

Hazel Johannessen: *The Demonic in the Political Thought of Eusebius of Caesarea*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 2016 (Oxford Early Christian Studies). xvi, 243 p. £ 72.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-878724-2.

Over the past twenty years, Eusebius of Caesarea (d.339) has received a great deal of scholarly attention, leading to a reassessment of his significance, particularly with respect to his somewhat neglected exegetical and apologetic works. Hazel Johannessen seeks to contribute to this ongoing reevaluation of Eusebius as an important participant in the shaping of late antique Christian discourse. Johannessen's book aims to explore the ways in which Eusebius' ideas about the demonic influenced his thinking on a range of other subjects that comprised his political ideas. The book, a revision of her dissertation, argues forcefully for a fresh evaluation of Eusebius' creative vision through an innovative study of his demonology, presenting its importance in shaping central topics of his thought, especially his political outlook. This is both a high-resolution study of the role of Eusebius' demonology in his overall Christian outlook and a reexamination of his ideal of Christian identity in a turbulent age of historical transition.

The introduction surveys recent scholarship on Eusebius, emphasizing Johannessen's new approach to Eusebius' thought through the lens of his demonology. This approach, influenced by recent works on Christian demonology, challenges the common view of Eusebius as a triumphal optimist. Johannessen then provides (in Chapter One) a survey of Eusebius' works, primarily those most relevant to her study, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, *De Laudibus Constantini*, *Vita Constantini*, and *Contra Hieroclem*, dealing briefly with issues of genre, dating, composition, authenticity and methodology. The chapter further sketches Eusebius' political thought.

Eusebius' thoughts on demons are discussed in Chapter Two. Here Johannessen identifies similarities between Eusebian and Neoplatonic demonology, especially that of Porphyry. She claims that Eusebius' demonology – rather neglected in Eusebian scholarship – is mostly Origenist. She further argues that demons are much more than a rhetorical and apologetic tool for Eusebius: they are powerful, malevolent material creatures who conspire continually to deceive humans. Moreover, they are in opposition to Christ and allies of the devil, impersonating true divinity.

Chapter Three examines Eusebius' cosmology through the lens of his demonology. Here the author suggests that Eusebius' conception of the universe is fundamentally polarized between rival spiritual opponents – good and evil, light and darkness, rational good angels and irrational tyrannical and immoral demons. She argues for Eusebius' moderate or moral dualistic tendencies, stopping short of attributing to him strict dualism in view of his overall monotheist theology. Demons, however, constitute for him a real presence, working against the divine economy while involuntarily serving its designs.

The next three chapters, constituting the core of Johannessen's study, concentrate on the more politically oriented aspects of Eusebius's thought, his view of human agency and historical outlook. Chapter Four focuses on the demonic influence on human agency and responsibility. Here, Johannessen discusses Eusebius' concept of free will through an examination of the term *προαίρεσις*, seeking to demonstrate its importance in his view of moral responsibility and personal virtue in the struggle against demons as the sole escape from demonic domination. Eusebius' concept of free will, she contends, ought to be understood primarily in a moral context; thus, demons cannot prevail over human rational *προαίρεσις* despite their manipulative deception that exploits human frailty. Johannessen further connects Eusebius' ideas of free will and morality to his soteriology of both individual and community. Taken as a whole, it seems that the author's understanding of Eusebius' demonology as an essentially moral and psychological ascetic practical 'philosophy' approximates the classical monastic demonology so familiar to us from Athanasius' Anthony.

In the fifth chapter, Johannessen deals with the place of Eusebius' demonology in his view of the Roman empire in the history of salvation. Here, she presents her key thesis: Eusebius, in fact, does not regard the empire as marching triumphantly with the victorious Church to the eschatological horizon. In this move, Johannessen boldly counters the accepted scholarly view of Eusebius as a political, perhaps naïve triumphant optimist who holds that demonic activity has ceased altogether. Since the formidable demonic power is an ontological reality that remains active in history regardless of the incarnation, the ongoing Christianization of the empire and the favorable turn of events under Constantine are ever-threatened by demonic machinations and in need of acute vigilance. These fragile factors are decidedly not, then, the culmination of history. Johannessen thus argues that Eusebius was

less interested in either the church or the empire as impersonal institutions than in leaders as virtuous exemplars. This explains, she tells us, his emphasis on historical personages, such as bishops and the Christian emperor, as key figures on the ongoing Christian road to salvation.

The sixth and final chapter is devoted to Eusebius' political thought, particularly to questions such as sovereignty and imperial virtue. Here Johannessen opts for studying the ideal of kingship through its distortion in tyranny. She examines earlier views of tyranny, proposing that, for Eusebius, various non-Christian tyrants in history were manipulated by demonic forces. Accordingly, tyrannical dominion hinges on demonic influence. Moreover, demonic manipulations also encompass false heterodox Christian beliefs. Further considering the role of the emperor, she directs her attention to Eusebius' Constantine and ascribes major significance to his imitation (*μίμησις*) of the divine rather than the demonic. Johannessen thus concludes that "for Eusebius, Constantine was important not as a triumphant eschatological figure envisaged in previous scholarship, but rather as a key figure in the ongoing battle" against demons and for Christian orthodoxy (173). Eusebius' "first loyalty", she somewhat apologetically informs the reader, was hence with God against the demons, rather than with the emperor (201).

In her forceful and decisive Conclusions section, Johannessen claims the "striking" finding (204) that Eusebius should not be regarded as a complacent triumphalist but rather as a cautious leader and historian concerned with an ongoing demonic threat. According to Eusebius, then, Christian salvation ultimately rests upon the virtuous conduct of all believers.

The originality of Johannessen's work lies in her examination of Eusebius' view of demons and its implications for his political thought, as well as in widening the scope of fourth-century Neoplatonic and Christian angelology and demonology. This approach indeed offers a helpful prism through which to view various important issues in Eusebius' writings, such as cosmology, ethics and especially political theory. However, such a relatively narrow angle has its price. The postulated logical strings between Eusebius' demonology, cosmology, ethics and political thought that constitute the core of the book seem a bit loose. Moreover, these important issues may very well stand independent of each other. The role of Eusebius' view of demons in his overall thought thus appears to be exaggerated, creating a somewhat reductionist and simplified picture of his variegated outlook. Johannessen's

strong motivation to correct what seems to her as an unjustified assessment of Eusebius as triumphalist may further be regarded as an apologetic of sorts.

On the whole, this is a fine study that sheds new light on the role of demonology in Eusebius' thought and writings. Johannessen presents her argument in an articulate and succinct – albeit slightly repetitive – manner. Though a bit sweeping in its reevaluation of a major part of Eusebius' surviving, vast corpus, this well-written book is of significant value for understanding the most erudite Christian writer of his time.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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