

Lactantius and Eusebius: Christianity and Philosophy in the Early Fourth Century

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How to cite this paper: Xu, Z. C. (2023). Lactantius and Eusebius: Christianity and Philosophy in the Early Fourth Century. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 13, 646-667. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2023.134041>

Received: August 18, 2023

Accepted: October 6, 2023

Published: October 9, 2023

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Abstract

What is the value of history to philosophy? Hasok Chang proposes that when a philosophical model runs into a problem, it is likely that its underlying historical assumption that informs and upholds such model, requires a revisit, if not, a major overhaul. A reconstruction of history could contribute to a new way of approaching philosophical problems. Chang through a series of articles gives us a detailed account of the debate over the nature of combustion, phlogiston and fixed air in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which shed light on operationalism, realism, natural kinds, pragmatism, epistemic iteration, incommensurability, epistemic pluralism, and other philosophical issues in the realm of HPS. This article applied his interdisciplinary approach to philosophy and history, to the three prevalent models concerning the relation between Christianity and philosophy. I argue that Integration Model, Disjunction Model, and Conflict Model, is not clear-cut but interwoven in the thoughts of early church fathers, many of whom hold onto paradoxical stances. I suggest that it is better to measure a person's commitment to Christianity and philosophy on a spectrum with philosophy on one side while Christianity the other. A person's degrees of commitment move back and forth on the spectrum contingent upon the semantic, political and social contexts within which they are speaking, as will be shown in the case of two early church fathers, Lactantius and Eusebius.

Keywords

Philosophy, Christianity, Lactantius, Eusebius, Conflict Model

1. Introduction

The relation between Christianity and philosophy is a highly debatable subject,

which could be demonstrated by three different stances proposed by Rudolf Bernet, namely, Integration Model, Disjunction Model, and Conflict Model (Bernet, 1999). The Integration Model argues that there is no clear-cut distinction between Christianity and philosophy and that Christianity was only part of the philosophy, i.e., Christian philosophy. Disjunction Model proposes that philosophy greatly influences Christianity albeit the fact that it is subsidiary to Christianity. Conflict Model, suggests an irreconcilable relation between Christianity and philosophy, and between faith and reason. Such debate over the relation between Christianity and philosophy has been extended to the studies in Late Antiquity and become an important lens through which we approach many Christian works. For instance, the very nature of Procopius' three works, whether it is classical/Greek or Christian, is a hotly-contested issue. It is also the lens through which we interpret important figures like Constantine, which hinged upon the questions like whether he was a "Christian" or "pagan". To test these three models, I will be focusing on the patristic period when Christianity was still on a defensive side, with philosophy and classical learning still in dominance. I will direct our attention to a careful case study of two early-fourth-century Christian apologists Lactantius (c. 250-325) and Eusebius (c. 260-339).

The writings of early church fathers are a well-researched area and many works on the subject have highlighted their ties with Greek philosophical traditions. Jeremy M. Schott (2005) illustrated that drawing upon the Greek historiographical tradition, Lactantius and Eusebius were conjuring of a transcendent Christian identity. He informed us how these apologetic works were further linked to Roman imperial ideologies in the court of Constantine. Schott therefore directed his attentions to the issues of ideologies, power and identity. Historians of Great Persecution (303-313/324) tend to interpret the works of Lactantius and Eusebius as a response to the maliciousness of the time, in particular the anti-Christian pamphlets of Porphyry of Tyre and Sossianus Hierocles. Yet, few works have been done on Lactantius' and Eusebius' views on the relation between philosophy and Christianity. I concede that some have focused on the possible sources and philosophical influences which might have shaped the writings of Lactantius and Eusebius. Nevertheless, this paper differs from the previous study in two aspects. First, instead of examining the actual contents, we investigate how these two apologists advanced their arguments. Many works have hinged upon the sources they drew on, the intellectual, social and political background of their apologetic works, and the relation between their works and other patristic or philosophical writings. However, the form of argument adopted by Lactantius and Eusebius has not been systematically studied. Second, to fully articulate the different dimensions of their thinking, apart from the affinity between Christianity and philosophy, I bring up another seemingly contradictory dimension put forward by the same authors. We focus on how they envisaged Christianity as 1) an independent divine institute as opposed to a civil one (Lactantius); 2) a nation at war with pagans or a community comprised of

martyrs, bishops and priests which replaced the traditional roles of philosophers in advising and educating the Roman bureaucratic elites; 3) gravitating towards the rule of faith (*regula fidei*), i.e., the authorities of the Gospel, and the traditions of the church.

The reason why I focus on Lactantius and Eusebius is threefold. Firstly, they were representative of the two groups of scholars centered around Alexandria and North Africa. Lactantius who was of Berber origin, served as an official professor of rhetoric in Nicomedia. Eusebius, though born in Caesarea, was a student of Saint Pamphilus (?- c. 309), both of whom were ardent followers of Origen, one of the founding fathers of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. In the fourth century, with the exception of Antioch, Constantinople, Gaul and Rome did not hold the same esteem as Alexandria and North Africa as a center of Christian learning. Secondly, Eusebius belongs to the Greek-speaking part of the empire while Lactantius the Latin-speaking part. By a portrait of these two figures, I believe we could have a broader understanding of the interaction between philosophy and Christian among church fathers in both parts of the empire. Although they had both gone through Greek *paideia* and pursued a similar education in rhetoric, philosophy, poetry and so forth, we could still discern the differences between the intellectual sources Lactantius and Eusebius employed. For example, Lactantius had a particular favor for Cicero whereas Eusebius was fascinated with Plato. Latin authors were not quoted by Eusebius, probably because his knowledge of their language was minimal. Otherwise, it is inconceivable that he would not have referred to Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*, a source Lactantius had relied on. Lastly, Lactantius and Eusebius were one of the most philosophically minded Christians of the early fourth century. Lactantius who had been refining his rhetorical skills by reading philosophy widely and practising arguing from either sides, was coined as the "Christian Cicero" by Renaissance humanists. Eusebius was similarly educated by an Origenian education system where Greek philosophy was the first step to a more sophisticated theological study, and a tool for allegorical interpretation for the spiritual/secret meaning of the Holy Spirit. That said, Lactantius and Eusebius still saw Christianity forming its unique identities and gravitating towards the rule of faith. A portrait of these two figures could fully exposed the tensions between philosophy and Christianity, between faith and reason. The tensions were never resolved, but carried its momentum into the Mediaeval scholasticism and even into the twentieth-first century when the relation between science, philosophy and religion was still open to dispute.

