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History and Theology

1.1 Problem

How to be "in the world but not of the world" is a classic theological question. The tension in the question is related to two models of the good life laid out in the Christian Scriptures. Is the good life modeled in the stories of the patriarchs, living in accordance with this world order and dying as octogenarians surrounded by goats and grandchildren? Or is the good life modeled in the stories of the prophets and Christ, speaking out against the wrongs of this world order and dying as a martyr at age thirty-three? These two models of the good life can both be found in OT and NT, but are not immediately reconcilable. Nevertheless, Christians throughout the ages have had to live their lives in tension between these two models. Christians have had to answer this question of how to be in this world on an individual level, applying it to their own life. But also on a communal level, with respect to how the church is to exist and organize, they have had to contemplate the question of how to be in the world without being of the world. A lot of Protestant theological consideration has gone into answering the question on an individual level, but much less consideration has gone into answering it on a communal level. In particular Lutheran theologians have not considered the question of how to be "in the world but not of the world" along the lines of an ecclesiological question.[1]

1. It is remarkable how the Lutheran Church has been able to foster theologians who were profoundly imaginative in formulating groundbreaking new theologies dealing with the relationship between the single individual and God. But when it came to the

No universal answer can be given to the question of how to be in the world without being of the world, as it is a question, both on the individual and the communal level, heavily dependent of the context. The question of how to be in the world without being of the world on a communal level can, with precaution, take the form of the question of the relationship between the church and the state.[2] How the church is to relate to the state is a question that likewise will have to take into account the historical setting of the church and can thus never be answered in a one-time, abstract manner. Stanley L. Greenslade expressed this succinctly in 1953, when he gave the F. D. Maurice lectures at King's College London under the heading *Church and State from Constantine to Theodosius*. Greenslade states that one must "recognize the difficulty of finding any pattern of Church and State relations which shall conform to luminously clear Christian principles."[3] Also when posed as pertaining to the relationship between church and state, the theological question of how to be in the world but not of the world cannot be answered in a definitive normative way, as it would disregard the context in which that question is posed. However, what can be accomplished, in terms of a general approach to the question, is to gain a better understanding of what is at stake theologically and historically. And gaining an understanding of the nuances in a question constitutes the first step in approaching an answer. Thus, to achieve a better understanding of what is at stake theologically in the question of how the church is to be in the world without being of the world is the modest aspiration for this book.

One way of achieving such an understanding is to look into what theologians at various times have thought about this question. Though these theologians might well be situated in vastly different contexts, an investigation of different interpretations of how the church is to be in the

communal part of the Christian existence, the church and the body and its relationship to other bodies, their imagination has fallen surprisingly short, and they have tended to affirm the existing order of society. Martin Luther (1483–1546) is of course an example, but also Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and his strong support of the Absolute Monarchy falls into this pattern. The reasons for this characteristic of Lutheran theology cannot be thoroughly investigated in this book, but throughout we will be able to identify some theological patterns for why it came to be so. For now it will suffice to say that it is probably no coincidence that it was N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872)—who drew much inspiration from the early church—who is the exception in Danish theology to the rule of Lutheran theologians not prioritizing ecclesiology.

2. "The world" and "the state" are not equivalent terms, but within ecclesiology the state can take the place as the other, which the church has to relate to.

3. Greenslade, *Church and State from Constantine to Theodosius*, 81–82.

world will contribute to a better understanding of the question in general. As it is difficult to analyze such a foundational matter in itself, a certain entry point needs to be identified. One such entry point is an analysis of how the Constantinian shift is interpreted in three paradigmatic works. Such a focused question provides a perspective necessary to yield meaningful insights pertaining to the abstract question of the relationship between church and world. An investigation of the historiography of the Constantinian shift will hence serve as a way to gain knowledge of how to think about these matters historically and theologically.

By analyzing paradigmatic interpretations of the Constantinian shift, two insights will hopefully be achieved. The first insight illumines how interpretations of the Constantinian shift through the history of the church has been influenced by theological underpinnings. As a result of this a second insight will illumine overarching theological issues at stake in the question of the relationship between church and state.[4]

After an account of the research question, I will here move on to provide a necessary account of two key terms and then provide a short outline of the book, thus enabling us to begin the investigation.

A question pertaining to historiography, such as the one that has occasioned this book, could be answered in a short-ranging manner. Such a book might consist in a detailed analysis of how, for example, Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–339) and Lactantius (ca. 250–325) depicted and interpreted the Constantinian shift. It could be supplemented with a discussion of how scholarly literature, within the last thirty years or so, has reevaluated Eusebius's works. A book like that would surely prove interesting. But such a narrow investigation would not provide the insights into the foundational theological underpinnings that influenced the interpretation of a historical event like the Constantinian shift. To understand what has formed the historiography of the Constantinian shift it is necessary to get to the theological presuppositions of the theologians who interpreted it. These are theological presuppositions pertaining to ecclesiology, ethics and eschatology.

