first book of his treatise *On the Good*, speaking of those nations who have adopted the opinion that God is incorporeal, he enumerates the Jews also among those who hold this view; not showing any reluctance to use even the language of their prophets in his treatise, and to give it a metaphorical signification. It is said, moreover, that Hermippus has recorded in his first book, *On Lawgivers*, that it was from the Jewish people that Pythagoras derived the philosophy which he introduced among the Greeks. And there is extant a work by the historian Hecataeus, treating of the Jews, in which so high a character is bestowed upon that nation for its learning, that Herennius Philo, in his treatise on the Jews, has doubts in the first place, whether it is really the composition of the historian; and says, in the second place, that if really his, it is probable that he was carried away by the plausible nature of the Jewish history, and so yielded his assent to their system.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the alienation from Judaism and Christianity's growing theological independence re-centered these debates around the person of its founder and his seemingly naive statements, compelling missionaries and apologists to face philosophical issues in order to keep competitive. It was one thing to blatantly suggest Christianity's superiority because of its alleged anteriority, but it was another thing to face the different issues verbalised by classical philosophy and proving why the Christian viewpoint was to be preferred.

Two main strategies were possible and also actually pursued. First, Greek philosophy could be dismissed either as useless, as the real truth could be found in Scripture and therefore did not need to be elaborated through tedious and

⁷³ TERT., *Apol.* 47 (Transl. S. Thelwall).

⁷⁴ For Celsus, cf. FREDE (1994); see also PICHLER (1980).

⁷⁵ Concerning Origenes' vision of the history of salvation, cf. FÜRST (2000).

⁷⁶ ORIG., *Cels.* 1.15 (Transl. F. Crombie). On this passage, see also VAN NUFFELEN (2011), ch. 3.

necessarily defective abstraction. This is an argument largely divulged, for instance, through Tertullian's famous rejection of philosophy.⁷⁷ One could even claim that Greek philosophy was essentially contradictory and wrong, a position taken by Tatian in his *Oratio ad Graecos* (176)⁷⁸ or by Hermias (ca. 200), who, in his polemics against philosophy, wrote:⁷⁹

Paul the blessed apostle, my beloved brethren, writing to the Corinthians who inhabit Laconian Greece, spake saying, "The wisdom of this world is folly in the sight of God", and he said not amiss. For it seems to me to have taken its beginning from the rebellion of the angels; for which cause the philosophers put forth their doctrines, saying things that neither sound the same, nor mean the same as one another. For some of them say that the soul is fire, like Democritus; air, like the Stoics; some say it is the mind; and some say it is motion, as Heraclitus; some say it is exhalation; some an influence flowing from the stars; some say it is number in motion, as Pythagoras; some say it is generative water, as Hippo; some say an element from elements; some say it is harmony, as Dinarchus; some say the blood, as Critias; some the breath; some say unity, as Pythagoras; and so the ancients say contrary things. How many statements are there about these things! how many attempts! how many also of sophists who carry on a strife rather than seek the truth!⁸⁰

A second approach practiced by Christian writers in order to boost the competitiveness of the new faith was the inclusion of Greek philosophers into the history of salvation itself. Thus, Greek thought became not only a somewhat flawed byproduct of the diffusion of the Mosaic revelation, but – without abnegating the anteriority of Judaism – the independent result of the presence of sparks of divine knowledge in each living being: as the divine *logos* was to be considered as omnipresent – every human necessarily having to be able to differentiate good and evil and to understand the righteousness of main virtues like truth, justice and compassion –, anyone following these basic elements had to be considered as an adept of Christian ethics, even before the coming of Christ. Hence, Greek philosophers could rightly be interpreted as predecessors of Christ, who incarnated for the first time in history the entire and not only

⁷⁷ TERT., *Apol.* 46.4 (Transl. S. Thelwall): *So, then, where is there any likeness between the Christian and the philosopher? between the disciple of Greece and of heaven? between the man whose object is fame, and whose object is life? between the talker and the doer? between the man who builds up and the man who pulls down? between the friend and the foe of error? between one who corrupts the truth, and one who restores and teaches it? between its chief and its custodian?*

⁷⁸ For the context of Tatian, cf. HUNT (2003).

⁷⁹ Cf. still von DiPAULI (1907).

⁸⁰ HERMIAS, *Ir.* 1 (Transl. J.A. Giles).

partial divine lore, and hence more or less as equals of the Jewish prophets. Thus Justin set out the following argument in his *Second apology*.⁸¹

And those of the Stoic school – since, so far as their moral teaching went, they were admirable, as were also the poets in some particulars, on account of the seed of reason [the Logos] implanted in every race of men – were, we know, hated and put to death, – Heraclitus for instance, and, among those of our own time, Musonius and others. For, as we intimated, the devils have always effected, that all those who anyhow live a reasonable and earnest life, and shun vice, be hated. And it is nothing wonderful; if the devils are proved to cause those to be much worse hated who live not according to a part only of the word diffused [among men] but by the knowledge and contemplation of the whole Word, which is Christ.⁸²

However, despite this positive approach towards classical thought and its inclusion in the history of the revelation, Justin and his contemporaries insisted on the necessarily fragmentary nature of philosophical insights, as only the coming of Christ enabled humanity to accede to the full understanding of truth and to overcome the numerous contradictions of philosophical thought unguided by religious revelation.⁸³

Thus, Christian apologists tried to incorporate Hellenistic philosophy into Christian salvation history by proving, through an extreme form of the ‘Altersbeweis’, the anteriority of Christianity as pure and eternal *logos*, of which all philosophies are only later and often feeble glimpses or memories. This strategy culminates in Arnobius’ and Minucius Felix’s explicit equation of philosophy with Christianity,⁸⁴ and Clement’s attempts to harmonise mythical, philosophical and biblical thought, even if insisting on the latter’s superiority, explained by Irenaeus of Lyon by the comparison of humanity with the growing up of a single individual.⁸⁵ Hence, Christian *logos* becomes, through an extreme form of ‘Altersbeweis’, the very essence of a primordial divine wisdom,

⁸¹ Concerning Justin’s attitude towards his Jewish (and pagan) roots, cf. ROKEAH (2002).

⁸² IUST., 2 *Apol.* 8 (transl. M. Dods / G. Reith, B. P. Pratten).

⁸³ Cf. IUST., 2 *Apol.* 13 (transl. M. Dods / G. Reith, B. P. Pratten): *I confess that I both boast and with all my strength strive to be found a Christian; not because the teachings of Plato are different from those of Christ, but because they are not in all respects similar, as neither are those of the others, Stoics, and poets, and historians. For each man spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the spermatic word, seeing what was related to it. But they who contradict themselves on the more important points appear not to have possessed the heavenly wisdom, and the knowledge which cannot be spoken against. Whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians. For next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became man for our sakes, that becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing.*

⁸⁴ Cf. generally HONNEFELDER (1992).