In this dissertation, I will first examine the texts of *Divine Institutes*, *the Preparation of the Gospel*, and *the Proof of the Gospel*. Again, my attention is not so much on the content than on the forms of argument Lactantius and Eusebius employed. Lactantius and Eusebius exploited the inconsistencies of the views of their opponents. They also turned pagan evidence against pagans' arguments and in support of theirs. To give a slightly elevated view, I also incorporate the Neoplatonist monotheism, a wider intellectual trend which epitomized

mized the amalgamation of philosophy and Christianity that we saw in the apologetic writings of Lactantius and Eusebius. However, I am wary of another tradition that emphasizes on the textual authorities of Gospel and the dogmatic teachings of apostles. In the second part, I will expound how Lactantius and Eusebius envisaged Christianity as a divine institute and as a nation. Moreover, Eusebius and several other church fathers (Didymus and Athanasius) in the fourth century, shared a deep commitment to the rule of faith, namely, the absolute authorities of the Scripture and the traditions of the church. Despite the fact that they were one or two generations later than Eusebius and Lactantius, Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373), Didymus the blind (c. 313-398), were more dogmatic than Lactantius and Eusebius in defending the rule of faith against other heresies and in advocating a literal reading of Bible as opposed to an allegorical misreading. The early Christianity was linking orthodoxy with cannonality, cannonality with apostolicity, and apostolicity with the New Testament. On the face of it, philosophical demonstrations and the rule of faith, seems to be contradictory. How could Lactantius and Eusebius hold on to both? The answer, in fact, lies at their understanding of the nature of knowledge and truth. Lactantius and Eusebius required knowledge to be absolutely certain, which could only be attained via Providence and the study of Bible. Pagan philosophy, oracles, history, poetry and epics, however true they may appear to be, were only the sources they drew on to bring greater rhetorical effects and to persuade non-believers to abandon the false religions. This dissertation will set forth the inherent intellectual tension between philosophical demonstrations and the rule of faith, philosophy and Christianity, reason and faith in the early fourth century.

2. Christian Philosophy

The apologetic attempt of Eusebius and Lactantius was a result of accusations from pagans. One of the allegations of these pagans was that Christians were fanatical and illiterate country folks who did not possess reason and rationality. As Lactantius complained:

“as we have such a mob of slanderers flooding us with the accusation that we are unable logically to present a clear demonstration of the truth we hold, and think it enough to retain those who come to us by faith along, and as they say that we only teach our followers like irrational animals to shut their eyes and staunchly obey what we say without examining it at all, and call them therefore ‘the faithful’.” (Divine Institute, 5.4.4)

To counter these allegations, Eusebius and Lactantius sought to ground their argument against polytheism and their defense for Christianity on careful reasoning with great eloquence. The argumentation they rely on, is revealing the inconsistencies of the views of their opponents and utilizing the evidence shared by both parties of debate, in particular Greek philosophy, oracles and pagan histories.

3. “Stricken by One’s Own Spears and Arrows”

Both Eusebius and Lactantius exploited the inconsistencies of pagan religions and philosophy as a sign of falsehood. According to Letizia A. Panizza, there are roughly three ways whereby Lactantius turned the arguments of an adversary against themselves. First, Lactantius captures a philosopher in self-contradiction. For instance, Lactantius ridiculed the scepticism of Academy: it is absurd for these philosophers to accuse others for not knowing when the only true knowledge they propagated, is not-knowing.¹ Second, pagan philosophers often are in discordance with the accepted view of his school. “Stoics preach that virtue is its own reward, Seneca bestows immortality forced to discard the school’s chief ethical tenet and admit what revealed religion has preached all along.” (*DI*, 1.1.3) Lastly, moral philosophers seldom practiced what they preached and therefore their words and deeds are in contradiction. Lactantius described pagan philosophers as hypocrites who were “passionate, covetous, lustful, arrogant, wanton, and, concealing their vices under a show of wisdom”. (*DI*, 1.2.5)

Another inconsistencies noted by Lactantius is that “(pagan) philosophy has split into a multiplicity of sects”, and so there is no certainty. The self-destructive tendency of Academy that denies the possibility of knowing, and its practice of arguing at extreme length on either side, only demonstrated that philosophy was no more than opinions, far away from truth. Panizza terms Lactantius’ strategy of exploiting the indeterminacy and inconsistencies of philosophy as “oratorical scepticism”, whereby Lactantius could speak from an elevated position to proclaim the falsehood of philosophy in pursuing wisdom and truth. Lactantius also extended such scepticism to criticize polytheism. He informed us that pagan philosophers were unconvinced by the stories about gods, and many held naturalistic or atheist view. He drew on their disapproval, though he charged them for suspending their judgement and turning to agnosticism: “wise men therefore attacked false religions because they realized they were false, but that did not bring in true religion because they did not know what sort of a thing or where it was. Because they could not find the true religion, they thought of all religions as void, and so fell into a much greater error than the people who kept up a false one.” (Panizza, 1978) By exploiting the inconsistencies and uncertainty of pagan philosophy and religions, Lactantius could look down upon them from an elevated position, and clear the way for Christian truth expounded in his following works.

Akin to Lactantius, Eusebius was also keen on exploiting the internal conflict between different sets of philosophy. As Aryeh Kofsky suggested, “harmony and agreement were indicative of truth, while contradictions and disagreements attested to error and falsehood. This principle runs through the entire apologetic undertaking of Eusebius” (Kofsky, 2000). To specify, in outlining his main task in Book XIV, Eusebius said that “we must pass on to the successors of Plato...

¹In modern epistemology, one of the arguments against scepticism, is that it is self-defeating, which is similar to Lactantius’ view here.

and survey their mutual disputations, and review also the dissensions of the other sects, and the oppositions of their opinions, wherein I shall exhibit the noble combatants like boxers eagerly exchanging blows as on a stage before the spectators.” Moreover, similar to Lactantius, he also ridiculed the absurdity of Academy, in particular Pyrrhonists, whose scepticism stripped human of any possibility of knowing. Regarding Epicurusists and other natural philosophers, he approached in a like manner. “Against all alike we shall use their (Epicurus’s) weapons to set forth their confutation. Also of all the so-called physicists alike I shall drag out to light both the discrepancies of their doctrines and the futility of their eager studies” (Eusebius, 2002: p. 123). In a similar vein, Eusebius exposed the falsehood of the religions of Phoenician, Egyptians and Greeks by pointing out their inner consistencies. Often, he rendered the authors he cited appeared as a fierce critic of gods from their own nation, which arguably brought greater rhetorical weight. For instance, Eusebius’ bitter enemy Porphyry ironically appeared as the critic of Greek polytheism. “I shall make use especially of him (Porphyry) as a witness and evidence of the delusion about those whom they imagine to be gods, in order that they may be put to shame at being stricken by their own spears and arrows.”² On the contrary, Eusebius presented a unified and harmonious image of Hebrew writers. Abraham, Moses and all other ancient Hebrews were consistent in their preaching and so did the prophets after Moses, “who flourished for countless periods of years, ever ventured to utter a word of discord either against each other, or against the opinions held by Moses and the elders beloved of God.”³ Yet, we know that there were apparent differences between Judaism and Christianity both in terms of practices (circumcision, abstention from pork) and doctrines (the status of New Testament and the nature of Jesus Christ). To make his argument well-supported, in *Proof of the Gospel*, Eusebius contended that Christianity, which also adhered to earlier Hebrew texts, had not introduced anything incongruent with doctrines of theology and the mode of life prescribed by Hebrews before and after Moses.⁴ To specify, he treated all the Jewish prophets in the Old Testaments (including Abraham and Moses who was seen as “Hebrew of Hebrews”) as Hebrews of which Jesus Christ and his apostles were the decedents.⁵ Moreover, Jesus Christ instructed that Judaism, a provincial and contingent system of practices and beliefs prescribed by Moses, was to be replaced by Christianity. The teaching of Jesus was not confined to Jews or Hebrews, but was aiming for all nations across the empire. The consolidation and expansion of Roman empire from the birth of Jesus onward, was a indication of God’s will to spread His words to all nations now united under one ruler. Christianity was therefore a natural heir of the immemorial past of Hebrew religion, and it was regarded as a second phase of Judaism. By showing the

²Ibid, 182.