4. Obviously, the Constantinian shift is not the only juncture in history at which the relationship between church and empire or state was being renegotiated. The Carolingian King Pepin's alliance with the church in 752, the Investiture Controversy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Pope Boniface VIII's *Unam Sanctam* from 1302, the Reformation history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Catholic Church in France during the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are examples of other more or less viable entry points into this complex of problems.

Church history is a theological discipline that takes into account both how the interpretation of history will have a theological aspect to it as well as how the interpretation of history can be informed by theological presuppositions. This book takes a theological approach, as it is precisely at this point church history has something distinct to offer the wider academic field of history.[5]

How theology can contribute to the wider academy is one of the questions I will touch on when I below will be looking into the theoretical and methodological framework for this book. Why have I chosen to look at interpretations of the Constantinian shift as expressed by three theologians? What material will I be looking at and why has it been chosen? How will I approach the analysis of this material?

Prior to Constantine's (ca. 272–337) so-called *Edict of Milan* (313) the Emperor Diocletian's persecutions of Christians had made it potentially lethal to be a Christian in parts of the Roman Empire,[6] whereas the Emperor Theodosius in 380 made it potentially lethal not to be a Christian in the Roman Empire.[7] During a short period of time, Christianity went from being one religion among many to being the only allowed religion.[8] This made it necessary for the church to reconsider a whole range of questions. What is the relationship between church and the empire? How does a proper church service look like? What is good government? Is God in control of the course of political history?

5. With that being said, the new scholarly interest among classicists in Eusebius will indeed serve as an auxiliary resource for this book.

6. The title *Edict of Milan* is problematic. Timothy Barnes states that "there is no ancient evidence whatever that either Constantine and Licinius jointly or Constantine alone issued any edict or general law respecting Christianity either during or immediately after their meeting in Milan." See Barnes, *Constantine*, 95. But the term does reveal how Constantine has been portrayed, though not in full accord with the historical facts. A portrayal which, according to Barnes, has served "to blind modern historians of Constantine to the fact that Gallienus legalized Christianity more than a dozen years before the first Christian emperor was born." See Barnes, *Constantine*, 97. Gallienus (218–268) was tolerant toward Christians as part of instigating a larger religious renaissance.

7. Technically Galerius's (not to be confused with Gallienus) *Edict of Toleration* from 311 meant the official end to most Christian persecution, but only in 313 did Christianity officially gain the status of a *religio licita*.

8. Such categorical depictions of historical developments presented in this introductory section are obviously bound to be an oversimplification of the nuanced relationship between the church and the Roman Empire in the fourth century and later on. It does convey a valid message, though, of a general trend.

Only since the Enlightenment has this union between the church and the state, founded in the fourth century, started to be partly broken up institutionally and intellectually, thereby once again raising a number of questions of how the church is to be in the world.[9]

As we will see throughout the book, there seems to be some similarity between the situation in the fourth-century Roman Empire and the contemporary situation in the West, in regard to a multi-religious environment. Such an environment spurs new questions in theology and did both in the fourth century and in contemporary time lead to new interpretations of the Constantinian shift and its consequences. Within contemporary Anglo-Saxon ecclesiology the questions of how to be the church in a post-Christendom context has come to expression in considerations on how to situate the church in this new landscape in the West.[10] But such questions are not new. It is not the first time the church has to be the church in a situation, where questions of the relationship to wider society are being renegotiated. To look at how theologians at earlier ages have interpreted the role of the church in a pluralist context will prove helpful for grappling with such issues today. Not necessarily to come up with distinct answers, but rather to gain a better understanding of the question. This book is bringing together perspectives from church history, ecclesiology and political theology in order to shed light on what is at stake theologically in the question of the Constantinian shift.[11]

9. The two terms "empire" and "state" are used here somewhat synonymously, though it must be acknowledged how the societal structures in which the church found itself in the fourth century were very different from the societal structures in later Western Europe; not least the understanding of the role of religion in public and politics had changed.

10. The British theologian Lesslie Newbigin's *Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989) is one of the important works to have initiated such a post-Christendom conversation in contemporary ecclesiology, whereas David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* (1991) opened the debate within the field of missiology. For a recent engagement with these questions in a Scandinavian context, see Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, *Distinctive Identity of the Church*; see also Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, "Missional Folk Church?," 23–36.

11. By "political theology" I do not mean to denote a form of political theology according to which theology is utilized to further some political (often Marxist) goal; i.e., making theology based on an already stated politic goal. I use the term to denote a theology that is carried out with the understanding that theology will necessary have a political side to it due to the all-embracing character of its subject matter. As Oliver O'Donovan puts it: "Rule out the political questions and you cut short the proclamations of God's saving power." See O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 3. O'Donovan argues that the theopolitical character of most theology has been occluded in the shadow of the

To restrict this book to dealing only with the narrowly historical aspects of the Constantinian shift would ignore the theological perspectives. But these perspectives are necessary in order to understand properly how an account of history and an account of theology come together in the examined interpretations of the Constantinian shift. The question of the interpretation of the Constantinian shift is a battleground, in which different theological presuppositions encounter each other. It is a question of contention, where the notions a theologian holds in regard to such dogmas as creation, ecclesiology, sanctification and eschatology are revealed—the three interpretations of the Constantinian shift we will look at in this book are no exception. I will now turn to identify texts where this battle is waged.

