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BONN CENTER FOR DEPENDENCY AND SLAVERY STUDIES

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Did Late Ancient Christianity Depend on Classical *Paideia*, and Did It Ever Get Rid of It?

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1. Introduction: What has Education to Do with Dependency?

1.1 Education, Social Mobility, and Dependency

What has education to do with dependency? With respect to present-day Germany – and perhaps not exclusively to this country – one might be inclined to answer that the main problem lies with the accessibility of education: While in principle schools and universities are open to all people, the opportunity to acquire higher education by attending secondary schools and universities actually depends to a significant degree on social background and financial resources.[1] Theoretically, the pursuit of happiness or, expressed with less pathos, the free choice of career path starts by developing of one's abilities, talents, and inclinations – but in many cases, circumstances prevent the realization of this individual freedom. One should expect otherwise in post-Enlightenment Germany, but as a matter of fact, the opportunity to receive instruction at school and to form oneself as a human being – that is, acquiring and unfolding the self in a life-long process of *Bildung* – in (too) many cases depends on factors that are beyond the reach of children and adolescents and also of their parents, and such constellations of dependency comprise even academic education.[2] Even if the situation may appear different in other European (rather than in low-income) countries, it seems that although education was clearly in the foreground in the United Nations declaration of human rights,[3] this claim has not yet been universally translated into action.

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[1] For an overview over current scholarship on school education and social settings in contemporary Germany, see Kai Maaz, "Soziale Ungleichheiten in den einzelnen Bildungsbereichen," https://www.bpb.de/themen/bildung/dossier-bildung/322324/soziale-ungleichheiten-in-den-einzelnen-bildungsbereichen/ [accessed 26.04.2023].

[2] See Julia Reuter, Markus Gamper, Christina Möller and Frerk Blome, eds., *Vom Arbeiterkind zur Professur. Sozialer Aufstieg in der Wissenschaft. Autobiographische Notizen und soziobiographische Analysen*, Gesellschaft der Unterschiede 54 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020).

[3] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948, art. 26, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights [accessed 24.09.2023].

However, the modern problem of individual and social welfare being dependent on education is not the issue which will be discussed here. But reflections upon modern pedagogical aims and challenges are related to the topic of the present study, insofar as I propose to read the impact of classical – i.e. pagan – education on late ancient Christianity, and the latter's critique and appropriation of pagan education, as the story of a struggle with dependencies. If individual advancement through education is still a problem in present-day Germany, one should expect a far more drastic picture in the late Roman Empire. In premodern times in general, and in late antiquity in particular, stable social stratification was the rule and upward mobility the exception.

But in the distant past of late antiquity, limited access to education due to prohibitive structures of dependency was only one side of the coin. On the other hand, Christian sources frequently testify to the fear of being too dependent on education: In this view, access to education was not regarded as the solution, but rather as part of the problem. Hence, the pressing question was not *how* to acquire education or to motivate people to strive for such advancement, but *whether* one should pursue (higher) education at all, or if one should not rather try to avoid it altogether. The factual reality of glass ceilings within Greco-Roman society went hand in hand with the discursive reality of anxieties concerning the hidden dangers of educational practices, institutions, and ideals. We can thus observe quite different perceptions of dependency on education, and the interesting question is if and how these realities interacted with each other and contributed to shape peoples' lives and minds. In the following two sub-sections I will first briefly highlight such Christian perceptions of education as a threat, and then outline the understanding of dependency as an analytical tool which informs the main part of my paper.

1.2   Christian Anxieties towards Ancient Education

The history of Christianity's relationship to the educational practices and ideals of the Roman world is complicated. The nascent communities

of believers in Jesus Christ found themselves in a world full of educational values, institutions, and discourses.[4] Although the majority of the population never attended school, the tradition which was preserved by authoritative writings (poems, histories, speeches) was present in public space in the shape of statues, images, and theatrical as well as cultic performances. However, it made a crucial difference to have 'graduated' from the schools of grammar and rhetoric, even if there was no formal degree to be achieved: Being "educated" (πεπαιδευμένος) or "literate" (*litteratus*) meant the ability to participate in literate discourse by deciphering and using literary codes, based on the intimate acquaintance with classical writers such as Homer, Demosthenes and Thucydides or Virgil, Cicero and Sallustius respectively. In this way the literate élite distinguished itself from the ignorant majority, the "uncultivated" (ἰδιῶται, *rustici*) or "unlearned" (ἀγράμματοι, *illitterati*). To belong to the fortunate few, practical skills such as those possessed by craftsmen or merchants were not sufficient – what was needed was noble descent and acceptance by the members of the upper class. Thus, even if a man was able to write his name and thereby sign a contract – people with this important competence were needed in every village! –, this did not render him 'literate' in the eyes of the *litterati*: As the philosopher Seneca (d. 65 CE) put it, an *illitteratus* was someone who "is not completely ignorant, but has not advanced to higher literature."[5] The 'public schools' (*scholae publicae*) thus provided for the educated few the means to distinguish themselves from the uneducated masses, as well as of integration within their own peer group.[6]

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[4] On the culture of *paideia* from Hellenistic to late Roman times, see Peter Gemeinhardt, "Paideia," in *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. David G. Hunter, Paul J.J. van Geest and Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte (Leiden: Brill, 2021), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993_EECO_SIM_00002503. The documentation and discussion of previous investigations into the field education need not be repeated here.

[5] Seneca, *De beneficiis* 5.13.3: *non ex toto rudem, sed ad litteras altiores non perductum.* Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Latin and Greek are my own.

[6] Cf. Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language. The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 11 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988): 14; Konrad Vössing, *Schule und Bildung im Nordafrika der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Collection Latomus 238 (Brussels: Latomus, 1997): 595–613. According to ibid. 325–35, the notion of *scholae publicae* does not indicate that these institutions were sustained by municipal or imperial authorities, but that they operated in public

Accordingly, ancient discourses on education were not concerned with the advancement of the many. Within the senatorial class, upward mobility was not welcomed: The famous senator Quintus Aurelius Symmachus (d. 402 CE) complained that "the way into a magistracy is frequently facilitated by a literary education!"[7] The addressee of this letter was Ausonius (d. 394), a prominent teacher in the flourishing schools of Bordeaux, and later an office-holder in the imperial administration, and it is safe to assume that in Gaul, far away from the city of Rome that regarded itself as the center of the world (*caput mundi*), promotion by education was regarded less critically than among the urban nobility of the *urbs aeterna*. But even if over time the chances of promotion to higher social ranks increased, most people never attended any school: Illiteracy was usual, few people received elementary instruction, and education in grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy remained reserved for a well-to-do minority. The notion of 'liberal arts' nicely captures this situation: Only those who were 'free' from the necessity to work all day long could spend their time on 'arts' such as literature. The word 'school' itself derives from the Greek word σχολή, which originally means 'leisure' (which may sound bewildering to pupils of today!). Thus, education was the privilege of a comparatively small number of people from higher social strata with a considerable degree of political and economic independency.

It is difficult to assess the social status of Christian writers, bishops, and parish members in the early centuries CE, but obviously there were Christians with a high degree of education, such as the apologists of the second and third centuries, and many protagonists of the dogmatic struggles in the fourth and fifth centuries. But not everyone was comfortable with his literary knowledge and skills, and remarkably, some of

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space, i.e., in the forum or agora, and that they were open to everyone (as long as he or she was able to pay for instruction). It was desirable to teach in a public place, but educational start-ups often had to take place in the teacher's home; see, e.g., Augustine recalling his beginnings as a rhetor in Rome (*Confessiones* 5.12.22). For education as a key element of social identity in Late Antiquity, see also Gabriela Ryser, *Education, Religion, and Literary Culture in the 4th Century CE. A Study of the Underworld Topos in Claudian's 'De raptu Proserpinae'*, Beiträge zur Europäischen Religionsgeschichte 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2020): 52–60.

[7] Symmachus, *Epistula* 1.20.1: *iter ad capessandos magistratus saepe litteris promovetur*.

these privileged members of Christian communities even felt threatened by their actual or alleged dependency on education. Jerome (d. 419), a well-connected representative of the newly established religion, is a case in point. In a famous letter, he narrated that, in a dream vision, he was accused by Christ of still using "pagan" education:

> Suddenly I was caught up in the spirit and dragged before the judgment seat of the Judge; and here the light was so bright, and those who stood around were so radiant, that I cast myself upon the ground and did not dare to look up. Asked who and what I was I replied: I am a Christian. But He who presided said: You lie. You are a follower of Cicero and not of Christ. For 'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (Matt 6:21). Instantly I became dumb, and amid the strokes of the lash – for He had ordered me to be scourged – I was tortured more severely still by the fire of conscience, considering with myself that verse: 'In the grave who shall give you thanks?' (Ps 6:6). Yet for all that I began to cry and to bewail myself, saying: Have mercy upon me, O Lord: have mercy upon me. Amid the sound of the scourges this cry still made itself heard. At last the bystanders, falling down before the knees of Him who presided, prayed that He would have pity on my youth, and that He would give me space to repent of my error. He might still, they urged, inflict torture on me, should I ever again read the works of the Gentiles. Under the stress of that awful moment I should have been ready to make even still larger promises than these. Accordingly I made oath and called upon His name, saying: Lord, if ever again I possess worldly books, or if ever again I read such, I have denied You.[8]

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8   Jerome, *Epistula* 22.30.3–5: *cum subito raptus in spiritu ad tribunal iudicis pertrahor, ubi tantum luminis et tantum erat ex circumstantium claritate fulgoris, ut proiectus in terram sursum aspicere non auderem. interrogatus condicionem christianum me esse respondi. et ille, qui residebat: 'mentiris', ait, 'ciceronianus es, non christianus; ubi thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum'. ilico obmutui et inter uerbera - nam caedi me iusserat - conscientiae magis igne torquebar illum me cum uersiculum reputans: in inferno autem quis confitebitur tibi? clamare tamen coepi et heiulans dicere: miserere mei, domine, miserere mei. haec uox inter flagella resonabat. tandem ad praesidentis genua prouoluti, qui astiterant, precabantur, ut ueniam tribueret adulescentiae, ut errori locum paenitentiae commodaret exacturus deinde cruciatum, si gentilium litterarum libros aliquando legissem. ego, qui tanto constrictus articulo uellem etiam maiora promittere, deiurare coepi et nomen eius obtestans dicere: 'domine,*

A few years later, Jerome himself was accused again, this time by a human being, his former friend at school, Rufinus (d. 411/12), that he had not kept his vow but continued to read and quote pagan authors. Jerome replied angrily that he simply had not managed to get rid of this knowledge because of his brilliant memory: "I can swear that I never read any of these things after I left school. I suppose that, to escape from having what I learned made into a crime, I must, according to the fables of the poets, go and drink of the river Lethe!"[9] Of course this complaint was meant to prove Jerome's admirable command of ancient literature and rhetoric, including mythological references. And, after all, had not the Old Testament prophets warned against taking dreams too literally?[10]

A century later, a similar experience was attributed to the erudite and ambitious Caesarius (d. 542), later bishop of Arles, and in the Middle Ages such scenes became iconic.[11] But among Jerome's contemporaries, there were alternative ways to approach the question of education. Augustine (d. 430), the most influential church father of the west, did not suffer from such threatening dreams. However, in his *Confessions* he deplored the lasting imprint which school had left on his

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si umquam habuero codices saeculares, si legero, te negaui'. Trans. W. Fremantle, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 2.6 (repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989): 35–36.

[9] Jerome, *Apologia contra Rufinum* 1.30: *Iurare possum me, postquam egressus de schola sum, haec numquam omnino legisse. Bibendum igitur mihi erit de lethaeo gurgite, iuxta fabulas poetarum, ne arguar scire quod didici.* Trans. Fremantle, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*: 498–99. In the critical edition, there are ten quotations from classical school texts in this one chapter alone!

[10] Jerome, *Apologia contra Rufinum* 1.31: *Sed tamen qui somnium criminatur audiat prophetarum uoces, somniis non esse credendum, quia nec adulterium somnii me ducit ad Tartarum, nec corona martyrii in caelum leuat.* The reference is, e.g., to Jer 23:25–28 and 29:8. For Jerome's debate with Rufinus see Peter Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum und die antike pagane Bildung,* Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 41 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007): 431–39.

[11] *Vita Caesarii* 1.9. For the medieval reception, see Horst Fuhrmann, *Cicero und das Seelenheil oder Wie kam die heidnische Antike durch das christliche Mittelalter?* Lectio Teubneriana XII (Leipzig: Teubner, 2003) and Marc-Aeilko Aris, "Cicero: Der Traum des Hieronymus und das Trauma der Christen," in *Mittelalterliches Denken. Debatten, Ideen und Gestalten im Kontext,* ed. Christian Schäfer and Martin Thurner (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007): 1–13.

conscience,[12] relating that it took him many years to fight the temptations of knowledge, polished speech, and a brilliant career, which he had once achieved by hard work. Augustine is a rare example of what we call in German 'Bildungsaufsteiger' (i.e. a person who achieved upward mobility by means of education): He had managed to obtain the illustrious professional position of rhetor at the imperial court in Milan by his own capabilities, which had won for him the protection of the senator Symmachus, not by inherited resources and networks. Yet, like Jerome and other contemporaries, he declared his conversion to Christianity a conscious decision to leave behind this kind of education, and so to lay down the burden of dependency on the classical and pagan past. Later, in his treatise *On Christian Doctrine,* he spilled much ink on the question of whether such learning could still be employed for Christian purposes – we will come back to this.

There is no doubt that such reflections were themselves rhetorically styled. The observation led scholars to the diagnosis that late ancient Christianity suffered from dependency on such education. The classicist Meinolf Vielberg described Jerome's argumentation as "a deliberate self-deception," because the Christian church never tried to replace the public schools with institutions of religious education. Therefore, he argued, the church "persevered in a state of dependency" instead of inventing a new form of learning: "Christians merely grafted Christian instruction in a makeshift manner onto humanistic pagan education, which they were able neither to shape according to their needs, nor to control."[13] Indeed, there were still no genuine Christian schools in the fourth or fifth centuries; the school in Syrian Nisibis where the teachers of the "school

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[12] On his early schooling see Augustine, *Confessiones* 1.9.14–15; 1.12.19–14.23.

[13] Meinolf Vielberg, *Klemens in den pseudoklementinischen Rekognitionen. Studien zur literarischen Form des spätantiken Romans*, Texte und Untersuchungen 145 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2000): 82–83 (commenting upon Jerome's dream vision, see above): "Es waren, alles in allem, nur behelfsmäßige Krücken und wohlmeinende Selbsttäuschungsversuche, um die Tatsache zu verschleiern, daß die Kirche in einem Abhängigkeitszustand verharrte, solange sie keine kirchlichen Schulen und Hochschulen aufbaute beziehungsweise das heidnische Schulsystem im gesamtstaatlichen Rahmen christianisierte, sondern die christliche Erziehung nur notdürftig einer humanistisch-paganen Bildung aufpfropfte, welche sie weder ihren Anforderungen entsprechend zu gestalten noch zu kontrollieren vermochte." My translation.

of the Persians" in Byzantine Edessa moved in 489 is the exception to the rule.[14] Only when the Roman Empire in the west had finally broken down did monasteries in the Merovingian kingdoms and in Italy – which remained under Byzantine influence until the Carolingian period – start to serve as substitutes for schools. This development entailed a profound transformation of the concept of education since, as we will see, until then the 'public schools' had no overt religious affiliation. The attempt by Cassiodorus (d. *c.* 580) – a Roman senator who spent his professional career at the Ostrogothic court in Ravenna – to establish a Christian school in Rome together with Pope Agapetus (535/36) remained an exception: Referring to the case of Nisibis (mentioned above), the initiators planned "to employ public teachers in Christian schools in Rome, for the soul to receive eternal salvation and the tongue of the faithful to be polished in chaste and purest eloquence."[15] This innovation remained isolated in the west, but foreshadowed the integration of 'divine' and 'secular' wisdom in the Middle Ages.

In the preceding centuries Christianity had participated in Greco-Roman culture simply because those who believed in Christ were members of urban society. Anyone who set out to write a biblical commentary or theological treatise or to deliver a sermon inevitably made use of elementary education, but also of the grammatical techniques for the exegesis of poetical works and the stylistic devices which were characteristic of the "Second Sophistic." This should not come as a surprise: Grammatical competence was necessary to interpret the scriptures, and rhetorical performance was essential for establishing a newly-founded

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[14] See Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), and Dmitrij Bumazhnov, "Nisibis, School of," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 21, ed. Constance M. Furey et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023): 538–40.

[15] Cassiodorus, *Institutio divinarum et saecularium litterarum* 1 praef. 1: *collatis expensis in urbe Romana professos doctores scholae potius acciperent Christianae, unde et anima susciperet aeternam salutem et casto atque purissimo eloquio fidelium lingua comeretur*. The attempt failed, most likely because of the protracted war between Byzantium and the Ostrogoths in Italy (535–553), which also led to the loss of Agapetus' library "on the Clivus Scauri" in Rome (cf. ibid. 2.5.10).

religion on the late ancient market of lifestyles. Early Christian 'intellectuals,' as they have recently been called, excelled in this competition.[16] Thus, while theologians repeatedly claimed that one should beware of such tools of education (or at least use them carefully and selectively), Christian life actually depended on practices of reading, writing, and speaking. After all, it was a religion based on texts, and it inhabited what Guy Stroumsa has called a "scriptural universe."[17]

1.3 Dependency Studies and Educational Discourse – Methodological Reflections

Before delving more deeply into the material, we have to give a preliminary answer to the question raised at the beginning: Why should we speak of 'dependency' to describe Christian perceptions of education, or more precisely, how can the concept of dependency of the *Bonn Centre for Dependency and Slavery Studies* be applied to the field of education and religion in late antiquity? To be clear, research into ancient education has duly taken into account the issue of slavery: after all, it was Greek slaves and freedmen – many of them prisoners of war during the centuries of Roman expansion – who introduced Hellenistic *paideia* into Roman society and thus paved the way for the invention of 'public schools'. This is nicely expressed by Horace (d. 8 BCE): "Captive Greece captured, in turn, her uncivilized Conquerors, and brought the arts to rustic Latium."[18] The spread of formal education throughout

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16   For the notion of an 'intellectual' in Late Antiquity, see Hartmut Leppin, "Intellektuelle Autorität unter frühen Christen. Auch zur Frage der Hellenisierung des Christentums," *Was ist Bildung in der Vormoderne?* ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, SERAPHIM 4 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019): 305–29; Lewis Ayres and H. Clifton Ward, eds., *The Rise of the Early Christian Intellectual*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 139 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

17   Cf. Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Scriptural Universe of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

18   Horatius, *Epistula* 2.1.156–57: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio.* Trans. A.S. Kline, https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceEpistlesBkIIEpI.php#anchor_Toc98154295 [accessed 15.09.2023]. The introduction of instruction in grammar and rhetoric by Greeks in Rome is reflected in Suetonius, *De*

the Mediterranean was therefore intrinsically linked to issues of slavery, dependency, and forced migration.