⁸⁵ Cf. BENGSCHE (1957), CLERICI (1974), WYRWA (1997).

whereas Greek philosophy is considered as a mere *propaedeuticum*, preparing the convert to grasp the whole extent of his new faith. The history of salvation, usually restricted to the Jewish prophets, now also incorporates pagan thinking. This form of friendly takeover finds a catchy expression in Justin's *First Apology*, where it is said:

[...] those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias, and Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others whose actions and names we now decline to recount, because we know it would be tedious. So that even they who lived before Christ, and lived without reason, were wicked and hostile to Christ, and slew those who lived reasonably.⁸⁶

This apologetical argumentation, doubtlessly corresponding to the general contemporary missionary practice, enabled the Christians to declare Jewish prophets as well as Greek philosophers as forerunners of Christ and to create a junction between Christian salvation history and the usually mutually exclusive traditions of Jewish and Greek thought. In all this, it should obviously not be forgotten that despite this apparent opening of Christian theology to other forms of spirituality, the Christian church was considered as sole guarantee of redemption:⁸⁷ the integration of non-Christian history and thought into the Christian history of salvation was destined to facilitate conversion, but not to preach religious equality. As the Christian apologists also referred not only to the ethics, but also the pseudo-monotheistic tendencies of some Greek philosophers, a Christian writer such as Athenagoras⁸⁸ (first half of second century) thought it correct to formulate:

Since, therefore, the unity of the Deity is confessed by almost all, even against their will, when they come to treat of the first principles of the universe, and we in our turn likewise assert that He who arranged this universe is God, – why is it that they can say and write with impunity what they please concerning the Deity, but that against us a law lies in force, though we are able to demonstrate what we apprehend and justly believe, namely that there is one God, with proofs and reason accordant with truth? For poets and philosophers, as to other subjects so also to this, have applied themselves in the way of conjecture, moved, by reason of their affinity with the afflatus from God, each one by his own soul, to try whether he could find out and apprehend the truth; but they have not been found competent fully to apprehend it, because they thought fit to learn, not from God concerning God, but each one from himself; hence they came each to his own conclusion respecting God, and matter, and forms, and the world. But we have for witnesses

⁸⁶ IUST., *I Apol.* 46 (transl. M. Dods / G. Reith, B. P. Pratten).

⁸⁷ FIGURA (1984).

⁸⁸ Cf. e.g. BARNARD (1972), KANEHLS (1993).

of the things we apprehend and believe, prophets, men who have pronounced concerning God and the things of God, guided by the Spirit of God.⁸⁹

Quite inevitably, Minucius Felix⁹⁰ (second/third c.) came to the conclusion that Christianity and philosophy had to be immediately equated:

I have set forth the opinions almost of all the philosophers whose more illustrious glory it is to, have pointed out that there is one God, although with many names; so that any one might think either that Christians are now philosophers, or that philosophers were then already Christians.⁹¹

This equation – later on also practiced by Arnobius (d. 330)⁹² – did not necessarily imply an appreciation of the entire scholarship accumulated within the Hellenistic school system,⁹³ but made it possible to christianise Greek philosophy (in an often very simplified way) and to flesh out Christian theology as attempted by Clement of Alexandria (150-215)⁹⁴ in his *Stromateis*. There he showed that Greek philosophy and Christian faith were wholly compatible,⁹⁵ though he insisted on the latter's epistemological superiority, as only Christ's Parousia opened the way towards real insight (*gnosis*) and thus the ultimate clarification of the last questions, irresolvable through mere speculative philosophy.⁹⁶ Thus, not only the philosophical, but also the prophetic

⁸⁹ ATHENAG., *Apol.* 7 (Transl. B.P. Pratten).

⁹⁰ Cf. in general BECKER (1967).

⁹¹ MIN. FEL. 20.1 (Transl. A. Roberts / J. Donaldson). Cf. simil. MIN. FELIX 19.3, 15 and 20.1.

⁹² ARNOB. 2.13; cf. in general SIMMONS (1996).

⁹³ SCHWENK (1992).

⁹⁴ See now DAINESI (2011).

⁹⁵ Cf. also VANDERHEIJDEN (2005).

⁹⁶ However – and this is one of the very few instances of this argumentation in Antiquity –, Clement insisted on the fact that the metaphysical perspectives Christian faith offered to Greek philosophy should not only be considered as the return to a primordial divine knowledge, but also be acknowledged and valued as important new additions. Thus, Clement does not only interpret the genesis of Christian faith as mere step in a continuous salvation history, but as a evolutionary skip, bringing with it something new. Drawing on the imagery of Irenaeus of Lyon (135-202), who compared the history of salvation with the slow growing of humanity – Concerning the similarities with Cato (in CIC., *Rep.* 2.2), Seneca (in LACT., *Inst.* 7.15.14-16) and Florus (*Praef.* 2.4-8), cf. ENGELS (2009a) – culminating in the adulthood of the coming of Christ, redeeming its childhood's disobedience of Adam's fall, Clement explains in his *Protreptikos*: CLEM., *Protr.* 89.1 (Transl. A. Roberts / J. Donaldson): *But you say it is not creditable to subvert the customs handed down to us from our fathers. And why, then, do we not still use our first nourishment, milk, to which our nurses accustomed us from the time of our birth? Why do we increase or diminish our patrimony, and not keep it exactly the same as we got it? Why do we not still vomit on our parents' breasts, or still do the things for which, when infants, and nursed by our mothers, we were laughed at, but have corrected ourselves, even if we did not fall in with good instructors?*

traditions of pagan Antiquity could henceforward be integrated into the Christian road to salvation. The Messianic components of the Sibylline oracles, heavily influenced by anti-Hellenistic and anti-Roman Near-Eastern resentments, eased the take-over and assimilation of these oracular texts. Moreover, the amalgamation of the (Oriental) Sibylline oracles and (Roman) Sibylline books facilitated the claim that Christianity had a right of being accepted by the Roman state on the same grounds as the Sibylline books had justified the integration of many other cults.

This gradual convergence of Christian faith and Roman state ideology enabled Christian thinkers to integrate not only pagan philosophy, but also the history of imperial Rome into the gradually emerging history of salvation.⁹⁷ Drawing on Near Eastern traditions of history as a succession of world empires as exemplified by the Danielic prophecies, initially directed against the Seleucid empire, the Roman empire was now integrated as a necessary and divinely preordained step in an evolution necessarily leading to the coming of Christ and his return at the end of times, explaining thus Orosius' vision of history.⁹⁸ In his *Histories*, written in close connection (though not always concordance) with St. Augustine, Orosius not only proposes a four-step model of world history,⁹⁹ but also exposes the base of what is generally known as 'Augustustheologie'.¹⁰⁰ Describing a Roman prodigy from the time of Augustus and also attested in other sources,¹⁰¹ he gives the event a wholly Christian interpretation where Augustus is transformed into an earthly parallel of the Christ, and the Roman empire interpreted as complement to the church, though it is clear that emperor and empire remain simple tools for the promotion of the Church:

What is more evident than that by this sign the coming nativity of Christ was declared in the days when Caesar was ruling the whole world? For Christ is interpreted as meaning anointed, to speak in the language of the people among whom and from whom He was born. Therefore at that time when the tribunician power was decreed to Caesar to be held forever, a spring of oil at Rome flowed

⁹⁷ Cf. TIMPE (2001).

⁹⁸ Cf. TANZ (1983), AMPIO (1988).

⁹⁹ Cf. essentially OROS. 2.1.3-5, based on POLYB. 1.2.1, DION. HAL. 1.2-3.3, VELL. 1.6 and of course *Dan* 2.26-45.

¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, it would go too far to develop here even the major aspects of the ideological importance of the chronological concomitance between the birth of Christ and the reign of the *diui filius* Augustus and his *aurea aetas* of *Pax Augusta*, enabling the formation of the 'Augustustheologie' following to which God preordained Augustus' rule in order to permit the venue of the Messiah and the spread of his Gospel; an idea also to be found in several other early Christian authors – see OPELT (1961), INGLEBERT (1996), p. 571f. – and forming the basis for the legend of the conversion of Augustus to Christianity in the *Legenda Aurea* 10.