1.2 Material

In this book I will be analyzing texts. Here I will provide an account of which texts will be analyzed, account for why they have been chosen, and provide a short ecumenical argument for the legitimacy of bringing texts from such different place and time into conversation.

In this book I will not attempt a general analysis of the historiography of the Constantinian shift as expressed throughout all of church history. Instead I will narrow the focus down to three authors, as this will allow me to investigate main paradigmatic stances in the interpretation of the Constantinian shift. I will narrow it further down, though, as I will not attempt to give an account of the historiography of the Constantinian shift as expressed in three complete authorships. Instead, I will analyze how an interpretation of the Constantinian shift comes to expression in three corpora of text. By focusing closely on three different interpretations of the Constantinian shift, main historical and theological postures will be exposed, which would not have become clear had a strictly historiographical reading been chosen. An analysis of such a narrowly defined material will provide a sustained engagement with the various positions and thereby enable us to further understand what is at stake in the interpretation of the Constantinian shift.

modern period. He recounts how the ignorance of the Old Testament combined with the fear of the influence of religion on politics after the Enlightenment let to theology gradually losing its political voice. See O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 1–120.

Vita Constantini (*VC*) by Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–339), *De Civitate Dei* (*ciu.*)[12] by Augustine of Hippo (354–430), and the three essays "The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics," "The Meaning of the Constantinian shift," and "Peace Without Eschatology" by John Howard Yoder (1927–1997)[13] are the texts I will analyze in this book as three paradigmatic models of how the Constantinian shift has been interpreted.

When the church was embraced by (or embraced) Constantine it was forced to rethink the relationship between the church and the Roman Empire. This was programmatically carried out by Eusebius, and his praise of the Constantinian shift found expression in his *Vita Constantini*. Augustine of Hippo, around a century later, reacted against Eusebius's interpretation of the Constantinian shift. In the *De Civitate Dei* Augustine laid out a grand view of history, in which a different interpretation of the Constantinian shift came to expression. In the *Vita Constantini* and the *De Civitate Dei* two paradigmatically different ways of interpreting the Constantinian shift were expressed. Glenn F. Chesnut, an American classicist with a special interest in ancient and medieval historiography, has suggested that Eusebius's and Augustine's approach to history came to form the two patterns according to which all Western history was written up through the middle ages and into the modern period.[14] A quite assertive statement that possibly exaggerates just how exemplary they came to be. However, that the two interpretations of the Constantinian shift laid out by Eusebius and Augustine came to form paradigmatic interpretations of this specific question up to early modernity, I hold to be a valid claim.

12. I refer to *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos* as *De Civitate Dei*. I am following the guideline for abbreviation of Augustine's works as laid out by the journal *Augustinian Studies* at Villanova University. This abbreviation goes back to the Italian name *De ciuitate dei libri uiginti duo* and is also utilized by the *Augustinus-Lexicon*. See Mayer, *Augustinus-Lexicon*, xi.

13. Yoder published much of his work in form of shorter essays.

14. "Eusebius and Augustine between them dominated historiographical theory and method for the entire Middle Ages and well into the modern period. It is difficult to exaggerate their importance: for a large part of the Middle Ages, had it not been for them, there would probably have been no histories written at all. Historians either copied one or the other of the two, or tried to combine them, or attempted to develop new genres whose seminal ideas nevertheless came from one or the other. Eusebius, and Augustine's reaction to him, set the stage for the entire complex history of medieval and early modern western historiography which followed." See Chesnut, "Eusebius, Augustine, Orosius," 709.

Yet, the current context has called for a new interpretation of the Constantinian shift. The American Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder has produced such a contemporary interpretation, which has gained influence especially in Anglo-Saxon theology.[15] Yoder's interpretation of the Constantinian shift deals with many of the same questions that Eusebius and Augustine dealt with, but is still, as we will see, presenting yet another way of interpreting the Constantinian shift. Relevant for this book is furthermore the fact that Yoder not only interprets the Constantinian shift as a historical event but at the same time analyzes Eusebius's and Augustine's interpretations of the Constantinian shift.[16]

Eusebius, Augustine and Yoder are all theologians, for whom the study of history and their theological work is not clearly distinguishable. To various degrees their historical account is the modus in which they express their theological convictions.[17] Such an approach to the study of history might not live up to the requirements of modern historians. This should not prompt us to discard these sources, though, as they are still very useful for a church historian. First, such "theological history-writing" can actually, despite its lack in historical accuracy, provide knowledge of the historical events. Through the way these authors utilize history to make their theological points, it is possible to tease out insights about historical events. If their biases are taken into account, such texts can thus function as sources for gaining knowledge of historical events. Second, such "theological

15. Mark T. Nation puts it this way: "During the last half of the twentieth century John Howard Yoder emerged as one of the most influential theologians and ethicists of his generation." See Nation, "John Howard Yoder: Mennonite, Evangelical, Catholic," 357. It needs to be taken into account that Mark Nation himself is a Mennonite theologian, but even a critic of Yoder, Peter Leithart, acknowledges his stature: "John Howard Yoder (1927–1997) was for many years the world's most prominent theological proponent of pacifism and was probably the most influential Mennonite theologian who ever lived." See Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, 11. However, when commending Yoder it is of the highest necessity not to hide how Yoder was guilty in far-reaching sexual abuse. Most importantly in respect for the victims, but also in order to keep Yoder accountable to his own theological concerns. How this process must begin by listening to the stories of the victims, I will return to in the coming chapter on Yoder.

