



# PATRISTIC STUDIES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

PROCEEDINGS  
OF AN INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE TO MARK  
THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION  
OF PATRISTIC STUDIES

Edited by  
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OVERVIEW  
OF PATRISTIC STUDIES





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## WHOSE FATHERS? AN OVERVIEW OF PATRISTIC STUDIES IN EUROPE

An overview of patristic studies in Europe in just a few pages is not only a difficult task. It is an impossible mission. Too many projects, people, and phenomena would have to be mentioned. Although things may gradually change in the twenty-first century, it is no exaggeration to say that in the fifty years covered by the history of the Association Internationale d'Études Patristiques (AIEP) more than half of patristic research worldwide has been carried out in Europe. It would be a futile debate to clarify whether it was actually sixty or seventy percent or even more. It is to be hoped that this will change – and that this change will happen not just because research in Europe declines due to lack of resources and fading cultural presuppositions, but mainly because of growing interest elsewhere (and hence an overall intensification). It is my conviction that the quality of 'our' material and the general development of Christianity worldwide justify such intensification.

For the present overview I resisted the temptation to give a short 'best of' list. Rather, I opted for a different solution. In my first section I will share a few general thoughts on Europe and Patristics. I will then mention just a few initiatives or institutions, *pars pro toto*, without any claim to give an exhaustive or representative cross-section, and I will finally reflect on a few recent and not-so-recent developments. It is almost superfluous to say that all this is highly subjective, and marked by personal experience, opinion, and limits.

### 1. *Whose fathers? – paternity and alterity*

My considerations start from the observation that many patristic scholars in Europe teach and do research in contexts where their field of competence is not actually called ‘Patristics’. Most relevant chairs bear names like ‘Religious Literature of Late Antiquity (Littérature religieuse de l’Antiquité tardive)’, ‘Ancient Church History (ältere Kirchengeschichte)’, ‘History of Christian Antiquity (Histoire de l’Antiquité chrétienne)’, ‘Ancient Christian Literature (Letteratura cristiana antica)’, ‘Historical Theology’, or many others. There is actually a surprising variety of designations – and a surprising consciousness of unity in reconciled diversity (if I may use this ecumenical terminology). All over the continent people dealing with Origen, Athanasius, and Augustine consider themselves patristic scholars, tend to come to patristic conferences, and often are members of the Association Internationale d’Études Patristiques, although at home they are disguised under different names.

The different designations often lead to different roots in the various cultural contexts: national, religious, academic. Sometimes these roots are of great historical interest, and sometimes they are not: they merely lead to idiosyncrasies of local politics, with very limited interest only to those who are involved actively or passively in some phase of reforming or deforming European institutions of higher education. It must be stressed, however, that the use or non-use of the term ‘Patristics’ does not depend on the religious or secular context. There are state faculties where the term is used, and ecclesiastical institutions where it is not used.

Apparently, the term ‘Patristics’ constitutes a relatively strong identity *ad intra*, whereas it does not immediately convey a clear message *ad extra*. Actually, even in academic contexts many colleagues from other disciplines would not even know the term. It may well be that this ambiguity of ‘Patristics’ ultimately derives from its literal meaning: It implies fatherhood, and in the last decades this aspect has become less clear or even somewhat embarrassing. Who fathered what child? Of course, there are good studies on the historic origins of the concept of ‘fathers’, on the ‘patristic principle’, etc.<sup>1</sup> There is also a broad and some-

<sup>1</sup> T. GRAUMANN, *Die Kirche der Väter. Vätertheologie und Väterbeweis in den*

what diffuse opinion that the fathers are Church fathers – and more than that.<sup>2</sup> They somehow belong to the origins of ‘our’ European culture. A narrow definition in an ecclesial (or even denominational) sense would be too technical; a broader definition remains vague and arbitrary. However, most Church fathers are not European, and if they fathered children, then it was not the European culture (of which they could not and did not know anything, because it originated much later). Even the most important and well known European Church father is not European at all: Augustine of Hippo was an African bishop and theologian.

This, of course, has always been true, but as part of a process of globalisation and pluralisation European scholars become more and more aware of it. For me personally this became clear in a vivid manner, when I attended an African American church in Washington, D.C., where St. Augustine was proudly presented in the stained glass windows in a very ostensibly African way.<sup>3</sup> Today, the fathers cannot (and should not) be read in a ‘teleological’ perspective, i.e., in a direct ancestral line from Jesus Christ to the Fathers, from there to the Latin (and Christian) culture of the European Middle Ages, to the theologians of the age of Reformation and post-Reformation, to European scholarship today.