This is however not the path which shall be pursued here.[19] In tune with the BCDSS' aim to develop "an understanding of relations of asymmetrical dependency 'beyond slavery',"[20] I will present some thoughts on the educational system of late antiquity, its institutions and especially its practices, under the perspective of asymmetrical dependency.[21] To begin with, if such dependency by definition refers to "the ability of one actor to control the actions and the access to resources of another," and if this ability is "supported by an institutional background" which prohibits that the dependent actors "change their situation by either going away ('exit') or by articulating protest ('voice'),"[22] a question arises: Who were the dominant actors and founding institutions of the educational system?

Generally speaking, education in the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods was a self-regulated system which did not depend on immediate

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grammaticis et rhetoribus 25.1–2; see Konrad Vössing, "Schule," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 29 (2019): 1167.

[19] Similarly, the metaphorical use of the terms 'slave' and 'freedman' will not be discussed here. In recent research on this aspect cf., e.g., Annette Merz, "Believers as 'Slaves of Christ' and 'Freed Persons of the Lord': Slavery and Freedom as Ambiguous Soteriological Metaphors in 1 Cor 7:22 and Col 3:22–4:1," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 72 (2018): 95–110 (on the Pauline letters), and Jan N. Bremmer, "Slaves of God/Christ: Narrated Total Devotion in the Apocryphal Acts of Peter," *Religion* 53 (2023): 87–115 (on early Christian apocryphal texts).

[20] Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter, Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler and Stephan Conermann, "On Asymmetrical Dependency," *Concept Paper* 1, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (2021): 27, https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/images/pdf-files/concept-papers/bcdss_cp_1-_on-asymmetrical-dependency.pdf [accessed 03.03.2024]. In what follows, I will draw on this concept paper which explores the possibilities of historically and culturally oriented research into dependency structures. This paper has proven very helpful as a starting point for rethinking previous ideas on theories, institutions, and practices of education from the Center's overarching viewpoint. I am aware that it does not represent 'the' overall and everlasting concept of the BCDSS, but is itself a work in progress.

[21] That educational structures, principles, and values are by no means innocent but are interconnected with claims to power has been shown, e.g., by the papers in Yun Lee Too and Niall Livingston, eds., *Pedagogy and Power. Rhetorics of Classical Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). However, there is as yet no in-depth analysis of late ancient educational practices from this perspective.

[22] Winnebeck et al., "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 2–3.

political or administrative power but relied on institutional authority: By teaching content and competencies, teachers imparted knowledge of the normative tradition and the goals of this education to their pupils. They trained them to live up to societal expectations and models. The grammarians whose task was to teach the correct use of syllables, words, sentences, and metrics were, as the younger Seneca put it, the "guardians of language,"[23] the gatekeepers to the textual codes and practices of the educated fortunate few. At the next level, the teachers of rhetoric were responsible for instructing young men in how to perform persuasively in public, be it in lawsuits at court, in political debates in the forum, or by delivering eulogies. Through such performances, they constantly recreated the great tradition which they had acquired. Mockery of teachers due to their lower social standing and their alleged pedagogical shortcomings was widespread in the ancient world, but this did not affect their institutional role: The famous first-century theorist of education, Quintilian (d. *c.* 96 CE), defined eloquent speech as "based on reason, antiquity, authority, and usage,"[24] among which "antiquity" (*vetustas*) functioned as the main criterion: "As we all know, it is our constant duty to venerate antiquity," remarked the fifth-century writer Macrobius.[25] This means that the teachers in the public schools and the educated in general were representatives of a social order which no one who wanted to participate in public life or pursue a professional career could avoid.[26] Agency was limited and predefined by adherence to this social order. It therefore seems justified to speak of structures of asymmetrical dependency which were produced and maintained by the educational 'system,' i.e. both by specific actors and by the overarching institutional framework of the social order, denoted by the term *paideia* (we will come back to this polyvalent term in section 2.1). In the societies of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean, education served to stabilize traditions, familial

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[23] Seneca, *Epistula* 95.65: *custos Latini sermonis*. See Kaster, *Guardians of Language*: 17–18.
[24] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.1: *Sermo constat ratione vel vetustate, auctoritate, consuetudine.*
[25] Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 3.14.2: *vetustas quidem nobis semper, si sapimus, adoranda est.*
[26] Winnebeck et al., "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 6, define 'social order' as any "system of institutions, social relations, value orientations and practices, and as the structuring and structured processes of social reality."

and other roles, and career paths – it thus both enabled and limited individual agency.[27]

Matters become even more complicated if one takes into account the religious aspect. Christian writers shared their contemporaries' criticism of the grammarians' boring lessons and the futile invocation of the glorious past in the rhetoricians' declamations. One should not underestimate the topical character of such criticisms: The philosopher Seneca is well known for his sigh that "we do not learn for life but for school only,"[28] and as we will see below, the seemingly old-fashioned style of rhetorical declamation perfectly served the needs of the upper strata of Roman society. But the Christians' motivation for their criticism was of a different kind: School texts such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssee* or Virgil's *Aeneid* were deeply 'contaminated' with mythical stories about the many gods of the traditional pantheon, and even at the lower levels of education the names and attributes of the gods were used didactically. Like everyone else, early Christians participated in the restriction of upward mobility by the gatekeepers of education; but additionally, they were inevitably confronted with 'paganism' in school, in political institutions, and in public life, at least in the eyes of apologetic writers. Statues, images and other aesthetic creations recalled the embeddedness of traditional religion in everyday life, not to mention the festival calendar.[29]

Of course, this is not to say that every single Christian felt uncomfortable with this situation: When the apologist Tertullian (d. after 215) argued that Christians could not serve as teachers without compromising their own faith and that of their pupils, the parents of those very pupils

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[27] Winnebeck et al., "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 6, suggest that agency means "the opportunity to act within relations of asymmetrical dependency" and that "individual agency should always be studied in its relation to other actors." In the following sections, my appropriation of the BCDSS's approach will be tested on concrete case studies.

[28] Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* 106.12: *non vitae sed scholae discimus.*

[29] For the latter aspect see Jörg Rüpke, "Calendars. Greco-Roman Antiquity, New Testament, and Christianity," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 4, ed. Constance M. Furey et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012): 789–92, 803–7. For Christian discourses on this everyday challenge (as prominent writers staged it) see Ryser, *Education, Religion, and Literary Culture*: 40–47.

were obviously neither convinced nor amused at the prospect that their children should forgo a proper education. This would prevent them from participation in public life![30] The episode nicely encapsulates the relevance of dependency structures in the field of education: Theoretically, families could have refused to let their children attend school, and the originator of eremitical monasticism, Antony (d. 356), became famous for just such a refusal in his early childhood.[31] But this story was told by his hagiographer in order to prove the nearly innate saintliness of Antony, and it should not be taken as representative for the wider population. In practical terms, such a refusal was no option for the majority of Christians while they wished to stay, live and prosper within urban society. That education should cause uncomfortable feelings for Christ-believers came as a surprise for their contemporaries: Generally speaking, neither teachers nor pupils in antiquity viewed instruction at school as a kind of 'denominational instruction in religion.' Greco-Roman religion was mainly a matter of cultic practice, not of intellectual reflection and pious belief.

Therefore, if dependency on 'pagan' education had to be taken into account, it should be stressed that this happened primarily on the discursive level. The statements of Jerome, Augustine and their contemporaries which I mentioned above testify to the need for theoretical clarification concerning this dependency on classical education. However, such elaborate statements are not totally separate from concrete Christian life: They resonate with practices and institutions which were of relevance even for people with little or no education. I would therefore like to approach the well-known topic of Christianity's precarious relationship with classical education from a *praxeological* point of view. The BCDSS concept rightly stresses the importance of analyzing practices as "the nexus of structure and agency"; epistemologically, practices appear in form of "routines," "rules and knowledge" and "individual ends and

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[30] This is argued at length in Tertullian, *De idololatria* 10. We will come back to this below (section 2).
[31] See Athanasius of Alexandria, *Vita Antonii* 1.2–3.

motives."[32] The notorious scarcity of sources from late antiquity notwithstanding, this approach seems highly helpful to decipher the grammar of Christian discourse about educational dependency, and to bring into this investigation sources beyond the obvious ones. The creation of new binary divisions can thereby be avoided. Instead, the differentiation between "sayings," "doings" and "interagency" employed by Winnebeck et al. seems useful to highlight the interwovenness of the *discursive* and the *performative* aspects of practices. In Christian discourse, this includes the definition and negotiation of 'orthodox' and 'heterodox' opinions and worldviews and the initiation into such routinized thinking and acting.[33] If one asks how this happened in late ancient society, a genuine pedagogical distinction comes into play, namely the difference between socialization, education, and self-formation.[34] As we will see, structures of dependency can be established and stabilized by routinized participation in family life or urban society; they can also be deliberately taught; but individuals can also develop a critical view of such structures (which is a major theme in ancient philosophy as well as in Christian theology, and not the least in the ascetic movement).

Such an approach seems promising for drawing a new and improved picture of the educational landscape in late antiquity. From a praxeological point of view, it seems possible to overcome the concentration on theoretical debates about the justification of using 'pagan' education for Christian purposes, which has dominated the research agenda for many years.[35] Focusing mainly (but not exclusively) on Latin Christian texts, I will survey different genres – epigraphy, hagiography, and homiletics

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[32] Winnebeck et al., "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 7–8. Cf. ibid. for the question of "how cultural phenomena of asymmetrical dependency are related to broader political and economic processes and structures, and shaped by power relations."

[33] Winnebeck et al., "On Asymmetrical Dependency": 8–11.

[34] See Peter Gemeinhardt, "Bildung in der Vormoderne – zwischen Norm und Praxis," in *Was ist Bildung in der Vormoderne?* ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, SERAPHIM 4 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019): 19–29.

[35] The most recent example is Jan R. Stenger, *Education in Late Antiquity. Challenges, Dynamism, and Reinterpretation, 300–550 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), who explicitly privileges educational theories without focusing on their application in practice. In my view, this is a shortcoming of this otherwise excellent book (as discussed in my review: *Plekos* 24 [2022]: 419–33, https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2022/r-stenger.pdf [accessed 26.06.2024]).

– in order to analyze the interwovenness of Christian and non-Christian cultural practices.[36] This close relationship fueled the critical discourse on education which aimed at undermining the dependency on values, institutions, and ideals of the *litteratus*. For its critics, education was not only something you could learn at school: It also encompassed the ideal of the cultured individual who was free to dispose of his competencies – and it could even be used to criticize its own ideals and role models. In other words, education involved dependency and freedom at the same time. It enabled agency but presupposed loyalty. Therefore we will ask: Was such dependency on previous tradition and practice inevitable? Did Christianity not get rid of *paideia* because it was unable or unwilling to do so, or did it consciously keep it and put it to good use? Struggling with educational dependency necessitated a creative adaptation and thorough transformation of classical education, and enabled Christianity to survive during times when the world around it underwent dramatic changes.[37]

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[36] Given the limited scope of the present work, this can only be done selectively. The embeddedness of Christian textual practices in the cultural framework of Late Antiquity has been discussed more deeply in Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*, and many aspects are covered in Lewis Ayres, Michael W. Champion and Matthew R. Crawford, eds., *The Intellectual World of Late Antique Christianity. Reshaping Classical Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), but there is still much more to say about practices and institutions. The sketch presented below will be further elaborated in a forthcoming monograph on religious education in Late Antique Christianity.

[37] The importance of the actual use and transformation of educational practices for the emergence, consolidation and survival of late ancient Christianity was discussed (albeit briefly) in Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*: 510–12.

2. *Paideia* as a Social Practice and as a Target of Philosophical Critique

2.1 *Paideia* from Classical to Early Imperial Times

Let us begin with a precise definition what we are talking about.[38] Greek παιδεία (*paideia*) is often translated as 'education,' but the term has a wide range of meanings: It encompasses all types of education; in a literal sense teaching at school; metaphorically, receiving instruction from divine beings. Beyond processes of imparting knowledge, *paideia* also refers to their results, being an 'educated' or 'literate man' (πεπαιδευμένος; *vir litteratus*).[39] We also know of some literate women, not the least within the Christian ascetic movement.[40] But first and foremost, advanced education prepared young men for acting as magistrates, judges, or councillors, enabling them to enter the public arena of competition and to serve their hometown (πόλις, *civitas*) as well as the imperial government. The latter aspect gained importance in tune with the increasing professionalization of the administration from the early imperial period onward.[41] But despite these changes, education should not be understood primarily as professional training: The focus lay on literary texts, and it was generally believed that the command of elaborate Greek and Latin and the knowledge of the classical school texts were sufficient to serve in public office. The Hellenistic period saw the development of the ideal of

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[38] In this section, I use material from Gemeinhardt, "Paideia."

[39] A good overview of the educational system from the classical period to late antiquity is given in W. Martin Bloomer, ed., *A Companion to Ancient Education* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).

[40] For learned ascetic women, see Philip Rousseau, "'Learned Women' and the Development of a Christian Culture in Late Antiquity," *Symbolae Osloenses* 70 (1995): 116–47, and Maria Munkholt Christensen, "Holy Women as Humble Teachers. An Investigation of Hagiographical Texts from Late Antiquity," in *Teachers in Late Antique Christianity*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, Olga Lorgeoux and Maria Munkholt Christensen, SERAPHIM 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018): 147–64; for Christian women in Late Antiquity in general, cf. Lynn H. Cohick and Amy Brown Hughes, eds., *Christian Women in the Patristic World. Their Influence, Authority, and Legacy in the Second through Fifth Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

[41] Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 74–89.

ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία (*enkuklios paideia*, "well-rounded education" or, in the words of Quintilian, "a circle of knowledge"), i.e. a body of knowledge and skills in grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy.[42] A concise summary was given by the second-century writer Apuleius of Madaura:

> A wise man made this famous comment on dining: 'The first cup,' he said, 'is to quench the thirst, the second is to promote jollity, the third to promote pleasure, and the fourth to promote madness.' With the Muses it's the opposite: the more numerous and stronger the cups, the better they are for the health of the soul. The first cup trims the spirit with the *litterator*'s elementary lessons; the second equips it with the learning of the *grammaticus*; the third arms it with the eloquence of the *rhetor*. Most people drink to this extent. I myself have drunk other cups, too, at Athens [...].[43]

As Apuleius explained, those other 'cups' contained poetry, geometry, music, dialectic, and, as the culmination, philosophy. But beyond the three initial stages, the curriculum was by no means fixed. More importantly, in acquiring an education the whole was more than the sum of its parts: For Cicero (d. 43 BCE), writing in the late Roman republic, such a 'banquet' led to true *humanitas*;[44] and in the second century CE, Aulus

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[42] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.10.1. For the development of the concept of ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία, see Ilsetraut Hadot, *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique. Contribution à l'histoire de l'éducation et de la culture dans l'antiquité*, Textes et traditions 11 (Paris: J. Vrin, 2005); for educational practices and the usual curriculum in general, see Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind. Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), and Konrad Vössing, "Die Geschichte der römischen Schule – ein Abriß vor dem Hintergrund der neueren Forschung," *Gymnasium* 110 (2003): 455–97.

[43] Apuleius, *Florida* 20.1–2: *Sapientis uiri super mensam celebre dictum est: 'prima', inquit, 'creterra ad sitim pertinet, secunda ad hilaritatem, tertia ad uoluptatem, quarta ad insaniam'. uerum enimuero Musarum creterra uersa uice quanto crebrior quanto que meracior, tanto propior ad animi sanitate. Prima creterra litteratoris rudimento excitat, secunda grammatici doctrina instruit, tertia rhetoris eloquentia armat. Hactenus a plerisque potatur. Ego et alias creterras Athenis bibi* [...]. Trans. Mark Joyal, Iain MacDougall and J.C. Yardley, eds., *Greek and Roman Education. A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2009): 193. For other sources of this triadic structure of elementary instruction, grammar, and rhetoric, see Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*: 28–29.

[44] Cicero, *Pro Caelio* 54.

Gellius confirmed that "it is humanity that the Greeks call *paideia* and we call 'noble arts' (*bonae artes*)."[45] Understood in this way, *paideia* comes close to the German concept of 'Bildung' in the sense of self-formation of the human being, i.e. self-aware behavior in a manner that is specific to humans (*humanitas*) in Cicero's and Gellius' understanding. Already Plato (d. 348/47 BCE) had described "forming oneself" (ἑαυτὸν πλάττειν) as the ultimate goal of human beings.[46] Nevertheless, such deep learning had remained the privilege of a tiny elite: "Philosophy avoids the crowd," as Cicero wrote.[47]

But, as mentioned above, education was also the subject of critical debate. In his *Sophists at Dinner* (c. 200 CE), Athenaeus reports a saying by the founder of the Epicurean school:

> Since Epicurus was not initiated in the educational curriculum (ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία), he considered as blessed those who had likewise managed to avoid it on their way to philosophy. Here is the kind of thing he said: 'I consider you blessed, sir, because you've set out for philosophy, pure of all education (καθαρὸς πάσης παιδείας).'[48]

In Cynic circles, schooling and philosophy could also be regarded as opposites:

> Diogenes (of Sinope) thought it remarkable that teachers of letters studied Odysseus' faults but were ignorant of their own; that musicians, moreover, tuned the strings on the lyre but had souls whose characters were out of tune; that mathematicians focused their attention upon the

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[45] Aulus Gellius, *Noctes atticae* 13.17.1: *humanitatem appellarunt id propemodum, quod Graeci* παιδείαν *vocant, nos eruditionem institutionemque in bonas artes dicimus.*

[46] Plato, *Respublica* 500cd.