16. Alexander Sider points out that, "Eusebius of Caesarea and Augustine of Hippo are only slightly less central figures in Yoder's account of the age of Constantine than is Constantine himself. Indeed, Eusebius and Augustine are the dominant theological touchstones in Yoder's narration of the fourth and fifth centuries." See Sider, *To See History Doxologically*, 113.

17. The work of N. F. S. Grundtvig can be pointed to as a Danish equivalent for an approach to history, where events of the past are theologically engaged and interpreted.

history-writing" will, through the way history is used and presented, reveal the theological points of view of the author. Despite the fact that the material might not provide the most reliable historical account, the manner in which the three theologians interpret or use a historical event yields insights into their theological position. Both approaches will be utilized in this book, but as this book focus on the historiography the latter approach will be the dominant one, as I will explain further in the section on the theoretical framework.

Many sources could have been chosen, so why exactly these? First, I hold their interpretations to be paradigmatic in regard to how the Constantinian shift came to be interpreted in the church. The convenient way to schematize them would be to oppose Eusebius's (positive) and Yoder's (negative) evaluation of the Constantinian shift and argue that Augustine is the corrective to both of them. It is not exactly that simple. But it is, nevertheless, a fact that between the three of them they do represent main stances regarding how the Constantinian shift has been interpreted through the history of the church. In addition to being paradigmatic interpretations, in the sense that they represent how the Constantinian shift came to be interpreted throughout the history of the church, I suspect them to be paradigmatic in another way. That is, I wonder whether a coherent Christian theology might not allow for many other interpretations of the Constantinian shift than these three. In that sense they are paradigmatic both in a contingent historical sense and possibly in a systematic theological sense.

Other material could have been chosen, but a number of reasons can be given as to why this material suffices for representing the outlines of the important ways in which the Constantinian shift has been interpreted through the history of the church.[18] First, the texts of Eusebius, Augustine and Yoder provide satisfactory material for both an analysis of the

18. Other representatives than Eusebius, Augustine and Yoder of these three main stances on how to interpret the Constantinian shift could have been engaged. As representatives of the ancient debate for example Hippolytus of Rome (170–235), strongly hostile to the union of church and empire, and Melito of Sardis (died around 180), strongly in favor of the union of church and empire, could also have been analyzed. But given that they both lived before Constantine, and that their writings only have survived in fragmentary form, they will not be dealt with in this book. Regarding later sources also the writings of for example an early Anabaptist theologian like Menno Simons (1496–1561) could have been chosen, but none made the question of how to interpret the Constantinian shift a center of their theology quite as elaborately as Yoder, as he is the one to have put this question on the theological map again in contemporary theology.

historiography of the Constantinian shift and for an investigation of the theological underpinning affecting the interpretation of the Constantinian shift.

Second, they are all three specifically writing on the question of the Constantinian shift, even sharing detailed subcategories, which makes them excellent conversation partners. We will come to see how three main areas of contention are to be found in all three interpretations of the Constantinian shift: (a) How is the (in)visible church to be in the world? (b) What approach is the church to take on war? (c) How is the eschatological perspective of the gospel interpreted? Throughout questions pertaining to these subcategories continually surface in the works of all three theologians. This makes it possible to bring them into conversation without forcing the material into preconceived schemes.

Third, Eusebius, Augustine and Yoder approach the interpretation of the Constantinian shift in a similar manner. Not only do they engage the same questions, but methodologically they engage them in a similar fashion. As described above they namely all perceive the study of history to be a deeply theological enterprise. This structural trait makes them eminent conversation partners as both the same themes and the same questions weave into each other in the three texts.

With that said, Eusebius, Augustine and Yoder wrote in distinctly different contexts, and their unique historical setting has influenced their differing interpretations of the Constantinian shift. Despite their likeness in how they approach these questions, it is important to keep that variance in mind, in order not to skim over their distinct differences. At the same time as it is important to keep their similarity in mind too, in order not to ignore the commonalities in their interpretations of the Constantinian shift. Like all historical investigations, the choice of material leaves also this book in tension between the investigation of the isolated historical event with no connection to wider history, and an engagement with history that discards the historical context and attempts to explain all of history from one principle.

Three theological accounts of history from different periods of time are to be compared. It is a challenge to make three such different theological voices engage in conversation. At least it requires a proper framework. This is what I will look into now.

1.3 Methodology

It has now been established what material will be examined in this book and the reasons behind why this material is selected have been clarified, but methodological questions remain. Eusebius, Augustine and Yoder were situated in very different contexts and have very different ecclesial backgrounds—can their interpretations of the Constantinian shift be brought into conversation at all? Are they not too removed in place and time to be engaged in meaningful comparison? A theologian sensitive to the history of the church would hardly hold such a view.