¹⁰¹ CASS. DIO 48.43.4; EUS., *Chron.* a.a. 41 (Helm). See in general ENGELS (2008), 701f.

throughout the whole day. Under the principate of Caesar and under the Roman Empire throughout a whole day, that is, throughout the entire duration of the Roman Empire, signs in the heavens and prodigies on the earth were very clear to those who did not heed the voices of the prophets. These signs and prodigies revealed that Christ and from Him, Christians, that is, the Anointed One and from Him, the anointed ones, would copiously and incessantly come forth from an inn, that is, from an hospitable and bountiful Church; that all slaves who still acknowledged their master must be restored by Caesar, and the others who were found without a master must be delivered to death and to punishment; and that the penalties due from offenders must be remitted under Caesar's rule in that City in which the oil had spontaneously flowed.¹⁰²

6. Manichaeism

Christianity succeeded in taking up Judaism's vague Messianic hope and convincing its followers to believe in its actual fulfilment in concrete reality. In this way, it redefined the past, present and future benchmarks of salvation history and constructed a vision of the past, including Jewish as well as pagan ideas in different intensities of rejection and continuity. Christ himself had announced that his Parousia would introduce, 'in a short while',¹⁰³ the end of times, but, with time passing, his advent seemed less and less imminent, and the community of the faithful became increasingly restless and prone to doubt the ultimate nature of the new religion.¹⁰⁴ Already Paul had insisted on the fact that the coming of Christ had definitely ended the revelation and thus the history of salvation, warning the believers not to give heed to the idea that Christ might only have been just another prophet, the real revelation being perhaps still to come:

But should we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again: If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that which ye have received, let him be accursed!¹⁰⁵

However, the awareness of the obvious postponement of the end of times inevitably provoked a gradual shift of the historical place of Christ from present to past and thus his increasing assimilation with the figures of the biblical prophets. A profound religious conviction, based on the experiences of the immediate historical present of the 30s, thus imperceptibly faded away and

¹⁰² OROS. 6.20.6f. (Transl. R. Deferrari).

¹⁰³ *John* 16.16.

¹⁰⁴ Concerning the delay of Parousia, cf. GRÄBER (1977).

¹⁰⁵ *Gal* 1.8-9.

became transformed into a traditional belief in a better future, grounded in a vague faith accorded to the past accounts of the gospels, and especially based on some allusions in John, where Jesus himself is said to have introduced the notion of the 'Paraclete':¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world concerning sin, and concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment: concerning sin, because they believe not in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to My Father and ye see Me no more; concerning judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.¹⁰⁷

Usually, the Paraclete, the 'Comforter' or 'Counselor', has been interpreted in early Christian thought as a symbol for the miracle of Pentecost and thus directly identified with Christ himself, as for example already in the first letter of John.¹⁰⁸ However, the popular allegorical interpretation of the Gospels made it possible to understand this allusion as reference to a material person, a further, distinct prophet. This created, at least in some fringes of late antique Christianity, a mental disposition closely resembling the situation just before the Christian fulfilment of Jewish Messianism, differing just insofar as a new Messiah would have to provide a meaningful place for the past mission of Christ in his new revelation. The evolution of Christian missionary strategy thus provided a handy and successful precedent for potential religious competitors and also constituted a ready-made point of contact for new prophets persuaded to be the foretold Messiah and culminating point of a new cycle of salvation history. Thus, by declaring that the Messianic hopes created by the prophets and entertained by his contemporaries were fulfilled through his coming and announcing his imminent return and the beginning of the end of times, Jesus, through his revolutionary redefinition of the main chronological markers of history, paved the way for potential successors who claimed to fulfill his announcements and made possible ever new cycles of Messianic manifestations and thus the emergence of new religions. Hence, by making the faithful believe in the possibility that the Messiah had already come in the past through the person of Christ and would return in the future, Christianity much eased the potential faith in the fact that someone declaring the Christ as his mere predecessor may come back in the present and 'renew' or 'fulfill' the Christian faith.

¹⁰⁶ SASSE (1925), MOWINCKEL (1933), BORNKAMM (1949), BETZ (1963), DULIÈRE (1970), JOHNSTON (1970), RAHNER (2000). Concerning the gnostic roots of John, cf. SCHOTTROFF (1969).

¹⁰⁷ *John* 16.7-11. Cf. also *John* 14.26; 17.16f.

¹⁰⁸ *1 John* 2.1: *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

This was already the case with Simon Magus, who, if we believe Irenaeus of Lyons, was one of the first to proclaim himself, already in the 60s, scarcely thirty years after the death of Christ, not only the immediate successor of Jesus, but a direct manifestation of diverse aspects of the Holy Trinity:

This man [i.e. Simon Magus], then, was glorified by many as if he were a god; and he taught that it was himself who appeared among the Jews as the Son, but descended in Samaria as the Father while he came to other nations in the character of the Holy Spirit. He represented himself, in a word, as being the loftiest of all powers, that is, the Being who is the Father over all, and he allowed himself to be called by whatsoever title men were pleased to address him.¹⁰⁹

But probably the most interesting example of a religious concurrent trying to operate a spectacular ‘friendly takeover’ not only of Christianity, but also of other religions along exactly these lines, was Manichaeism.¹¹⁰ It would go too far to discuss here the theological self-legitimation of Manichaeism which considered itself as the direct continuator of Christianity in God’s preordained path to salvation. However, the existence of numerous gnostic tendencies in Christianity and the errings of S. Augustine show how close ‘orthodox’ mainstream Christianity, gnostic sects and Manichaeism seemed to their own contemporaries, and that they addressed the same audience and operated with a very similar intellectual and missionary reasoning. This becomes even more obvious when considering the position Mani (216-276/7) claimed to occupy, on the one hand, as apostle of Christ,¹¹¹ but, on the other, as the author of the ultimate Gospel, implying the defectiveness of the precedent religious books:

I, Mani, Apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, the Father of Truth, from whom I also came into being. He lives and abides for all eternity. before everything, he is and he remains after everything. Everything which has happened and will happen is established through his might, From him I came and I am also from his will. And from him all that is true was revealed to me and I am from [his] truth. [...] I have proclaimed hope and revealed this revelation; and have written this immortal Gospel, in which I have put down these preeminent mysteries and disclosed in it the greatest works [...].¹¹²

The reference to Christ as Mani’s predecessor and personal protector is also made obvious in other passages, where the new prophet declares that Christ sent

¹⁰⁹ IREN., *Adv. Haer.* 1.23.1 (transl. A. Roberts / W. Rambaut). Cf. e.g. BEYSCHLAG 1974.

¹¹⁰ See in general WIDENGREN (1961), KOENEN (1993), RUDOLPH (1994) and now the papers in BEDUHN (2009). For a bibliographical survey (up to 1996), cf. MIKKELSEN (1997).

¹¹¹ Concerning Mani as Apostle of Christ, cf. QUISPTEL (1970), ROSE (1979), PEDERSEN (1988).

