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Faith and the city in the 4th century CE

Abstract: How do concepts and practices of Christian faith change when it becomes possible for Christians to live openly and interact materially with the cities of the later Roman empire? How do Christian understandings of *pistis/fides* change the social or spatial order of late antique cities? This paper will investigate how physical space and movement in late antique cities are described as fostering or shaping faith, and explore the competition between Christian and non-Christian practices of *pistis/fides* in some urban contexts.

1 Introduction

The language of “faith” (πίστις, *fides* and their relatives in the languages that dominate our early sources) is central to Christianity as to no other ancient cult or modern religion.¹ In the earliest surviving Christian writings, followers of Christ are already known as οἱ πιστεύοντες or οἱ πιστοί, and πίστις language describes almost every aspect of the relationship between God, Jesus Christ, and Christ’s followers (Morgan 2015, chs. 6–7). By the early second century πίστις was so embedded in Christian thinking that Christianity had become known to its adherents simply as ἡ πίστις, “the faith” (Morgan 2015, 514). Faith was linked discursively with all the other key concepts and practices of the new cult, including grace, salvation, righteousness, holiness, love, peace, obedience, truth, new life, hope, and thanksgiving.

From this unprecedented use of a single lexicon to describe almost all of a cult’s central theological, ethical, ecclesiological and eschatological ideas, one range of usage is notably absent. Before the fourth century, Christians almost never connect πίστις/*fides* with the physical context of worship, and never in unequivocally positive terms.² Nor are faith and place connected in the scanty early

1 I will usually translate πίστις/*fides* as “faith” for convenience; distinguishing shades of meaning is not the main concern of this essay, but on the range of meanings in play see Morgan 2015, 5–7, 20–21. On the inappropriateness of the term “religion” to this period see Nongbri 2013; Barton and Boyarin 2017. I am grateful to Laura Nasrallah for her illuminating comments on a draft of this essay.

2 The evolving relationship between faith language and architecture is related to that between faith and liturgy; the latter is beyond the scope of this essay, but see below, pp. 80–81. References to pre-fourth-century meeting places and church buildings are often to their destruction

accounts of the cultivation of significant sites, such as places associated with the life, death and resurrection of Christ or the tombs of martyrs.

Seeking to explain a negative is methodologically risky: too often the identification of a puzzling absence is based on an unwarranted assumption that some positive phenomenon, attested elsewhere, must be the norm. In this case, though, there is some justification for it. Christians use *πίστις/fides* language so extensively and systematically that its absence from writing about space and place is intriguing. Several explanations are possible, in addition to the relative paucity of Christian discourse and visible Christian buildings and pilgrimage sites before the fourth century. As long as Christian places of worship intermittently risked attack from hostile neighbours or a nervous Roman administration, there may have been little incentive to invest much in them either materially or theologically. Alternatively or additionally, the Christian *topos*, borrowed from the Jewish scriptures, that the whole world, as God's creation, illustrates God's power and law, may have led worshippers to think that one does not need to be in any particular location to express one's faith in God (Fuchs 1965; Novak 1998). This may be the view of a hymn from the second-century *Odes of Solomon*, which hints that Christians can think of practising faith as an alternative to visiting a particular place of worship. "One hour of your faith is more excellent than all days and years", says the psalmist (4.5), adapting Psalm 84.10 ("one day in your courts [of the Jerusalem temple] is better than a thousand elsewhere"). The Jerusalem temple, of course, is no longer standing in the second century, but Christian meeting places exist and might be imaginable as "courts".³ The psalmist, however, sees him or herself as worshipping God by exercising *πίστις* rather than by going to church. In another *topos* from an even earlier date, the faithful themselves form an edifice to the glory of God, built on foundations laid by Christ or on Christ himself as its foundation. "[L]ike a wise master builder," says Paul, "I laid a foundation and another is building upon it ... Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit

(e.g. White 1990, 118, 127–30; MacMullen 2009, 117–41). Places of worship are sometimes mentioned where the emphasis is on the gathering of the community rather than the building: e.g. Ign. *Eph.* 5.2–3, Clem. *Str.* 7.5, Or. *De or.* 31. Sessa 2009 disposes of a longstanding misapprehension that the phrase *οἶκος ἐκκλησίας* in the sense of a church building predates Constantine; cf. e.g. Cypr. *De mort.* 6 (doubt is like being without faith in *domus fidei*) which refers to a community, not a building, in a back-formation from Paul's *οἰκείοι τῆς πίστεως* (Gal. 6.10).