The church was possibly the first globalized institution in history. However, it had a concept of globalization different from the one that is dominant today—the church (at its best) understood the importance of both the global and the local perspective.[19] When it comes to the sources chosen for this book, I have striven to follow this principle. None of the sources are directly addressing each other and are approaching the question

19. The church historically understood globalization in a manner very different from how it is understood today, informed as it now is by the logic of the market and big corporations. The financial logic of hyper-capitalism envisions globalization as a fluid cosmopolitan way of being, without any attachment to a specific place. As Fredric Jameson has argued, the global capitalist system is supported by the myth of the individual abstract person without body or culture; factors which only posits limits for the urge of capitalism to grow and spread into all of life's spheres. See Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 260–78. As a counter-reaction to such rootless cosmopolitanism, we have seen the rise of a number of right-wing parties all over Europe, which insist on human beings belonging only at one certain place. They rule out communities not bound to a specific place, and deny the existence of overarching international communities. The church (at its best) has from the outset presented a distinctly different vision of globalization. The early church was from the beginning a globalized institution, which upheld an ideal of stretching across boundaries of culture, class and gender (Gal 3:28, Matt 28:19–20). But it was at the same time committed to the place and the specifics of the locations of the various congregations. Contrary to the logic of big corporations, the local did not only serve the bigger structure, but was an end in itself. The church did not move away when a specific location had been "depleted of resources" or better opportunities presented themselves elsewhere, as multinational corporations tend to do today. This vision might present an ideal and in reality the Christian Church has often fallen into either a nationalist or an overly universal mistake. But it is nevertheless a fact that in Christian theology is to be found a vision of the relationship between global and local, which avoids both the mistake of abstract cosmopolitanism and local chauvinism; for a further development of this idea, see Luke Bretherton's exposition of the concept of Christian Cosmopolitanism in his *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 126–74. Likewise, the material dealt with in this book will be investigated in its specificity, but it will not be ignored how it can shed light on universal theological questions.

of the Constantinian shift with very different agendas. But they are, in very specific contexts, dealing with questions unified by universal theological concerns. One of the tasks of the theologian is to identify how what lies far away in place and time can be immediately relevant for the here and now. And this leads us on to the theoretical framework.

This book is set within three theoretical frameworks. These frameworks pertain to questions of how to do theology, which historical questions to ask and how to set the timeframe for a historical study. That these questions are connected will be made evident later. First I will deal with them one by one.

The concrete problems with which the church has to deal are the source from which the most interesting theological questions emerge. Through the history of the church, the most creative theological work has been done when concrete problems of the church pressed theologians to think anew about foundational questions of Christianity.[20] In the same way as medicine and law, for example, are dealing with questions pertaining to what goes on in the court houses and the hospitals, the questions of theology springs from the lived life of the church. When that connection is severed, theology is left to drag on an anemic existence. Does that mean theology is but a servant of the church? Not exactly. The discipline of theology needs some distance from the church in order to see it clearly and get the bigger picture. Academic theology's contribution to the church consists surprisingly often exactly therein that it can criticize the church. And only from a sufficiently independent point of view is it possible to maintain such a critical view.[21]

My conception of theology's direct dependence on the church draws inspiration from the so-called Yale School (also referred to by the broader term "postliberal theology") founded by Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, and their critique of the paradigm of secular modernity, or, more precisely, how theology reacted to modernity by compromising its tradition in return

20. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, Martin Luther's *Römervorlesung*, and the Confessing Church's *Barmer Bekenntnis* are but a few examples.

21. When following the approach to theology laid out here one has to keep an eye out for the pitfall, which Marc Bloch described this way: "Unfortunately the habit of passing judgments leads to a loss of taste for explanations." See Bloch, *Historian's Craft*, 140. Bloch was the historian who, with Lucien Febvre, founded the so-called Annales School of historical method named after the journal *Annales d'histoire* économique *et sociale* established in 1929.

for academic acceptance.[22] By an ecumenical engagement of the theological tradition prior to the Enlightenment postliberal theology eludes the tiring schism in Anglo-Saxon theology between liberal and conservative approaches to theology, which emerged as a reaction to modern critical scholarship. Postliberal theology maintains furthermore that only when superseding this dichotomy, theology will have unique contributions to make to the wider academy.

One quality of postliberal theology is its attempt to break down the divides between the theological disciplines of biblical exegesis, church history and systematic theology and reinstate a unified theological approach held together by the task of providing answers to the multifaceted questions springing from the life of the church.[23] This book falls within the discipline of church history; but will not operate with a narrow separation of church history and systematic theology. In that respect this book is in line with how postliberal theology envisions the craft of theology. That leads on to the second point.