[47] Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* 2.1.4: *est enim philosophia paucis contenta iudicibus, multitudinem consulto ipsa fugiens.*

[48] Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 13.588a: ὅστις ἐγκυκλίου παιδείας ἀμύητος ὢν ἐμακάριζε καὶ τοὺς ὁμοίως αὐτῷ ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν παρερχομένους, τοιαύτας φωνὰς προιέμενος· 'μακαρίζω σε, ὦ οὗτος, ὅτι καθαρὸς πάσης παιδείας ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν ὥρμησαι.' Trans. Joyal et al., eds., *Greek and Roman Education*: 128.

sun and the moon but disregarded the things right in front of them; that rhetors were eager to say what was right but not to do it.[49]

In a sense, this claim to being uneducated as a matter of principle was successful: Apuleius called the Cynics whom he met in second-century Carthage "rude, impure and inexperienced people,"[50] but of course he did not appreciate their way of life. However, the Cynics were only the most radical advocates of a critique of formalized education, which was as old as the invention of formal education by the Sophists of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Already Plato in his dialogue *Gorgias* had argued that philosophy might be suitable for the education of young men but that it should no longer occupy them when they had grown old – of course, he had in mind a kind of philosophy which distracts men from their public duties.[51] Criticism could be directed against the boring exercises in the grammarian's lessons and the uselessness of the rhetorical preparatory exercises (*progymnasmata*), that still in late antiquity evoked the heroes of classical Athens or the republican Roman. It might come as a surprise that education did not suffer from this apparent irrelevance to daily life, but, as Robert Kaster pointed out, its primary aim was to initiate young people into the Greek and Roman past:

> Declamation tended tacitly to instill the belief that convention and tra-
> dition were sufficient to meet even the most unexpected needs; and
> this belief in turn fostered the self-confidence – not to say, compla-
> cence – and sustained the social reproduction of the conservative elite
> who patronized the schools of rhetoric: declamation told this elite, in
> effect, what it wanted to hear [...]. By becoming steeped in all the
> values, beliefs, and stereotypes implied in declamatory arguments, the

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49 Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 6.27–28: τούς τε γραμματικοὺς ἐθαύμαζε τὰ μὲν τοῦ Ὀδυσσέως κακὰ ἀναζητοῦντας, τὰ δ' ἴδια ἀγνοοῦντας. καὶ μὴν καὶ τοὺς μουσικοὺς τὰς μὲν ἐν τῇ λύρᾳ χορδὰς ἁρμόττεσθαι, ἀνάρμοστα δ' ἔχειν τῆς ψυχῆς τὰ ἤθη· τοὺς μαθηματικοὺς ἀποβλέπειν μὲν πρὸς τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὴν σελήνην, τὰ δ' ἐν ποσὶ πράγματα παρορᾶν· τοὺς ῥήτορας τὰ δίκαια μὲν ἐσπουδακέναι λέγειν, πράττειν δὲ μηδαμῶς. Trans. Joyal et al., eds., *Greek and Roman Education*: 128.
50 Apuleius, *Florida* 7: *rudes, sordidi, imperiti.*
51 Plato, *Gorgias* 485a–e.

students of declamation acquired the reflexes needed to live as respectable men.[52]

In other words, for the purposes and challenges of everyday life it was essential to know the foundational texts by heart: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid* or the declamations of Demosthenes and Cicero. A man who was able to perform public speeches like a Ciceronian (to refer to the accusation in Jerome's dream mentioned above) was still regarded as "of utmost eloquence" (*eloquentissimus*) in Augustine's lifetime. It is however telling that, from a Christian perspective, the church father reserved the epithet "most learned" (*doctissimus*) for a much more thorough acquaintance with knowledge about God and the world, that is, with philosophy in the proper Christian sense.[53] Thus Christians acknowledged Plato's critique of formal education (or polemically: "sophistry"). It was, however, precisely this appraisal of rhetoric which was flowering in the second and third centuries, in the time of the so-called "Second Sophistic," when Christianity started the search for its own place and identity in the cultural melting-pot of the Mediterranean.[54]

2.2 Early Christianity in a World Full of Gods – and Full of *paideia*

It is remarkable that, from the first century CE onward, *paideia* – both as a subject of instruction and as a process of self-education – became increasingly linked to religious affiliations. While the public schools of grammar and rhetoric remained indifferent to religious beliefs and traditions (one might be inclined to call them 'non-denominational'), religion and philosophy converged in Middle Platonism and Stoicism and also in

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[52] Robert A. Kaster, "Controlling Reason: Declamation in Rhetorical Education at Rome," in *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, ed. Yun Lee Too (Leiden: Brill, 2001): 325–26.

[53] Augustine, *De quantitate animae* 33.70.

[54] For a fine introduction to the Second Sophistic see Tim Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

the Hellenized Jewish religion, such as in Philo of Alexandria (d. after 40 CE).[55] According to the Delphic priest and philosopher Plutarch (d. c. 125), the famous inscription "Know thyself" (γνῶθι σαυτόν), originally a philosophical maxim, was to be understood as an exhortation to know oneself as a weak human being in opposition to the almighty god.[56] Thus, philosophy, education, and religion were increasingly merging in the time of nascent Christianity, and this development would continue in late ancient Neoplatonism where cultic ('theurgic') practices were explicitly combined with highly abstract reflection upon the god, the world, and the self.[57] The Christ-believers did therefore not invent the religious dimension of education: In a world full of gods and full of *paideia,* the blending of both aspects was well under way. This was primarily the case in philosophical schools and discourses, while the schools of grammar and rhetoric remained largely untouched by religious topics and questions. Early Christianity soon engaged in this discourse on intellectual knowledge and the right way of life. However, Christian writers included those institutions of literary education in their criticism of contemporary 'paganism', to the surprise of teachers who had never thought of Homer or Virgil as writers of authoritative religious texts. In contrast, Christians were not likely to distinguish between those different institutions when formulating their criticism of the seemingly 'contaminated' education system around them.

Among the Christian writers who took a critical stance towards the educational ideals of the time, the North African apologist Tertullian stands out. In his treatise *On the Testimony of the Soul*, he declared that Christians were not in need of "a wisdom fashioned in schools, trained in libraries, fed in Attic academies and porticoes"; instead, he invoked the human soul as "simple, rude, uncultured and untaught, such as they

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[55] For his blending of biblical and philosophical traditions see the thorough study by Maren R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

[56] Plutarch, *De E apud Delphos* 21.

[57] Cf. Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity. The Invention of a Ritual Tradition*, Beiträge zur Europäischen Religionsgeschichte 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2013).

have you who have you only."[58] But there can be no doubt that his own writings benefited from his excellent command of rhetorical skills and classical texts. The same ambivalence can be found in his contemporary, Clement of Alexandria. He regarded Christ, the Logos, as the divine pedagogue:

> [S]ince the Logos himself has come to us from heaven, it seems to me that we need no longer have to resort to human teaching, seeking knowledge in Athens or the rest of Greece or Ionia. For if we have as teacher the one who has filled everything with his holy activities – creation, salvation, beneficence, law-giving, prophecy, teaching – this teacher now gives us all instruction, and, through the Logos, the whole universe has now become Athens and Greece.[59]

On might call this a declaration of pedagogical independency, and this is supported by a remark in Clement's *Stromateis* where he claims that "for everyone whose life conforms to our way of life can philosophize without knowledge of letters, whether barbarian or Greek, whether slave, old man, child or woman."[60] But one must not overestimate such claims to independency of the educational standards of the surrounding world:

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[58] Tertullian, *De testimonio animae* 1.6: *Sed non eam te aduoco, quae scholis formata, bybliothecis exercitata, academiis et porticibus Atticis pasta sapientiam ructas. Te simplicem et rudem et impolitam et idioticam compello qualem te habent qui te solam habent* […]. Trans. S. Thelwall, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3 (repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989): 175.

[59] Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 11.112.1: Διό μοι δοκεῖ, ἐπεὶ αὐτὸς ἧκεν ὡς ἡμᾶς οὐρανόθεν ὁ λόγος, ἡμᾶς ἐπ᾽ ἀνθρωπίνην ἰέναι μὴ χρῆναι διδασκαλίαν ἔτι, Ἀθήνας καὶ τὴν ἄλλην Ἑλλάδα, πρὸς δὲ καὶ Ἰωνίαν πολυπραγμονοῦντας. Εἰ γὰρ ἡμῖν ὁ διδάσκαλος ὁ πληρώσας τὰ πάντα δυνάμεσιν ἁγίαις, δημιουργίᾳ σωτηρίᾳ εὐεργεσίᾳ, νομοθεσίᾳ προφητείᾳ διδασκαλίᾳ, πάντα νῦν ὁ διδάσκαλος κατηχεῖ, καὶ τὸ πᾶν ἤδη Ἀθῆναι καὶ Ἑλλὰς γέγονεν τῷ λόγῳ. Trans. Judith Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher according to Clement of Alexandria," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001): 3–4. This is one of two early Christian texts that put the 'teacher' in the title (the other being Augustine's *De magistro*). For Clement's view of Christ as divine teacher see Peter Gemeinhardt, "Teaching the Faith in Early Christianity. Divine and Human Agency," *Vigiliae Christianae* 74 (2020): 151–56.

[60] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4.58.3: ἔξεστι γὰρ τῷ καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς πολιτευομένῳ καὶ ἄνευ γραμμάτων φιλοσοφεῖν, κἂν βάρβαρος ᾖ κἂν Ἕλλην κἂν δοῦλος κἂν γέρων κἂν παιδίον κἂν γυνή.

In his writings, Clement developed a comprehensive didactic program which aimed at integrating all kinds of knowledge into the Christian worldview. Obviously, this was inevitable for an apologist who wanted to advertise Christianity as heir of ancient philosophy to people who did not regard such path dependency as a problem.

At the same time, education became a tool in debates among Christians: Opponents were accused that they had taken in too much *paideia*.[61] Tertullian's famous antithesis "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" did not primarily target ancient philosophy as such, but rather the Christian ('gnostic') appropriation of *paideia* for reading the Bible creatively or, in the eyes of critics, erroneously, due to an inappropriate dominance of philosophy over faith.[62] The core problem was not 'philosophical' thinking as such (after all, Christian apologists presented themselves as competent philosophers), but the choice of the wrong philosophy: Marcellus of Ancyra (d. 374) criticized Origen (d. 253), the most prolific writer before Augustine, for having been way too dependent on "external education" (ἡ ἔξωθεν παίδευσις), which he saw primarily represented by Plato's writings.[63] A special stance had already been taken by the second-century apologist Tatian, a native of Syria who termed himself a "barbarian philosopher" and teacher of a genuinely Christian *paideia* which was strictly opposed to Greek philosophy.[64] But even Tatian relied on Hellenistic *paideia* in order to refute *paideia*.

Positive role models were found in Christian scriptural resources. The apostles Peter and John were hailed for speaking with divine power, even though they were "illiterate" (ἀγράμματοι: Acts 4:13), and the idea was widespread that "Christ did not send educated men and rhetors, but fishermen without education and shepherds, poor and ignorant people, in order to proclaim the message of the Lord."[65] With this sort of

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[61] Cf., e.g., Ps.-Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 6.29.1, and Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarium haeresium* 31.2.3, both of which target the gnostic school founder Valentinus.

[62] Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 7.9–13.

[63] Quoted in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Contra Marcellum* 1.4.24.

[64] Tatian, *Oratio contra Graecos* 12.10; 27.1; 31.2.

[65] Here quoted from Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 1.20; for many other examples see Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*: 332–37.

discursive drawing of boundaries, Christians wanted to establish their independence from public schooling, where the poems of Homer or Virgil, bursting with stories of the Gods and their quarrels with each other, served as textbooks of grammatical instruction (see above).[66] But Christian teachers, however firm their individual beliefs, could simply not avoid dealing with the gods and so seducing their pupils to idolatry, as Tertullian warned.[67] Even he conceded, however, that Christian children needed to acquire education in order to participate in public life; he therefore thought it possible to attend school as a pupil, well prepared by the catechumenate, but not as a teacher.[68]

Unanimously, these Christian authors declared the aims and contents of *paideia* to be 'pagan' or 'secular,' as opposed to 'religious' or 'spiritual.' The Greco-Roman schools and their actors had defined their subject-matter as purely literary: The omnipresence of mythological topics and names was obvious, but they had not been regarded as witnessing to religious affiliations. Later authors theorized this claim to *paideia* as useful – even if dangerous – for Christians: Basil of Caesarea, in his *Address to the Youth on the Value of Greek Literature*, recommended a careful reading of secular books with an acknowledged ethical value.[69] Augustine, in *On Christian Doctrine*, justified the use of 'pagan' education with a reference to the Exodus narrative: Had not the Israelites, obeying God's command, rescued "the gold and silver of the Egyptians" (Exod 3:21–22; 12:35–36)? These valuables, according to Augustine, were the pagan sciences which, in his view, the Egyptians had neglected but which now would be put to good use.[70] In critical conversation with the Donatist grammarian

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[66] For this competitive approach to education see Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer. School, Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, Library of New Testament Studies 400 (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

[67] Tertullian, *De idololatria* 10.1, 4.

[68] Tertullian, *De idololatria* 10.5–6.

[69] For Basil's *Ad adolescentes de legendis libris gentilium*, see Jan R. Stenger, "Athens and/or Jerusalem? Basil's and Chrysostom's Views on the Didactic Use of Literature and Stories," in *Education and Religion in Late Antique Christianity. Reflections, Social Contexts, and Genres*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, Lieve Van Hoof and Peter Van Nuffelen (London: Routledge, 2016): 91–96.

[70] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 2.40.60; for the history of the trope of the "spoliation of the Egyptians" see Pier Franco Beatrice, "The Treasures of the Egyptians. A Chap-

Cresconius – a former professional colleague, so to speak –, Augustine pointed out that eloquence in itself was neither good nor bad, but that everything depended on what was being said eloquently.[71] In order to underline the primacy of Christian wisdom, he referred to none other than Cicero: "Wisdom without eloquence is of little use, but eloquence without wisdom is often harmful and never useful."[72] In accordance with ancient philosophy, Augustine claimed that a preacher's life was more important for his trustworthiness than his rhetorical abilities.[73] Yet his *orator christianus* strikingly resembled the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* ("a good man, skilled in speaking") whom Cato the Elder (d. 149 BCE) and Quintilian had praised.[74]

To cut a long story short: From its very inception, Christianity had to struggle with the fear that too much contact with ancient *paideia* would lead to contamination with the wrong gods. Augustine showed himself amazed that the world had believed the unbelievable message of Christ's ascension to heaven, proclaimed by men "without instruction in the liberal disciplines, without command of grammar, without being armed with dialectic or inflated by rhetoric."[75] But had the faith been spread without making use of the rhetorical tool-box of antiquity? Was there really a gulf between Christians and "Ciceronians"? And were all Christians convinced of the necessity to draw sharp demarcations between useful and dangerous forms of education, legitimate and misleading ones? As we will see, this was not the case, and this leads us to the question of asymmetrical dependency on education as a phenomenon of Christian textual practices.

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ter in the History of Patristic Exegesis and Late Antique Culture," *Studia patristica* 39 (2006): 159–83.

[71] Augustine, *Contra Cresconium* 1.1.2: *eloquentia* [...] *facultas dicendi est congruenter explicans quae sentimus, qua tunc utendum est cum recta sentimus.*

[72] Cicero, *De inventione* 1.1.1: *sapientiam sine eloquentiam parum prodesse ciuitatibus, eloquentiam uero sine sapientia nimium obesse plerumque, prodesse numquam*; quoted in Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 4.5.7. See Karla Pollmann, *Doctrina Christiana. Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der christlichen Hermeneutik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustinus, de doctrina christiana*, Paradosis 41 (Fribourg: Fribourg University Press, 1996).

[73] Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 4.27.59.

[74] Cato maior, *Ad Marcum filium* frg. 14; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 12.1.1; 12.12.11.

[75] Augustine, *De civitate dei* 22.5.

3. Learned Christian Practices: On the Inevitability of Using Education

To answer such questions, it seems useful to explore discourses and practices as different but interrelated testimonies to dependency. Scholarship on late antique Christianity frequently privileged the image of one religion struggling with another, "Christianity" versus "paganism" – categories which only made sense from the perspective of the Christians.[76] More specifically, Christian writers proclaimed that they had to fight tooth and nail for independency from traditional, idolatrous *paideia*, which they regarded as contaminated with the wrong religion. This image of a clash of cultures also resonated in modern research.[77] This does not come as a surprise, since such binary oppositions were a recurrent theme from the early apologists to Gregory the Great. The lifetime of Jerome and Augustine can be seen as the high point of these debates: Highly erudite converts entered ecclesiastical positions and felt the need to justify their use of classical *paideia*. The "despoiling of the Egyptians," mentioned above, can be regarded as a means of converting education itself in order to use it according to the will of God – but only after it

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[76] A telling yet outdated book title is "The Final Fight of Paganism in Rome" (that is, against Christianity); cf. Jelle Wytzes, *Der letzte Kampf des Heidentums in Rom*, Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1977). For a critical assessment of the construction of clear-cut distinctions between overarching religious units such as "Christianity," "Judaism," and "Paganism" by Christian authors from the second through the fourth century, see Francesco Massa, "Nommer et classer les religions aux IIᵉ–IVᵉ siècles: la taxinomie 'paganisme, judaïsme, christianisme'," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 4 (2017): 689–715, https://journals.openedition.org/rhr/8829 [accessed 25.09.2023]. Recent developments of research are discussed by the contributors to Marianne Sághy and Edward M. Schoolman, eds., *Pagans and Christians in the Late Roman Empire. New Evidence, New Approaches (4th–8th Centuries)*, Central European University Medievalia 18 (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2017). The narrative of a struggle or even war between Christians and pagans in the fourth century has already been brilliantly demythologized by Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

[77] For a very brief history of the scholarship see the closing section, "Historiography," in Gemeinhardt, "Paideia."

had been purified of any improper elements, as Jerome argued with reference to the cleansing of the "beautiful captive" (Deut 21:10–13).[78]

As has already been said, this rhetorical construction of boundaries itself required an outstanding command of classical education. To speak of a construction implies that this rhetoric should not be taken at face value, as Averil Cameron already pointed out thirty years ago:

> The prominence of the notion of the *difference* between Christian and pagan expression in the work of the Christian writers themselves is to be read as a rhetorical device and a symptom of adjustment rather than as a description of a real situation.[79]

The history of research into the difficult relationship between Christianity and pagan education often started with this discursive aspect and, consequently, pondered the apparent oddness of Christians postulating a distinctly Christian education while remaining dependent on 'pagan' institutions of education and a 'pagan' canon of literature. Averil Cameron called this a "rhetoric of paradox."[80]

In order to move beyond the discursive level, I will explore Christian approaches to education by investigating concrete literary practices. To start with the obvious: Christians employed literary skills in manifold ways, be it in written communication for administrative or theological purposes or in practices of piety and liturgy, hereby interconnecting texts, artefacts, and spaces. As in late ancient societies in general, only a small part of those who identified as followers of Christ and/or as members of the church were literate, but all believers participated in worship and received catechesis. And among the fortunate few who were literate were not only bishops and theologians – people with a formal authorization or a license to write, so to speak. Literary practices also existed among other groups who did not produce philosophical or theological

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[78] Jerome, *Epistula* 21.13.5–9. Sources for such models of converting education are discussed in Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*: 470–81.

[79] Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire. The Development of Christian Discourse*, Sather Classical Lectures 55 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 7.