³ Even if, as Charlesworth 2010, xvii–xx suggests, the psalmist is a Jewish Christian who might have wanted to visit the temple and emends the verse because he no longer can.

of God dwells in you?”.⁴ Clement of Alexandria agrees: “Christ builds his temple in people, so that he may set up the shrine of God in humanity” (*Protr.* 11). In this world, at least, no other city or even building is needed.⁵ Clement is also among those who emphasize that faith, in the form of prayer, can and should be practised everywhere and at all times: at home and at work, on land and sea, by day and night.⁶

Any or all of these may explain why early Christians, who made such extensive use of πίστις/*fides* language elsewhere, did not apparently connect it with buildings or significant locations. The fourth century, however, saw a dramatic change. Christians began to connect πίστις/*fides* language regularly with places of worship and, increasingly, with the act of pilgrimage and pilgrimage sites. As far as I know, this change has gone unnoticed, but it is striking and significant.⁷ It is interesting not only for historians of Christianity but for classical historians and archaeologists, who are deeply interested in the development, representation, and lived experience of space and architecture – especially civic space and architecture – throughout the Graeco-Roman world. What follows will focus on three aspects of the change: how fourth century writings talk about churches in connection with πίστις/*fides*, and, more briefly, how they describe pilgrimage and monastic sites.⁸

2 Πίστις/*fides* and churches

Most of the Christian discourse that links faith with places of worship or pilgrimage relates to churches in cities. From the early fourth century it is, if not abun-

⁴ 1 Cor. 3.10, 16, transl. NAB, cf. 1 Cor. 3.11 (Christ as the first builder); Mt 21.42 (Jesus as the cornerstone); Acts 7.48; 2 Tim. 2.19.

⁵ Origen *Or.* 31.5, which suggests that it is especially helpful for the faithful to meet in a place of prayer, emphasizes the importance of the community (of the living, and of the living with angels and the dead) and their shared ritual rather than of the place, which he does not describe.

⁶ *Strom.* 7.7.35.6; *Paed.*, 3.12.; cf. 1 Thess. 5.16–17; *Trad. Apost.* 35; Origen, *Or.* 31:549B.

⁷ Little work has been done on the meaning and operation of πίστις/*fides* in the patristic period, except in specific instances such as the relationship between πίστις and γνώσις or the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ. There is a widespread and mistaken assumption that πίστις/*fides* discourse is thinly spread outside the New Testament.

⁸ I shall not discuss the evolution and likely symbolism of fourth century church architecture in general, nor the overall impact of Christianity on the organization and appearance of late imperial cities, both of which are well studied, except where references to them are explicitly linked with πίστις/*fides*.

dant, a definite presence, especially in literary sources. The longest single account of the connection between faith and a church is also the earliest.

In c.315, remarkably soon after Constantine's 313 edict of toleration, Bishop Paulinus of Tyre completed and dedicated a grand new cathedral at Tyre which he had built on the foundations of an earlier church destroyed by non-Christians (Eus. *HE* 10.4.26–7). Paulinus invited Bishop Eusebius from nearby Caesarea to speak at the consecration, and Eusebius preserves a version of his oration in his *Ecclesiastical History* (10.4).

Eusebius calls the cathedral, in the tradition of the Jerusalem temple (and, though not explicitly, Greek and Roman temples), “God’s house on earth”. It is no longer by hearing the spoken word, he says (10.4.5–6), that people learn about the power and might of God. We can now see with our own eyes that the traditions of the past were trustworthy and true (πιστὰ καὶ ἀληθῆ). This “church of the living God” is a “pillar and foundation of truth” (στῦλος καὶ ἐδραίωμα τῆς ἀληθείας) (10.4.7). By it God has “proven reliable (πιστός) the record of the ancient narratives” foretelling the humbling of the mighty and exalting of the humble, and he has done this “not only for believers (οἱ πιστοί) but also for unbelievers (οἱ ἄπιστοι)” (10.4.8–9).⁹