Certain theological underpinnings influenced how Eusebius, Augustine and Yoder interpreted a historical event like the Constantinian shift. Theological presuppositions was not the only factor influencing their interpretations, though. The influence determining how they interpreted the Constantinian shift can be classified in two categories. One category we can label the influence from sociological, economic, political etc. factors. To identify how such factors influenced the development of church and theology has been one of the virtues of the discipline of church history as it has

22. Martinson, "Postliberal Theology," 1818. For a succinct account of postliberal theology, see Mattias Martinson's entry "Postliberal Theology" in *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions*. For the primary initiating works, see Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, and Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. Though still maintaining its focus on exploring the Christian narrative, rather than engaging in apologetics, postliberal theology has moved forward in different ways today and Yale Divinity School and Duke Divinity School have become main proponents for two dissimilar developments, which differs on the question of whether a unified Christian interpretation of reality can be attempted. In relation to this, Yale theologian Kathryn Tanner has argued that the restriction of theology to reflect only on the experience of the church does not do justice to how human beings gain knowledge about God and the world. For the Yale position, see for example Tanner, *Theories of Culture*; for the Duke position, see for example, Hauerwas, *In Good Company*.

23. Former professor at Yale University David Kelsey's dogmatic tome *Eccentric Existence* is one of the most systematic works inspired by postliberal theology to have appeared. Kelsey here characterizes the life of the church as "primary theology," and the academic reflection over and critique of it as "secondary theology." See Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 17–45.

been construed for the past two centuries. A second category we can label the influence from the theological presuppositions of the three theologians. Though hardly possible to separate succinctly, the focus of this book is directed toward the second category of influence on their interpretation of the Constantinian shift.

By applying the method of a close thematic reading, I analyze three interpretations of the Constantinian shift, and conclude as to which theological underpinnings and preconceived models of the church reveal themselves in Eusebius's, Augustine's and Yoder's interpretations. Such a project entails a careful reading of the three interpretations of the Constantinian shift that still not ignores the historical details. As this book is written within the discipline of church history and not systematic theology, such identification of theological structures will be pointed out along the way during the analysis of interpretations of the Constantinian shift found in the texts, but only made explicit and compared by the end of the book. That I am attempting to follow a post-liberal approach does not mean ignoring the structure in theological work that disciplinary boundaries can also bring with them.

By concluding with teasing out the theological tenets expressed in the three interpretations of the Constantinian shift, I am not suggesting that the interpretations are only or mostly driven by influence from what I classified as the second category of influence, i.e., the theological underpinning. All sorts of political, sociological, economic influence, what I labeled category one, exerts their influence on the three interpretations too—Eusebius was on very good terms with Constantine, to point out the most obvious example. But the aim of this book is not (a) to identify to what extent political, social etc. pressures played a role for the interpretation of the Constantinian shift.[24] Neither is it (b) to investigate the interplay between how a specific interpretation of the Constantinian shift reversely formed the theological presuppositions of the authors. Instead, I will analyze texts and look into what theological views and argumentative structures are revealed in these three interpretations of the Constantinian shift.[25]

24. For a succinct account of how all kind of politic considerations influenced the life and theology of the early church, see the renowned scholar on the fourth century Hal Drake's *Constantine and the Bishops*. Drake pointedly states that "the councils of the early church may have been subject to the Spirit in their content, but as blasphemous as it may sound, in getting things done even the Spirit had to bow to the rules of politics." See Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, xvii.

25. Once more, such an approach finds inspiration in the Postliberal narrative

As will become increasingly clear throughout this book, the writing of history and theology is intertwined. Deeply seated theological structures have exerted influence on how the Constantinian shift was interpreted throughout church history. An insight into these theological underpinnings will help cast light on why the Constantinian shift was interpreted the way it was. One could ask where such a research question is located within the discipline of academic church history? That leads us to the third point.

A contemporary renewed interest in the *longue durée* ties in with the way historical questions are posed in this book.[26] After having been ignored by the historical guild, which had lost faith in the possibility of any overarching narratives, ideas from the *longue durée* are now reemerging, and grand studies of history are being published again.[27] David Armitage and David Christian both identify extreme specialization in the field as well as the influence from academic ideals in the natural sciences and lately the influence from postmodern theory as three causes for the often prevalent distrust of grand historical perspectives.[28] They also agree that new digital

theological approach. This methodology does not hold that historical questions of how theological texts came to be are irrelevant, but, instead of stopping with such questions, goes on to investigate what is actually the theological content of the texts of the church. For an introduction to this approach within the discipline of biblical exegesis, see Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*.

26. The term *longue durée* was first used by Fernand Braudel in a 1958 article in the *Annales*. See Braudel, "Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée," 725–53. In this article Braudel lamented how historians who focused only on shorter timespans (fifty years at the most), would come to ignore deeper continuities often underlying processes of change. See Armitage and Guldi, "Return of the *Longue Durée*: An Anglo-American Perspective," 6. For a recent study of the history the Annales school, see Burguière, *Annales School*—a study referred to by Georg Iggers as "without question the best history of the Annales movement to date." See Iggers, review of *The Annales School: An Intellectual History*. Burguière focuses on how the early founders (Bloch and Febvre) shared an interest in the history of mentalities, which became less prominent among later *Annales* historians. See Burguière, *Annales School*, 4–5. This book is thereby not the first to depart from exclusively applying the *longue durée* perspective to study the influence of "hard" factors like geography or economic structures.