[80] Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*: 86 and 155–88.

treatises but who had a solid knowledge of written culture – or at least an interest in it and the financial means to promote it. Frequently, such groups of Christian literate agents interacted with each other: The collections of letters written by Latin theologians like Jerome, Augustine, and Paulinus of Nola, their Greek contemporary Basil of Caesarea or even the letter-writing monks Barsanuphius and John in sixth-century Palestine testify to epistolographic networks beyond ecclesiastical organizations.[81] Among the many possible fields of investigating Christian literate practices, I chose three types which represent quite different contexts of inward and outward communication while also shedding light on different forms of dependency and corresponding concerns. But as we will see, not every kind of dependency caused debates!

Looking at practices means focusing on widespread types of literary activities, in modern terminology: on routinized processes that have largely not been the subject of conceptual debates. It seems promising to apply Andreas Reckwitz' concept of what he called a "square of cultural analysis," which encompasses "practices, discourses, artifacts, and subjectivations"[82] and connects routinizations to intellectual reflections, subjective viewpoints and material objects. This does not exclude theological reflection, but frames the latter within the individual and communal conduct of Christian life. An equivalent in historical research into religion is the concept of "lived ancient religion," which was developed at the University of Erfurt in the last decade and aims at analyzing

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[81]　These and other collections of letters have received much attention in recent scholarship; see, e.g., Bronwen Neil and Pauline Allen, eds., *Collecting Early Christian Letters. From the Apostle Paul to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), as well as Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin and Edward J. Watts, eds. *Late Antique Letter Collections. A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017). See also Peter Gemeinhardt, "Bildung in Briefen – Bildung durch Briefe. Spätantike christliche Briefe als Medien theologischer, rhetorischer und pastoraler Kommunikation," in *Brief und Bildung*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker and Alfons Fürst, Epistula. Studies on Ancient Letter Writing 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024): 335–60.

[82]　Andreas Reckwitz, "Die 'neue Kultursoziologie' und das praxeologische Quadrat der Kulturanalyse," in *Kreativität und soziale Praxis. Studien zur Sozial- und Gesellschaftstheorie*, auth. Andreas Reckwitz (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016): 31–41; see also Karl H. Hörning and Julia Reuter, "Doing Culture: Kultur als Praxis," in *Doing Culture. Neue Positionen zum Verhältnis von Kultur und sozialer Praxis*, ed. Karl H. Hörning and Julia Reuter (Bielefeld: transcript, 2004): 9–15.

individual and collective practices of religion.[83] Elsewhere, I applied both sociological and the historical perspectives in tandem to patristic texts to explore what might be termed a "practice theory" of late antique Christianity.[84] This approach allows us to investigate concrete actions as well as their structural preconditions – the "nexus of structure and agency" mentioned above. With regard to education, we will analyze the interconnections between dependency on the literary tradition and the individual agency of literate people with a religious motivation.

3.1 Remembering the Dead: Funerary Inscriptions

An excellent example of religious practices that is sometimes underestimated in patristic research are funerary inscriptions. While honorary inscriptions are in most cases silent or, at best, ambiguous about religion, epitaphs became a place where not only the worldly political career (*cursus honorum*) but also the religious affiliation of the deceased person was mentioned from the imperial period onwards.[85] The Chris-

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[83] See, among many other publications, esp. Jörg Rüpke, "Religious Agency, Identity, and Communication. Reflecting on History and Theory of Religion," *Religion* 45 (2015): 344–66; Janico Albrecht et al., "Religion in the Making: The Lived Ancient Religion Approach," *Religion* 48 (2018): 1–26; and Valentino Gasparini et al., eds., *Lived Religion in the Ancient World* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

[84] Peter Gemeinhardt, "Praktische Patristik," in *Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie XXXIV. Praxis*, ed. Elisabeth Gräb-Schmidt and Martina Kumlehn, Marburger Theologische Studien 142 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2023): 43–51, offers a discussion of various sociological and religio-historical approaches.

[85] An overview of the material and the existing scholarship can be found in Danilo Mazzoleni, "The Rise of Christianity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*, ed. Christer Bruun and Jonathan Edmondson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 445–68; methodological issues are discussed in Katharina Bolle et al., eds., *The Epigraphic Cultures of Late Antiquity*, Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien 60 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2017). Only rarely we can compare different sources and draw a more comprehensive picture of an individual or his or her family. For the topic of education in late ancient funerary inscriptions see Heike Niquet, *Monumenta virtutum titulique. Senatorische Selbstdarstellung im spätantiken Rom im Spiegel der epigraphischen Denkmäler*, Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien 34 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000) (which focuses on the senatorial class); for a broader focus on inscriptions for educated Christians see Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*: 165–84; additionally, see Alexander Puk, "Was ist der Mensch gewesen? Präsentation von Beruf und Status in christlichen Grabinschriften der Spätantike," in

tian faith is obviously ascribed to the deceased if his or her epitaph bears a symbol such as the cross, or contains the expression *in pace* (in peace). Depending on the semantic context, this expression can either refer to a peaceful eternal rest when combined with *(re)quiescere* (to rest) or *dormire* (to sleep) or, if paired with *vivere* (to live), to heavenly life with Christ. If the latter verb is in the perfect tense (*vixit in pace*), it refers to an undisturbed life with regard to the individual's conscience and their participation in the life of the community.[86] In other words, Christian funerary inscriptions reveal a web of possible relationships which testify not only to the deceased's belief but also to his or her belonging to an earthly and heavenly community. Such webs could include fellow believers in the Christian faith as well as the martyrs who were known to have been taken up to heaven directly after their deaths – the community thus comprised the living as well as the dead.[87] One could therefore say that epitaphs served as a reminder of the salvific future of the dead and, of course, also as a means of consoling the living.[88]

Most funerary inscriptions are silent about the earthly achievements of the deceased. But there is a considerable number of examples of such inscriptions that contain references to education, be it as an individual achievement or as the profession of the deceased. To begin with a young man who was most probably not a Christian: In third-century North Africa, a certain Marcus Antonius Faustianus Nepos Principinus, who had died at the age of eighteen, was praised as "gifted with extraordinary piety, famous for his manners and intellect (*ingenium*), renowned in his native place, skilled in oratory (*dicendi peritus*), beloved with highest

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'Quaerite faciem eius semper'. Studien zu den geistesgeschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Antike und Christentum. Dankesgabe für Albrecht Dihle zum 85. Geburtstag aus dem Heidelberger 'Kirchenväterkolloquium', ed. Andrea Jördens et al., Studien zur Kirchengeschichte 8 (Hamburg: Dr. Kovač, 2008): 306–19.

[86] Cf., with examples, Mazzoleni, The Rise of Christianity": 453–54.
[87] See Tertullian, *De anima* 55.2–5.
[88] The notion that remembering the dead primarily means providing pastoral care for the living is not an original idea of modern Practical Theology, but can be found as early as Augustine's treatise *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* 3: *proinde ista omnia, <id est> curatio funeris, conditio sepulturae, pompa exequiarum, magis sunt uiuorum solacia quam subsidia mortuorum.*

honor by his parents."[89] The praise of his rhetorical competence uses the words of the great Roman philosopher and statesman, Cato (quoted above, section 2.2), which implies that the young man had really lived up to the ideal of a true *orator*. Education and public fame are foregrounded, while the notion of "piety" remains unspecified. While Christian inscriptions testify to a religious connotation of *pietas*, in traditional Roman understanding *pietas* signified the attachment to one's parents, hometown, or country – the *patria* which is mentioned here explicitly. In an exemplary manner, we can observe an ensemble of formulaic expressions that were combined like a mosaic in order to provide an image of the deceased youth. While such inscriptions display a certain degree of individuality, it is clear that the pieces of the puzzle were by no means original, except for the age of the dead person and the names of those who took responsibility for keeping his or her memory.

While honorary inscriptions as a rule contain no hints at religious preferences, funerary inscriptions became a place where literary erudition and political career merged with religious affiliation, marking different groups of believers and practitioners.[90] This indicates different groups who were responsible for public or private monuments respectively: Statues in the Roman Forum or one of the adjacent imperial forums were dedicated by the Senate, which was interested in praising political, military, or cultural achievements. Funerary epitaphs, on the other hand, were a family affair and thus followed another path of dependency. The surviving inscriptions testify to different degrees of outspokenness about religion. The most cautious form was to leave the

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[89] CIL 8.12159 (Agger, Byzacena / Hr. Sidi Amara, North Africa): *insigni piaetate praeditus, | moribus et ingenio clarus, | acceptus patriae, dicen|di peritus, his cum sum|mo honore parentium | dilectus*. For helpful comments on this inscription see Vössing, *Schule und Bildung*: 117–19. The date is uncertain, but comparisons with other inscription suggest a dating in not too early imperial times.

[90] For this difference between honorary and sepulchral inscriptions in general, see Niquet, *Monumenta virtutum titulique*: 167; for a decrease of honorary inscriptions and an increasing dominance of funerary material from the third century onward, see Christian Witschel and Barbara Borg, "Veränderungen im Repräsentationsverhalten der römischen Eliten während des 3. Jhs. n. Chr.," in *Inschriftliche Denkmäler als Medien der Selbstdarstellung in der römischen Welt*, ed. Géza Alföldy and Silvio Panciera, Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien 36 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001): 47–78; briefly Puk, "Was ist der Mensch gewesen?": 308.

discovery of the faith to the visitors of a given tomb, due to its location in a Christian cemetery or in a catacomb. To give an example: In a North African inscription, a certain Turpilius Victorinus Marianus is described as "a man of all letters and virtues," an expression that recalls the classical definition of an educated man with *litterae* and *virtus* as traditional attributes – it was obviously a concern of the bereaved to remember the deceased Christian as a good Roman.[91] Such ambiguity was frequently and deliberately applied: Many inscriptions are identifiable as Christian only because, as has been said, they were discovered in Christian cemeteries, while on the surface they remained perfectly traditional, i.e., without an explicitly religious appearance. A telling example is the metrical inscription for the rhetor Magnus in the Roman cemetery of St. Lawrence outside the Walls (San Lorenzo fuori le mura): Addressing the deceased, it stated that "no ageing will destroy your honorary titles, for you will enjoy eternal life in books."[92] In other words, a man buried by Christians (and therefore presumably a Christian himself) was commemorated precisely like his peers from the upper strata of Roman society, and there is no indication that anyone, cleric or layperson, would have been displeased by this. The sarcophagus of his namesake, Flavius Magnus (d. after 425), a former *rhetor urbis aeternae* (an orator who was officially appointed and paid by the Eternal City), was found in the same cemetery; this man was credited with the fame that "within a short span of time, he was chosen as teacher of rhetoric by the whole rising generation of patricians."[93] The only indication of his faith is a double Christogram, each combined with Alpha and Omega. Flavius Magnus is known to have criticized Jerome for using pagan literature in his writings,[94] and it is probable that this criticism was uttered from a Christian perspective.

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[91] CIL 8.20162 = ILCV 746 (Cuicul / Djemila, North Africa): *memoriae | L. Turpili Victorini Ma|riani eq. R. aduocati om|nium litterarum et uirtu|tum uiri, qui fuit in rebus | humanis annis XXXII, cum | magna laude actus et d[i]s|ciplinae suae.*

[92] ILCV 103, lines 13–14: *nulla tuos poterit titulos delere uetustas, aeterna in libris nam tibi uita uiget* (Rome, Catacomb of S. Lorenzo fuori le mura).

[93] ILCV 102, lines 3–4: *intra breve tempus universae patriciae soboli lectus magister eloquentiae.* Niquet, *Monumenta virtutum titulique*: 170, regards this as a gross exaggeration.

[94] Magnus' letter is lost, but Jerome's answer (*Epistula* 70) is preserved. See Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*: 386.

Jerome reproached him for being all too fond of Cicero himself (which was not surprising in the case of a teacher of rhetoric). Be that as it may, his participation in the intra-Christian discourse on the legitimate reception of pagan education did not prevent Flavius Magnus' family or peers from commissioning an inscription which portrayed him as a 'Ciceronian.' Even if Christian funerary practices were oriented toward the time of the death and eternal hope as far as religion was concerned, the people behind these practices of memorization continued to celebrate the political and educational achievements of the deceased.

The nexus of death, burial, and the hope of resurrection was of course a fundamental theological concern of Christian theology, pastoral care, and preaching.[95] But funerary inscriptions like the examples discussed above were not crafted by theologians or clerics,[96] but by laypeople. This is why I consider them a paradigm of pious practice: The initiative to set up a tomb and commission an inscription generally came from the family or friends of the deceased. Sometimes they were more open about Christian belief and the reinterpretation of traditional values: The Roman senator Sextus Petronius Probus, who died in the 380s, was remembered as "gifted with intellect, erudite in poetry, splendid, wise, humble, moderate, honest, estimated by all, moreover pious in kindness." But here, "piety" was understood in a clearly Christian sense: "Death will not be able to harm you, for you dwell in continuous praise [of God] and live in the kingdom of Christ without end."[97] Such a blending of *eloquentia* and *pietas* is found in several inscriptions, some of which were for priests: Pope Boniface III (d. 607) was glorified as

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[95] See Ulrich Volp, *Tod und Ritual in den christlichen Gemeinden der Antike*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 65 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

[96] The exceptions are 'official' inscriptions for bishops and other ecclesiastical office-holders; see, briefly, Mazzoleni, "The Rise of Christianity": 462–63 and, with respect to education and eloquence, Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*: 179–84.

[97] ILCV 64 (Rome, Cemetery at the Via Salaria nova): *spes generis clari, magnorum gloria patrum, | sollers ingenio, carmine doctiloquus, | inlustris sapiens humilis moderatus honestus | communis gratus, plus bonitate pius, | ante annos animumque gerens aetatis auitae, | clarior in patria nobilitate Probus, | nil tibi mors nocuit, cum hic uiuis laude perenni | et Χρι in regno dum sine fine manes.*

"versed in eloquence and pleasing in piety"[98] – a few years after Gregory the Great (d. 604) had harshly criticized bishops who cultivated and taught grammar and rhetoric.[99] Even Augustine, a severe critic of education, was commemorated in verse: "In true Roman eloquence, he uttered mystical insights with a thundering voice."[100]

We can therefore observe in funerary inscriptions a striking lack of influence of the theological discourse on education: People used the literary tools at hand to commemorate and even praise the dead, and they did so in accordance with the usage of their ancestors as well as their contemporaries. The attribution of *eloquium* and *mores*, brilliant speech and outstanding virtue, testifies to a deep indebtedness to tradition. Thus we read about the lawyer Constantius, who lived and died in the early sixth century, "As a true Roman, he always by his own brilliance adorned virtue with eloquence and eloquence with virtue." The inscription even contains an echo of Ovid's *Tristia*.[101] More than a century after Jerome's and Augustine's sharp demarcations against classical education, it still seemed to be the currency for the public display of dead people's qualities and achievements. And roughly three hundred years after Tertullian's harsh critique of Christian teachers in public schools, a considerable number of inscriptions were crafted in order to remember exactly this kind of urban professional.[102]

One might regard such inscriptions as a 'non-discursive' answer to literary debates about the dangers of a literary education. There were clearly many Christians who felt the need to commemorate their parents, children, family members, teachers, or pupils, and who did what every

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[98] ILCV 992 (Rome, St. Peter at the Vatican): *pontificale sacrum qui bene gessit opus,* | *initiae custos rectus patiensq. benignus,* | *cultus in eloquiis et pietate placens.* For more examples of a connection of *eloquium* and *pietas* in Christian contexts see Niquet, *Monumenta virtutum titulique*: 171, and Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*: 176–79.

[99] Gregory I, *Registrum epistularum* 11.34, addressed in 601 to Desiderius of Vienne.

[100] ILCV 1595 (Rome, Lateran Palace, Chapel *Sancta Sanctorum*): *diuersi diuersa patres,* *s[ed hic]* | *omnia dixit Romano eloquio* | *mystica{s} sensa tonans.*

[101] ILCV 244, line 5–10: *quis per bella fori totiens de iure triumphum* | *re(t)tulit et saeuos perculit ore reos?* | *ornauit proprio semper fulgore togatus* | *eloquio mores, moribus eloquium.* | *non multum, mors dira, noces in funere iusti:* | *nil tua tela grauant, possidet astra pius.* Line 5 alludes to *Tristia* 3.12.18 (*garrula bella fori*).

[102] Examples of *magistri ludi*, *grammatici* and *rhetores* are collected in Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*: 368–72, 384–86.

well-to-do member of Roman urban society would appreciate: They commissioned inscriptions which conformed to what Ramsay MacMullen has called the "epigraphic habit" of their time.[103] They adapted the characteristics of funerary epigraphy to the requirements of Christian belief, without thinking themselves dependent on something external (and in many cases without omitting the traditional, abbreviated formula *D.M.*, *Dis manibus*, "to the gods and the favoring spirits"). From a praxeological point of view, it is important that there was no theological master theory of funerary epigraphy in late ancient Christianity. Of course, this is not to revive another well-known difference: the gap between a theory without any connection to 'real life' and a practice without reflection.[104] The fate of the immortal soul and the dead body was without doubt a theological topic, and many inscriptions show such reflections, even if we can only hypothesize about whether and how such epigraphic practices triggered theological discourses about eschatological hope.[105] In fact, we observe a lively practice mostly driven by laypeople, which contradicts the narrative of a sharp divide between Christians and non-Christians ('pagans') as far as this kind of practice is concerned. In terms of dependency we recognize the indebtedness of Christians to shared cultural practices that provided formulas and values for commemorating the dead. Judging from the examples discussed above (which could be added to), it would be too much to speak of a conscious 'Christianization' of funerary epigraphy. Instead, Christians and non-Christians alike depended on a common heritage which was open to different conceptions, phrasings, and images of the hope for life after death.

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[103] Ramsay MacMullen, "The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire," *American Journal of Philology* 103 (1982): 233–46; cf. Puk, "Was ist der Mensch gewesen?": 313.

[104] Such a sharp contrast between "two churches" or even "two Christianities" is advocated by Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church. Popular Christianity A.D. 200–400*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World. Supplement Series 1 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009): 105 and 108. His many examples of Christians who did not conform to ecclesiastical rules make a plausible case for the importance of material evidence, but his anti-episcopal bias distorts the emerging picture.

[105] The interaction of inscriptions with images would be an interesting topic for further study. Cf. Vladimir Cvetković, "Symbols, Icons, Liturgy. Eschatology in Early Christian Art," in *Eschatology in Antiquity. Forms and Function*, ed. Hilary Marlow, Karla Pollmann and Helen Van Noorden (London: Routledge, 2021): 554–60, who discusses a selection of paintings from early Christian catacombs.