³Ibid, 183.

⁴Ibid, 635.

⁵Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel* (London, 1920): 23.

continuity and congruity between Judaism and Christianity, Eusebius could then defend the superiority of Christianity over other schools of pagan philosophy which were inconsistent and self-contradictory.

4. Evidence from the Other Side

Lactantius

In a section in Book Five, Lactantius criticized earlier defenders of Christian faith as inadequate, which he included Tertullian's *Apologia* and Cyprian's rebuttal of Demetrianus. He argued that the defense of Christian faith should not be based on biblical proof which pagan readers saw as invalid and unconvincing. He recognized that the eyewitness of apostles was discredited among pagan audiences. Many criticized that it was fictive, written by uncultured barbarians at the periphery of the empire.⁶ "Demetrianus should have been rebutted with arguments based in logic, and not with quotations from scripture, which he simply saw as silly fiction and lies" (Eusebius, 2002: p. 233). Demetrianus should have been offered men's evidence and so "he could be refuted as far as possible by authorities which he himself acknowledged." (Eusebius, 2002: p. 291). He is confident that if men of learning and faith who engage their talents and powers of utterance on the battlefield of truth can follow his advice, "false religions will swiftly vanish and all philosophy will go down" (Eusebius, 2002: p. 291). Throughout the *Divine Institute*, Lactantius drew on quotations from pagan philosophers, orators, philologists, as well as from pagan prophets and poets to support his arguments. He rarely cited Scripture in his seven Books. There are only 92 biblical citations, of which 73 are from the Old Testament (Penwill, 2004). Lactantius preferred to castigate polytheism and pagan philosophy by using the very evidence and facts that upheld pagans' claims. As a master of great rhetorical skills, he must know that the best way to refute an argument is by turning one's evidence against themselves. "Let us put the testimony of the prophets to one side, however, in case there is something unsatisfactory in proof apparently dependent on sources which are wholly unacceptable. Let us come to the writers, and to prove the truth let us cite in evidence people who are often used against us: I mean the poets and philosophers" (Eusebius, 2002: p. 91).

In Book One, Lactantius quoted lengthily from Orpheus, Homer, Roman poets Vergil and Ovid, all of whom bear testimonies to the single supreme almighty God. He then enlisted philosophers including Thales of Miletus, Pythagoras, and many other, on his side as additional witnesses to one supreme god. Although they had almost grasped the truth, they rejected it and insisted on worshiping pagan gods, instead of the One. Apart from drawing on the evidence from philosophers and poets, Lactantius believed that audiences who saw philosophy as false and poets as fictive, would be satisfied with the divine evidence they accepted, which consisted of the testimonies of pagan prophets and gods.

⁶"Now, those who are ignorant of the truth think the prophets should not be believed: they say their voices were not divine but human; because their message concerns one god, evidently they must have been either lunatics or cheats." (*DI*, 1.4.1).

His knowledge of pagan prophets and oracles, according to Peter Garnsey, is unprecedented for a Christian apologist, even exceeding many pagan writers and philosophers. “No Christian apologist or Church Father after Lactantius was tempted to make Isaiah and Jeremiah share a bed with Apollo and Hystaspes (Eusebius, 2002: p. 19). Trismegistus and ten female prophets (Sibyl), testified and showed that “the world is governed by the power and foresight of one god” (Eusebius, 2002: p. 12). Even the alleged pagan gods were made witness of the one Almighty. “Since we are defending the cause of truth before people who are astray from it in the service of false religions, what sort of proof could we better use against them than to rebut them with evidence from their own gods.” Jupiter, Apollo, Mercury and other pagan gods, for Lactantius, were revealing the secret of one God, the creator, despite their demonic nature.

Lactantius was consistent in following pagan evidence in the construction of Christian doctrines. He constantly admonished his fellow Christian apologists that “one should keep their scriptural texts back a while and give the fellow some primary training, as if he were a beginner, showing him the elements of illumination little by little to avoid blinding him with all the light at once.” In Book IV, “True Wisdom and Religion”, Lactantius reported that Jesus Christ who was the image of God and was endowed with maximum power, had been recorded by the pagan prophecies of Trismegistus and of the Sibyls. For example, Hermes writes, “when He had created Him as His first and unique creation, and thought him fine and full of all good, He loved and cherished Him as His only son.” Similarly, one of the ten Sibyls goes, “know that the son of God is himself your God” (Eusebius, 2002: p. 233). Sibyls, which consisted of ten Greek prophetesses, were heavily drew upon in confirming the biblical accounts of Jesus Christ (Schott, 2005). As Lactantius stated, “what about the fact that the Sibyls had set all this out in their verses long before? “The first coming of Jesus Christ in a human form was described by one of the Sibyls as: “he is pitiable, without distinction or looks, so that he can give hope to the pitiable.” The authenticity of miracles performed by Christ (e.g. walking on the sea and silencing the wind), was also in accord with Sibyls’ prediction. As for Jesus’ suffering, “he will come in the end into lawless hands, ... and they will give blows to God with unclean hands.” The Sibyls also affirmed to many details of Christian texts, including the silence which Jesus maintained until his death, the food and drink which they offered him before they crucified him, and even the earthquake happened when Jesus was crucified. The validity of Sibyls, according to Lactantius, was in turn strengthened by confirming to the Providence. “So they lay low for many generations, to be heeded only later, after Christ’s birth and passion had opened up the secrets.” To prove the authenticity of miracles performed by Christ (e.g. walking on the sea and silencing the wind), Lactantius did not resort to the eyewitness of apostles in case some discredited their validity, but found supports in pagan evidence, which was said to record or presage the deeds of Jesus Christ.