Today Europe may be in search of a common narrative and identity – after a long phase of postmodern delight in diversity and plurality. But the fathers do not easily lend themselves to

*Kirchen des Ostens bis zum Konzil von Ephesus (431) (Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie, 118), Tübingen, 2002; A. MERKT, Das patristische Prinzip. Eine Studie zur theologischen Bedeutung der Kirchenväter (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, 58), Leiden, 2001; M. FÉDOU, Les Pères de l'Église et la théologie chrétienne, Paris, 2013.*

<sup>2</sup> Already Henri-Irénée Marrou in his opening lecture of the first Oxford Conference on Patristic Studies in 1951 claimed the Church fathers as a source of the classical humanism that post-war Europe needed. (The lecture was printed only in 1976; it served as a programmatic opening contribution to a homonymous collection of articles: H.-I. MARROU, ‘Patristique et humanisme’, in *Id., Patristique et humanisme. Mélanges*, Paris, 1976, p. 25–34.)

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine Catholic Church, ‘the Mother Church of African American Catholics in the Nation’s Capital’; the church was built in the nineteenth century for an Irish parish in the historicizing style of the time. Most stained glass windows of the original building survive (in their European pseudo-medieval style) – except for the one mentioned in the text.

such a purpose. Charlemagne often is pushed into this role, at times even Constantine, but not patristic literature. On the other hand, European scholarship is still very strong in Patristics, but there is no such thing as a monopoly.

What does this all mean? One thing for sure: the distance has grown. This is true in many respects, not least for the languages. In all European countries the knowledge of Greek and Latin has significantly decreased in the last fifty years. The impact and the presence of Christian traditions in the public realm have also decreased. The consciousness of different approaches to Patristics and scholarship elsewhere, outside Europe, is gradually growing. Today, the fathers are not as naturally ‘our’ fathers as they were half a century ago.

It is my hypothesis that the significance and the importance of patristic studies does not decrease with the growing distance. On the contrary, there is a new interest in patristic studies under the paradigm of ‘otherness’. The new Munich ‘Centre for Ancient Worlds’ (plural!) runs a graduate school for ancient studies under the name of ‘Distant Worlds’.<sup>4</sup> Patristics is explicitly included in this context. It may well be that the fathers continue to be Church fathers, i.e., that they have a vital identifying role for Christian believers. But firstly this is not important for all scholars in the field (there are many non-Christians or non-believers), and secondly, even for Christian theologians the constitution of a Christian identity is not necessarily the main reason for the interest in ‘our’ texts. As I said at the beginning, the quality of ‘our’ material is so high, that the interest is justified, maybe even stronger under the paradigm of alterity. The fathers speak for themselves, and they will make their voice heard also in the future, also in Europe. *Patres suorum ipsorum interpretes.*

## 2. *Who does what where? – institutional aspects*

*Quibus rebus dictis*, it must also be said that we all still owe a great deal to European scholarship. I will mention a few concrete



<sup>4</sup> <[www.mzaw.uni-muenchen.de/dw/](http://www.mzaw.uni-muenchen.de/dw/)>; in what follows I limit myself often to giving internet addresses (URLs). The most accurate and up-to-date information on many projects can be found in the internet, although URLs may change over time. All addresses were correct in July 2014.

achievements of the last fifty years. This will be only illustrative, as I said, without any claim to being exhaustive. First of all, most patristic texts are to be read in European editions. This is certainly true for the older editions, like the Maurists and others, mostly reprinted in Migne's monumental *Patrologia*. Although most fathers are not European, they come to us in European clothes, as it were. It is also true for most recent critical editions. As is well known, the most important series are the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (CSEL) originally from Vienna, now Salzburg,<sup>5</sup> the *Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* (GCS) from Berlin<sup>6</sup> and the *Corpus Christianorum* from Turnhout in Belgium.<sup>7</sup> All three are older than half a century, and thus older than AIEP, but they all continued to flourish in these years. In all three cases, the institutional background is neither a university nor a religious institute, but an academy of science in Austria and in Germany, and an independent foundation in Belgium. To name but a few recent developments: For the *Corpus Christianorum*, the last decades were characterized by an extension of the original programme. The corpus publishes not only Latin fathers, but also a Greek series, apocryphal texts, and a very prolific 'medieval continuation'. The Vienna corpus is still known under this name (and they still operate in Vienna),