The cathedral building, in its highly wrought and decorated glory, both expresses God’s power and, like a human preacher or teacher or an oral or written tradition, teaches viewers about God. It is, as Eusebius spells out at length, with multiple examples and scriptural quotations, the confirmation Christians have been waiting for that Christian πίστις is justified. Not only does it confirm the faith of the faithful: it also creates faith, or the conditions for faith, in unbelievers. A gateway to the outer enclosure of the church gives a clear view into the precincts from the street, which has the effect of “turning the faces even of outsiders to ἡ πίστις to the entrances (καὶ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων τῆς πίστεως ἐπὶ τὰς πρώτας εἰσόδους ἐπιστρέφων τὰς ὄψεις) ... no-one can hurry past without having his soul mightily struck first by the ... miracle” (10.4.38). By this means, Eusebius explains, Paulinus hopes to impel non-Christians to have their steps turned, purely by the sight of it, towards the entrance to the church and the entrance to the faith (10.4.39).

In this passage, Paulinus’ cathedral is given a novel and specific set of duties. Together they encompass much of the work of bringing people to faith and strengthening the faithful in their faith which historically has been performed by human preaching, teaching and example, miracles, scripture, and tradition. The

⁹ Eusebius’ language of truth and proof indicates that πίστις here is belief in the truth of the Church’s teaching; elsewhere it is also (e.g. 10.4.38, 39) Christianity itself.

idea that a building can confirm God's faithfulness to his people has a precedent in the building and dedication of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 5 and 8, but Eusebius' account of what the Tyrian cathedral represents is rather different from the account of 1 Kings and much more dramatic.¹⁰ A much-longed-for and long-awaited hope has been gloriously fulfilled; the power and faithfulness of God are all the more convincingly demonstrated; the impact even on those outside the community is proportionately greater.

A description of the cathedral follows, emphasizing its beauty: the "perfect wisdom and architectural order" with which it has been designed (10.4.44), the embossed bronze and iron gates, towering walls, porches and colonnades, and the inlaid marble floor (10.4.41–4). "Why need I say more?" asks Eusebius (10.4.44), before saying a good deal more. The building is miraculous, and miracles traditionally evoke faith. It seems clear that both Paulinus and Eusebius expect not only non-believers (10.4.38), but all the believers listening to Eusebius' oration to be struck by the wonder of it all – and wonder too is a precursor to faith, or the increase of faith. The idea that Christian πίστις might be inspired or inflamed by the beauty of a building, however, is new.¹¹

Towards the end of the oration (10.4.61) Eusebius returns to the scriptural idea that the faithful are given to Christ by God to be built up into a metaphorical building.¹² The whole edifice of the church, in the sense of the people of God, he says, is supported by πίστις. Some people are entrusted with acting as entrances to the house of God; others are props under the first quadrangle; others form the basilica, and so on (10.4.62–5). Catechumens can enter the building, but only the faithful (who are always the baptized) enjoy a "divine vision of what is innermost" (10.4.63). This vision plays on the commonplace identification of the faithful with the church and the church with "the faith", but it also relies on a vision of how people interact with a physical building. The more deeply one is involved in the cult, the further one progresses into the church, and the more one's faith is nourished by divine visions.

10 Solomon's prayer of dedication (1 Kgs. 5.19, 8.22–24) affirms that God keeps his covenant with his faithful servants, and has kept his promise to David, but God's promise here has been fulfilled within a generation by Solomon's decision and there is no sense that it might not have happened or that God's intervention was needed to make it happen.

11 For two other ecphrastic tours of churches, emphasizing their effects on those who approach and enter them, see Paul. Nol. Ep. 13.11–13 (St. Peter's in Rome) and Carm. 27–28 (Paulinus' own church complex at Nola).

12 This passage draws on the relational aspect of πίστις which dominates very early Christian writings (Morgan 2015, chs. 6–10): the faithful put their trust in God and Christ and are entrusted with participation in God's ongoing action in the world.

Eusebius gives a vivid impression of the joy and triumphalism of Christians who are enjoying official imperial toleration and (even more by the time of writing than in 315) patronage, and who could, for the first time, dare to build large, prominent, highly decorative churches in major cities and develop elaborate, publically visible rituals in them.¹³ His vision of churches as active promoters of faith, and the faith itself, soon became common currency, if it was not already. At the other end of the century another Paulinus writes in similar terms of the church complex he has built at Nola: “How, therefore, will this building provide a model by which I can cultivate myself, build myself up and renew my faculties, and establish myself as a dwelling place for Christ? (*quoniam igitur nunc ista modo mihi fabrica formam / praebebit, qua me colere, aedificare, novare / sensibus, et Christo metandum condere possim?*)” (*Carm.* 28.279–81). *Imitatio Christi* is a familiar concept to Christians; *imitatio aedis* is new.