References to pagan oracles, philosophy and poetry, were accompanied by

quotations and passages from Septuagint. Lactantius must have in mind either Jewish audiences who contested the divine nature of Jesus Christ, or pagan audiences who questioned the problematic relation between Judaism and Christianity.⁷ Again, he highly valued the sources and evidence that Jews followed, and believed that the New Testament was the fulfillment of the Old, and the testator was the same in each, namely Christ.⁸ In Book IV, he summoned Solomon (book of Wisdom), David (psalm), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Esdras and many other Hebrew texts, as evidence of the life of Jesus, including incarnation, his teachings, his suffering and resurrection and so forth. Lactantius made the prophets whom Jews accepted, speak out the crimes of Jews. As he remarked with disdain, “it is the text the perpetrators had, and they could read who it was aimed at, and the heirs of their name and crime still have the text now and give voice in their readings every day to their own damnation as the prophets foretold it; and yet they never admit it in their hearts, which is a piece of their damnation.” Moses foretold in Deuteronomy that the laws given by him would be succeeded by a new law given by Jesus Christ in which he emptied circumcision of meaning and removed the ban on pork. Every precept of Jewish laws according to Lactantius, had double meanings “so that things spiritual can be learned from the form of things carnal.” As Moses admonished, “in the latter days God will circumcise your heart for the loving of the lord your God”. Circumcision was not about the flesh, but of the heart and spirit. Similarly, the ban on pork should be taken symbolically. “It is a ban on copying the life of pigs”, and thus one should be abstinent from sins and uncleanness. Moses also foretold the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Lactantius also mobilized Moses’ accounts in both Numbers and Deuteronomy to prove, for example that “Jews would lay hands on their own God and kill him”. The prophecies of Moses were the most powerful rhetorical evidence against Jews’ disbelief since they held Moses in high esteem. When the Old Testament failed to provide a direct proof, Lactantius tended to adopt a technique of allegorical reading to render, for instance, the words of Moses consistent with the New Testament, as the reinterpretation of circumcision and pork has demonstrated. In short, Lactantius recruited pagan philosophy, poetry, oracles, and the Old Testament, to show that the coming of Jesus Christ was by no means a fiction invented by allegedly uncultured barbarians, but was firmly confirmed by these ancient texts which held authority among Jews and Greeks.

Eusebius

Eusebius followed a similar rhetorical technique, who stated, “from what source then shall we verify our proofs? Not, of course, from our own Scriptures, lest we should seem to show favour to our argument: but let Greeks themselves

⁷Historians have directed their attentions to how Christianity responded to the accusations that they not only betrayed their ancestral traditions, but the practice of Judaism and the teaching of Moses. Christians sought to negotiate a space between paganism and Judaism.

⁸Lactantius explained the differences between the new and old testament as followed: “all Scripture is divided into two testament. The one which came before the advent and passion of Christ, which is the law and the prophets, is called the old testament, and what was written after his resurrection is called the new testament. The Jews use the old testament, and we use the new one.” (*DI*, 4.20.4-5)

appear as our witnesses, both those of them who boast of their philosophy, and those who have investigated the history of other nations” (Eusebius, 2002: p. 23). Eusebius 1) drew heavily on Jewish and Greek historians to defend the authenticity and the antiquity of Bible, and 2) sought to reveal a concordance between the teachings of Plato and Platonic philosophers and those of Hebrew prophets.

Eusebius first outlined the history of Hebrews before and after Moses with the assistance of the testimony of Jewish writers such as Philo and Josephus, from whom we learn about Hebrews’ “pious judgement concerning God”, and “their agreement with their forefathers” (Eusebius, 2002: p. 243). Moreover, Greek historians testified to the truth of the historical narratives, the mode of life, and doctrinal theology recorded by the Old Testament. “We proved that the Greek themselves were not ignorant of that people (Hebrews and Jews), but mentioned them by name, and greatly admired their mode of life, and has given a long account both of their royal capital, and other matters of their history” (Eusebius, 2002: p. 234). To specify, Porphyry, Hecataeus of Abdera, Phthagorean philosopher Numenius and ancient poet Choerilus bear testimonies to the historical events, such as the Flood. The building of Babel Tower was mentioned by foreign writers like Abydenus in *Of Assyrian History*. Similarly, the life story of Abraham recorded by pagan Alexander Polyhistor faithfully concurred with that in the Scriptures.

Eusebius then exhibited the agreement of the Greek philosophy with the Hebrew oracles “in some if not in all their doctrinal theories” (Eusebius, 2002: p. 124). He confined his attention to Plato (and his neo-Platonist followers such as Plotinus and Plutarch), who he thought was “the leader of the whole band”, and who could represent the rest of philosophers (Eusebius, 2002: p. 201). Eusebius argued that most of the Platonic doctrines could be found in the Hebrew texts, though the latter was much earlier. For instance, Eusebius noted that Plato’s division of philosophy into Physics, Ethics, Logic, corresponded with Hebrew’s tripartite forms of teaching, namely, Ethical, and Dialectical, and Physical studies. Yet, Plato was by no means original, but learned from Hebrews who “had dealt with the like matters of philosophy before Plato was born” (Eusebius, 2002: p. 230). According to Eusebius, Moses was the teacher of Plato almost in all issues, which included the existence of evil, the immortality of the soul, incorporeal essence, and the physical theory of the sensible world. After a close comparative reading of Plato and Hebrew Scripture, Eusebius was able to discover nearly all the parallel Platonic concepts and doctrines in Hebrew texts, and thus “the opinions of Moses and Plato were in full harmony” (Eusebius, 2002: p. 231). Yet, why not adopt Neoplatonist philosophy instead of Christianity? To answer this question, from Book XIII, Chapter XIV onward, Eusebius pointed out the discrepancies between Plato and Old Testament, and condemned the former for falsehood (Eusebius, 2002: p. 231). Although Plato knew the truth and plagiarized his ideas from the Old Testament, out of a fear of retaliation from pagans, Plato twisted his accounts and concealed the secret of the true religion. Eusebius

concluded, “we must abandon this philosopher, as having through fear of death played false with the Athenian democracy: but must honour Moses, and the Hebrew oracles, as everywhere shinning out from the one true religion that is free from error” (Eusebius, 2002: p. 233). In short, Greek and Jewish historical records confirmed the oracles and histories recorded in Hebrew text. Moreover, Greek philosophy, exemplified by the Plato’s teaching, was in accord with the theologies put forward by Hebrews. That said, it was Christianity that first revealed the true religion in its fullest, and in a most accurate way. Eusebius’ approach of utilizing Greek and Jewish sources was therefore very much similar to that of Lactantius.