¹¹² *Cologne Mani Codex* 66-68.

out angels to protect him,¹¹³ and where he calls himself ‘Paraclete and chief of this generation’s apostolate’,¹¹⁴ explicitly referring to the above-mentioned allusions in *John*¹¹⁵ and legitimating his present mission by Christ’s past allusions. But Mani did not only consider himself as fulfiller of Christian eschatology, but also as executor of the religious hopes of many, in fact all other people:

You have been sent out not only to this religion, but to every people, every school, every town and every place. For [by you] will [this] hope be explained and proclaimed to all [zones] and regions [of the world].¹¹⁶

Whereas it took Christianity centuries to grow from a Jewish reform movement through an opponent of paganism into the official religion of the Roman Empire and even a world-religion of which the historical self definition was the fruit of a complex evolution, Mani, from the beginning on, aimed at presenting his faith as the fulfilment of a universal salvation project and as the restoration of a pure original faith – an approach already prefigured in the epistle of Barnabas and adopted later by Islam. Hence, as with all first millenium monotheistic religions, Christianity and Manichaeism were not seen as outrightly incompatible – this restriction concerned only the relation with polytheism –, but rather as simply two stages in the evolution of salvation and revelation, the more recent one being presented, in a somewhat bewildering fashion, as restauration of the earliest stage of religion as well as present fulfilment of the prophecies of its direct predecessor. However, these attempts at a friendly takeover of Christianity (and of most other religions) by Manichaeism should not make us forget the situation of dire competition between these different faiths. Thus, Mani explicitly stressed the merits of his own creed in comparison to his predecessors, explaining in the (fragmentarily preserved) Middle Persian account of his religion, the *Shahburagan*:

This religion which was chosen by me is in ten things above and better than the other religions of the ancients. Firstly: The older religions were in one country and one language; but my religion is of the kind that it will be manifest in every country and in all languages, and it will be taught in far away countries. Secondly: The older religions (remained in order) as long as there were holy leaders in it; but when the leaders had been led upwards, then their religions became confused and they became slack in commandments and pious works, and by {V} greed and fire (of lust) and desire were deceived. However, my religion will remain firm through the living (. . . tea)chers, the bishops, the elect and the hearers; and of wisdom and

¹¹³ *Cologne Mani Codex*, 107f.

¹¹⁴ *Cologne Mani Codex* 17.

¹¹⁵ Concerning Mani as Paraclet, cf. QUISPÉL (1970), SUNDERMANN (1988), DECRET (1992).

¹¹⁶ *Cologne Mani Codex* 104f.

works will stay on until the end. Thirdly: Those former souls by whom in their own good action was not completed, come to my religion and it verily is to them the gate of salvation. Fourthly: This revelation (of mine) of the two principles and my living books, my wisdom and knowledge are above and better than those of the previous religions. Fifthly: All writings, all wisdom and all parables of the previous religions when they to this (religion of mine came ...).¹¹⁷

Hence, Mani considered his Gospel – as did Christian faith – as the ‘last’ and ultimate religion, presiding over all others religions because of its return to unspoiled divine primordality. However, whereas the Christian rapprochement towards and, in some way, reconciliation with many features of pagan religion took several generations to operate, Manicheism immediately tried to define its position towards the other religions on the very pragmatic grounds of a maximum terminological and theological convergence and established itself as fulfiller of Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and Buddhistic faiths.

It was inevitable that this unique blend of various theologies and salvation histories should be considered as a dangerous competitor as well by Christianity as by other competing religions. Thus, the *Acta Archelai* (c. 350) stigmatised Mani’s religious syncretism and presented him as an impostor, voluntarily and indistinctly mixing various Egyptian, Iranian and Christian holy books in order to present himself to all nations as a false Paraclete:¹¹⁸

That boy reached the age of sixty, having acquired all the knowledge in the land, almost more than anybody else, but especially what was in those four books [i.e. the *Mysteries*, the *Chapters*, the *Gospel*, and, last of all, the *Treasure*]. He also acquired three disciples: Thomas, Addas, and Hermas. He translated the four books and claimed authorship after having inserted much new material, similar to the tales of old wives. Thus, he had those three disciples who knew about his wrongdoings. He wrote his own name upon those books, having erased that of the previous owner, as if he had written them all by himself. He then sent his disciples with the things he had written in those books to the upper parts of that province, to various villages and cities, so that he had someone to follow him. [...]

65. Then, while in prison, he made them obtain some Christian books, but those whom he sent to all the various places were held in great hatred by those who revered the name of Christians. So taking a little money, they went to places where Christian books were written, and presenting themselves as Christian novices, the asked for books they might buy. And, in brief, they buy all the books of our scriptures and bring to him in prison. He took them, and being a smart fellow, he began looking for passages that might confirm that duality of his, though it was not his, but that of Scythianus, who had brought it forth a long time ago. And, basing himself on our books, he made this assertion like when he disputed with me,

¹¹⁷ Transl. Gardner / Lieu (2004), 109 from m5794 I + m5761, *MM* ii, 295-296 + *KG* 2205-2207 + 2210-2212. Larger parts of the *Shahburagan* are also preserved in al-Biruni. For al Biruni as a central source in the tradition of Manichaean fragments and biographical informations on Mani, cf. STROHMAIER (2000).

¹¹⁸ Cf. e.g. LIEU (1988), KLEIN (1991).

pointing to some passages, while changing others, only retaining the name of Christ. He pretended to adopt this name, so that they would not chase his disciples throughout the towns when they heard the holy and divine name of Christ. After having found the word 'paraclete' in one of the books, he began calling himself the paraclete, although had he read more closely he would have noticed that the paraclete had already come at the time the apostles were on earth.¹¹⁹

A similar criticism was also formulated by St. Augustine, himself a former Manichaean auditor between 373 and 382, in his *De haeresibus*, where he criticised Mani's dualism and his eclectic handling of the Christian Gospels, denied him the title of Paraclete, but called him rather an heresiarch:¹²⁰

They do, however, state that Christ existed, the one our scripture calls the Serpent, by whom they assert they have been illuminated, so that they opened the eyes of knowledge (*cognitio*) and were able to tell good and evil apart, even though Christ is supposed to have come in recent times to free the souls, not the bodies. Nor is he supposed to have been in a true body, but to have offered to human senses a simulated aspect of flesh in order to fool them, in which he feigned not only his death but also his resurrection. The God who gave the Laws through Moses and spoke through the Hebrew prophets is not supposed to have been the true God, but one of the princes of darkness. And they read the scriptures of the New Testament itself as if it were falsified, taking from it what they like and rejecting what they dislike and even place ahead of the scriptures several apocrypha, as if they held everything that is true. Jesus Christ's promise of the *paraclete* Holy Ghost they say was fulfilled in their heresiarch Mani. Hence, in his writings, he calls himself the apostle of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ had promised he would send himself, and in him he sent the Holy Ghost. And for this reason Mani himself had twelve apostles, in imitation of the apostolic number, which the Manicheans preserve to this day.¹²¹

Interestingly, Mani's universally adaptative syncretism proved to be his major strength as well as his greatest weakness, for all empires viewed this exotic blend of diverse religions with suspicion and interpreted it as dangerous attempt to undermine imperial homogeneity. Thus, pagans such as Diocletian suppressed Manichaeism¹²² (in 297/302) because of its introduction of 'the accursed customs and perverse laws of the Persians',¹²³ Christian emperors

¹¹⁹ *Acta Archelai* 64f. (transl. S.D.F. Salmond).

¹²⁰ Cf. in general VAN OORT (1994) and VAN OORT (2001). Concerning the *de haeresibus*, cf. MÜLLER (1956).