<sup>5</sup> <www.csel.eu>; the new 'Festschrift' of the project contains relatively little on its history: *Edition und Erforschung lateinischer patristischer Texte. 150 Jahre CSEL* – ed. V. Zimmerl-Panagl, L. J. Dorfbauer, C. Weidmann, Berlin, 2014, cfr. in particular C. HARRAUER, "...die Akademie ist in eine sehr fatale Lage gekommen". Schlaglichter aus den Anfängen des CSEL', in *ibid.*, p. 289–311. The older contribution by M. ZELZER, 'Ein Jahrhundert (und mehr) CSEL. Evaluation von Ziel und Veröffentlichungen', *Sacris Erudiri*, 38 (1998–1999), p. 75–99, continues to be useful.

<sup>6</sup> The series is published by de Gruyter (<www.degruyter.com/view/serial/16240>); it is affiliated to the project at the Berlin academy (<www.bbaw.de/forschung/bibelexegese>; see below). For the early history of the project, cfr. the magisterial work of S. REBENICH, *Theodor Mommsen und Adolf Harnack. Wissenschaft und Politik im Berlin des ausgehenden 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1997, in partic. p. 129–222. After the re-unification of Germany a 'Neue Folge' of the series was launched (1995–). For the preceding volumes a useful overview can be found in S. REBENICH, *Adolf von Harnack. Protokollbuch der Kirchenväter-Kommission 1897–1928*, Berlin, 2000, p. 163–173.

<sup>7</sup> <www.corpuschristianorum.org>; cfr. J. LEEMANS, 'Fifty Years of Corpus Christianorum (1953–2003). From Limited Edition Project to Multi-located Scholarly Enterprise', in *Corpus Christianorum 1953–2003. Xenium Natalicium. Fifty Years of Scholarly Editing* – ed. J. Leemans, Turnhout, 2003, p. 9–55.

although officially the project is now domiciled in Salzburg. It is concentrating on (without being limited to) Augustine. The project at the Berlin academy had been officially closed but was officially re-launched in 2010 under the new name 'Late antique Biblical exegesis in Antioch and Alexandria'. The series, however, continues to be called *Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller*, and continues to publish what its name says.

The production of useful editions is, of course, not limited to these major series, but I want proceed to a different area. The last fifty years have seen an extraordinary production of translations into various European languages. The pioneer of all later activities has been the series *Sources chrétiennes*, founded in the 1940s by the Jesuits Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou.<sup>8</sup> When Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* appeared in 1941, in war-shaken Europe, in occupied France, nobody could foresee that this modest volume would become the first of now several hundred, many of which have become milestones in our field. In the present volume the contribution by Jean-Noël Guinot pays homage to this extraordinary story of success. Many other similar initiatives would have to be mentioned. The closest relatives are, perhaps, the German *Fontes Christiani* and the recently launched Italian *Sources chrétiennes*.<sup>9</sup> Italy, by the way, is extremely prolific in the sector of translations, accompanied or not by the original text. (And to my knowledge, Italy is the only European country, maybe the only country worldwide, where you would find patristic literature in average book shops at train stations, sometimes even minor ones.) Let me mention, *honoris causa*, only *Scrittori greci e latini* of the Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, *Biblioteca patristica*, *Collana di testi patristici*, and several fathers' *Opera omnia*

<sup>8</sup> <[www.sourceschretiennes.mom.fr](http://www.sourceschretiennes.mom.fr)>; cfr. É. FOUILLOUX, *La collection «Sources chrétiennes». Éditer les Pères de l'Église au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1995.

<sup>9</sup> The 'Fontes' (whose *spiritus rector* was the late Wilhelm Geerlings, 1941–2008) are a prolific and wide-ranging series. In four sub-series more than 120 volumes have appeared since 1991. With the exception of the third sub-series (Brepols), the publisher is Herder. Further information can be found on <[www.mueze.uni-muenchen.de/fontes\\_christiani/](http://www.mueze.uni-muenchen.de/fontes_christiani/)>. The first volume of the Italian series appeared in 2006 (Cipriano di Cartagine, *L'unità della Chiesa* – ed. P. Siniscalco, P. Mattei, A. Carpin, Rome, 2006); the publisher is Edizioni Studio Domenicano.

of the publisher Città nuova.<sup>10</sup> Many of these volumes (along with their introductions) do not only serve the purpose of diffusion to a larger audience, but constitute serious contributions to academic research.