Where the New Testament applied

However, my argument would be biased if I ignored the part where Lactantius and Eusebius did rely on the New Testament, and utilize it as a source. Yet, when the New Testament was applied, its authenticity had already been vindicated by both Eusebius and Lactantius. Lactantius defended the credibility of apostles’ account in Book II, *Divine Institutes*, where he argued, given that 1) the numbers of apostle and their accounts were consistent, 2) apostles declined a life of comfort and chose to imitate their master; many of them were persecuted and there is no profits in spinning up a story full of lies, 3) they were civilized, educated folks (attested by their abilities to spread the teachings of God to remote places, which requires oratorical skills and knowledge of different languages) and they would not be deceived (as some Greek apologists suggested that these apostles were lunatics deceived by a magician). The eye-witnesses of apostles should be taken seriously. Eusebius made a similar argument in Book III, *Proof of the Gospel*. He mentioned first that Jesus Christ was not a deceiver. The reason is as followed: 1) the effect of his teaching reached to barbarians as well as Greeks, accompanied with and to some extents contributed to the rise of Roman empire (a precondition whereby His word could spread) 2) His miracles and deeds were attested by old Hebrew texts and Greek philosophers.⁹ 3) Eusebius then responded to several specific accusations from Porphyry. In Chapter V, Eusebius went on arguing that the accounts of disciples were not fictive. To specify, 1) it is impossible considering their numbers (twelve chosen, and seventy besides), to think that they were all in agreement to lie. 2) They gained no profit from a lie, since they chose a life of poverty, and many suffered and die for their religion 3) they were knowledgeable people and so unlikely to be deceived. 4) they did what they preached in contrary to the hypocritical Greek philosophers.

Lactantius and Eusebius’ arguments for the authenticity of New Testament were largely identical. I believe it is reasonable to precede from and utilize a justified source (whose warrant has been granted) as partial evidence for the truth

⁹“Remember that this was no novel doctrine or one peculiar to Him, but one dear to the Hebrew saints of long ago...from whom lately the sons of our modern philosophers have derived great benefit, expressing approval of their teaching.” The Greek philosophers, Eusebius then told us, pride themselves on the fact that the oracles of their own gods foretold the coming of “holy wise, God their King, self-born” (*Proof of the Gospel*, 119)

of Christian doctrine. Furthermore, when the New Testament was in use, it was only a supplementary source, sporadically appeared as an illumination or a further proof when the case had already been established. It is safe to conclude that the two apologists resort to logical demonstrations and pagan evidence (pagan oracles, philosophy, poetry and historical records) which belongs to a line of rational inquiry.

According to the Conflict or Disjunction Model, theology differs from philosophy chiefly because theology assumes the truth of divine revelation, whereas philosophy takes its foundational axioms and assumptions from human reason and sensory experience. As we have seen, this is not true at least in the case of two early church fathers, Lactantius and Eusebius. They both criticized their opponents and established their own views through careful logical demonstrations. However, some argue that theologians do utilize philosophical techniques, which includes carefully defining terms, making formally valid arguments, uncovering contradictions in opposing views, etc. “Yet these methods are found in any form of rational inquiry, and so (presumably) they do not belong to philosophy alone.” It is therefore uncertain whether Lactantius and Eusebius only imitated the form of philosophical argument, or they had a deeper commitment to the value of philosophy. Another line of argument against early Christianity as a system of philosophy is that Christians rely on the authority of Bible and do not engage in intellectual battle with pagan philosophers on the same ground. J. Aaron Simmons draws the distinction between theology and philosophy in this way: “the former appeals to evidence restricted to determinate communities defined by revelational authorities (Scripture and authoritative Church tradition) while philosophy appeals to evidence that is, in principle, accessible by all members of the philosophical community, or available to any rational inquirer.” However, this is not the case. Christianity has to defend itself from the challenges of pagans and Jews, and the best way of doing so is to engage in dialogue and to draw on intellectual discourse shared by contenders and defenders alike. It is a common practice for apologists to make use of contemporary sources that is shared and accepted by both parties in debate. Otherwise, their polemical attempt could never influence people outside their own intellectual communities. Modern analytical theologians and Christian philosophers enlist analytical philosophy and science as their apologetic weapons, both of which are widely accepted and regarded as having great intellectual prestige. As I have shown, Lactantius and Eusebius has confirmed to this widely-adopted strategy in an early-fourth-century setting. We shall now look at a wider intellectual current of the time, from which we could find a similar pattern of argumentation.

5. The Pedigree: Neo-Platonist Monotheism

In the foregoing discussion, I have shown that Eusebius and Lactantius highlighted the inconsistencies of opponents, and mainly made use of pagan and Jewish evidence as proof of the Gospel. Their apologetic effort has long been de-

scribed as “eclecticism”, which falls into the eclectic tradition of the so called “monotheistic Neo-Platonist philosophy” prominent during the second sophistic period. Much has been said about the Neo-Platonist monotheism. It underpinned Gnosticism, Charledeon Schools, regional cults (like that of Delphi) as well as Anomoeans, Macedonianism, Apollinarism, Trinitarianism, Modalism and many other Christian sects, all of which were seeking a claim of universality and a status of orthodoxy. The process of how neo-Platonist doctrines were incorporated into the main principles of Christianity, has also been well-researched. Some scholars like Michael Frede and M.L. West, argue that the transformation from polytheism to monotheism, accompanied by a decline of Epicureanism and a ascend of Platonism, was a wide intellectual current among pagans, Jews and Christians from second century onward. Yet, I will not concentrate on the ‘Platonist’ and ‘monotheistic’ elements from which Christian scholars borrowed, but on the rhetorical techniques Lactantius and Eusebius shared with or possibly imitated from those Platonist monotheists. To specify, in this part, I will first illuminate how Neoplatonist monotheists ridiculed the inconsistencies of the views of their opponents. I will also demonstrate that they shared a same commitment in eclecticism with Lactantius and Eusebius. The main feature of eclecticism, is crisscrossing and borrowing freely the doctrine of other philosophical schools, to either support or elucidate one’s own claim.

Neo-Platonists, including Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, Greek philosopher Plutarch and Plotinus (who is the teacher of Porphyry), were the precursors of fourth-century Christian apologists Lactantius and Eusebius, in terms of their rhetorical techniques and eclecticism. Philo, for example, reconciled Old Testament with Greek philosophy. On the one hand, Philo invokes the sceptic techniques of arranging the theories of philosophy in opposition. For him, this indeterminacy reveals human fallibility and provides the foil for his Hebrew religion, the only true divine wisdom that could transcend the limitation of human reason. On the other hand, Philo, used various schools of Greek philosophy, in particular, Stoicism and Peripatetic school, to “set up a sequence of literal and allegorical interpretations of a scriptural passage”. These two methods exactly correspond to Lactantius’ and Eusebius’ argumentation. Similarly, Plutarch and Plotinus, two Middle Platonist philosophers, was interested in the consolidation of a philosophical religion of Delphi, “to which philosophy is brought as a support by allegorical interpretation.” Elizabeth dePalma Digeser also suggested a close connection between Porphyry and Eusebius and Lactantius, stating that “both of their lengthy and important works, ... have chosen Porphyry as an opponent worthy of their most serious attention.”¹⁰ Inspired by his master, in *Against the Christians*, Porphyry, denounced Christianity by pointing out the inconsistencies of apostolic accounts, and depreciated the Gospel as “guess-

¹⁰Eusebius explicitly stated that he was responding to the accusation of Porphyry, whereas Lactantius only mentioned “the anonymous philosopher” or “our critic”. Who this anonymous philosopher was, is highly controversial. Here, we take the view of Seston and Chadwick that Lactantius is alluding to Porphyry.

work”, “fairy tales” or “ridiculous tales”.¹¹ For instance, he mocked Paul the Apostle for adding “a piece of foolishness designed to limit God’s providence to humanity and to deprive animals of the divine care”, which was against the very essence of the almighty God.¹² He also contrasted the account of John, Luke, Mark and Matt on Jesus’ crucifixion and concluded that “based on these contradictory and secondhand reports, one might think this describes not the suffering of a single individual but of several !” Porphyry, nevertheless, showed a profound knowledge of Bible, and akin to Lactantius and Eusebius, he borrowed freely from different philosophies to support his claims. Porphyry’s eclecticism was epitomized in his *Philosophy from Oracles* where he combined Neoplatonist doctrines with Delphi oracles. For example, in respect of the resurrection of the Flesh, Porphyry largely followed a typical Plato’s theory of reincarnation which emphasized on the resurrection of soul, not body.