3.2 Venerating Saintly Models: Hagiography

Concerns about inappropriate dependency are more evident in another genre of Christian literature: Hagiography, the writing of the lives of saints.[106] The problem is clear: If literary competence served the needs of humans in their societal and political contexts, as we have seen above, was it also suitable for narrating God's miraculous deeds in the lives of extraordinary men or women? Could divine agency be appropriately praised in human words, or was any such endeavor bound by the restrictions of worldly discourse? And if the saints themselves deliberately dispensed with 'secular' education, were their hagiographers entitled to use such skills to celebrate the memory of illiterate people? This literary discourse, however, was deeply intertwined with cultic practice, and here we again encounter individual agency which was not easily regulated: The veneration of saints in everyday life or on festive occasions was part of the challenge of delineating the field of popular piety – there obviously were practices like drinking, dancing, or interacting with relics which bishops (not always successfully) tried to prevent.[107] But such events were no Christian inventions: They developed out of the culture of memorization of the deceased in the Greco-Roman world, which included communal meals by the tombs of deceased family members. This practice was applied to Christian martyrs from the second half of the second century onward, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* being the first

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[106] Late ancient hagiography is a vast field of study which can only be dealt with sketchily here. For an overview over hagiographic life-writing, see Peter Gemeinhardt, "Hagiography. Greek and Latin Patristics and Orthodox Churches," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* 10 (2015): 1153–59. Recent trends of research are documented in collected volumes by Koen De Temmerman, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), as well as Christa Gray and James Corke-Webster, eds., *The Hagiographical Experiment. Developing Discourses on Sainthood*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 158 (Leiden: Brill, 2020). A classical assessment of the connection between literature and cult is Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981 [reprint with an update 2015]). Information of all kinds on the veneration and memorization of saints is now available in the database "The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity," http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/ [accessed 19.09.2023].

[107] For such phenomena see Gemeinhardt, "Praktische Patristik": 51–61.

literary testimony,[108] the veneration site of St. Peter's in Rome the first material one. Such *refrigeria* formed the background of the hagiographic discourse. Therefore, we observe parallel developments of encounters with the dead by virtue of practices which were similar to, but not identical with, those practices of non-Christian traditions: The veneration of the graves of martyrs and holy men and women on the one hand, the literary discourse about holiness on the other.

Below, we will focus on dependency in the context of hagiography. This is a highly interesting case in point, since, beginning with Athanasius' *Life of Antony* (written c. 360 CE), this genre flourished in all Christian languages and remained prolific far beyond late antiquity. While it is clear that the 'historical' Antony was not the first person to lead a solitary life – as Athanasius himself narrates, he visited other men who lived nearby and in a similar manner to learn from them[109] –, it is widely acknowledged that Athanasius' *Life* is the first example of this literary genre.[110] At first glance, these *Lives* represent the "rhetoric of paradox" mentioned above. Antony, living with his Christian parents, refused to attend school and deliberately chose to remain uneducated:

> As a child he was raised by his parents, knowing nothing besides them and life at home. As a result, when the child grew and advanced in age, he did not continue learning his letters, wishing to stand apart from the normal activities of the children. His whole desire was, as it is written,

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[108] Cf. *Martyrium Polycarpi* 18.3.

[109] Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 4.1–3.

[110] The *Vita et Passio Cypriani* (mid-third century) resembles a funeral speech and is mainly modeled on the martyr acts, while the *Vita Constantini* by Eusebius of Caesarea (written c. 340) is strictly speaking not a saint's life. James Corke-Webster argued that Eusebius' *Life of Pamphilus* should be regarded as the first exemple of Christian hagiography. This suggestion deserves further scrutiny, but it will be difficult to substantiate this hypothesis in any case, as the *Life of Pamphilus* has unfortunately been lost; James Corke-Webster, "The First Hagiographies. The *Life of Antony*, the *Life of Pamphilus* and the Nature of Saints," in *The Hagiographical Experiment. Developing Discourses on Sainthood*, ed. Christa Gray and James Corke-Webster, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 158 (Leiden: Brill, 2020): 50–55.

to live at home (cf. Gen 25:27 LXX), unaffected by the outside world; he would, however, join his parents in church.[111]

The hagiographer describes the young Antony, so to speak, as pursuing a radically independent way of life without any ambition to follow the established career paths which we discussed above. This hagiographical image of a saint who is completely detached from educational values is, of course, contradicted by the fact that Antony wrote letters to fellow monks.[112] Even the *Life* itself reports his exchange of letters with emperors and state officials,[113] and his refutation of 'philosophers' and 'sophists' who wanted to put him on the test but left him, "astonished because they had witnessed such great understanding in an unlettered person."[114] Of course, such admiration for an "uneducated and ordinary man" makes Antony a follower of the apostles Peter and John (Acts 4:13), and the point which Athanasius wants to drive home is not that Antony was unable to write but that he had not been affected by higher education – his refusal to attend the school of grammar and rhetoric thus symbolizes a withdrawal from the world where young men had to strive for career, wealth, and marriage for which a good education offered the necessary support. It should however be stressed that the *Life of Antony* does not simply reject education but – a fact that has often

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[111] Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 1.2–3: Καὶ παιδίον μὲν ὢν ἐτρέφετο παρὰ τοῖς γονεῦσι, πλέον αὐτῶν καὶ τοῦ οἴκου μηδὲν ἕτερον γινώσκων. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ αὐξήσας ἐγένετο παῖς καὶ προέκοπτε τῇ ἡλικίᾳ, γράμματα μὲν μαθεῖν οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, βουλόμενος ἐκτὸς εἶναι καὶ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς παῖδας συνηθείας. Τὴν δὲ ἐπιθυμίαν πᾶσαν εἶχε, κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον, ὡς ἄπλαστος οἰκεῖν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ. Συνήγετο μέντοι μετὰ τῶν γονέων ἐν τῷ κυριακῷ. Trans. Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *The Greek Life of Antony, The Coptic Life of Antony and An Encomium on Saint Antony by John Shmūn and A Letter to the Disciples of Antony by Serapion of Thmuis*, Cistercian Studies Series 202 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2003): 57.

[112] While researchers have long been skeptical about the authenticity of these letters, Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony. Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995): 35–42, has shown convincingly that they were written by Antony himself.

[113] Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 81.5–6; 86.2.

[114] Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 73.3: Ἀπῆλθον οὖν θαυμάζοντες, ὅτι τοσαύτην ἔβλεπον ἐν ἰδιώτῃ σύνεσιν. Trans. Vivian and Athanassakis, *The Greek Life of Antony*: 211. This subject is discussed in great detail in chapters 72–80 of the *Life*.

been overlooked – replaces the public schools with another educational institution: Antony, who went to church with his parents,

> paid such close attention to the reading of Scripture that nothing in the Scriptures fell to the ground (cf. 1 Sam 3:19). He remembered everything (cf. Luke 8:15), with the result that for him memory took the place of books.[115]

Interestingly, in the *Life of Antony*, Athanasius not only proclaims the invention of an alternative education, but stages it convincingly: Christian teaching derives from the Scriptures and is thus connected to literary education. However, the teacher's authority does not depend on his knowledge of classical authors and his competence to analyze the school texts, but on his individual ascetic experience, that is, on a lifestyle directly shaped by the Bible:

> One day, then, Antony went out and all the monks came to him and asked to hear him speak, and he spoke these words to them in the Egyptian language [i.e., Coptic]: 'The Scriptures are sufficient for us for instruction, but it is good for us to encourage one another in the faith and to anoint us mutually by means of words. You then, like children, bring what you know to the father and tell him about it while I, because I am your elder in years, will share with you what I know and have accomplished.'[116]

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[115] Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 3.7: Καὶ γὰρ προσεῖχεν οὕτω τῇ ἀναγνώσει, ὡς μηδὲν τῶν γεγραμμένων ἀπ' αὐτοῦ πίπτειν χαμαί, πάντα δὲ κατέχειν καὶ λοιπὸν αὐτῷ τὴν μνήμην ἀντὶ βιβλίων γίνεσθαι. Trans. Vivian and Athanassakis, *The Greek Life of Antony*: 63.

[116] Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 16.1–2: Μιᾷ γοῦν ἡμέρᾳ προελθών, καὶ πάντων τῶν μοναχῶν ἐλθόντων πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀξιούντων τε ἀκοῦσαι παρ' αὐτοῦ λόγον, ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς τῇ Αἰγυπτιακῇ φωνῇ ταῦτα· τὰς μὲν γραφὰς ἱκανὰς εἶναι πρὸς διδασκαλίαν, ἡμᾶς δὲ καλὸν παρακαλεῖν ἀλλήλους ἐν τῇ πίστει, καὶ ἀλείφειν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις. 2. Καὶ ὑμεῖς τοίνυν ὡς τέκνα φέρετε τῷ πατρὶ λέγοντες εἴ τι οἴδατε· κἀγὼ δὲ ὡς τῇ ἡλικίᾳ πρεσβύτερος ὑμῶν, ἃ οἶδα καὶ ὧν πεπείραμαι μεταδίδωμι. Trans. Vivian and Athanassakis, *The Greek Life of Antony*: 97. The reference to "anointing each other" alludes to the Hellenic gymnasia, which were part of the type of education rejected by Antony. For the use of Scripture in the *Life*, see Peter Gemeinhardt, "'Habe für alles ein Zeugnis aus der Heiligen Schrift!' Monastische Diskurse über Schriftauslegung und Bildung in der Spätantike," *Scriptural Interpretation at the Interface between Education and Religion*, ed. Florian Wilk, Themes in Biblical Nar-

It would be an exaggeration to claim that Christian hagiography was, from its inception, a way to free Christianity from 'pagan' dependencies. But I would like to underline that this view of the *Life of Antony* and related texts should help us to understand the strict demarcation against schools and education as a major driving force for the development of a real alternative, while at the same time the abstract discourse of Jerome, Augustine, and their contemporaries about the legitimacy of education and the danger of dependency on non-Christian values was flourishing.

This discourse found its way into the prefaces of hagiographic texts; not the Greek *Life of Antony* itself but into its earliest Latin counterparts. A case in point is Sulpicius Severus' *Life of Martin of Tours*, written c. 397 CE, which became most influential in the Western patristic and medieval tradition. The author proclaimed that he would not follow the footsteps of ancient biographers who had tried to "make an everlasting memory for their names (everlasting, as they thought), if with their pen they might signalize the lives of famous men."[117] For anyone who had attended the grammarian's school, the critical reference to Sallustius – "since the life which we enjoy is short, we should try to make remembrance of us as lasting as possible"[118] – was easy to decipher. This is undoubtedly another example of the "rhetoric of paradox" mentioned above,[119] but we should not rule out the possibility that he may actually have been struggling with the opportunities and limitations of writing a saint's life. Sulpicius was not only, as I would argue, eager to show off his knowledge of literature and his literary skill. He was deeply concerned

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rative 22 (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 251–56. The topic of experience as a basis of teaching is further enlarged upon by John Cassian, *Collationes patrum* 3.7; 12.4–5, 16; 19.7; see Dorothee Schenk, *Monastische Bildung. Johannes Cassians 'Collationes Patrum'*, SERAPHIM 16 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022): 208–12.

[117] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 1.1: *Plerique mortales studio et gloriae saeculari inaniter dediti exinde perennem, ut putabant, memoriam nominis sui quaesierunt, si uitas clarorum uirorum stilo inlustrassent.* Trans. Philip Burton, *Sulpicius Severus' Vita Martini* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 95. More examples of education as a hagiographical trope are discussed in Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum*: 244–306.

[118] Cf. Sallustius, *Coniuratio Catilinae* 1.3: *quoniam vita ipsa qua fruimur brevis est, memoriam nostri quam maxume longam efficere.*

[119] Vielberg, *Klemens*: 42–3 describes the author's intention as follows: "[Er versucht,] mit dieser Rhetorik des Paradoxons sein Werk als zur Höhenkammliteratur gehörig zu erweisen."

with the problem that writing a saint's life might, by definition, not lead to "an empty memorial among men" but an "eternal reward from God," and so the hagiographer wanted to guide his readers to "the true philosophy, the service of Heaven, the power that is of God."[120] All of this is perfectly embodied by Martin of Tours, who, like Antony, is portrayed as "a perfectly unlettered man" (*homo inlitteratissimus*).[121] In this and similar texts, we observe a strong sense of dependency on education and an equally strong desire to get rid of its shortcomings: Exactly because he wrote like the historians and biographers of old, it seemed essential to Sulpicius and his readership to underline that Martin was not like the heroes of Roman history. This may qualify as a deliberate attempt to do away with a dependency on previous models – although it did not require much skill to detect Sulpicius' actual competence in writing!

Another hagiographical strategy to cope with the challenge of education can be seen in the *Sermon on the Life of Honoratus of Arles*, the founder of the monastery of Lérins in southern Gaul. His nephew and successor Hilary (d. 449) delivered a memorial speech on the occasion of the first anniversary of Honoratus' death (in either 430 or 431)[122] – an impressive piece of oratory in a liturgical context. We might call it a critical appraisal of an earlier tradition of writing biography:

> It is a commonplace of oratorical training that those who set out to pronounce a eulogy on any man's life should begin by extolling his birthplace and his origins, so that any deficiencies in his own qualities may

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[120] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 1.6: […] *quo utique ad ueram sapientiam et caelestem militiam diuinamque uirtutem legentes incitabuntur. in quo ita nostri quoque rationem commodi ducimus, ut non inanem ab hominibus memoriam, sed aeternum a Deo praemium exspectemus*. Trans. Burton, *Vita Martini*: 95.

[121] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 25.8.

[122] For a close reading of this text with full notes and bibliography, see Peter Gemeinhardt, "Monastic Teaching and Episcopal Preaching: Education in the *Lives* of the Bishops of Arles in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 17 (2024) [forthcoming]. On the Lerinian background of both Honoratus and Hilary, see René Nouailhat, *Saints et Patrons. Les premiers moines de Lérins*, Centre de Recherches d'Histoire Ancienne 84 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1988); on the wider historical context of the sociocultural background of late ancient bishops, see Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Leadership in an Age of Transition*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 37 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 172–207.

appear to have been supplied beforehand by the glories of his ancestors. But 'we are all one in Christ' (Gal 3:28), and there is no higher rank than 'to be reckoned among the sons of God' (Wis 5:5); nor can honours of earthly origin bring us any increase of true dignity except through our contempt for them. None is more glorious in the heavenly places than those who have ignored their pedigrees and chosen to be reckoned as fatherless except in Christ. I forbear, therefore, to recall his inherited insignia of worldly honours, and (what the world regards as almost the peak of ambition) a family risen in rank to the consular dignity itself – and all spurned by the higher nobility of his heart.[123]

It is a classical rhetorical tool that Hilary refers to: the *praeteritio*, the art of mentioning what should be left unmentioned. This may indicate that Hilary wanted to fulfill the expectations of his audience and (later) readership, among them Honoratus' peers and family members, fellow bishops, and educated monks from the island of Lérins. But at the same time, he aimed at establishing a hierarchy of values: Eternal fame and thus Christian saintliness depended on belonging to Christ, not to a noble family. That noble descent is mentioned but placed in a different conceptual framework is a frequent move in contemporary Christian writings: To give just one more example, the saintly bishop Germanus of Auxerre (d. 448) was known as "noble by his birth, but even more noble by his religion," as his hagiographer declared.[124] Yet, in the *Sermon on the Life of Honoratus*, there is no open competition between two models of fame, as there is in Sulpicius Severus. Moreover, Hilary aimed at integrating

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[123] Hilarius of Arles, *Sermo de vita Honorati* 4: *Est illud notum omnibus oratoriae disciplinae, quorum laudandam receperint vitam, patriam prius et originem praedicare, ut quod in propriis virtutibus deest, in patrum gloria praecessisse videatur. Nos autem in Christo omnes unum sumus; et fastigium nobilitatis est inter Dei filios computari; nec addere quicquam nobis ad dignitatem hanc terrenae originis decus nisi contemptu suo potest. Nemo est in caelestibus gloriosior, quam qui repudiato patrum stemmate elegit sola Christi paternitate censeri. Praetermitto itaque commemorare avita illius saecularium honorum insignia et, quod concupiscibile ac paene summum habet mundus, usque ad consulatus provectam familiae suae nobilitatem, maiore generositate pectoris fastiditam.* Trans. F.R. Hoare, *The Western Fathers. Being the Lives of SS. Martin of Tours, Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, Honoratus of Arles and Germanus of Auxerre* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954): 250.

[124] Constantius of Lyons, *Vita Germani Autissiodorensis* 22: *natalibus nobilis, religione nobilior.*

the traditional model into the innovative one. He did not want to get rid of the Roman past, including literary education, as rhetorical brilliance made an outstanding bishop: In his sermon, he reminded his flock that they had heard "those discourses of his (sc. Honoratus) that matched his life and in which purity of heart and splendour of language went hand in hand"[125]; and it was not by chance that Hilary commented on Honoratus' deathbed scene by quoting the philosopher Seneca: "Great men suffer much, and are born as an example from which others may learn to suffer."[126] This is all the more significant as in the *Sermon on the Life of Honoratus*, quotations from classical authors are otherwise rare.[127] Here, the quote from Seneca – a stoic philosopher who had been well-received in early Christian literature[128] – served to link the values of the senatorial class to a form of learned ascesis. This entailed an appropriation and transformation of biographical models which deeply impregnated Gallic episcopal biography in the fifth and sixth centuries.

In conclusion, there is a variety of path dependencies in hagiographical texts, both in terms of literary forms and content. A closer look at other texts adds to the picture of a creative and transformative power of hagiographic discourse beyond the simple reception or rejection of biographical models. In recent research, the notion of "discourse" has served as a unifying cipher for many different ways and forms of narrating the lives of saints (biographies, poems, sermons, inscriptions, and images). The quest for a *genre* of "hagiography" has not proved fruitful, despite many attempts at defining patterns of Christian life-writing based on classical models.[129] It would therefore be a mistake to conclude

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[125] *Sermo de vita Honorati* 26: *Audistis quoque os illud congruens vitae, in quo erat consentanea puritati pectoris sermonis luculentia.* Trans. Hoare, *The Western Fathers*: 270.

[126] *Sermo de vita Honorati* 31: *Magni viri multa patiuntur; "ut alios pati doceant, nati sunt in exemplum".* Trans. Hoare, *The Western Fathers*: 273. The quote is from Seneca, *De providentia* 6.3.

[127] See Nouailhat, *Saints et Patrons*: 55–63 for a discussion of the respective passages.

[128] The first Latin witness is Tertullian, *De anima* 20.1 where he refers to *Seneca saepe noster* and quotes from *De beneficiis* 4.6.6. For early Christian reception of Stoicism see now Charlotte Kirsch-Klingelhöffer, *Frühchristliche Stoarezeption. Zur Rezeption einer philosophischen Schule in den apologetischen und antihäretischen Schriften des 2. und frühen 3. Jahrhunderts*, SERAPHIM 21 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024).