The idea that church buildings can act as miracles or portents to create and foster faith is taken up by Sozomen and Socrates in a story of the conversion of the Iberians by the example a Christian slave (Soz. *HE* 2.7, Soc. *HE* 1.20). Having been attracted to Christianity by her πίστις, the Iberians decide to build a church. As building proceeds, however, one of the pillars refuses to be raised. The slave prays over it all night and the next morning the pillar is found miraculously hovering in the air. As the Iberians watch, it descends and fixes itself into position. The new converts, awestruck, send to Constantine offers of friendship and a request for clergy. Their new church has miraculously confirmed their πίστις and – equally important for the historians – brought them into God’s Roman Empire. In another story from Sozomen a Christian shrine acts as a warning of faithlessness. The young future emperor Julian and his brother Gallus, while living in Cappadocia, undertake to raise a shrine over the tomb of St. Mammars. Julian’s section keeps collapsing, which is interpreted (even, allegedly, at the time) as a sign of his lack of true πίστις.¹⁴

Eusebius refers to the cathedral at Tyre as “God’s house”, and this phrase introduces a second development in the discourse connecting faith with church buildings. In the course of the fourth century, churches are increasingly understood as the principal places in which the faithful encounter God and Christ, and

¹³ Following Eusebius see e.g. Procop. *Aed.* 1.1.27, 61–4, 67 on Justinian’s Hagia Sophia in Byzantium with Pentcheva 2017. On the power of ritual to excite the cognitive-affective responses of Greek worshippers see e.g. Chaniotis 2014; Chaniotis notes the importance of location to ritual but does not discuss it.

¹⁴ Soz. *HE* 5.2. Cf. Soz. *HE* 2.5, 5.22 par. Soc. *HE* 7.17 (a baptistery prevents a man who has already been baptized from being rebaptized by draining itself of water); Ambros. *Hom. adv. Aux.* 10 (a church miraculously protects itself against armed men).

going to church, consequently, as the principal way in which the faithful practise their faith.¹⁵ Church buildings are described – often in passing, as if the idea is uncontroversial – as *the* places for prayer, repentance, and the strengthening of one's πίστις/*fides*.¹⁶ The faithful are noted as celebrating feast days, especially, in church.¹⁷ The contents of churches are characterized for the first time as sacred by virtue of belonging in church buildings, and not to be removed.¹⁸ John Chrysostom, in his sermons, is especially fond of metaphors for churches and what the faithful do in them: he calls one church a perfumery (*Hom 53 in Sanct. Ioh. Ev.* 1) making visitors smell sweeter, another a pharmacy (*Hom 1 in Gen.* 3) to which one comes to be dispensed medicine for the spirit.¹⁹

In Augustine's *Confessions* (8.2.4–5), a church building plays an active role in a conversion. The grammarian Victorinus is interested in Christianity and is studying scripture. His and Augustine's friend Simplicianus, however, tells him that he will not believe that Victorinus is a Christian, nor count him as one, until he has seen him in the “church of Christ”. Victorinus replies, mockingly but on sound theological principles, “Is it walls, then, that make a Christian?” One day, however, Victorinus says to Simplicianus, “Let us go to the church: I want to become a Christian.” Simplicianus is overjoyed; in church Victorinus' real instruction begins, and eventually he makes his profession of *fides ... in conspectu populi fidelis Romae*.²⁰ Apparently for Simplicianus, and perhaps Augustine, it is, in significant part, walls that make a *fidus*.

In 395, the increasing significance of church buildings attracts criticism by Jerome in a letter to Paulinus of Nola (*Ep.* 58). Jerome objects to the assumption that Christians need buildings (as he says Jews needed the temple²¹) as places in which to encounter God. “You are the temple of the Lord”, he insists, quoting Paul, and “the Holy Spirit lives in you” (3).²² *Fides* takes place between God and the faithful, wherever the faithful are; no building is needed. (One aim of

15 Though some writers, notably the Cappadocians, continue to use “church” almost always to refer to the community, not a building.