These Neoplatonist monotheists shared several common features with Lactantius’ and Eusebius’ argumentation. First, Philo (a Mosaic philosopher), Plutarch (a Delphi priest), Porphyry and Plotinus (two Neoplatonist monotheists), sought a catholic unity of faith by a philosophical interpretation of their own national religion. By doing this, these Jewish or pagan scholars all struggled to make a universal claim for their religion. Their allegorical reading techniques and reliance on philosophy, in particular Neoplatonism, to interpret their sacred texts, were followed by Lactantius and Eusebius, both of whom were precursors of a systematic attempt to universalize Christianity. To show that the teachings of Jesus Christ and his apostles were not contingent upon cultures, places and times, Eusebius and Lactantius made all those Greek and Jewish philosophers as the witnesses of ever-present *logos*, which transcends time and space. By incorporating evidence from different traditions, Christian apologists could make a claim of universality. Second, akin to Lactantius and Eusebius, these Neoplatonist monotheists all exercised their reason to the fullest by either making their opponents appear to be self-contradictory or by resorting to evidence accepted by both sides. However, Christopher Stead argued that “the religious apologists...merely combined their dogmatic creed with philosophical doctrines, directly borrowed and assumed without modification.”¹³ He maintained a distinction between Christianity and these Neoplatonist monotheism in that the former was regarded as unoriginal and unable to combine different systems of thoughts in a new synthesis: “few patristic fathers were interested in basic questions of logic or methodology for their own sake; fewer still developed new methods or established new results.” Nevertheless, Lactantius’ and Eusebius’ eclecticism does not imply an equal preference for each philosophical school. For instance, Lactan-

¹¹Apart from the discrepancies of the eyewitnesses, Porphyry also ridiculed some of the logical contradictions of Gospels. See, John 12.31.

¹²To specify, Paul said, “Does God care about the oxen? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake”. Such remark contradicts with what the Scripture says-“He has made all things, sheep and oxen and beasts and birds and fishes, subject to him” (*Against the Christians*, 61)

¹³As for the attack on Peter and Paul, see also, 1 Cor.10.20-26, Rom. 5.20, 1 Tim.4.1, Matt 16.23, Acts 5.1.

tius believed that the Stoic-Platonic traditions came closest to the truth, whereas Epicureanism and the ancient materialism Lactantius thought it represented, was misleading. Similarly, Eusebius, as I have shown, singled out Plato and his successors as the ones that were most in accord with Christian doctrines. Therefore, as Johannes Zachhuber argued, “the emerging intellectual culture of late ancient Christianity can be conceptualized as a kind of philosophy within the late ancient context of a plurality of philosophical schools. Its relationship to the philosophies of Platonism or Stoicism will then appear analogous to the one those schools had amongst each other” It is better to call Christianity, at least Lactantius’ and Eusebius’ apologetic work, as a kind of *Christian philosophy*, which should be read alongside Greek and Jewish philosophies as well as other monotheistic systems.

Return to the question that I pose at the outset. Are Lactantius and Eusebius writing philosophy or Christianity? I argue that Christians and philosophers were standing at the same ground, using texts accepted by both sides, pointing out the inconsistencies of their opponents, drawing upon the techniques of allegorical reading, and thus engaging in a meaningful intellectual dialogue within and between different schools of philosophy. Christian apologists, Jewish writers, and pagan priests, all in different ways, shared these common features that we find among the Neoplatonist monotheists. Moreover, according to Lactantius and Eusebius, Christianity was termed as “barbarian philosophy”, “Hebrew philosophy”, “the only true philosophy”, “philosophy of all philosophies”. In contrary, they never describe their work as “theology”, which in the early-fourth century meant “poetic speech about the gods, and was in general associated with pagan story-telling and myth-making: the great “theologians”, were Homer and Hesiod.” I concede that the existence of one single God, incarnation, trinity and resurrection, were typically Christian topics. But, like all other philosophical schools which have their own jargon and problems specific to their worldviews, Christianity also has their particular subject matter. In fact, the doctrinal debate between different sets of Christianity on the nature of Jesus Christ and Christology, could be linked to a larger context of debate within Greek philosophical tradition concerning soul, body and identities. This line of reasoning has been followed by Zachhuber (2020) recently, albeit the fact that he focuses on a different period, namely, from the late fourth century to the seventh century. In conclusion, to conceive Christianity as a type of learning that is separated from philosophy, is misleading and fails to understand the methods and evidence adopted by apologists. It also fails to recognize a wider intellectual current epitomized by the Neoplatonist monasticism.

6. “The Faith Once Delivered to the Saints”

Despite the entanglement between philosophy and Christianity, I do agree that Christianity was forming its unique identities, which anticipated a Medieval scholastic philosophy that was subordinated to Christianity. To specify, Christianity was creating its own boundaries and gravitating towards the deposit of

faith or the rule of faith, i.e., the Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the apostles. In this part, I will illustrate how Lactantius and Eusebius, two widely recognized Christian philosophers, reconciled their pagan knowledge with the rule of faith. Since our focus is the early fourth century, I will also concentrate on two of their contemporaries, Didymus the Blind (c. 313-398) and Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373), in a bid to give a more contextualized understanding of the other end on the spectrum of philosophy-Christianity interaction.

Anticipating Augustine's *City of God*, Lactantius' *Divine Institute*, contrasted the civil institutes with the divine ones. As Lactantius said,

“And if some skilful men and arbiters of justice composed and published Institutions of civil law, by which they might lull the strifes and contentions of discordant citizens, how much better and more rightly shall we follow up in writing the divine Institutions, in which we shall not speak about rain-droppings, or the turning of waters, or the preferring of claims, but we shall speak of hope, of life, of salvation, of immortality, and of God, that we may put an end to deadly superstitions and most disgraceful errors.”