[129] Marc van Uytfanghe, "Heiligenverehrung II (Hagiographie)," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 14 (1988): 155–57.

from the use of classical texts in saints' lives that this is the only kind of dependency one should investigate. To take a prominent example: Jerome, in his first hagiographic work, the *Life of Paul of Thebes*, quotes from Virgil's *Aeneid* to embellish the personal encounter of the paradigmatic hermits Paul and Antony.[130] It has long been recognized that he puts excerpts from Latin (!) school texts into the mouths of two men in Egypt whose mother tongue was Greek or probably Coptic, and it is clear that his intended readers must have had the same educational curriculum like the author himself in order to enjoy and benefit from reading such a scene. While Jerome certainly intended to show off his literary skills (and was therefore rightly accused as *a Ciceronianus*, as mentioned above), we should, however, take seriously his endeavor to find appropriate forms for praising his favorite saint and to communicate the ideal of Christian holiness (which qualifies him as a *Christianus*). In other words, we should take into account processes of reception *and* of production, of dependency and at the same time of creativity, and thus of a certain independency (even if Jerome himself never succeeded in leaving behind his educational heritage – he would probably have been quite uncomfortable if he had succeeded in this respect!).

Hagiographical intertextuality can refer to a classic such as Virgil, but also to intertexts closer to the author's own time. The first monastic biography is again a case in point: It seems that Athanasius modeled his *Life of Antony* on earlier Lives of Neo-Platonic philosophers, and some modern researchers made an especially strong case for intertextuality with contemporary Lives of Pythagoras.[131] Such a resemblance is obvi-

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[130] Jerome, *Vita Pauli* 9.5–6, quoting Virgil, *Aeneis* 2.650 and 6.672. For this encounter, see Susan Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints. Hagiography and Geography in Jerome*, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 58 (Leiden: Brill, 2005): 77–80; Yorick Schulz-Wackerbarth, *Die Vita Pauli des Hieronymus. Darstellung und Etablierung eines Heiligen im hagiographischen Diskurs der Spätantike*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 107 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017): 87 and 126; Christa Gray, "How to Persuade a Saint: Supplication in Jerome's *Lives* of Holy Men," in *The Hagiographical Experiment. Developing Discourses on Sainthood*, ed. Christa Gray and James Corke-Webster, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 158 (Leiden: Brill, 2020): 237–38.

[131] So Jan N. Bremmer, "Richard Reitzenstein, Pythagoras and the *Life of Antony*," in *Pythagorean Knowledge from the Ancient to the Modern World: Askesis, Religion, Science*, ed. Almut-Barbara Renger and Alessandro Stavru, Episteme 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016): 227–45.

ous in certain chapters of the *Life of Antony*, e.g., the account of how the hermit leaves his shelter after twenty years in strict seclusion:

> Antony emerged as though from some shrine, having been initiated into divine mysteries and inspired by God […] When he saw the crowd, he was not bothered, nor did he rejoice at so many people greeting him. Instead, like someone guided by reason, he maintained his equilibrium and natural balance.[132]

However, it does not seem clear to me whether this is the hermeneutical key to the *Life* as a whole. Biblical and martyrological patterns are equally important for the explanation of the main narrative and of many details of this most influential *Life* – in my opinion, they form the 'common thread,' so to speak.[133] This is not only of literary interest but also touches upon the question of dependency: Did nascent Christian hagiography derive its plot structure from the emulation of non-Christian sources, or did it rewrite Jesus' call to discipleship and the martyr stories as examples of such discipleship until death, for the times when the persecutions would have ceased? In other words, was Antony an imitator of Christ (by his life and teaching, but also by his desire to die for his faith) or an imitator of Pythagoras (by his competitive supersession of philosophical models of his time)? Did the plausibility of the ascetic life depend on its conformity to the life and conduct of the sages of old, or to Christ and his persecuted followers?

As always, the truth may lie in the middle. These intertextual genealogies are not exclusive, and the *Life of Antony* may well have served apologetic as well as edifying and even anti-heretical purposes at the

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[132] Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 14.2, 4: προῆλθεν ὁ Ἀντώνιος ὥσπερ ἔκ τινος ἀδύτου μεμυσταγωγημένος καὶ θεοφορούμενος […] Οὔτε γὰρ ἑωρακὼς τὸν ὄχλον ἐταράχθη οὔτε ὡς ὑπὸ τοσούτων κατασπαζόμενος ἐγεγήθει, ἀλλ' ὅλος ἦν ἴσος, ὡς ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου κυβερνώμενος καὶ ἐν τῷ κατὰ φύσιν ἑστώς. Trans. Vivian and Athanassakis, *The Greek Life of Antony*: 91, 93.

[133] The reasons for this assessment are given in Peter Gemeinhardt, "*Vita Antonii* oder *Passio Antonii*? Biographisches Genre und martyrologische Topik in der ersten Asketenvita," in *Die Kirche und ihre Heiligen. Studien zur Ekklesiologie und Hagiographie in der Spätantike*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 90 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014): 327–60.

same time. The concept of hagiographic discourse is intended precisely to capture such a variety of models, appropriations, and even rivalries. In any case, it seems impossible to me to view Antony (and other saints) as mere copies of pagan prototypes. This becomes even clearer when we look at holy women to whom male hagiographers freely ascribed spiritual teachings in order to express their own unconventional thoughts.[134] Such a literary strategy was unknown in pre-Christian biography. I suggest that Christian hagiographers were aware that they inevitably had to draw on their entire educational heritage – and that they consciously remodeled it in the act of writing.

3.3 Preaching the Word of God

Finally, and perhaps most obvious for Christian preaching, the tension between the indebtedness to *paideia* and the anxiety not to surrender to one's rhetorical abilities is crucial. While inscriptions were public and visible to everyone who sought out a cemetery (as far as we know, there were no restrictions, even to visitors in catacombs), and while hagiographical *Lives* were addressed to Christians but also circulated more widely, sermons were a part of the liturgy on Sundays or the feast days of martyrs and thus represented a mode of communication among Christians. Of course, not everyone who attended a service had already been baptized: Catechumens were regularly present and listened to the sermons, but they had to leave before the eucharist was celebrated; they remained "on the threshold" and enjoyed a "partial integration."[135] It seems that Christian worship was similarly open in principle for people

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[134] For this, see Maria Munkholt Christensen and Peter Gemeinhardt, "Holy Women and Men as Teachers in Late Antique Christianity," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 23 (2019): 312, with reference to Peter Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Lectures on the History of Religions, n. s. 13 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988): 153. This aspect, though highly interesting, cannot be pursued in detail here.

[135] Matthieu Pignot, *The Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa (4th–6th Centuries): Augustine of Hippo, His Contemporaries and Early Reception*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 162 (Leiden: Brill, 2020): 127.

who wanted to know more about this religion and simply dropped in: In the vast homiletic corpus of Augustine we find a text with the telling title "A sermon which was delivered when the pagans had entered."[136] Augustine himself may be counted among this group: When he moved to Milan in 384, he had just left Manichaeism behind and begun to attend the services held by Bishop Ambrose, but for the time being he felt attracted not by the "teacher of truth" (*doctor veri*) but by the "graceful man" (*homo benignus*); he openly pursued a professional interest in Ambrose's rhetoric, not in his exposition of the biblical message.[137] As late as in the sixth century, Christian preachers expected and sometimes feared erudite persons among their audience, and even if this fear can be considered a trope, we must reckon with the continued existence of people who had received a higher education and were able to judge the preacher's performance. More importantly, many fourth and fifth-century bishops had attended the 'pagan' schools, and while some of them felt concern over using such 'pagan' skills, others were perfectly happy to be skilled speakers, as were the people who commissioned their epitaphs: The Burgundian bishop Avitus of Vienne (d. 517) received praise because "in whatever kind of speaking, no-one was his equal as an orator or as a poet."[138]

As in the case of hagiography (but unlike epigraphy), we are in a position to compare theoretical assessments and practical specimens of the opportunities and limits of preaching the word of God. However, apart from occasional reflections on the aims and means of proper preaching, there is only one methodical treatise on this subject: In book 4 of *On Christian Doctrine* (written 426–27), Augustine developed a theory of

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[136] Augustine, *Sermo* 360B = *Sermo Dolbeau* 25: *Sermo cum pagani ingrederentur.*

[137] Cf. Augustine, *Confessiones* 5.13.23: *studiose audiebam disputantem in populo, non intentione, qua debui, sed quasi explorans eius facundiam, utrum conueniret famae suae an maior minor ue proflueret, quam praedicabatur, et uerbis eius suspendebar intentus, rerum autem incuriosus et contemptor astabam.*

[138] Quoted from Edmond Le Blant, ed. *Inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule antérieures au VIIIe siècle*, vol. 1 (Paris: L'Imprimerie Impériale, 1856): 402, line 22–23: *unus in arce fuit cui quolibet ordine fandi / orator nullus similis nullusque poeta.* Cf. the funerary inscription for Avitus' contemporary, the hagiographer, letter-writer and bishop Ennodius of Pavia (d. 521; ILCV 1046, line 13–14): *pollens aeloquio, ductrinae nobilis arte restituit Cristo innumeros populos.*

using rhetoric for Christian purposes. This description of the education and performance of the *orator Christianus* followed the first three books that were devoted to biblical exegesis – it is thus clear from the structure of the book that rhetorical skills would be applied to contexts of speaking that differed from traditional oratory, and we should not regard Augustine as a Christianized Quintilian. Being himself a rhetor by training and experience, Augustine defined the principal task of preaching as teaching which is best achieved by a well-structured and persuasive speech.[139] He believed that the preacher's life was more important than flowery oratory for the successful communication of religious education,[140] but he did not dispense with the traditional standards of public performance: Delivering a comprehensible, convincing and admonishing speech was crucial to Christian preaching, just as it had been on the forum of each Greek and Roman city. In a play on the double meaning of the Latin verb *orare*, which means both "to speak" (hence *orator*) and "to pray," Augustine postulated that a preacher must first become "a person at prayer" and then a "speaker" (*sit orator antequam dictor*). Only by performing both tasks in the correct order could he be called "eloquent" – interestingly, according to Augustine, this attribute was independent of the speaker's success or failure in moving his hearers to consent (which had been – and still was – the main goal of every public performance of oratory).[141] Importantly, Augustine warned that while a Christian preacher should duly teach (*docere*) and move (*movere*) his audience (in accordance with two of Cicero's "duties" of an orator, *officia oratoris*), he should avoid pleasing them (*delectare*) merely for the sake of pleasing,[142] which had been the road to success for late antique rhetors, as Augustine himself knew from his time at the emperor's court in Milan. However, he admitted that the preacher had to keep the audience attentive; therefore, it seemed legitimate to employ pleasing language cautiously![143]

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[139] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4.26.56; cf. id., *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 126.3.
[140] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4.27.59.
[141] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4.15.32; cf. ibid. 4.17.34: *Quod cum apte et conuenienter facit, non immerito eloquens dici potest, etsi non eum sequatur auditoris adsensus.*
[142] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4.25.55.
[143] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4.13.29; 4.26.57.

In this treatise, *On Christian Doctrine*, we can thus observe a subtle transformation of rhetoric as it was taught at school and as most Christian preachers would have learned it at this time. Augustine went beyond the literary dispute (mentioned above) about the legitimacy of using rhetoric for Christian purposes: To him, speaking convincingly was simply a necessity for preachers, and this competence was actually expected from Christian bishops, the majority of whom had been schooled in a classical manner. As long as the educational institutions of the Roman Empire existed, it was possible to find well-trained persons for episcopal office, at least in the cities. In the sixth century, the need for professional training of clerics at lower levels became obvious, but despite some scattered hints in synodal canons, no institution of pastoral training was established in late antiquity.[144] Augustine himself argued that the best way to become a true Christian rhetor was to learn from other eloquent Christians, namely from biblical figures and patristic theologians whose fame derived from an appropriate combination of wisdom and eloquence.[145] We should however not forget that Cicero had already exhorted his students to learn from models (*exempla*)! The numbers are difficult to estimate, but it is reasonable to assume that from the fourth century onward, many future bishops did not learn their grammatical and rhetorical skills at school, but from earlier Christian writers and from the preachers they heard every Sunday at church.[146]

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[144] See Peter Gemeinhardt, "Men of Letters or Fishermen? The Education of Bishops and Clerics in Late Antiquity," in *Teachers in Late Antique Christianity*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, Olga Lorgeoux, and Maria Munkholt Christensen, SERAPHIM 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018): 32–55. A systematic investigation of the educational level of clerics below the episcopate is desirable. Individual regions have already been investigated from this perspective; see Sabine Huebner, *Der Klerus in der Gesellschaft des spätantiken Kleinasiens*, Altertumswissenschaftliches Kolloquium 15 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2005): 245–52 (Asia Minor) and Isabelle Mossong, *Der Klerus des spätantiken Italiens im Spiegel epigraphischer Zeugnisse. Eine soziohistorische Studie*, Klio Beihefte n. s. 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022): 165–68 (Northern Italy).

[145] Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4.5.8.

[146] Athanasius of Alexandria is a case in point: Legend has it that he was educated by Bishop Alexander, his predecessor, from childhood on, as is reported by Gelasius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica* F18b (ed. Wallraff, Stutz and Marinidis), and Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 10.15. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 21.6, adds that Athanasius had only a moderate "liberal" education (τὰ ἐγκύκλια). However, Sozomenus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.17.5, seems to exaggerate when he calls Athanasius "self-taught"

Although a large proportion of the bishops at this time still came from aristocratic families and so of course had been educated at the schools of grammar and rhetoric before their ordination, this proportion declined with the increasing number of rural bishoprics and the need for local clergy, many of who were uneducated. Whether rhetorical techniques were acquired superficially or thoroughly, the practice of preaching was paramount to Christian communities. Christians did not have a different toolbox of communication; and even if we only have the one theoretical treatise discussed above, they actually agreed with Cicero and therefore with Augustine that the primary task of public speaking was to persuade the audience.[147]

However, Christian preachers also introduced at least two innovations. The first is the homily itself. A speech devoted to the exegesis of an authoritative text had had no place in ancient cults; in Christianity, the Bible-based homily became the most popular genre of preaching.[148] Consequently, Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* proceeded from exegesis to preaching, even if such careful hermeneutics as in this treatise were not regularly employed in sermons. Secondly, the discursive demarcation against an elitist habit of speaking reappears in warnings to the Christian orator not to be deceived by his own brilliance. Exhortations "to speak simply to the simple"[149] are frequent and reflect a general view on the preacher's audience, as it is expressed by the mid-fifth century bishop of Ravenna, Peter Chrysologus (d. after 450):

(αὐτοδίδακτος). For a discussion of the sources on Athanasius' childhood and education, see Peter Gemeinhardt, "Herkunft, Jugend und Bildung," in *Athanasius Handbuch*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011): 75–82.

[147] Cicero, *De oratore* 1.31.138: *dicere ad persuadendum accommodate.*

[148] Technically, one can distinguish ὁμιλία ("intimate conversation") from λόγος ("speech"); thus, speaking of homilies indicates the doctrinal instruction within the peer group (so Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4.89.2; 6.52.3; prayer to God can also be termed ὁμιλία: ibid. 7.39.6). In fact, however, this distinction was frequently blurred, like the equivalent terms in Latin, *sermo* and *tractatus*. For the terminology see Maurice Sachot, "Homilie," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 16 (1994): 148 and 171.

[149] Jerome, *Tractatus in Psalmos* 1.118[119]: *dico simplicius propter simpliciores.*

We should speak to the populace in popular fashion. The parish ought to be addressed by ordinary speech. Matters necessary to all men should be spoken about as men in general speak. Natural language is dear to simple souls and sweet to the learned. A teacher should speak words which will profit all.[150]

Such admonitions were themselves expressed in carefully sculpted phrases. They testify to a growing awareness that the closed circle of communication among the few highly educated men had to be opened up in order to fulfill the preacher's task, namely to "go and make disciples of all nations […] and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you," as their risen Lord Jesus Christ had put it (Matth 28:19–20). The gradual realization of this vision testifies to a significant independency of Christian preaching from its classical methodological roots. The sixth-century bishop Caesarius of Arles (d. 542) admonished his fellow clerics that "there is no need for eloquence and impressive memory, where an exhortation in a simple and down-to-earth style is obviously appropriate."[151] He therefore recommended dispensing with *elocutio* and *memoria*, two of the traditional stages in the preparation of a speech.[152] The vast corpus of his own sermons testifies to the fact that Caesarius himself was committed to speaking in a 'low' or 'humble style' and thus contributed to the development of what has been termed *sermo humilis*.[153]

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[150] Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 43.1: *Populis populariter est loquendum; communio compellanda est sermone communi; omnibus necessaria dicenda sunt more omnium. Naturalis lingua cara simplicibus, doctis dulcis: docens loquatur omnibus profutura.* Trans. George E. Ganss, *Saint Peter Chrysologus: Selected Sermons*, Fathers of the Church 17 (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953): 90.

[151] Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 1.13: *Non hic aut eloquentia aut grandis memoria quaeritur, ubi simplex et pedestri sermone admonitio necessaria esse cognoscitur.*

[152] Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 3.3.1 who enumerates *inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria* and *actio.*

[153] See in general, Peter Auksi, *Christian Plain Style. The Evolution of a Spiritual Ideal* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995): 24–25, 144–73; for Caesarius in particular, Nicolás Anders, *Christianisierung des Habitus. Die Predigten des Caesarius von Arles als religiöse Bildungsprozesse*, SERAPHIM (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024): 95–99, 257–262. However, one should consider the political dimension of this claim to "simple language," that was designed to prove the speaker's episcopal legitimacy and superior moral authority. For this multi-faceted image of the bishops see Conrad

Of course, not every Christian preacher who claimed that he used simple words obeyed to his own rule. To speak in an persuasive manner was not optional but essential: As Augustine astutely remarked, preachers needed to pay attention to their style, because otherwise they would only reach those die-hard listeners who were so eager to learn that they would not shy away from a base and formless speech.[154] But not only highly wrought texts but also moderately ambitious sermons and homilies were written down, copied, and transmitted, and many of the mass of Augustinian and pseudo-Augustinian sermons belonged to the "low style" (*genus submisse*), as it would have been thought of in classical terms. In other words, formal eloquence was not the main criterion for choosing texts to be preserved for future use. We thus observe an adaptation and transformation of genres and styles which Christians had learned in the public schools, side by side with their non-Christian peers.

This is also true for hagiography and, albeit in a less pronounced form, for epigraphy: Inevitably, Christian written culture depended on traditional patterns, but in many cases this was much more than simple reproduction. To be dependent on previous traditions, whether in terms of education or other elements of the common heritage of Greco-Roman antiquity, did by no means exclude creativity and innovation, and such a claim to social and intellectual freedom was not confined to the upper classes of the society of the Roman Empire.

Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000): 84–90. William E. Klingshirn points to the principles of church reform laid down in Julianus Pomerius' *De vita contemplativa* as background for Caesarius' episcopal agency; William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles. The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought 4.22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 75–82.

[154] Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4.11.26: *Quod tamen si fiat insuauiter, ad paucos quidem studiosissimos suus peruenit fructus, qui ea quae discenda sunt, quamuis abiecte inculteque dicantur, scire desiderant.*

4. What Happened to Education when the Roman Empire Broke Down?

4.1 Visions of Decline and Survival: Monastic Education at the Dawn of the Middle Ages

This empire, like every other secular power, did not last forever. When Augustine wrote his famous educational treatises, the western part of the empire was already in the process of disintegration and dissolution into several barbarian kingdoms. The eastern Mediterranean remained under Roman rule, although its territory would shrink dramatically due to the Arab conquests from the seventh century onward, and despite the common modern term for it, i.e. the "Byzantine Empire," the emperors at the time left no doubt that they were still the rulers of the "Romans" (ῥωμαῖοι). These dramatic events have traditionally been labeled 'Völkerwanderung' ('migration of nations' or 'peoples'); but since it has become clear that these 'nations' (ἔθνη) only emerged during their wanderings or in the processes of settling down, these transformations are in current research often termed 'ethnogenesis.'[155] Whatever the correct terminology might be, this transformation of the political circumstances led to significant shifts in social and cultural as well as religious life. Remarkably, Christianity survived, despite its interwovenness with its Roman environment.[156] While there was certainly not one single reason for this resilience, I would argue that education played a major role in the process of reconfiguring collective and individual Christian identities. This

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[155] For a description of this debate see Mischa Meier, *Geschichte der Völkerwanderung. Europa, Asien und Afrika vom 3. bis zum 8. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (München: C.H. Beck, 2019): 99–116 (whose book however bears the traditional title). The pressing problem with the notion of 'Völkerwanderung' is of course not whether these groups were constantly on the move or not – the most successful founders of a new kingdom, the Franks, did not wander at all! – but the ideological connotation of 'Volk' (people) with 'völkisch' and 'Volksgemeinschaft' (i.e. an ethnic group understood as a biological or racial community) in older German scholarship, including drastic stereotypes of the 'Germanic peoples' in opposition to the 'decadent' Romans.

[156] Which was not exclusive: From the late third century onward, several Christian groups lived outside the Eastern borders of the empire in the Middle East, Mesopotamia and Africa.

is why I want to reflect briefly on the question of how dependency on education continued and changed.

A well-established narrative tells us that education was rescued by the monks. With the rise of monastic education, however, antiquity gave way to the Middle Ages, and so this change, while necessary, was not for the better. This is, briefly, the argument of the final chapters of the ground-breaking *History of Education in Antiquity* by Henri-Irénée Marrou (d. 1977), a book whose influence can still be detected in today's scholarship.[157] Marrou declared that with the rise of the monasteries, for the first time "there appeared a type of Christian school that was wholly devoted to religion and had none of the features of the old classical school."[158] As the term 'school' indicates, monasteries were not places without culture: From the outset, the leading figures of the Pachomian community in Egypt put all ascetics, male and female, under the obligation to engage with scriptural practices and acquire the necessary skills, especially the ability to read and meditate parts of the Scriptures.[159] The hermits in the Egyptian, Palestinian, and Syrian deserts may have been even more literate than the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* suggest (an aspect that Marrou and his contemporaries underestimated): They used methods familiar from the public schools to memorize the Bible or the words of authoritative desert fathers and mothers.[160] On the surface, such texts time and again rejected secular education: We can observe strict contradictions between learning from books and from experience,[161] or

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[157] Henri-Irénée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1956) [French original: *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, 4th ed. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1958)]. For the background and impact of this book, see Christoph Auffarth, "Henri-Irénée Marrous 'Geschichte der Erziehung im klassischen Altertum'. Der Klassiker kontrastiert mit Werner Jaegers 'Paideia,'" in *Was ist Bildung in der Vormoderne?* ed. Peter Gemeinhardt, SERAPHIM 4 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019): 39–65, as well as the contributions to Jean-Marie Pailler and Pascal Payen, eds., *Que reste-t-il de l'éducation classique? Relire 'le Marrou'* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2004).

[158] Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*: 330.

[159] Cf. *Regula Pachomii* (translated into Latin by Jerome) 139–40.

[160] This topic has been explored in depth by the contributions in Lillian I. Larsen and Samuel Rubenson, eds., *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical 'Paideia'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[161] *Apophthegmata Patrum. Collectio alphabetica* 224 (Euprepius 7). The following sketch of

between "Roman and Hellenistic education (παίδευσις)," which appeared useless for salvation, and "the alphabet of the peasants," which the highly erudite Abba Arsenius tried to learn in order to leave behind his educational and professional 'worldly' career.[162] In fact, however, many hermits lived with books – first and foremost, of course, with the Scriptures –, were skilled readers and put literate techniques and hermeneutic methods to good use for their spiritual life. Guy Stroumsa therefore termed monasteries "textual communities."[163]

Western monasticism similarly was a scriptural culture from the outset, as is attested by many monastic rules from the fourth to the sixth centuries, starting with the Latin translations of the rules of Pachomius (by Jerome) and Basil of Caesarea (by Rufinus), and resulting in standard admonitions such as "Everyone has to learn the letters!" in the rules, e.g., written by the bishops of Arles in mid-sixth century.[164] Their contemporary Ferreolus of Uzès declared: "For everyone who wants to lay claim to the title 'monk' it would be inappropriate not to know his letters."[165] Based on such monastic prescriptions, Marrou concluded:

> When in the sixth century the darkness of barbarism descended, and culture declined in the West and threatened to disappear altogether, we find those in charge of monasticism insisting more than ever on the need for every monk and every nun to be able to read and devote themselves to the Scriptures […]. Even in Western Europe's darkest days the monastery remained a true home of culture.[166]

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education in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* uses material that has been discussed at length in Gemeinhardt, "Habe für alles ein Zeugnis aus der Heiligen Schrift!": 256–65.

[162] *Apophthegmata Patrum. Collectio alphabetica* 44 (Euprepius 6).

[163] Guy G. Stroumsa, "Scripture and *Paideia* in Late Antiquity," in *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters*, ed. Maren R. Niehoff, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture 16 (Leiden: Brill, 2012): 37.

[164] See Caesarius of Arles, *Regula virginum* 18.7: *omnes litteras discant*; the identical directive can be found in the rules of his successor Aurelianus: *Regula monachorum* 32; *Regula virginum* 26.

[165] Ferreolus of Uzès, *Regula monachorum* 11: *Omnis qui nomen vult monachi vindicare, litteras ei ignorare non liceat.*

[166] Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*: 333–34.

While Marrou, a classicist by training, placed monastic education in a narrative of decline, disruption, and the reconstruction of the legacy of Roman culture, the French medievalist Pierre Riché (d. 2019) saw late antiquity up to the Carolingian period as a "period of contemplation."[167] Eventually monasteries would indeed preserve ancient culture, but at least from the sixth to the eighth centuries this happened rather by chance; it was not their task. The same is true for monasteries as places of education for children: There is evidence that this happened,[168] but while the ideal of classical *paideia* with its fundamental impact on societal life remained valid, a monastery was no proper alternative to the public schools. As Riché observed, "educated clergy knew that it was necessary to break with classical culture but could not manage it despite conciliar decisions."[169] In later centuries, monastic schools would provide a model for the establishment of new schools, but the exhortation to "learn one's letters" (*litteras discere*) in late ancient monastic rules referred to basic skills in reading and writing, not to fully-fledged literate studies. The monastery called Vivarium which Cassiodorus founded at Squillace in southern Italy (after his attempt to set up a school in Rome had failed, see above) remained the exception: For this monastery, its founder wrote a comprehensive guide to Christan and pagan literature (*Institutio divinarum et saecularium litterarum*). Apparently, he gathered only literate people as members of his community who would be able and eager to study the Bible and the church fathers based on the liberal arts. But, significantly, Cassiodorus argued that these disciplines had their origin in the Bible and had only later been appropriated by the "teachers of secular arts."[170] Here, we can observe a reversal of the direction of dependency: While the "teachers of previous times" (*magistri*

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[167] Pierre Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West. From the 6th through the 8th Century*, trans. John J. Contreni (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1978): 496–97 [French original: *Éducation et culture dans l'Occident barbare: VIe–VIIIe siècle*, Patristica Sorbonensia 4 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962)].

[168] Augustine, *Epistulae ed. Divjak* 20.32.1, refers to a man whom he, in his youth, had received and instructed in a monastery: *iuuenis in monasterio nutritus a nobis*.

[169] Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West*: 99.

[170] Cassiodorus, *Institutio divinarum et saecularium litterarum* praef. 6: *constat enim quasi in origine spiritalis sapientiae rerum istarum indicia fuisse seminata, quae postea doctores saecularium litterarum ad suas regulas prudentissime transtulerunt.* Cassiodorus' concept

antiqui saeculi, i.e. the church fathers) had struggled with their actual or supposed dependency on classical schooling, Cassiodorus claims the foundations of any education for the Christian (in fact, Jewish) tradition; accordingly, the *Institutiones* start with a survey of the Christian writings and then continue, in book 2, with the seven liberal arts. Such enterprises – among which one could also count the many encyclopedic writings of Isidore of Seville (d. 636) – testify to a feeling of transition that motivated the authors to collect and preserve the knowledge of their time, including the 'pagan' writings. Since neither in sixth-century Italy nor in seventh-century Spain any adherers of the traditional polytheistic cults had survived in appreciable numbers, such reasoning seemed no longer dangerous: Since the times of Jerome and Augustine, competition had ceased, and now Christian writers were eager to preserve what is still referred to today as the foundations of European culture.[171]

4.2   The Continuity of Christian Education: Catechesis in a Time of Transition

But it should not be overlooked that processes of teaching, learning and self-formation also took place in the parishes. Tranquility was not complete. Recent research has highlighted 'transformation' and 'continuity' instead of a 'break' or 'rupture' from the Roman to the post-Roman periods, and while this has not gone unchallenged with regard to political upheavals, smooth transition was the rule at the level of local communities. After all, the 'barbarians' had not invaded the Roman Empire to destroy it but to participate in its wealth and traditions. So it does not come as a surprise that within two centuries, most post-Roman kingdoms experienced a merging of resident Romans and newcomers.[172] The medievalist Chris Wickham even warned against a too "Romanist"

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of education (including his collection, the *Variae*, and his commentary on the Psalms) is lucidly analyzed in Stenger, *Education in Late Antiquity*: 270–82.

[171] As Manfred Fuhrmann, *Bildung: Europas kulturelle Identität* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2006) energetically argued.

[172] The ongoing division between Vandals and Romans in North Africa was the exception to the rule. Ostrogothic Italy during the reign of Theoderic (d. 526) had been governed

approach to the time from 400 to 800: In his view, these centuries were not primarily marked by the continued existence of Roman institutions and traditions, but by a mixture of change and continuity, the former on the political stage and the socio-economy, the latter in agriculture and mentalities.[173] He underlined regional differences in this mixture of developments: Neither transition nor change occurred synchronically at every place. Regrettably, neither religion nor intellectual culture feature prominently in Wickham's account, which would have added important nuances to the illuminating picture. It is of course trivial to say that people did not notice of the end of late antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages, but it is far less obvious how such transitions can be delineated in the source material.[174]

Again, a particularly interesting mixture of change and continuity can be observed in the field of education. A case in point is the enduring practice of catechesis. The beginnings of this institution go back to the second century, and the fourth century is often seen as the 'golden age' of catechetical instruction, due to the transmission of several extensive series of catechetical sermons, written, among others, by bishops and catechists like Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 387), Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, or Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428).[175] These and additional sources provide valuable insights into the preparation for baptism in Lent based on the creed and the mystagogy that followed in Easter week to explain what had been experienced when the neophytes received baptism and eucharist. This general structure – which existed

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by a well-working *modus vivendi* which came to an end by the invasion of Justinian's armies and the following war between 535 and 552.

[173] Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 1–3, 10–13.

[174] The medievalist Bernhard Jussen recently presented an account of "post-Roman Europe" predominantly based on material sources (Bernhard Jussen, *Das Geschenk des Orest. Eine Geschichte des nachrömischen Europa 526–1535* [München: C.H. Beck, 2023]), beginning around 530 with ivory tablets as a reminder of traditional senatorial practices of self-presentation and a catacomb painting which indicates a crucial shift in family relations. It seems fruitful to follow up this approach, even if it is not always clear how Jussen reaches his general conclusions from the highly individualized objects he scrutinizes.

[175] For an overview of the relevant sources, cf. Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Histoire du catéchuménat dans l'église ancienne* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2007).

in many local and regional variations – reveals the different stages of Christian initiation: While it was considered possible to grasp the meaning of doctrinal and ethical teaching cognitively, the deeper impact of the sacraments could only be explained after they had been experienced. For this reason, those who had not yet received baptism were excluded from the sacramental part of the liturgy. As Cyril of Jerusalem pointed out, an irreversible decision had to be made: once a man or woman had enrolled for baptism, there was no way back.[176] In turn, it was assumed that every human soul was "self-determining" (αὐτεξούσιον),[177] and that every applicant for baptism could and had to make this decision him- or herself:

> And all souls are alike, both of men and women; only their bodily members are differentiated. There is not a class of souls sinning by nature and a class of souls acting justly by nature. Both are a matter of choice (ἐκ προαιρέσεως), since the substance of the soul (ἡ τῶν ψυχῶν ὑπόστασις) is of one kind and alike in all.[178]

As Olga Lorgeoux summarized Cyril's anthropological view of the catechetical enterprise, "learning the Christian doctrines, as one part of the Christian faith, is a willingly accomplished process and, consequently, can be stimulated and guided by the catechist in order to prepare the candidates for a worthy baptism."[179] This is not to say that teaching and learning the faith was an exclusively interpersonal affair: Cyril is careful to emphasize that learning the faith must involve human agency

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[176] Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 5.

[177] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses baptismales* 4.18.

[178] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses baptismales* 4.20: καὶ ὁμοῖαι πᾶσαι αἱ ψυχαί εἰσιν ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν· τὰ γὰρ μέλη τοῦ σώματος διακέκριται μόνον. Οὐκ ἔστι τάγμα ψυχῶν κατὰ φύσιν ἁμαρτανουσῶν, καὶ τάγμα ψυχῶν κατὰ φύσιν δικαιοπραγουσῶν· ἀλλ᾿ ἐκ προαιρέσεως ἀμφότερα, μονοειδοῦς καὶ ὁμοίας οὔσης ἐν ἅπασι τῆς τῶν ψυχῶν ὑποστάσεως. Trans. Leo P. McCauley and Anthony A. Stephenson, *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*, vol. 1, Fathers of the Church 61 (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1969): 129. For the topic of choice and free will in Cyril, see Olga Lorgeoux, *Religiöse Bildungsprozesse in den Taufkatechesen Kyrills von Jerusalem*, SERAPHIM 17 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023): 78–84 and 101–4.

[179] Olga Lorgeoux, "Choice and Will in the Catecheses of Cyril of Jerusalem," *Studia Patristica* 95 (2017): 126.

and divine inspiration in tandem. Thus, while religion can be taught and the candidates must cooperate in constructing their own edifice of faith,[180] the activities of both catechist and catechumens are limited in their effect. In short, faith is open to didactic reflection, but it also exceeds didactics, and therefore God must come into play as the third entity involved in the triangulated catechetical process: "For it is mine to speak, yours to make a resolve and God's to perfect the work."[181]

While it is naturally not possible to ask the hearers of this and other catechetical lectures themselves how they understood and realized this demand to collaborate in their individual process of becoming Christians, it seems important that this idea was upheld at a time when more people than ever were interested in receiving baptism. Studies on the catechumenate have sometimes tended to privilege the pre-Constantinian period because of the long duration and existential seriousness of pre-baptismal instruction, as e.g., described in the so-called *Apostolic Tradition*, which was probably written in third-century Rome.[182] In his influential book on the catechumenate, Michel Dujarier declared that at this time "in the four corners of the Mediterranean world, the Church introduced the requirement of a serious baptismal preparation," so that we can recognize in the third-century catechumenate "[its] most authentic form."[183] But this would not last forever, as Dujarier complained: "With the ease of the Constantinian era, quality unfortunately gave way to quantity."[184] Notwithstanding the significant amount of literature

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[180] The metaphor of an edifice is used in Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 11.

[181] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis* 17: Ἡμεῖς μὲν ταῦτα, ὡς ἄνθρωποι, καὶ παραγγέλλομεν καὶ διδάσκομεν […] Ἐν ἐμοὶ μὲν γάρ ἐστι τὸ εἰπεῖν, ἐν σοὶ δὲ τὸ προθέσθαι, ἐν Θεῷ δὲ τὸ τελειῶσαι. Trans. McCauley and Stephenson, *The Works of Cyril of Jerusalem*: 1:84. For a lucid description of this trialogic process see Lorgeoux, *Religiöse Bildungsprozesse*: 312–15.

[182] This text – on which many studies of the early catechumenate are based – is beset by problems which include virtually every aspect of historical contextualization (authorship, date, localization, language); for a discussion see Paul Bradshaw, Maxwell Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002). The structure of the catechumenate according to the (hypothetical) original text is presented by Gavrilyuk, *Histoire du catéchuménat*: 95–115.

[183] Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries* (New York: Sadlier, 1979): 71.

[184] Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate*: 79.

about the catechumenate – including Augustine's methodological treatise "On the First Catechesis for Beginners" (*De catechizandis rudibus*) –, Dujarier concluded from admonitions like those in Cyril's sermons that pre-baptismal instruction should be attended with the correct motivation, not out of self-interest: "Much was said about catechumens in this period, but though there were many catechumens, there were few true converts."[185]

While without doubt many preachers and catechists were dissatisfied with their flock and criticized the lukewarm "half-Christians" among them,[186] it must not be overlooked that catechetical instruction was continued, adapted, and even intensified in the fourth and fifth centuries. The most important innovation was the use of creeds as a basis for dogmatic teaching: In contrast to the view of Dujarier and others, instruction was not reduced but rather expanded in terms of the content of catechetical lectures. Strikingly, this practice did not come to an end with the transition from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages: Catechesis continued on the basis of the creed, that is, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in the East and the Apostles' Creed and its many cognate versions in the West.[187] Admittedly, early medieval catechetical sermons

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[185] Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate*: 84.

