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**The Forgotten Creed: Christianity's Original Struggle Against Bigotry, Slavery, and Sexism,
written by Stephen Patterson**

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Stephen Patterson, *The Forgotten Creed: Christianity's Original Struggle Against Bigotry, Slavery, and Sexism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. VIII + 184. \$23.34 / £19.99. ISBN: 9780190865849. (E-BOOK)

Stephen Patterson (Willamette University, Salem, Oregon) is a well-known specialist of the early Christianities. He published intensely on subjects related to nascent Christianities, mostly on the lost gospels, Q, and the Gospel of Thomas. Written by a leading specialist, *The Forgotten Creed* creates real expectations for the reader who has the chance to discover, all extents of the subject and to benefit from the often-new insights and appealing cross-references to other cultural phenomena and theoretical debates.

The introduction gives the reader an incentive about the unbelievable Creed (1–7). Patterson takes this literary journey on a personal note. His narrative grows around the first Christian Creed (5) and human solidarity (7). The first chapter is dedicated to the “forgotten” first Creed (9–29). The prose of the volume is intensively personal and dramatic. Patterson delves into Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians with deserved respect as being one of the “real gems from the earliest days of nascent Christianity,” or Christianities (9). By keeping a slow pacing and nice flowing for his narration of a story about Paul and his evangelical interests, Patterson manages to have the reader constantly captivated (11).

Patterson argues that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians to win back these communities of believers and to go autobiographical (14). This is a not a very original point as Patterson relies heavily on Hans Dieter Betz and other scholars and appropriates from them the idea that Paul “probably took these verses from an early Christian baptismal liturgy” (17). However, if Paul did not write down this credo, and just used it for his missionary interests, one can wonder whether the form of Galatians 3:26–28 is the original one (22): “For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus; for as many of you who have been baptized have put on Christ: there is no Jew or Greek; there is no slave or free; there is no male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3). Patterson concludes that this is true (29). Paul just repeated a pre-existent idea and formula.

The second chapter deals with the oldest clichés (31–50): those of race, class and gender. Why does he employ these pairs and not others (31)? He is engaging in a short and comprehensive survey on ancient Greek philosophy from which the reader benefits greatly. However, how about the slaves? Basically, the fear of these three categories was the main reason of creating the otherness.

Still, the creators of this “elegant manifesto” tried to see themselves and the “others” in a new light: “That ancient cliché, ‘I thank God that I was not born a foreigner, a slave, or a woman,’ crystallized for them a problem, a theory of identity they had learned to reject.” (50).

The third chapter is dedicated to “the children of God” (51–70). Patterson believes that “long before Christians made this a central tenet of Christian faith, the followers of Jesus believed something else: that Jesus had taught them to see themselves as ‘sons’ or ‘children of God.’” (51). And consequently “this idea that the followers of Jesus could become sons or children of God, like Jesus, persisted for a long time in early Christianity” (57). Patterson felicitously brings into discussion an-*other* early Christian gospel in which wisdom and knowledge make one a child of God – the Gospel of Thomas (61).

What Patterson does not mention in this volume is how he reads these apparently different documents. He seems to read them in parallel but says nothing about their common roots in early Christianities. Thomas is brought into discussion to work as a device in favor of his scholarly demonstration. Moreover, Patterson characterizes Thomas as an outline of a “branch of earliest Christianity that was rooted in Hellenistic Judaism of the sort to be found, say, in Egypt or far to the east in ancient Edessa” (61). This claim remains a scholarly construct already at work within his assemblage of scholarly work dedicated to Thomas.

The fourth chapter is about “no Jew or Greek” (71–96), the fifth chapter is about “no slave or free” (97–119), the sixth chapter is about “no male or female” (121–153) and the conclusion is about “you are all” (155–160). In these chapters Patterson examines the social binaries (Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female) in their historical contexts. Patterson embraces Galatians 3:28 as being a very important statement generated by early beliefs among Christians. His arguments must be corroborated with other claims belonging to the exegetical and historical grounds. His enterprise around this verse develops a scholarly scenario which brings out real conflicts within our world and the conventional and accepted Christianity.

The inner transformation, as claimed by Thomas, for instance, incites the reader to pay special attention outside of the accepted New Testament writings compiled in the fourth century to the non-compiled ones like Thomas in saying 114. However, Patterson suggests that the meaning of the traditional sources of power, so specific (not only) to the ancient world, were changed by aligning them against the ideal model stage set by the words of Jesus.

The Forgotten Creed: Christianity's Original Struggle Against Bigotry, Slavery, and Sexism is an important achievement in the comparative approach on

social aspects (race, class and gender) important to early Christianities. The volume is useful due to Patterson's fascinating way of combining scholarship with the art of storytelling.

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