I have to pass over in silence various precious initiatives in other languages like *Oxford Early Christian Texts* or *Bibliothek der Griechischen Literatur* in order to be able to remain in Italy, and to come to a different institutional aspect. I am talking about the founding of the Patristic Institute *Augustinianum* in Rome in 1969.<sup>11</sup> Whereas the *Sources chrétiennes* belong to the pre-history of the Second Vatican Council (they are to be seen in the context of *nouvelle théologie*, which forms one of the roots of the new spirit in the Roman Catholic Church), the Patristic Institute is a ripe fruit of the Council. It was founded with the intention to make the voice of patristic thought and patristic competence heard in the Roman Catholic Church worldwide. Apart from this, the Institute is particularly successful in creating a bridge between the patristic activities in state universities and the ecclesiastical realm. This is achieved primarily by means of annual conferences, whose proceedings are a useful tool of the research.<sup>12</sup>

There would be many other smaller or larger institutions to be mentioned: the Paris *Institut d'Études Augustiniennes*, the *Franz Joseph Dölger-Institut zur Erforschung der Spätantike* in Bonn, the *Zentrum für Augustinus-Forschung* in Würzburg, etc.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The *Scrittori greci e latini* started in 1974. The series is published by Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, and among its numerous volumes appear both patristic and non-patristic texts (<http://collane.librimondadori.it/scrittori-latini-e-greci>). *Biblioteca patristica* started in 1984; it has produced around fifty volumes so far and is published by Edizioni Dehoniane ([www.dehoniane.it](http://www.dehoniane.it)). The *Collana di testi patristici* (only translations) is very productive: nearly 250 volumes since 1991. The publisher is Città Nuova ([editrice.cittanuova.it](http://editrice.cittanuova.it)). The same publisher produces *Opera omnia* of authors like Ambrose, Gregory the Great, and others (reprint of Latin text without apparatus, Italian translation).

<sup>11</sup> [www.patristicum.org](http://www.patristicum.org); the history of the institute still remains to be written (for the time being, cfr. only a few remarks on the homepage).

<sup>12</sup> The proceedings are regularly published in the series *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* (first volume 1967), cfr. [www.patristicum.org/it/pubblicazioni](http://www.patristicum.org/it/pubblicazioni) (also for the journal *Augustinianum*).

<sup>13</sup> The respective URLs are: [www.etudes-augustiniennes.paris-sorbonne.fr](http://www.etudes-augustiniennes.paris-sorbonne.fr), [www.antike-und-christentum.de](http://www.antike-und-christentum.de), [www.augustinus.de](http://www.augustinus.de).

Rather than listing names of institutions, I wish to mention a few concrete activities, in particular conferences. Apart from single conferences, which take place all the time everywhere, there are a few significant series of events, first and foremost the mythical Oxford conferences. They take place every four years, organized primarily, but not exclusively by our colleagues in England. Over the last fifty years they have become more and more international in a worldwide sense. It is certainly true to say that this is *the one* occasion where Patristics becomes visible globally. It is probably also true to say that the growth in quantity is not always and not necessarily a growth in quality. In any case, the ever more voluminous conference proceedings *Studia Patristica* are an impressive witness to the vitality of our field.<sup>14</sup>

Among smaller and more specialized events is the successful series of *Colloquia Origeniana*. Eleven conferences on Origen have already taken place, the last was in summer 2013 in Aarhus in Denmark on the topic ‘Origen and Origenism in the History of Western Thought’.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, there is a fruitful series of colloquia on Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>16</sup> A few events on Augustine have been organized by the Würzburg centre and/or by the *Augustinianum*.

<sup>14</sup> The proceedings of the last conference of 2011 filled eighteen (!) volumes: *Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2011*, 18 vols. – ed. M. Vinzent (*Studia Patristica*, 53–70), Leuven, 2013. The early volumes appeared in East Berlin (vols. 1–2, ed. K. Aland [*Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 63–64], Berlin, 1957). When this became impossible for political reasons, the series passed to Peeters Publishers in Belgium.

<sup>15</sup> Proceedings appear in the series *Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum Lovaniensium*. The last published volume is *Origeniana decima. Origen as Writer. Papers of the 10<sup>th</sup> International Origen Congress, University School of Philosophy and Education ‘Ignatianum’, Kraków, Poland, 31 August – 4 September 2009* – ed. S. Kaczmarek, H. Pietras, A. Dziadowiec (*Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum Lovaniensium*, 244), Leuven, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> The next event will be the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Colloquium in Rome in September 2014 ([www.gregoryofnyssa.org](http://www.gregoryofnyssa.org)). Proceedings appear in the series *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae*. The last published volume is *Gregory of Nyssa. The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism. Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Tübingen, 17–20 September 2008)* – ed. V. H. Drecoll, M. Berghaus (*Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae*, 106), Leiden, 2011.