Lactantius was expecting a separated divine institute that regulated our spiritual life as opposed to our civil life. He clearly envisaged a distinction between philosophy and Christianity. In *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius similarly expounded the birth of a new nation that was at war with pagans. The apologists, martyrs, and Christian ‘soldiers’ defended their commonwealth through apology, preaching, martyrdom and asceticism. According to David John Devore, Eusebius’ history was a combination of Greek historiographical genres, namely, national history and philosophical biography. Eusebius also modeled the biography of saints, bishops and martyrs upon the classical and standard roles of philosophers in advising and educating the Roman elites. Through a comparative reading of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* with Herodotus’ *Histories* and Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, one could easily find resemblances between philosophers and Christian scholars. The similar patterns include the critical distance both philosophers and bishops maintained to imperial bureaucrats, a commonwealth of letters constructed by individual ties, moral character, and even appearances. As Devore concluded, “Eusebius’ forging of a comprehensive program for training Christians to think and act as philosophers positioned the church to displace Greek philosophical schools as the premier intellectual institution of the Empire.” The birth and consolidation of a Christian commonwealth constituted by priests, bishops and Christian scholars, was the main story of Eusebius’ *history*. Yet, differed from that envisaged by St Augustine which was in parallel with the empire, Eusebius’ commonwealth remained only to serve the Roman empire. Eusebius and Lactantius nonetheless, insisted on an unique identity of Christainity that was separated from civil institutes and the empire.

Furthermore, from the first century to Eusebius’ and Lactantius’ day, Christian community saw a gradual formation of canons. In the *Pattern of Christian Truth*, H.E.W Turner challenged conventional view of Walter Bauer that ortho-

doxy that we later recognized, was no more than one of the many sects of Christianity during the patristic period. Turner contended that “the faith once delivered to the saints, was embedded, like a genetic code, in the inspired text of Scripture itself. But only by having to confront counter-narratives-by having to respond to heresy-does the community of faith recognize this pattern with clarity and set forth creeds and confessions of faith to guard the integrity of its worship and proclamation.” It is interesting to note that the view of our twentieth-century theologian corresponded to that of Eusebius who also argued that the close of the apostolic age and the resulting threat of heresy initiated the process of canon formation. To specify, for Eusebius, the apostolic age or the primitive church history ended in the reign of Trajan, last conceivable period during which eyewitnesses of Jesus still lived. According to Eusebius, Symeon, the second bishop of Jerusalem, who had been a personal witness of Jesus, was martyred by crucifixion for being a descendant of David. The death of Symeon indicated the “final passing of the living memory of the Lord from the church”. For Eusebius, no unorthodox doctrine infected the oral tradition while the apostles and the immediate witnesses to the Jesus Christ remained alive. It is the close of apostolic age that we saw the emergence of various heresies. He went on equating rule of faith with cannonality, and cannonality with apostolicity. Although the living memory of Jesus Christ had gone, the fourth century could restore the primitive history of church by returning to the word of God recorded by apostles and disciples in the New Testament. Eusebius, in his depiction of Papias, demonstrates two fundamental principles of the rule of faith: 1) all apostolic traditions are orthodox, even if apparently contradictory 2) antiquity in the absence of apostolicity does not necessarily indicate orthodoxy. Eusebius’ rule of faith therefore was firmly grounded on the absolute authority of the New Testament and the traditions of the church.

Apart from Eusebius, “the rule of faith” was also demonstrated by other church fathers in the fourth century, including Didymus the Blind and Athanasius of Alexandria. Their common way of arguing against heretics, is to criticize that their opponents followed neither Scripture nor tradition. Their adherence to the Scripture, was so dogmatic that many of them distrusted the possibility of knowing anything outside the sacred texts. In *Contra Manichaeos*, Didymus the Blind, linked heresies with knowing too much things outside the Gospel. To specify, Didymus urged us to suspend those inquiry whose answers could not be found in the Scriptures, and leaves others in the hands of God. He relived us from the burden of inquires commonly pursued by natural philosophers and even from questions regarding some of the core Christian doctrines which he called mysterious and beyond human’s comprehension.¹⁴ No one possess this knowledge except God Himself. All those who tried to explain or even describe Incarnation, was deemed to be futile, if not, leading to heresies. Athanasius, in

¹⁴For instance, “if any one, therefore, says to us, ‘how then was the Son produced by the Father?’ we reply to him, that no one understands that production, or generation, or classing, or revelation, or by whatever name one may describe His generation, which is in fact altogether indescribable.” (*Contra Manichaeos*, 215)

Against Arianism, held a similar view. Nowhere did he mention a piece of pagan evidence. He made his argument on the basis of the New Testament and criticized his opponents for not following the Gospels and the teachings of apostles. He asked, if God the Son was the image of God the Father, how can the Son be somehow divided or secondary to His Father. Holding such false doctrine only implied that God, the Father was not all-powerful, since His Word, His Wisdom, His Radiance, His Image or His Son, was not perfect, which was totally blasphemous. Athanasius, therefore, took a literal meaning of the text, not taking it as a metaphor as some Arians might assume. Throughout his work, Athanasius repeatedly bash Arians (an umbrella term for a cluster of different approaches to the nature of Jesus Christ) for deviating from the original sacred texts and the teaching of apostles, and denounced them as completely irreligious.¹⁵ St Jerome reported an account of when Athanasius of Alexandria summoned blessed Anthony to the city to assist in defeat of the heretics, whereupon “Didymus, a man of great learning who had lost his eyes, came to visit the Hermit,” and the two were discussing the Holy Scripture. It is not surprising that Didymus the Blind and Athanasius held a similar view given the fact that both of them were acquainted to each other and were all pro-Nicene.

To conclude, I argue that Christianity was forming its boundaries, consciously distinguishing itself from other sects of philosophy. Christianity was regarded as a separate divine institute that issued divine laws and governed the spiritual life (Lactantius). It was also seen as a nation at war with pagans and a community that replaced the traditional roles played by philosophers (Eusebius). Moreover, the rule of faith was also deeply embedded in the thoughts of early church fathers. Eusebius held the authorities of the New Testament and regarded it as a record of the living memory of Jesus Christ and as the only source of the true faith. His insistence on the unquestionable authorities of the New Testament, was echoed in the writings of his contemporaries Athanasius and Didymus, which demonstrated the commitment of the church fathers to the rule of faith in the fourth century.