¹²¹ AUG., *De haer.* 15-16.

¹²² Cf. in general KADEN (1953).

¹²³ *Coll. Vat.* 15.3.4 (Transl. M. Reinhold / N. Lewis): *We take note that those men concerning whom Your Sagacity has reported to Our Serenity, namely the Manichaeans, have set up new and unheard-of sects in opposition to the older creeds, with the intent of driving out to the benefit of their depraved doctrine what was formerly granted to us by divine favor. We have heard that these men have but recently sprung up and advanced, like strange and unexpected portents, from the Persian people, our enemy, to this part of*

feared its deceptive similarities to Christianity,¹²⁴ the Chinese emperor, in his prohibition of Manichaeism in 732, stressed that ‘The doctrine of Mar Mani is basically a perverse belief and fraudulently assumes to be a school of Buddhism and will therefore mislead the masses. It deserves to be strictly prohibited’.¹²⁵ Finally, the Islamic Khalifs tried to eradicate Manichaeism because of its alleged deformation of Islamic principles.¹²⁶

7. Islam

Besides Manichaeism and other gnostic sects, the most important example of an adoption and further development of the Messianic dynamics of salvation history as a strategy of theological and missionary ‘friendly takeover’ was Islam. Since its beginning, one of the main challenges Islam had to face in order to establish its own religious position was the definition of its relationship with the other important monotheistic religions present in Arabia and the way to assure their easy conversion to the new faith.¹²⁷ Thus, Christianity (as well as Judaism and local Arab prophecy)¹²⁸ appears in the Qur’an at the same time as a teleological requisite, as a theological legitimation and as an opponent to be overcome – three elements present for instance in the popular legend of the Christian monk Bahira,¹²⁹ recognising in Muhammad the prophet predicted in ‘the holy books of the Christians’:

Now, at Busra, in Syria, there was a monk named Bahira who was of the Christian faith. He had always lived in the same hermitage, which possessed a book - for the instruction of the monks - which was passed down and was always kept by the oldest among them. When the caravan encamped in the vicinity of Bahira’s hermitage - and they had previously often passed by without his speaking or presenting himself to them - he prepared a great deal of food for them, reputedly

the world, where they are perpetrating many outrages, disturbing the tranquillity of the peoples and also introducing the gravest harm to the communities. And it is to be feared that peradventure, as usually happens, they may try, with the accursed customs and perverse laws of the Persians, to infect men of a more innocent nature, namely the temperate and tranquil Roman people, as well as our entire Empire with what one might call their malevolent poisons.

¹²⁴ CTh 16,5,3 (2.3.372); 5,7 (8.5.381); 5,9 (31.3.382); 5,35 (17.5.399); 5,38 (12.2.405); 5,40 (22.2.407); 5,43 (15.11.408); 5,62 (17.7.425); see also KADEN (1953).

¹²⁵ Edict of the Chinese emperor of 732, transl. Lieu (1985), p. 190.

¹²⁶ Cf. CHOKR (1993).

¹²⁷ Concerning the general relations between early Islam and contemporary Christianity, cf. ANDRAE (1926), TRIMINGHAM (1977) and now the papers in GRYPEOU *et al.* (2006) with literature. See also ENGELS (2013b) for a case study concerning Sicily.

¹²⁸ Cf. e.g. WANSBROUGH (1978).

¹²⁹ On Bahira cf. GERO (1992), GRIFFITH (1995), ROGGEMA (2008).

because of something he had seen whilst in his cell. It was said that, from his hermitage, he had seen the apostle of Allah in the caravan, and that as the caravan approached a cloud hung over the apostle of Allah. [...] When Bahira saw this he came down from his cell and ordered food to be prepared. When it was ready he sent the following message to the people of the caravan, 'I have made a dinner for you, o ye Quraysh people. I should like you all to come, the small and the big, the bondmen and the free! [...] When Bahira saw him he scrutinized him closely and examined him to find the signs he sought. [...] Accordingly he put to him various questions about his state during sleep, and his condition and circumstances, to which the apostle of Allah gave replies which agreed with what Bahira expected of him. Then Bahira looked on his back and discovered the seal of prophecy between his shoulders. After he had examined the boy, Bahira went to Abu Talib and [...] said: "[...] Return with your nephew to his country, and guard him from the Jews; for, by Allah, if they see him and know about him what I know, they will try to injure him, because something very great will happen to this nephew of yours. Therefore make haste to return with him to his country."¹³⁰

This typical missionary anecdote tries to legitimate the Islamic prophet as well as to persuade the Christians to convert to Islam, and is representative for the Islam's ambivalent attitude towards the 'people of the book' (*ahl al-kitâb*): on the one hand, they are believed to have received and accepted the divine message through various Jewish or Arab prophets,¹³¹ but, on the other hand, are accused of having gradually falsified and deformed their books,¹³² a reproach we already encountered when discussing Christian attitude towards Jews and pagans and the Manichaean attitude towards all other religions. In this perspective, Islam is not advertised as a wholly 'new' religion; rather, its holy book is only the untainted revelation of a heavenly and preexistent proto-Qur'ân,¹³³ the 'perfect book',¹³⁴ and thus an attempt to return to the abrahamic religion – exactly as Christianity and Manichaeism had claimed before:

And they say: Be Jews or Christians, then ye will be rightly guided. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters.¹³⁵

Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian; but he was an upright man who had surrendered (to Allah), and he was not of the idolaters.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ IBN ISHAQ, *Sīrat rasūl allāh* 1 (Transl. A. Guillaume).

¹³¹ *Q.* 17.15.

¹³² *Q.* 3.78: *And lo! there is a party of them who distort the Scripture with their tongues, that ye may think that what they say is from the Scripture, when it is not from the Scripture. And they say: It is from Allah, when it is not from Allah; and they speak a lie concerning Allah knowingly.*

¹³³ *Q.* 85.22.

¹³⁴ *Q.* 2.2.

¹³⁵ *Q.* 2.135.

¹³⁶ *Q.* 3.67.

This interpretation of Islam as return to an older and hence, as it was believed, unspoiled and better state of religion necessarily implied a certain esteem for the other religions that developed from this same ground, viz. Jewish and Christian prophecy. However, whereas Mani professed that Jesus had to be considered as the son of God and hence integrated one of the most important dogmas of Christian theology into his mission, Islam could only accept Christ as one prophet among others in order not to dilute its radical monotheism. Nevertheless, Muhammad, like Mani, used Christianity as connecting point for his own legitimation and considered himself, through a rather adventurous translation of 'Paraclete' (παράκλητος) as 'praised' ('*ahmad*) and thus as allusion to his own name Muhammad (whose root HMD also refers to the notion of praise), as the Paraclete predicted by Christ himself, positioning Islam in continuity, not outright opposition to the 'original' Christianity:¹³⁷

And when Jesus son of Mary said: O Children of Israel! Lo! I am the messenger of Allah unto you, confirming that which was (revealed) before me in the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a messenger who cometh after me, whose name is the Praised One. Yet when he hath come unto them with clear proofs, they say: This is mere magic.¹³⁸

This statement is not only found in the Qur'ân, but also in the prophet's hadiths.¹³⁹ Obviously, Islam immediatly adopted the view it had taken Christian theology some generations to develop and accepted in principle that even non-Muslims – as long as they were monotheists – might accede to redemption through their ethical qualities:

Lo! Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabians - whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right - surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.¹⁴⁰

However, this should not make us forget that Islam – as well as Christianity, Manichaeism and many other late antique sects – considered its faith as the only 'true' religion and thus necessarily superior to other religions. This implies that

¹³⁷ Concerning the position of Christ and the Christians in the Qur'an, cf. e.g. the useful compilation in BAUSCHKE (2001); see also SCHUMANN (1988), KHALIDI (1992).