27. Armitage, "What's the Big Idea?," 496–97. "In recent years there has been a resurgence of large-scale narratives in world history, global history, trans-national history, macro-history, or whatever we choose to call it." See Christian, "Return of Universal History," 15.

28. As this book will reveal, the abandoning of overarching accounts of history is the exception within the way historical accounts have been given in far the most part of Western history. As we will see, neither Eusebius nor Augustine shrink back from large historical narratives. Yoder too operates with a grand historical narrative, though a contemporary scholar.

tools provide historians with ways to make academically rigorous large-scale studies that was previously impossible.[29]

An analysis of three interpretations of the Constantinian shift, though separated by centuries, will hold this book together. It will not be a classical study in the *longue durée* tradition, as I will not here be focusing on overarching sociological or geographical structures. But my methodological approach does connect to central tenets in a reemerging interest in the *longue durée*. The following quotation elucidates how this is the case:

> In a moment of ever-growing inequality, amid crises of global governance, and under the impact of anthropogenic climate change, even a minimal understanding of the conditions shaping our lives demands a scaling-up of our inquiries. As the *longue durée* returns, in a new guise with new goals, it still demands a response to the most basic issues of historical methodology—of what problems we selected, how we choose the boundaries of our topic, and what tools we put to solving the question. The power of memory can return us directly to the forgotten powers of history as a discipline to persuade, to reimagine, and to inspire . . . the new historians of the *longue durée* should be inspired to use history to criticize the institutions around us and to return history to its mission as a critical social science. History can provide the basis for a rejection of anachronisms founded on deference to longevity alone. Thinking with history—but only with long swathes of that history—may help us to choose which institutions to bury as dead and which we might want to keep alive.[30]

At least three traits described by Armitage and Guldi are guiding this book. First, this book focuses on "long swathes" of history, comparing three different interpretations of the Constantinian shift expressed in very different points of time. Instead of analyzing fifty years of historiography I will be analyzing 1,500 years of historiography.[31] Second, while adherents of intel-

29. See Armitage, "What's the Big Idea?"; and Christian, "Return of Universal History."

30. Armitage and Guldi, "Return of the *Longue Durée*," 45–46. For a succinct summary of ideas expressed in this article, see Arbesman, "Return of History at Long Timescales."

31. To be more precise, I will analyze the interpretation of the Constantinian shift at three specific times over a 1,600-year history (the fourth, the fifth and the twentieth century). This approach will at the same time allow us to pay attention to both the grand narrative of history and the contextual uniqueness of history. Such an approach to historical study is partly inspired by Yoder, without this implying necessarily sharing his

lectual history traditionally were hostile to *longue durée*, this animosity is not necessarily the case among new proponents of this approach. Armitage points out that, though maybe not straight forward, there can be effected "a greatly overdue rapprochement between intellectual history and the *longue durée*."[32] The connection between intellectual history and the theological study of the interpretation of the same historical phenomena over time, I believe to be fruitful. This book is concerned with how the concept of the Constantinian shift has been interpreted differently and has meant different things in different contexts, and thereby ties in with a *longue durée* approach to intellectual history. Third, this book shares the concern from the quote above that a historical study, ought "to persuade, to reimagine, and to inspire" regarding how we think about current institutions of society. Few subjects honor this principle better than one pertaining to questions of how to conceive of the relationship between church and state.

What ties together the theological theory for this book (the first point) and the historical theory (the third point), is the way the historical question of this book is asked (the second point)—i.e., focusing this book not on the historical events surrounding the Constantinian shift, but rather on the interpretation of these events, makes it possible to align questions of historical and theological interest. An analysis of how the Constantinian shift has been interpreted by Eusebius, Augustine and Yoder allows for a project comparing the same concept in very different periods of time.

Before we can begin unfolding this, though, we need to look at the definition of two concepts central to this book. When analyzing the historiography of the Constantinian shift, one is engaging two terms which can both be variously defined: "historiography" and "the Constantinian shift." Below I will provide a brief definition of how these terms are applied in this book.

The term historiography can carry two slightly different meanings, which can be distinguished as the narrow and the broad use. The narrow use is characterized by dealing with "the writing of history on writing history," i.e., the investigation of how history as a craft has been described and how the methods and theories of the craft have changed over time. The broad use of the term is characterized by dealing with the body of historical work on a specific topic (i.e., how historians have interpreted and narrated a certain period, phenomenon, etc.). A study of how historians have

interpretation of history. See Sider, *To See History Doxologically*, 128–29.

32. Armitage, "What's the Big Idea?," 497.

presented the story of the Roman Empire would serve as an example of the broad use of the term. Though closely related, these are two different perspectives. In this book I will utilize the term historiography in the second, broad sense. I will investigate work historical theologians have produced when accounting for the Constantinian shift. These two approaches cannot be separated, though, and the question of how Eusebius, Augustine and Yoder perceived the craft of history differently will likewise be dealt with in the analysis of their interpretations of the Constantinian shift.