7. Reason, Wisdom and God

At the end, I will briefly touch upon how Lactantius and Eusebius addressed the paradox of reason and faith as well as that of Christianity and philosophy that we have outlined above. The answer of the paradox, in fact, lies at the heart of Greek and Latin tradition. Plato, the most-cited philosopher in Eusebius’ work, associated “eikos” (a Greek term referring to what is probably, likely, or reasonable in the absence of hard evidence) with the deceptive rhetoric of the sophists, which was different from “erga”, i.e, facts and reality. Lactantius’ favorite author,

¹⁵For instance, “it were fit to answer grievous error, as neither having studied Scripture, nor understanding Christianity at all, and the faith which it contains. Nor does Scripture afford them any pretext; for it has been often shown, and it shall be shown now, that their doctrine is alien to the divine oracles.” Or, “For, behold, we take divine Scripture, and thence discourse with freedom of the religious Faith, and set it up as a light upon its candlestick”. (*Against the Arians*, 21)

Cicero, in his *De Oratore*, similarly separated “veritas” from “opinio” (truth that come from God, from opinions generated by philosophy). On the one hand, Lactantius and Eusebius argued that true religion could never be achieved without reason. In other words, reason is necessary in debunking false beliefs and in illuminating the divine truth, namely, recognizing and worshiping the true God. On the other hand, reason could never achieve wisdom or truth without the true religion.¹⁶ Pagan philosophy, is deemed to be false in the sense that it is not guided by Providence.¹⁷ A lack of religion accounts for the persistent falsehood of philosophy while the religion of gods fails to give an logical account of itself which it lacks. In short, both Lactantius and Eusebius described wisdom and religion as streams sourced by one spring: “the spring of wisdom and of religion is God, and if these two streams lost their link with him, they are abound to run dry. Those who don’t know God can be neither wise nor religious.” Wisdom and religion are united by God, without whom none is attainable.

However, to counter the accusation of Jews and pagans that Christian doctrines and the New Testament was false, Lactantius and Eusebius still had to resort to logical demonstrations and evidence that is available or accepted by their opponents. Nevertheless, given their understanding of the nature of knowledge and truth as absolute whose source only come from the true God, we could clearly discern a sense of grudgingness in their use of reason. As Lactantius suggested, “though we have the tradition of holy scripture that the thinking of philosophers is futile, it is fact and proof that we must use to divert people from a preference for belief in things human rather than in things divine, whether they are persuaded by the fair name of philosophy or tricked by the glitter of empty rhetoric.” Eusebius was also appealed to the rhetorical effect when opting for pagan evidence and philosophical demonstrations. As he claimed, “although truth can be defended, as many often have defended it, without eloquence, nevertheless it ought to be illuminated and indeed maintained with clarity and splendor of utterance, so that it floods into people’s minds more forcefully, with the equipment of its own power and religion and its own brilliance of rhetoric.” In short, Lactantius and Eusebius, two of the most philosophically-minded church fathers of the fourth century still firmly held onto Christianity as a separate community and the New Testament as the only source of faith.

The use of reason, at least as far as Lactantius and Eusebius is concerned, is an act of expediency, only for the sake of refuting the false claims of pagans and Jews.

8. Conclusion

This dissertation traces the thoughts of Lactantius and Eusebius, from an entanglement between philosophy and Christianity, to their views on the consolidation of Christian community and canons, and lastly to a tenable answer to this

¹⁶“It is God who “opened man’s eyes and made him a gift of the acquisition of truth.” (*DI*, 4.3.5, 292)

¹⁷“In worship, we need to exercise intelligence—we must, that is, know what we are to worship and how; and in exercise of our intelligence we must worship—that is, we must fulfil what we know in real earnest.” (*DI*, 2.4.1, 136)

paradox. The early fourth century witnessed a rationalization of Christianity in the sense that Christian authors were engaging in intellectual debate with pagan philosophers on the same ground, namely, using same philosophical techniques and drawing on evidence shared by their opponents. It is these prerequisites that guarantee a meaningful conversation between pagans, Jews and Christians. The first part of my work, fits into the current trend of seeing early Christianity as part of the Greek philosophical tradition. Eusebius and Lactantius, two early church fathers, advance their arguments in a rather rational and highly philosophical way, which suffices to show the affinity, if not the homogeneity, between philosophy and Christianity in the early fourth century. I then briefly outline a wider intellectual trend that this Christian philosophy belongs, namely, the Neoplatonist monotheism. However, in the second part, I bring up another equally important dimension; that is, the formation of Christianity as an independent institute (Lactantius' *Divine Institutes*), or as a nation at war with pagans and as a separate community consisted of bishops, priests and martyrs (Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*), in juxtaposition with the civil institutes and the Roman empire. I also demonstrate that the early church fathers upheld the authorities of the New Testament against the intrusion of any distorted interpretation based on pagan philosophy and literature. The independence of Christianity as a divine institute or a nation, and the "purity" of the New Testament, was endorsed by the same apologists who adopted philosophical demonstrations and incorporated lengthily the pagan sources. At the end, the answer to this paradox, is that Lactantius and Eusebius only sought to persuade their audiences with great eloquence and thus did not hesitate to bring up any evidence whether it was pagan philosophy, oracles, history, epics, poets and so forth. Yet, they are aware that the true religion could only be derived from the New Testament, and this is where cannonality and apostolicity lie. By incorporating Neo-Platonist monotheism and the thoughts of two Alexandrian Christians Didymus and Athanasius, I intend to show that Lactantius' and Eusebius' views have had a wider currency, and in fact characterized a fourth-century complex approach to the relation of Christianity and philosophy.

I shall now return to the Conflict, Integration and Disjunction models outlined at the outset. How does this study reconfigure our understanding of the relation between philosophy and Christianity? No one of the models adequately accounts for the range of Christian engagement with classical philosophy. Eusebius and Lactantius roughly adhered to an Integration model, drawing upon evidence accepted by both parties of rational inquirers without resorting to the revealed truth. Nevertheless, their integration of philosophy into their apologetic work is aiming to more effectively refute false claims and to defend Christian doctrines against pagan and Jewish accusations. They believed that Christianity could only come from the Providence, which was echoed with Athanasius' and Didymus' views. "Man's evidence", was being drawn upon for the sake of bringing greater eloquence and persuading non-believers. Both Lactantius and Euse-

bis therefore held a mixture of Integration Model and Conflict Model. Moreover, Eusebius, an Origenian Alexandrian church father and Lactantius, a teacher of rhetoric in North Africa, all went through a Christian *paideia* that began from a study of Greek philosophy to a higher level of theological learning. I believe they had no problem with the Disjunction Model that placed philosophy in a subordinate position to Christianity. These three models were not clear-cut, but intermingled in the thoughts of Lactantius and Eusebius. The thoughts of early church fathers concerning the relations between philosophy and Christianity were therefore multilayered, and I think they should be better measured by their position on a spectrum of reason and faith. Some (Athanasius and Didymus) were leaning towards faith while others (Neoplatonist monotheists) towards reason. As in the case of Lactantius and Eusebius, their position is at the middle, undergirded by a particular kind of Platonist understanding of knowledge and truth. Further studies could well utilize these existing models, yet they should recognize the complexity and the richness of the views of early church fathers, which invalidated much effort of categorization. This study also suggests that Christianity and philosophy, reason and faith, are gradable in the sense that a subject's commitment to Christianity and philosophy could be measured by his/her position on a spectrum. A person could move back and forth on the spectrum, contingent upon the contexts he/she is situated. As shown in the case of Lactantius and Eusebius, they could simultaneously hold on to the Integration Model, Conflict Model, and Disjunction Model in different semantic contexts. I think a future patristic study on how a person's commitment to philosophy and Christianity, reason and faith, varied according to specific social and political contexts, could further illuminate the diversity of philosophy-Christianity interaction.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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