¹³⁸ Q. 61.6.

¹³⁹ See e.g. AL BUKHARI 3442: *I heard the messenger of God say: Compared to other people, I am nearer to the son of Mary. The prophets are the children of 'allât. Between Jesus and myself, there were no other prophets.* Cf. also AL BUKHARI 3443: *The messenger of God said: Compared to other people, I am nearer to the son of Mary, here on this world and in the other. The prophets are the children of 'allât, viz. of different mothers. But their religions are the same.* For the importance of hadith-literature in Islamic thought, cf. also Engels (2009b).

¹⁴⁰ Q. 2.62.

other monotheists could enjoy the protection of the community and should not be compelled to convert to Islam,¹⁴¹ but that they had to pay special taxes and that a conversion from Islam to another faith was forbidden by death penalty.¹⁴² Indeed, whereas Jesus was considered as the last prophet by Christianity, and Mani as the last prophet by Manicheism, Islam now regarded Muhammad as its ultimate prophet, whose revelation contained the definitive version of divine wisdom. Thus, as in Christianity and Manichaeism, the prophet of Islam considered himself as founder of the only 'true religion' and as the 'seal of the prophets', adopting thus willingly the mechanism of creating theological and teleological continuity as claiming to inaugurate – again – the definitive 'end of times'.

Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets; and Allah is ever aware of all things.¹⁴³

Hence, Islam follows the basic construction parameters of salvation history, predefined by Christianity and Manichaeism, in order to define its relationship towards its predecessors and to justify its own superiority and thus competitive attractiveness as a fulfiller, not an antagonist, provoking thus similar reactions from the Christians as when they were confronted with Manichaeism.¹⁴⁴ As the Christian component of Islam could not easily be dismissed, but theological acceptance of Islam would have been disastrous for obvious reasons of religious survival, polemics were to be directed against the syncretistic nature of Islam and thus its alleged 'Altersbeweis', as shows Theophanes the Confessor:¹⁴⁵

At the beginning of his advent the misguided Jews thought he was the Messiah so that some of their leaders joined him and accepted his religion while forsaking that of Moses who saw God. Those who did so were ten in number and they remained with him until his first sacrifice. But when they saw him eating camel meat, they realized that he was not the one they thought him to be, [...] those wretched men taught him illicit things directed against us, Christians, and remained with him.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, John of Damascus' (650-754), growing up in an already Islamic Damascus, tried to prove the composite nature of the Qur'ân by deforming the legend of Bahira and adopting exactly the same strategy we already encountered when discussing Christian criticism of the syncretism of Manicheism:¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ Cf. TRITTON (1930), FATTAL (1958), PETERS (2003).

¹⁴² Concerning the basic text of this issue, the alleged pact of Umar, cf. e.g. NOTH (1987) and COHEN (1999).

¹⁴³ Q. 33.40.

¹⁴⁴ Concerning early Christian writings on Muhammad, cf. HOYLAND (1997), GRIFFITH (1983), HOYLAND (2000).

¹⁴⁵ Concerning Theophanes, cf. HOYLAND (2011).

¹⁴⁶ THEOPH. CONF., *Chron.* AM 6122/629-630 (Transl. C. Mango).

¹⁴⁷ Cf. NASRALLA (1950), SAHAS (1972).

From that time to the present a false prophet named Mohammed has appeared in their midst. This man, after having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments and likewise, it seems, having conversed with an Arian monk, devised his own heresy. Then, having insinuated himself into the good graces of the people by a show of seeming piety, he gave out that a certain book had been sent down to him from heaven. He had set down some ridiculous compositions in this book of his and he gave it to them as an object of veneration.¹⁴⁸

8. Ismâ‘ilism

The death of the ‘seal of the prophets’ in 632 and the obvious continuation of a history without Muhammad’s further guidance provoked the first identity crisis of Islam and already immediately kindled first hopes for the future return of the prophet and the restauration of the golden days of the Umma of Medina.¹⁴⁹ Immediately upon the news of Muhammad’s death, many faithful denied the prophet’s death (though he himself never refused to admit his mortality), and even the later Calif Umar is said to have declared, according to Ibn Ishâq:

Now Umar rose before the people and said, “Some Hypocrites say that the apostle of Allah is dead! He has not died, but has departed to his Lord, just as Moses left his people for forty days, and returned to them when it was rumoured he was dead. By Allah! The apostle will return just as Moses did, and the hands and feet of the men who have said that the apostle is dead will be cut off!”¹⁵⁰

However, the mourning about the prophet’s death and the eschatological hopes aroused by this event rapidly were re-contextualised by the problem of the deceased’s succession, particularly after the confrontation between the fourth Calif, Mu‘âwīyya, and the prophet’s nephew and son in law, ‘Alî. This led to civil war and the political and gradually religious secession of the latter’s followership, the Šî‘a, from the majority of Muslims, the Sunna.¹⁵¹ The political failure of the Šî‘a to accede to political power because of the death of ‘Alî in 661 and of his sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn in 670 and 680 and the subsequent need to hide its ideology behind a protecting screen of allusions and symbols marked the initial point of the construction of a complex history of salvation, centred around the eschatological role of Fatima’s descendants, the allegiance to the current head of the ‘Alide family – the hidden *imâm* – and the firm belief in the

¹⁴⁸ JOH. DAMASC., *Haer.* 101 (Transl. F.H. Chase).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. e.g. MONTGOMERY WATT (1956).

¹⁵⁰ IBN ISHAQ 26.

¹⁵¹ Cf. e.g. MADELUNG (1997), DAKAKE (2008).

future takeover of the last of them, the *mahdî*, who should restore pure faith.¹⁵² Again, enthusiasm about the earthly realisation of the salvation process was transformed into hope of a future fulfilment, and again, the evergrowing bulk of Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, Manichaeic and Islamic prophecies provided numerous possibilities of connecting the new utopia with the present beliefs and prepared a new mutation of monotheism, even if the difficulty of legitimating – again – a new faith and incorporating the ancient material proved to be ever more difficult.

The technical climax of this new competitive system can probably be found in the Ismâ'îlî movement, which later on acceded to power in North Africa and founded the powerful Fatimid Caliphate.¹⁵³ This is not the place to expose and discuss the complex theology of the Ismâ'îlî mission, much more influenced by Manichaeic and Gnostic dualism than by orthodox Islamic monotheism. Let us only stress its complex handling of salvation history and its belief into a preordained succession of six exoteric 'speakers' and of six esoteric 'keepers'. The former are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus und Muhammad, who each found a new, outer religion in order to teach the human soul an approximation of divine law based on a superficial outer shell. The esoteric 'keepers' (Abel, Sem, Ismael, Aaron, Peter and 'Ali) preserve the spirit of the true religion hidden behind these smokescreens and pass it each on to a succession of seven hidden imams the last one of whom will be the next 'speaker'. The seventh speaker is believed to be the ultimate prophet, the Mahdî, who is expected to accede to political power, restore and disclose to the eyes of all the original, Adamic faith, and abolish the Quranic laws.¹⁵⁴

As the ultimate goal of the Ismâ'îlî mission (*da'wa*) was, at least from an 'Abbasid and Sunnite point of view, political high treason and religious apostasy through an allegedly erroneous interpretation of the Qur'ân,¹⁵⁵ its missionaries had to use utmost caution and stealth and had to rely on a complex system of initiation grades in order to protect the theological core of their faith. Theology, salvation history and politics thus formed an inextricable whole, and as spiritual and political interests were inseparable, some Ismâ'îlî missionaries often doubtlessly had quite specific personal motivations and used religion as a means of gaining secular power.