The terms most central to a field of study are sometimes the ones hardest to define.[33] This principle also pertains to the study of the Constantinian shift. A question can be raised as to when the Constantinian shift took place. Was it with the *Edict of Milan* in 313, when Constantine legalized Christianity alongside other religions? Was it in 380, when Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire? Or was it in 392 when Theodosius I passed legislation that made all pagan worship illegal? In addition to such legal definitions, the Constantinian shift is also applied to denote a shift in the relationship between church and the secular state.[34] But exactly what that shift consists in is not clear either. Does the Constantinian shift mean *caesaropapism*; when a secular ruler is in control of the church?[35] Or is the opposite the case—that the Constantinian shift means *hierocracy*; when a secular ruler acquires legitimacy only when authorized by the church?[36] How the Constantinian shift is defined comes to the core of how it is interpreted.[37] Therefore it would not be appropriate to

33. The academic study of religion is a good example. There is in the field of Religious Studies no agreement as of how to define the term "religion." Yet, this does not hinder the field from developing and producing studies on religion. This goes to show how a term does not need a narrow definition in order to be used fruitfully.

34. To use the vocabulary of a "secular state" is an anachronism when writing about fourth-century material, since the dividing line between ecclesiastical and secular politico-military realms was not clearly defined by this point. See Chesnut, "Eusebius, Augustine, Orosius," 689. However, the term "secular" is employed in this book, as it functions as a readily understandable marker when differentiating between the church and the political realm. Such use of the word goes back to its Latin root *saeculum*; meaning "mundane" and "temporal." In part 3 I will revisit the debate on how to conceive of the *saeculum*.

35. Max Weber defines *Caesaropapism* as a secular ruler having total power over the church. See Swedberg, *Max Weber Dictionary*, 22.

36. Max Weber defines *Hierocracy* as a ruler legitimated by priests or as a high priest who is also king. See Swedberg, *Max Weber Dictionary*, 112.

37. In his dissertation on Yoder, history and ecclesiology, Alexander Sider made that poignantly clear with a question: "Why call Constantinianism a shift? Why not a

operate with a rigorously defined term, as this would distort the picture when analyzing different interpretations of the Constantinian shift. Instead of a narrow conceptual definition, a broad practical definition of the Constantinian shift is applied in this book. The Constantinian shift will thus be understood as referring to the political events and theological changes taking place during Constantine's ascendency in the late third and early fourth century.

One qualification needs to be made. Yoder uses the term Constantinian shift and Constantinianism also to denote a general shift in mentality, which continues to have ramifications throughout the history of the church until the present day.[38] For Yoder, the Constantinian shift thereby becomes both a historical and a theological term. Yet, also for Eusebius and Augustine the Constantinian shift, to a varying degree, becomes simultaneously a historical and a theological term, and the question of the relationship between a historical account and a theological account lies at the heart of this book. I will now provide a short outline of the book, and then commence the investigation of the historiography of the Constantinian shift and its theological underpinnings.

1.4 Structure

As mentioned already, Eusebius, Augustine and Yoder in their interpretations of the Constantinian shift deal with the same categories of questions. In order to make this similarity fruitful for the analysis, I will approach the three authors in a parallel manner. I will compare the texts in a five-fold structure, which will make both similarities and dissimilarities stand out. Parts 2–4 of the book follow such a five-fold structure: (a) An introduction to the theologian and his context will be found in the start of each part. (b) It will be succeeded by an analysis of that theologian's interpretation of the Constantinian shift, along the lines of similar subcategories. In order not to lose the reader in the thematic treatment of the work, a short outline will in each case be given in the beginning. (c) Then a preliminary conclusion on the analysis of the text can be made. (d) After such a close reading, an engagement with contemporary scholarly research will follow. Though contemporary research will be continually drawn in to aid the analysis, this

development? An evolution? A maturation? Each description is loaded, and each deploys a different narrative about the past." See Sider, *To See History Doxologically*, 107.

38. LeMasters, *Import of Eschatology*, 101.

will be a specific engagement with contemporary debates useful for this book. (e) At the end of each chapter a comparison to the previously analyzed interpretations of the Constantinian shift will be conducted.

Texts have their own will and can only be forced into such grids to a certain extent. This condition is also true here, and these five main sections do not entirely resemble each other throughout. Part 2 on Eusebius will necessary fall short on a fifth section, as there is no earlier analysis to compare it to. Part 3 on Augustine cannot be organized into exactly the same subcategories in the second section, due to the fact that Augustine's treatment of the Constantinian shift is structured a little different from Eusebius's and Yoder's.

The book thus follows a structure of rising complexity. Part 2 establishes the historical basics of the Constantinian shift and provides a close reading of the *Vita Constantini* in order to establish foundational material on the Constantinian shift. Part 3 provides an account of Augustine's critique of Eusebius's interpretations and compares the two interpretations. But only in part 4 will it be possible to conduct a proper comparison of the three interpretations and their theological underpinnings, all of which come together in the conclusion in part 4. This will lead up to part 5 of this book, which teases out overarching historical and theological points central for how the Constantinian shift is interpreted, and thereby connects to part 1 and the question of how to be "in the world but not of the world" from an ecclesiological perspective.