A.H.M. Jones made no claim to be an ecclesiastical historian. The doctrines and practices of the Christian Church were not subjects that Jones studied or wrote about for their own sake. He was a social and economic historian, and his assessment of the Church in the Later Roman Empire must be understood in that light. Yet Jones knew the sources and the controversies of early Christian history considerably better than a superficial reading of his great work might suggest, and his contribution to the history of the Church fully merited the D.D. that he received from Oxford University in 1966.1 By the standards of contemporary Late Roman historiography Jones was by no means unusual in the limited space that he allowed for the nature and internal conflicts of Christianity, while in the careful attention he devoted to questions of hierarchy, wealth and legal status his work was a watershed in the study of the Church as an organisation within the Later Roman world. The separation between social-political and ecclesiastical-theological history in Late Antique scholarship has still not been satisfactorily closed, and the work of Jones represents an important step forward in bridging the gulf between these fundamental disciplines.

That Jones’ priorities were not those of a Church historian is made explicit in the much quoted Preface to the *Later Roman Empire* itself:

>This book is not a history of the later Roman empire. It is a social, economic and administrative survey of the empire, historically treated...I have little to say about doctrinal controversies, but much about the growth of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. I ignore the two major intellectual achievements of the age, theology and law, but discuss the organisation

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1 Jones was presented for the degree by Henry Chadwick, to whom I am grateful for this and other personal communications. One of Chadwick’s letters to Jones is quoted earlier in this volume by Garnsey (ch. 2) 27.
and finances of the church, the administration of justice, and the social status of the clergy and of lawyers.\(^2\)

Jones does go on to declare that his introductory narrative chapters will nevertheless give an outline of ecclesiastical history, but he then repeats his intention to emphasise social and economic factors.\(^3\) In the following pages I will survey briefly the presentation of Christianity in the *Later Roman Empire*, before I turn to look in slightly more detail at two of Jones’ most influential and controversial theories: his characterisation of Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor, and his assessment of the impact of Christianity upon the empire as a whole.

I do not intend to comment here upon Jones’ personal religious views. In the words of Jones’ daughter, Mrs Cordelia Gidney, “although styling himself an atheist he never assumed that believers were necessarily either knaves or fools”.\(^4\) Certainly Jones was fully aware of the importance of religious history to the study of Late Antiquity,\(^5\) and also of the potential for personal bias to influence the study of the Church.\(^6\) His own attitude towards the primary sources for Church history is once again made explicit in his Preface, as too are the priorities with which he approached those writings:

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\(^2\) Jones (1964) I, v.

\(^3\) Ibid., I, vi. Jones’ ambivalent attitude towards narrative Church history is already visible in his review of E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* (1949) in 1953/4. “The strictly narrative form of presentation somewhat restricts the scope of the book. In ecclesiastical affairs, for instance, a very full account is given of the doctrinal controversies of the age, since they gave rise to events. But such topics as the development of monasticism, or the growing wealth of the church and the consequent evolution of corrupt and simoniacal practices are, because they did not give rise to correspondence and councils, completely ignored” (353).

\(^4\) Quoted in Liebeschuetz (1992) 6.

\(^5\) Crook rightly praised “Jones’ ability to appreciate the importance of religiosity in the make-up of the men of late antiquity (paradoxical in one who, in spite of a strong clerical element in his family background—for his mother was the daughter of a clergyman and his father the son of the Revd. Hugh Jones, D.D., minister of the Welsh Wesleyan Methodist Church of Mount Sion in Liverpool—was quite unreligious)” (Crook (1971) 430–1).

\(^6\) In his review of Stein in 1953/4 Jones comments upon the effect of the former’s conversion to Catholicism upon his work (353), while in the Preface to *The Decline of the Ancient World* (Jones’ abridged summary of the *Later Roman Empire* published in 1966) he explains that “in calling the bishop of Rome the pope I imply no theological overtones, nor do I imply that he was commonly so called in the period of which I write…he was usually styled the bishop, or archbishop, of Rome; to use this title today would, however, savour of aggressive Protestantism” (vii).