¹⁵² Concerning early Šî'a and Messianism, cf. SACHEDINA (1981), ARJOMAND (1984) and the papers in GARCÍA ARENAL (2000).

¹⁵³ As introduction to early Ismâ'îlî history and religion, cf. LEWIS (1940), IVANOW (1942), MADELUNG (1961), STERN (1983), DAFTARY (1990), HALM (1991), BRETT (2001). Concerning a case study for Sicily, cf. ENGELS (2010c).

¹⁵⁴ Concerning Ismâ'îlî cosmology and theology, cf. HALM (1978).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. e.g. POONAWALA (1988).

Accordingly, metaphysical extravagance and cynical manipulation may not always have been separated very clearly, and thus, the Sunnite orthodoxy quickly tried to despise the new heresy by diabolising it and stressing its machiavellistic adaptivity and its alleged underlying atheism. Our sources are thus heavily biased but even the little information we have demonstrate the versatility of the Ismâ'îlî salvation history and the obvious wish to facilitate the mission by creating numerous intersections with other Near Eastern creeds.

A typical example of Ismâ'îlî missionary tactics,¹⁵⁶ usually affecting Šî'ite sympathies in order to bait the potential convert, is given by the testimony of Ibn Haušab, a disillusioned Šî'ite who, after the death of the twelfth Imam in 874, ceased to believe in traditional Šî'a, rejoined the Ismâ'îlî faith and became himself a missionary. Following to the *Iftitâh* of Nu'mân,¹⁵⁷ Ibn Haušab related the conversion of the young Yemenite 'Alî ibn al-Faḍl in 880 (266) who, during the season of pilgrimage, wept at the mausoleum of Ḥusayn, in the following terms:

One of the dā'īs observed him every day while he was acting in this way, and having seen his intention and diligence remained alone with him and comforted him. He disclosed to him some knowledge and asked him some questions. 'Alî b. al-Faḍl trusted him and kept company with him and sought to find out what he knew. Then one day during his conversation the man asked him, 'Tell me, if you had attained the occupant of this mausoleum at which you weep and whose excellence you declare, what would you have done for him?' He replied, 'By God, I would have placed my cheek and kissed the ground which he trod.' [...] He said, 'You seem to assume that God, the Exalted and Glorified, has cut off his cause with his death, and removed His proof from His creation with his death.' He replied, 'Certainly not! But how can I act about it?' The man remained silent and 'Alî b. al-Faḍl implored him, saying, 'By God, you would not have spoken to me thus about him without having some trace of him, so direct me to him.' ('Alî b. al-Faḍl) began to frequent him, while he avoided him, and he implored him, while he shut himself off [...].¹⁵⁸

Apart from the missionary tactic of first arousing the convert's curiosity by Šî'ite allusion before disclosing proper Ismâ'îlî teachings, another often used means of convincing future converts was the play with esoteric allusions, underlined as typical missionary practice by Ibn Haušab himself:

Then (the imam) revealed the communication whose principles he had established and ideas which he wanted to express. While making recommendations to him he said, "If you meet someone smarter than you in the art of controversy, drown him in the esoterics." (The dā'ī) asked, "How am I to do so?" (The imam) replied, "You will interrupt the discussion and show him that the reply that you want to give

¹⁵⁶ Cf. IVANOW (1939), CANARD (1942-47), HALM (1981).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. FYZEE (1934).

¹⁵⁸ NU'MĀN, *Iftitâh* § 6 (Transl. H. Haji, p. 27).

covers an esoteric aspect which you cannot reveal. Keep this from him until he loses the argument.”¹⁵⁹

Apart from Ibn Haušab, our knowledge of the techniques of the early Ismâ‘îlî mission is still very fragmentary for it was totally illegal and therefore tended to cover its tracks as much as possible. Moreover, the image conveyed by later Sunnite sources is heavily biased.

For example, since the tenth century a ‘book of the highest initiation’ (*kitâb al-balağ al-akbar*) and a ‘book of guidance’ (*kitâb as-siyâsa*) circulated. They presented themselves as confidential handbooks for Ismâ‘îlî missionaries, but were, in fact, anti-Ismâ‘îlî pamphlets directed against the Fatimids.¹⁶⁰ According to the *kitâb as-siyâsa*, the initiation happened in nine grades, departing step by step from the initial religious convictions of the convert and leading towards atheism and cynicism. Thus, the missionary is not only advised to display a respectable behaviour, but is also instructed to adapt as much as possible to the beliefs of the future convert not only in order to protect himself, but also to ease the conversion:

Make propaganda among the people by approaching each individual according to the manner to which he inclines and by making everyone believe that you belong to his sect. If you have a Shī‘ite do deal with, you will let him understand that you share his convictions. In order to gain his confidence, you will dwell upon the injustice with which the Muslim community treated ‘Alī and his children [...].

If you has to deal with a Sābian, insinuate yourself into his mind by discourses on the hebdomadal number; you will find his doctrines kindred to yours.

If you have to deal with a Zoroastrian, you are in agreement with him on principles – see the fourth degree. [They profess, as you do,] the excellence of the fire, the light and the sun. [...]

If you have the chance to meet a Jew, hold his attention by speaking to him about the Messiah; tell him that it is the same as the Mahdī; that the knowledge of him procures rest from the duties imposed by religion and of its troublesome obligations, in the same way as his law enjoins him to rest on the Sabbath-day, You will gain his sympathy by speaking disparagingly on the ignorant Christians and Muslims with their assertions concerning Jesus: that he has not been born and that he had no father. Tell them that Joseph the carpenter was his father and Mary his mother; and that Joseph was her husband. By this and similar speech you will soon make them your followers.

Gain the Christians by expatiating on the faults of the Jews and the Muslims; show that you approve of their making the sign of the cross, but let them know its allegorical explanation. Try to confute their negative views about the Paraclete and prove to them that he is going to come and that you call them to him.

If you make acquaintance with a Manichaean, well, he is a sea whence you can draw freely. Approach them by the doctrines to be found in the sixth chapter, show

¹⁵⁹ NU‘MĀN, *Ifitāh* § 6 (Transl. H. Haji, p. 29).

¹⁶⁰ Cf. the papers in STERN (1983).

them the sixth grade of the Initiation; the mixture of darkness and light, and suchlike things in that chapter [...].

If you meet a philosopher, you know perfectly well that we rely on the philosophers and that we agree with them concerning the Laws of the prophets and the doctrine of the eternity of the world [...].

If you are presented to a Dualist, say bravo! – you are sure of victory. You will gain him by the rejection of the doctrine of the unity of God, by the doctrine of the Preexistent and the Follower and the heritage of onbe of the, as it is exposed in the first and third grades of the Initiation.