However, the most important contribution to the research on the bishop of Hippo is certainly the impressive *Augustinus-Lexikon*, whose fourth volume is now in course of publication.<sup>17</sup> Generally speaking, German scholarship has a certain predilection for monumental encyclopaedias. The most conspicuous case in our field is the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, which has now come to the letter ‘N’ and whose thorough and well documented articles are known worldwide.<sup>18</sup> Along with the journal *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* and the series of monographs (*Ergänzungsbände*, 1964–; there is also a *Kleine Reihe*, 2004–), the *Dölger-Institut* in Bonn provides an excellent forum of research.

Speaking of journals and series, again the list would be very long, and by naming a few, I cannot avoid committing more than just venial sins of omission. *Vigiliae Christianae* continues to be a point of reference (and an important contribution by our colleagues in the Netherlands), although it is now supplemented by the *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity*, founded in 1997. More or less in the same timespan the Italian journal *Adamantius* has made its extraordinary career from a tiny newsletter to a voluminous annual of international research on Origen and related topics.<sup>19</sup> ‘Augustine and beyond’ could be the motto of journals like *Augustinianum* and *Revue d’études augustiniennes et patristiques*. Obviously, patristic scholars continue to publish in distinguished journals of related fields, especially antiquity (like *Gnomon*), history of Christianity (like *Cristianesimo nella storia*) or theology (like *Journal of Theological Studies*) – and many others.

It would be very easy to go on with an enumeration of initiatives, institutes, journals, series, conferences, editions, etc. I also completely refrain from mentioning single names of significant scholars, both deceased and living, and – among the latter – both

<sup>17</sup> *Augustinus-Lexikon* – ed. C. Mayer et al., 3 vols., Basel 1986–2010. The second fascicle of the fourth volume has reached the letter ‘O’.

<sup>18</sup> *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum. Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt* – ed. T. Klauser et al., 25 vols., Stuttgart, 1950–2013.

<sup>19</sup> The first volume appeared in 1995 with 36 pages. In the following years it gradually grew to a veritable *Jahrbuch*: 84 pages in 1996, 128 in 1997, 268 in 1998, and 362 in 1999. By 2008 *Adamantius* had grown to 724 pages!

present at the Jerusalem conference and not. This is, maybe, the most serious drawback of my presentation, because ultimately behind all initiatives there are always individuals with their personal energy and imagination – and some of them were and are remarkable. Let me only say in passing that our scholarly community significantly contributed to European societies in general. Patristic scholars have served as archbishop of Canterbury or as president of the Humboldt University of Berlin. Others have been named cardinal or dame of the British empire,<sup>20</sup> or have received other high honours. Rather than naming a few and offending others, I wish to come to my third section and final remarks.

### 3. *What has changed and what will change? – diachronic aspects*

Speakers on the state of Patristics in various parts of the world were asked in a letter to identify ‘trends in the discipline of Patristics’. This is not easy to do, because Europe as a continent is too heterogeneous. Whereas it would probably be correct to see in Peter Brown’s works a leading paradigm for a whole generation of North American scholars (with exceptions, of course), there is no such thing for Europeans. Methods and research topics in Paris and in Tübingen, in Rome and in Oxford are quite different. There is a broad variety of approaches in terms of confessional or linguistic or cultural backgrounds. And, fortunately, there is also a variety of languages spoken. Pieces of serious scholarship continue to be published at least in the four main European languages (English, French, German, and Italian), maybe in a few others as well. On the whole, what I would call the ‘Swiss principle’ works astonishingly well, i.e., everyone speaks and writes in his or her own language – and hopes that others will understand. The smaller language groups, however, adopt more and more English as their *lingua franca*.



<sup>20</sup> Rowan Williams (archbishop of Canterbury 2002–2012), Christoph Markschie (president of Humboldt University of Berlin 2006–2010), Prosper Grech (cardinal 2012), Averil Cameron (DBE 2006), to name but a few (still living).

If I had to identify a trend in terms of contents, I would probably mention the growing interest in Origen. In the last fifty years in Europe, studies on the Alexandrian theologian have been flourishing in a surprising way.<sup>21</sup> The discovery of a manuscript with unknown homilies on the psalms in April 2012 was the icing on the cake. The publication of the text in the GCS series, edited by Lorenzo Perrone, is imminent.<sup>22</sup> It is quite remarkable, that the *one* father who attracts particular attention is not really a father but, technically speaking, a condemned heretic. This observation may lead back to my initial remarks on paternity. Apparently, being a father is not an objective category; the question ‘who is a father for whom?’ is more complex.