[186] For such criticism see Charles Guignebert, "Les demi-chrétiens et leur place dans l'église antique," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 83 (1923): 65–102, and the discussion in Peter Gemeinhardt, "Heilige, Halbchristen, Heiden. Virtuelle und reale Grenzen im spätantiken Christentum," in *Die Kirche und ihre Heiligen. Studien zur Ekklesiologie und Hagiographie in der Spätantike*, auth. Peter Gemeinhardt, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 90 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014): 50–52 and 55–60.

[187] For this continuity of instruction, see Wolfram Kinzig, "Formation des Glaubens. Didaktische und liturgische Aspekte der Rezeption altkirchlicher Symbole in der lateinischen Kirche der Spätantike und des Frühmittelalters," in *Neue Texte und Studien zu den antiken und frühmittelalterlichen Glaubensbekenntnissen III*, ed. Wolfram Kinzig, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 151 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022): 227–62; for the development of creeds in general, Wolfram Kinzig, *A History of Early Christian Creeds* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), based on his comprehensive collection of creeds and related texts: Wolfram Kinzig, ed. and trans., *Faith in Formulae. A Collection of Early Christian Creeds and Creed-Related Texts*, 4 vols., Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Liuwe H. Westra has investigated textual variants and versions of credal texts from the fourth to the seventh centuries from which eventually "the Apostles' Creed" would emerge; Liuwe H. Westra, *The Apostles' Creed. Origin, History, and Some Early Commentaries*, Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia 43 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

and explanations of the creed there are not characterized by theological sophistication, and this is already true for fifth-century sermons from the pen of Peter Chrysologus or Quodvultdeus of Carthage.[188] Compared to the flourishing catechesis in the time of Cyril, Ambrose, or Augustine, it may well be thought a loss of thoroughness that bishops had to insist that the faithful must know at least the creed and the Lord's Prayer: "There are many believers who either do not know their letters or claim that, due to their worldly occupations, they are not able to read the Scriptures – but at least they should keep (sc. the Creed and the Lord's Prayer) in their hearts and memories so that they may have sufficient salvific knowledge," wrote Ildefonsus of Toledo (d. 667).[189]

One may well deplore the fact that the contents of catechetical instruction were reduced to a minimum; Dujarier termed this "the eclipse of the catechumenate."[190] Certainly expectations of priests as teachers in their parishes were not very high, as the extant pastoral handbooks from the seventh to the ninth centuries show.[191] Nevertheless, these manuals themselves testify to the fact that local priests *were expected* to teach the faith and its morals. In more general terms, it is clear that instruction was seen as necessary for every human being who wanted to receive baptism. This practice was maintained even after infant bap-

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[188] For the former, see Lina Hantel, *Bildung im Gespräch. Die sermones des Petrus Chrysologus*, SERAPHIM (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025): 143–144, 212–15, 298; for the latter, David Vopřada, *Quodvultdeus: A Bishop Forming Christians in Vandal Africa*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 154 (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 133–219.

[189] Ildefonsus of Toledo, *In cognitione baptismi* 34: *ut, quia multi credentes uel litteras nescirent, uel scientes occupati impedimento saeculi Scripturas eis legere non liceret, hoc corde et memoria retinentes, sufficientem sibi haberent scientiam salutarem.*

[190] Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate*: 133; a similar impression is given by Eugen Paul, *Geschichte der christlichen Erziehung*, vol. 1, *Antike und Mittelalter* (Freiburg: Herder, 1993): 114 and 176–77.

[191] Looking at 'local priests' has greatly contributed to differentiating the picture of early medieval parish life in general and education in particular. See, among many other studies, Carine van Rhijn, "The Local Church. Priests' Handbooks and Pastoral Care in the Carolingian Period," in *Chiese locali e chiese regionali nell'alto medioevo*, vol. 2, Settimane di Studio 61.2 (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2014): 689–710, and Steffen Patzold, "*Pater noster*. Priests and the Religious Instruction of the Laity in the Carolingian *populus christianus*," in *Men in the Middle. Local Priests in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Steffen Patzold and Carine van Rhijn, Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde. Ergänzungsband 93 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016): 199–221.

tism had become the rule: Catechesis was postponed to a time when the baptized would be able to follow instruction; it therefore merged with the lifelong educational process within Christian communities, which was mainly carried out by sermons. New opportunities for the baptism of adults were offered by the conversion of individuals, groups or even entire peoples of 'barbarian' origin. In a word, while the traditional educational institutions of the Roman Empire, together with their political framework, declined in the west during the sixth century, religious education in Christian communities continued, even outside the walls of monasteries, and there were good pastoral and theological reasons for this continuity of practice.

4.3   Catechesis and Dependency

This necessity of teaching and learning is spelled out in a letter by John the Deacon to Senarius, a high-ranking official at the court of Theoderic in Ravenna. Senarius had asked why people had to become catechumens before receiving baptism, and John did not hesitate to give an explanation:

> I am confident that you are sufficiently versed in such matters as to know that the whole human race, while still so to speak in its cradle, should properly have fallen in death through the waywardness of the first man: and no rescue was possible except by the grace of the Saviour […]. There cannot therefore be any doubt that before a man is reborn in Christ he is held close in the power of the Devil: and unless he is extricated from the Devil's toils, renouncing him among the first beginnings of faith with a true confession, he cannot approach the grace of the saving ablution. And therefore he must first enter the classroom of the catechumens. *Catechesis* is the Greek word for instruction. He is instructed through the Church's ministry, by the blessing of one laying his hand [upon his head] that he may know who he is and who he shall be: in other words, that from being one of the damned he becomes holy,

from unrighteousness he appears as righteous, and finally, from being a servant he becomes a son.[192]

The catechumenate thus compensates for another kind of human dependency: sinfulness, or in Augustinian terms, original sin. As John pointed out, oral instruction and the rites of purification combined to explain Augustine's teaching of grace theoretically and apply it in practice to the baptismal sacrament.[193] Traditional schooling, as mentioned above, had never been concerned with religious questions such as sin, grace, or redemption, and accordingly catechetical instruction in sixth-century Rome had not much to do with traditional *paideia*. But it is clear from John's letter and other contemporary sources that Christianity did not try to get rid of education as soon as the opportunity arose – now, however, we are able to detect a genuinely Christian kind of instruction and education. The earlier discourses on education had always encompassed critical reception *and* transformation, and the practice of communicating education to future believers continued these appropriations of classical *paideia*. This is nicely indicated by John's remark that those who wish to be baptized "enter the *auditorium* of the catechumens": In the third century, the Alexandrian writer Origen had imagined the lecture hall of the rhetor[194] as an eschatological place of everlasting learning for the

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[192] John the Deacon, *Epistula ad Senarium* 3: *Studium vestrum nosse confidimus quia omne genus humanum in ipsis, ut ita dicam, mundi cunabulis praevaricatione primi hominis in morte fuerit iure conlapsum, nec ab ea posse redimi nisi affluerit gratia salvatoris* […] *Non est ergo dubium quod, priusquam alius renascatur in Christo, diabolicae potestate teneatur adstrictus, cuius laqueis nisi inter ipsa primitus fidei rudimenta veraci professione renuntians exuatur ad salutaris lavacri gratiam non accedit; et ideo hunc oportet prius cathecumenorum auditorium introire. Catechisis enim Graece instructio dicitur. Instruitur namque aecclesiastico ministerio per benedictionem inponentis manum, ut intellegat quis sit qui ve futurus sit, hoc est quia ex damnabili sanctus fiat, ex iniusto iustus appareat, ad postremum filuis fiat ex servo* (André Wilmart, ed., *Analecta Reginensia. Extraits des manuscrits latins de la reine Christine conservés au Vatican*, Studi e Testi 59 [Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1933]: 171–72; trans. Edward C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* [London: S.P.C.K., 1960]: 144–45). A detailed analysis of this letter (written between 510 and 520) can now be found in Pignot, *The Catechumenate*: 307–24.

[193] For the anti-Pelagian framework of John's position see Pignot, *The Catechumenate*: 321–23.

[194] See, e.g., Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 2.11.3; Tacitus, *Dialogus de oratoribus* 9.3.

redeemed.[195] Closer to John, the North African preacher Quodvultdeus (mid-fifth century) had used school imagery to depict the pedagogical setting of the Christian catechumenate:

> You have seen how this teacher has prepared the classroom […] and he made you stay in the morning in front of him, listen and say what should be renounced and in whom to believe.[196]

Assuming that Quodvultdeus spoke to catechumens who most probably had never attended any school, it is telling that he still used such imagery. On the one hand this shows that the dependency on the institutions of classical *paideia* remained valid, even if those institutions were in severe decline. And on the other we see another creative appropriation of such imagery from the urban context of the preacher and his audience. Traditional education remained a point of reference for Christian practice even at the end of late antiquity.

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[195] Origen, *De principiis* 2.11.6 (in Rufinus' translation).
[196] Quodvultdeus, *De accidentibus ad gratiam* 2.3: *Vidistis quemadmodum vobis hic magister ordinaverit hoc auditorium* […], *fecitque vos mane adstare in conspectu suo, audire et dicere cui renunciandum sit, et cui credendum.* Trans. Pignot, *The Catechumenate*: 255–56.

5.   Conclusion: Did Christianity Ever Get Rid of Classical *paideia*?

To conclude, I want to recall the strong images with which we had started: Jerome's dream with his dramatic renunciation of his 'pagan' erudition and Augustine's reading of the Exodus narrative about the "despoiling of the Egyptians" as a theologically justified use of classical education, albeit under certain restrictions. We have also seen that such theorizing of the relationship between Christianity and pagan education was founded upon equally strong assumptions: The existence of clear-cut religious groups, among them 'pagans' (who in reality never existed as a coherent entity); the possibility of a deliberate selection of literature which could be read without danger for the Christian self (as Basil of Caesarea argued); and a concept of how classical *paideia* could be fruitfully integrated into the communication of the faith (such as in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*). On the discursive level, all these prerequisites were available at an early stage. Clement of Alexandria in the late second century already put them together in a way which became characteristic for later patristic and medieval theology:

> As the subjects in a general education (ἐγκύκλια μαθήματα) contribute to their mistress philosophy, so also does philosophy herself assist in the acquisition of wisdom, since philosophy is the cultivation of wisdom and wisdom is the knowledge of divine and human things and of their causes. Now, wisdom is superior to philosophy, as philosophy is superior to preliminary education (προπαιδεία).[197]

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[197] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.30.1: Ἀλλ᾽ ὡς τὰ ἐγκύκλια μαθήματα συμβάλλεται πρὸς φιλοσοφίαν τὴν δέσποιναν αὐτῶν, οὕτω καὶ φιλοσοφία αὐτὴ πρὸς σοφίας κτῆσιν συνεργεῖ. ἔστι γὰρ ἡ μὲν φιλοσοφία ἐπιτήδευσις σοφίας, ἡ σοφία δὲ ἐπιστήμη θείων καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ τῶν τούτων αἰτίων. κυρία τοίνυν ἡ σοφία τῆς φιλοσοφίας ὡς ἐκείνη τῆς προπαιδείας. Trans. Joyal, MacDougall, and Yardley, *Greek and Roman Education*: 235. The image is repeated more pointedly in John of Damascus, *Dialectica* 1: πᾶς γὰρ τεχνίτης δεῖται καί τινων ὀργάνων πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀποτελουμένων κατασκευήν. Πρέπει δὲ καὶ τῇ βασιλίδι ἄβραις τισὶν ὑπηρετεῖσθαι. Λάβωμεν τοίνυν τοὺς δούλους τῆς ἀληθείας λόγους καὶ τὴν κακῶς αὐτῶν τυραννήσασαν ἀσέβειαν ἀπωσώμεθα καὶ μὴ τῷ καλῷ κακῶς χρησώμεθα, μὴ πρὸς ἐξαπάτην τῶν ἁπλουστέρων τὴν τέχνην τῶν λόγων μεταχειρισώμεθα, ἀλλ᾽, εἰ καὶ μὴ δεῖται ποικίλων σοφισμάτων ἡ ἀλήθεια, πρός γε τὴν τῶν κακομάχων καὶ τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως ἀνατροπὴν

Viewed from this perspective, the hierarchy seems clear: The liberal arts served the 'mistress philosophy,' and the latter was subordinated to Christian wisdom. But this is not the whole story.

Instead, we have seen that questions such as "Who is the master and who is the slave?" cannot be answered in a straightforward manner. In other words, if one asks according to Augustine's reasoning, "Who were the Egyptians and who despoiled them?," a clear-cut answer can only be expected as long as one neglects the interactions between Christians and non-Christians, as well as interactions within Christian groups. Reception of educational ideals, values and methods was not a one-way street. If we followed the course of history beyond the period under scrutiny here, a new religious culture emerged, namely Islam, which itself adapted Jewish and Christian practices and modes of knowledge and, so to speak, itself 'despoiled' them. Another religion thus 'depended' on Christianity, but as in the previous centuries, this dependency always entailed innovation and creativity as well as an ongoing interaction between religious cultures. Guy Stroumsa has termed late antiquity a "patristic crucible of the Abrahamic religions,"[198] but I think we should go one step further: The first half millennium BCE was not so much a melting pot as an arena of lively encounter, criticism, and conflict; in addition, it was a space where people with different religious backgrounds and practices interacted and coexisted without constantly debating hierarchies and dependencies. This is true for the big picture of late ancient religions as well as for our concrete topic, education in urban settings and within Christianity. Discourses about the 'wrong', i.e. 'pagan' education and debates about how to properly 'receive' and 'purify' this education can-

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τούτοις ἀποχρησώμεθα. One of the first medieval propagators of the *ancilla theologiae* was Peter Damian in the twelvth century: *De divina omnipotentia* 7: *Quae tamen artis humanae peritia, si quando tractandis sacris eloquiis adhibetur, non debet ius magisterii sibimet arroganter arripere, sed velut ancilla dominae quodam famulatus obsequio subservire, ne si praecedit, oberret, et dum exteriorum verborum sequitur consequentias, intimae virtutis lumen et rectum veritatis tramitem perdat.*

[198] Guy G. Stroumsa, "Athens, Jerusalem and Mecca: The Patristic Crucible of the Abrahamic Religions," *Studia Patristica* 62 (2013): 153–68; on the image of the 'Abrahamic religions', see also Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

not conceal the common practices of education, in the 'public schools'
but also in Christian life itself.

As far as debates among Christians are concerned, it is useful to
carefully distinguish the levels of discourse and practice respectively.
While religious identities were discursively stabilized, there were over-
laps between options in terms of education, based on religious affili-
ation and continuously negotiated within and between different reli-
gious groups. In the midst of this plurality, Christianity stands out – as
Celsus, one of its despisers in the second century, already noticed and
criticized – as a religion which promoted religious education for all its
members, regardless of age, sex, social standing, and also regardless of
a person's status as a free citizen, freedperson, or slave.[199] It is difficult
to assess how integrative everyday life in Christian parishes really was:
This image of equality is, however, attested by the critics of Christian-
ity, and it may therefore be counted among its characteristics. It is not
because of theoretical claims, but of this perception by critical contem-
poraries that I would term nascent Christianity a "Bildungsreligion" (a
religion characterized by education),[200] and it is precisely in this sense
that education as a human right could be part of the heritage of late
antique Christianity.

Does this ultimately mean that Christians simply remained "Cicero-
nians" and dependent on *paideia*, although they continuously declared
their desire to get rid of it? And is it a meaningful question whether
Christians could break away from the educational ideals and values of
the world in which they lived? It remains true that Christians could only
distinguish themselves *from* this world, *in* this world. I hope that my
paper has opened up the possibility of a more nuanced interpretation
of this tension. Education is a case in point, especially because neither
the public schools nor their textbooks were regarded as 'religious,' and
as we have seen, Christians hotly debated among themselves how to

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[199] Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.44.
[200] This was my argument in Peter Gemeinhardt, "Ist das Christentum eine Bildungsreli-
gion? Beobachtungen zu Bildungsprozessen und -zielen in der frühchristlichen Apolo-
getik und Katechetik," in *Augustinus als Pädagoge und als Sprachtheoretiker*, ed. Christof
Müller and Guntram Förster, Res et Signa 16 (Würzburg: Augustinus bei Echter, 2020):
17–51.

deal with institutions and traditions which were declared contaminated by the 'wrong' religion but were still useful, even necessary, for Christian purposes. While such adaptations and transformations of education were theorized by some authors, in most cases we observe what might be called, sociologically speaking, "doing education": most members of Christian parishes were apparently not concerned with such theological demarcations. And the same bishops and theologians who wrote critically about schools did not close the doors of their churches to less obedient parishioners. Instead, they felt the need to intensify their pedagogical action. One could say that the inevitable dependency on traditional *paideia* led to remarkable educational efforts in late ancient Christianity: Making disciples of all people required not less, but more education, but this did not prevent Christian teachers, preachers, monks, and individuals from using what they had learnt at school. It is this mixture of dependency and originality which I proposed to scrutinize by applying a praxeological approach.

Constellations of indebtedness to or deliverance from the shared heritage of ancient *paideia* should therefore be investigated not only by accumulating rhetorical claims to independency from rhetoric, but also by looking at practices. Christians participating in literary discourses in the late antique world were eager to show that they were the true heirs of traditional education (even if they claimed that they did not need it). A praxeological approach seems promising for analyzing how and to which end they filled new wine into old wineskins – and whether they themselves invented new wineskins. It has long been observed that Christians did not invent 'denominational schools,' because this would have prevented them from taking part in society, culture, and politics, the exception being monks who deliberately avoided such involvement in everyday life. The majority of Christians attended public events as well as religious feasts, and the erudite among them, including many ecclesiastical office-holders, applied grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy to biblical texts and Christian practices. As we have seen, this was relevant not only for theological and exegetical debates but also for liturgy, the veneration of saints, and the commemoration of deceased family members. Here we we have evidence not of stable path dependencies,

but of a remarkable amount of innovation and improvisation, i.e. of independency. Instead of getting rid of ancient *paideia*, early Christianity in the words of the Gospel of John, sought and found ways "to be in the world but not of the world" (John 17:11–16).

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Did Christianity in its beginnings depend on classical education, and was it ever able to free itself of this dependency? Christians were confronted with classical *paideia*, which comprised literate learning as well as social codes and the ideal of the true human being. Many Christian writers uttered their skepticism about *paideia* (due to the prominence of pagan Gods in school texts), but looking at educational practices opens up a different view. Christians made use of literate skills in memorializing the dead in inscriptions, writing down the life of saints, and preaching the Gospel in worship. Their dependency on educational competencies and values thus always entailed innovation and creativity as well as an ongoing interaction with contemporary religious cultures. If one distinguishes the levels of discourse and practice, it becomes clear that Christians felt no need to dispose of *paideia*. Instead, religious education was promoted for all members of the faith, regardless of age, sex, social standing, and also regardless of a person's status as a free citizen, freed person, or slave. One may even call late ancient Christianity, as is argued, a "Bildungsreligion" (a religion characterized by education).

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