

Preface

This issue of the Forum features four essays devoted to specific aspects of foundational Christian origins. The first two of these include poignant reviews of specific contemporary scholars in the field of NT studies and early patristic research, that is, Judith Perkins and Daniel Boyarin. In many respects the perspectives of these scholars have come to shape contemporary views into post-modern understanding of Christianity's originary frameworks and conflicts, here associated with "Christian identity" and the so-called "parting of the ways" specifically. The last two essays are somewhat experimental in form, concerning themselves with Rome and the specter of violence associated with imperial life and practice. These explorations include evidence in portrait form of Roman hegemony and its impact on the rise of Christian institutions.

The opening paper features Richard Ascough's contribution to the spring 2017 Christianity Seminar, whose general theme was authority and its impact on second-century trajectories of Christian development. While the core papers for that session featured offerings by Jason BeDuhn and Tony Burke (set for the fall issue of Forum later this year), Ascough's exploration should not be overlooked, having incorporated one of the key big-picture themes of the session with his focus on Christian identity as developed and employed within the writings of Judith Perkins. Such approaches have become fundamental to how various contemporary scholars think about the essence of that formative period during the rise of patristic thought.

Grouped together with Ascough's work is a contribution by Nina Livesey from the fall 2016 meeting of the Christianity Seminar. Together with a separate paper by Maia Kotrotsits, Livesey investigated the work of Daniel Boyarin at the meeting, portraying Boyarin's contributions as a big-picture aspect of the Seminar's work. This current Forum issue features Livesey's review in which one sees an exploration of Boyarin's major writings on the "parting of the ways," expositions that have challenged traditional accounts of how Judaism and emerging Christian faith necessarily separated at some fixed moment in history.

Turning to Hal Taussig's essay next, this issue makes a decided shift in focus, featuring an appreciation for Christianity's emergence within a culture of Roman violence. Dinner clubs were an important context for early Christian gatherings, and Taussig's paper uses a novel "portrait" motif to develop that perspective. Here he imagines the scenario of a meal to bring to life what might

be considered to be the daily experience of those who lived under Roman violence. His conclusion gives a good summary of the primary theme itself, offering different ways of coping with violence. In many respects this essay is a companion to his contribution to the fall 2016 issue of *Forum* ("The Parting of the Ways), offering a tentative portrait based on his previous concerns for the prevalence of violence in the first and second centuries.

The final essay featured together with Taussig's contribution is Brandon Scott's intriguing review of Jewish identity both before and after construction of the Arch of Titus. As with Taussig, Scott offers a portrait on the Arch and its significance with respect to how Rome and violence were intimately connected. In his oral presentation of these materials in last year's spring 2018 Westar conference, Scott observed how the accident of the burning Temple set in motion a negative attitude toward Jews that ensued within the self-image of Roman domination. This paper was offered under a session called "Snapshots," and much like Taussig's own paper, selected a prominent Roman theme for exploration. Both papers are experimental in form and currently are in preparation for a volume on the Seminar's findings.