Another observation may also shed some light on this: the useful *Nuovo dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane* obviously contains a lemma ‘patrologia/patristica’. But then it also contains – quite surprisingly – an article on ‘matristica’ (which is even longer).<sup>23</sup> This does not necessarily mean that new female authors have been discovered; it is more a sign of contemporary sensitiveness, a new approach to paternity, again a grown sense of distance between a world of fathers and a world in which fathers and mothers define their roles in new and more equal ways.

I will come back to these considerations. Before doing so, let me single out two more ‘trends’, or rather one anti-trend and one future trend. The first is a development in the last decades which I see as a regrettable loss. I am talking about the loosened ties between Patristics and Christian archaeology. It is certainly true that we are living in a time of growing specialization, sometimes over-specialization, and it also true that contents and methods of Christian archaeology have now reached a very high level of professionalization which makes it difficult for outsiders to

<sup>21</sup> For the *Colloquia Origeniana* see above n. 15; for the journal *Adamantius* see above n. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Now in print: Origenes, *The New Homilies on the Psalms. A Critical Edition of Codex Monacensis Graecus 314* – ed. L. Perrone (*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte, Neue Folge*, 19), Berlin, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> A. HAMMAN, J. LEAL, ‘Patrologia-Patristica’, in *Nuovo Dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane* – ed. A. Di Berardino, 3 vols., Rome, 2006–2008, III, col. 3967–3972; K. E. BØRRESEN, ‘Matristica’, in *ibid.*, II, col. 3149–3156.

give competent contributions. However, I cannot refrain from thinking that the growing distance is not only due to specialization but also to an unfortunate history of emancipation from theology. This process has different manifestations in different European countries, but there are remarkable structural parallels. Christian archaeology originated in and grew out of theology. This is again a story of problematic paternity. Emancipation can be a healthy and normal process in a father-relationship. Loss of contact would be to the detriment of both sides. Patristics in Europe is in a privileged situation because large parts of the relevant archaeological evidence is on European territory, in European museums, or within one or two hours of flight distance. If my diagnosis of this anti-trend is correct, it would be my hope that it can be stopped.

As for the future trend I mentioned, this is another hope for development in our field. It is my impression that European Patristics has not yet fully understood and exploited the potential of Eastern Europe and of the Orthodox tradition. The Berlin wall and the iron curtain in Europe came down, but there are still many mental curtains in our heads. Various nationalisms and confessionalisms play a role in this, at times also linguistic barriers. In the 1990s and 2000s there was a certain political and ecumenical impetus to overcome these limits. Maybe our common 'fathers' and research on them could contribute to a deeper understanding. It is my personal hope that this is a future trend in European Patristics. This would certainly include but not primarily concentrate on the relationship to early Islam.

If this happens, this again will shed new light on the idea of fatherhood. The Norwegian author of an article 'matristica' in an Italian dictionary will have different ideas from an Orthodox theologian in Bulgaria or a Catholic philologist in Poland. My concluding remarks come back to the beginning. The distance is growing, I said, and the fathers gain some new interest also under the perspective of otherness. However, this does not necessarily mean that we have to abandon the category of fatherhood (and, maybe, motherhood) altogether. Paternity and alterity do not automatically exclude each other. Maybe paternity in the univocal sense of normativity has lost its meaning. Since the days of the Second Vatican Council the normative pressure

on our field has weakened. We are in search of a new, a more adult form of paternity. Our fathers today are neither (simply) Church fathers nor fathers of the European culture, but mothers and fathers of a world with complex religious interactions and multiple religious identities. What we need is a dialogic relationship with the fathers, a relationship where our own identities are also at stake. Even the experience of growing distance shows how important our authors are in defining our positions today and in finding our ways towards a European and global future. I look forward to fifty more years of patristic research in Europe, and fifty more years of AIEP.

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*Abstract*

Europe has a special relationship with the 'fathers'. Although Patristics deals with Church fathers (and not fathers or mothers of European history/culture), there is a closeness which has gradually weakened in the last decades. Patristic research in Europe is still very lively, but it has to redefine its paradigms. The article argues that a deepened reflection on paternity and alterity can contribute to this process. Europe has given and still gives a considerable contribution to Patristic research in a multi-religious and globalized world.