If you have to deal with a Sunnī, speak to him with respect of Abū Bakr and 'Umar, mention their excellent character; speak ill of 'Alī and his descendants and do not be sparing with censure of them. Insinuate to him that Abū Bakr and 'Umar were not quite alien to the doctrine you are teaching him [...].

You must make yourself acquainted with the histories of the ancients, their adventures, their ways and their religions, so that you will be able to arrange your teaching in a manner suiting your own generation. You must also make yourself familiar with the impostures of the prophets and the contradictions that can be found in their words [...].¹⁶¹

Though it has to be underlined that these passages are essentially a parody, the authors seem rather well informed about the esoterical aspects of Ismā'īlism and obviously used what appears to be more or less credible, though caricatured, stereotypes. Quite clearly, towards the end of the tenth century, the complexity of the history of salvation had become, at least in some circles, a mere cynical game...

9. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the pagan mediterranean religious *koine* – except Judaism – has to be seen mainly as an addition of diverse, not mutually exclusive cults, mysteries and philosophies, whose reciprocal compatibility did not imply awareness of a shared, internal coherence. Only the widespread diffusion of Christianity provoked the fusion of these polytheist beliefs into the idea of a single, 'other' religion, whose 'falsehood' seemed diametrically opposed to Christian 'truth'. This also implied, for the first time in the Mediterranean world, a consciousness about the possible existence of 'religions' as mutually exclusive alternatives.

Hence, the definition of the historical genesis and evolutionary relationship between one's own faith and the (of course) misguided beliefs of the other

¹⁶¹ *Kitāb as-siyāsa* (quoted by NUWAIRĪ, *Nihāyat al-arab* from Aḥū Muḥsin), § 1-9 and 23f. (ed. and transl. S.M. Stern, *Studies in Early Ismailism*, Leiden / Jerusalem 1983, ch. 4: *The Book of the Highest Initiation and other anti-Ismā'īlī Travesties*, p. 56-83).

gained a crucial importance. Indeed, a stress on historical continuities or even on teleological interrelations could ease transitions and conversions and thus facilitate missionary activities. An emphasis on fundamental divergences, however, could strengthen one's own theological position and assure inner cohesion and discipline.

Continuity and discontinuity, dissociation and teleology henceforward became central elements of defining religion and constructing apologetic strategies in the context of the competition of religions. In order to systematise our understanding of the genesis, evolution and complexification of salvation history in a context of mission and competition, it seems convenient to sum up the following points.

To begin with, we saw that the construction of religious legitimacy through the projection of cultic origins into a distant past was already deeply embedded in classical mentality, coalescing in the famous 'Altersbeweis'. Nevertheless, it did not allow for the formation of a meaningful and universally recognised salvation history, which precisely defined, linked and evaluated, from a theological point of view, the historical past, present and future. Only the influence of Near Eastern and particularly Jewish Messianism added a forward-looking dimension to this mostly backward oriented perspective, and with the rise of Christianity, the present gained a precise theological status.

The historicising of religion constituted one of Christianity's major assets in the competition with the diverse forms of paganism, and enabled it to effectively back up men's hopes and aspirations. Judaism and paganism were considered as teleologically necessary, albeit outperformed predecessors, easing conversion as well as delimitation. As the delay of the Parousia weakened Christianity's credibility, the allusion to the coming of the Paraclete enabled new religions to connect their new beliefs to Christianity and reinterpret salvation history according to their own needs, thus turning Christian argumentary strategies against itself and degrading it to a mere predecessor in order to prove their own absolute truthfulness.

This technique became more and more popular and allowed the rapid spread of Manichaeism, Sunnite Islam and even Ismâ'îlism, each drawing on the religious potential of the former, until the evolution reached the point when the religious debate, the quest for continuity and the learned game of interpreting allusions and prophecies risked becoming a mere cynical game of manipulation and arbitrariness – a game obviously not over at all if one considers contemporary missionary techniques not only of Muslim,¹⁶² but also, at least partially, of Christian missionaries.

¹⁶² As example, one might refer to the numerous websites advising Muslim missionaries to underline the belief that Christ himself had announced, through his allusion to the paraclet, the coming of Muhammad. Cf. e.g. the anonymous entry on

I only refer to the long bygone, yet still highly illuminating debate about the 'Chinese rites' (1610-1744), mainly dealing with the question to what extent the Jesuit missionaries Matteo Ricci and Michele Ruggieri were right in assuming that central elements of the Christian theory of salvation had already been formulated in Chinese religion and philosophy and had to be respected by the missionaries. Thus, in 1659, the congregation for the evangelisation of the nations advised its missionaries:

'Ne mettez aucun zèle, n'avancez aucun argument pour convaincre ces peuples de changer leurs rites, leurs coütumes et leur moeurs, à moins qu'ils ne soient évidemment contraires à la religion et à la morale. Quoi de plus absurde que de transporter chez les Chinois la France, l'Espagne, l'Italie, ou quelque autre pays d'Europe? N'introduisez pas chez eux nos pays, mais la foi, cette foi qui ne repousse ni ne blesse les rites, ni les usages d'aucun peuple, pourvu qu'ils ne soient pas détestables, mais bien au contraire veut qu'on les garde et les protège.'¹⁶³

However, Ricci's successor, Niccolò Longobardo, and the Spanish Dominicans and Franciscans strongly disagreed with this view and, underlining that the veneration of the emperor, the heaven and the ancestors were religious, not civil customs, advocated an unconditional propagation of Christianity in its European

<<http://www.shiachat.com/forum/index.php?/topic/234970754-parakletos-in-bible-vs-ahmad-in-quran/>> from November 3, 2009, explaining (I cite as written):

,Most christians hold the view that the prophecy of Muhammad (sawa) was never mentioned in the bible. Such claims are put forth on the basis that there was no mention of the actual name "Muhammad" but as we know Allah is Al-Latif, the most subtle. Just as he did not actually mention any of the Ahlul-Bayt in the Quran by name, this doesn't mean that there were no references to them because as we all know the Quran is filled with subtle references to the Ahlul-Bayt. I bring forth two verses, one from the bible and one from the Quran, which are both in striking conformity to the prophecy of Muhammad (sawa) made by Jesus. From John 16:7-8 RSV: "*Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor [parakletos] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.*" Pay attention to the original greek word used here "Parakletos", which translates to 'the praised one' or the 'comforter'. From Quran 61: 6: *And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: "O Children of Israel! I am the messenger of Allah (sent) to you, confirming the Taurat (Law) (which came) before me, and giving Glad Tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad."* But when he came to them with Clear Signs, they said, "*This is evident sorcery!*" Here the arabic word "Ahmad" again translates to "the prasiad one" just as the word 'parakletos' was used in the bible. Of course, we don't need to refer to the bible for our proofs since it is already clear but I think these are good verses to use for dawah purposes when debating with christians.'

¹⁶³ Extract from the 1659 'Instructions', given to Mgr François Pallu and Mgr Lambert de la Motte of the Paris Foreign Missions Society by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, quoted after *Missions étrangères de Paris. 350 ans au service du Christ*, Paris, 2008, 5.

form – a view confirmed, in 1715, by the bulla *Ex illa die* by Clemes XI, and followed, in 1724, by the interdiction of Christianity by emperor Yongzheng. Only in 1939, the bulla *Plane compertum* admitted the rightfulness of the so-called ‘Chinese’ Christianity...¹⁶⁴

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¹⁶⁴ Cf. in general also MOULE (1930), MINAMIKI (1985), MUNGELLO (1994).

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