CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: THE REVOLUTION OF NICENE HISTORIOGRAPHY

The church historians of the late fourth and early fifth century had an important role to play in the theological controversies of their time. Scholarship has tended to focus on the place of theologians in the development of Christian doctrine, seeing church history as the background in which these figures operated, necessary for providing context but clearly in a secondary category in regard to lasting influence. Complementing this scholarship with an equal amount of scrutiny of the church historians, we have seen how Eusebius, the anonymous chronicler, Rufinus, and Philostorgius are integral components in the development of Nicene and non-Nicene understandings of this time period. Church histories functioned alongside exegetical, liturgical, and doctrinal works as texts produced by communities of belief loyal to particular theological traditions, tracing authority from a succession of teachers.

Eusebius of Caesarea’s Ecclesiastical History has often been seen as the foundation for subsequent church history. Various authors have shown how Eusebius was influential in his method of collecting source materials, establishing a succession of bishops within principle dioceses, documenting the development of the biblical canon, and noting the providential nature of Christianity operating within the Roman world, among other influences on later historians. In this work I have shown another way in which Eusebius served as a model for writing church history. As much as any work of theology, Eusebius’ defense of the school of Caesarea is an explication and advancement of the theology, cosmology, and exegesis he learned from Pamphilus and the Caesarean school of Origen. Placing the oft-overlooked Panegyrical Oration in Book 10 of the Ecclesiastical History and the oft-maligned Life of Constantine within this framework allows for the holistic integration of these works into a larger understanding of Eusebius’ work as a theologian, and provides a greater appreciation of the scope and depth of his historical work. There is no clear distinction between church history and theology as distinct genres.
Rather the legacy of the school of Caesarea permeates the entire fabric of Eusebius’ work.

Eusebius established a paradigm for writing church history as an apologetic narrative of one’s theological tradition. This perspective allows us to bridge the gap between anachronistic designations such as “heresy” and “orthodoxy” and see commonalities between various groups of Christians in the fourth century rather than perceived differences. The anonymous chronicler of the mid-fourth century and the historical works of Athanasius of Alexandria stand in continuity with this Eusebian paradigm. Church history for both authors finds its foundation in the defense of a particular theological tradition. Alexandrian and Lucianic perspectives are part of the same apologetic framework rather than polar opposites. In addition the work of the anonymous chronicler, by showing his fidelity to the Lucianic school, also serves to demonstrate the diversity of theological opinion in the fourth century. Traditionally labeled as an “Arian,” identifying the community of belief that he defends provides a deeper understanding of the theological traditions of his community. Diversity in theological opinion necessitates examining diversity in historical expression. The recovery of the non-Nicene chronicler’s narrative bears witness to this.

This paradigm takes a dramatic shift in the work of Rufinus. Like Eusebius, Rufinus incorporated an apologetic element for the school of Origen in his translation of Books 1–9 of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*. Furthermore Rufinus modified this apology in his treatment of subsequent events. Rather than presenting the “Arian” controversy as Eusebius did, he incorporates an Athanasian perspective on the events of the fourth century. Rufinus provided the historical narrative to the “Arian” controversy as it emerged from the polemical work of Athanasius. Taking polemic as fact, through falsification of historical detail he worked to exonerate the emperor Constantine and lay the blame for dissension in the church at the feet of Constantius, and recounted the attempts of an organized and systematic group of followers of the presbyter Arius to influence the emperor and to bring down Athanasius.

Yet Rufinus goes a step further than providing the narrative framework to his Athanasian source. In addition he evidences a paradigm shift in understandings of authority in the church which would be an important contribution to the development of Nicene historiography. Rufinus’ work reflects the rise of the Christian monastic move-