16 E.g. Aug. *Conf.* 5.9.17, 8.6.13–14, J. Chrys. *Hom.* 2.1 (on repentance), 3.19, 64, 82, *passim*; cf. Ambros. *Ep.* 18.10.

17 E.g. Athanasius *Ep. Fest.* 1.10 19 Aug. *Serm.* 254.5, 259.6, 264.1. Preachers regularly refer, in passing, to the fact that they are in church, and not infrequently to church decorations.

18 Ambros. *De off.* 2.28(143), *Hom. adv. Aux.* 5.

19 Though he can also criticize congregations for treating the church like a shop, without respect for its sanctity (1 Cor. hom. 36.340D).

20 On the church as the physical place to be instructed in *fides* cf. Aug. *Enchirid.* 5.

21 Cf. *Ep.* 52.10 to Nepotian: it was appropriate, and approved by God, for the Jerusalem temple to be highly decorated, but the poverty of Christ sets a different standard for Christians.

22 2 Cor. 6.16; Rom. 8.11.

this letter, to which we will return, is to persuade Paulinus that he need not make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem: if the faithful can encounter God anywhere, there is no advantage in travel.) Worse, according to Jerome, some people think that if churches are places of divine encounter, they should be decorated as lavishly as possible. There are, he says, better uses for wealth. “The true temple of Christ is the soul of the faithful person: decorate this, clothe it, make gifts to it, welcome Christ in it. What good are walls shining with jewels when Christ, in his poor, is in danger of starving to death?” (7).²³

Jerome’s reservations about church buildings are linked not only to his focus on the community but to his interest in the individual soul as the place where the worshipper meets God.²⁴ The evolution of discourses of interiority, which become increasingly important in the fourth century, is a topic in its own right, but we can infer from Jerome’s objections that, for some worshippers, on the contrary, faith increasingly involves new forms of exteriority. Building and decorating churches and making expensive gifts to them are germane to the divine-human relationship because worshippers have come to understand Christ as inhabiting the church and themselves as encountering Christ there, as well as, or even more than, in scripture, tradition, or faithful individuals.²⁵

Jerome’s view was evidently not widely shared. By the mid-fifth century it has become commonplace to refer to churches as the places where the faithful encountered God and Christ and practised their faith. In his pastoral sermons, for instance, Peter Chrysologus (bishop of Ravenna c.433–50) takes for granted that “making an act of faith” means going to church. In Sermon 6 on Psalm 99 he says that scripture tells us to go into God’s gates with praise. “This praise is the only confession which makes us pass through the gate of faith (*sola est confessio quae nos fidei facit introire per ianuam*)”. A little later: “as we enter [the gate of the Church] we can make a confession of faith; we can sing hymns in its atria; and then we can utter full praises in its inner sanctuary, where the whole fullness of the Godhead resides” (transl. Ganss 2014, 55–6, emended). Enacting one’s faith is equated with going to church. As people progress from the catechumenate through baptism to full membership of the community, they move symboli-

²³ Cf. Ambros. *Off.* 2.28(137); later he plays on the church as building/community by saying (140) that a church’s real treasures are its poor. Elsewhere (e.g. *Ep.* 60.12), Jerome can approve of decorations as an expression of devotion.

²⁴ For Jerome here *fides*, though interior, remains strongly relational. Augustine shifts the focus of interior faith (*fides qua*, e.g. *De Trin.* 13.2.5) further towards the individual’s experience, and describes the divine-human relationship more often with the language of love.

²⁵ No doubt making gifts to churches is also a new form of competitive euergetism, but Jerome does not dignify this with comment.

cally from the gate to the atrium to the inner sanctuary, and what the faithful do in church allows the fullest expression of their faith.²⁶ The revolution of the fourth century is firmly embedded in worshippers' thinking in both east and west.²⁷

In a letter of 403/4 to Severus (*Ep.* 32.5), Paulinus of Nola (who never visited Jerusalem, but does not seem to have shared Jerome's low view of churches), provides an inscription for a church which recalls the Jerusalem temple (ll. 3–4) and affirms the building as the location of Christian *fides*:

aula duplex tectis, ut ecclesia testamentis:
una sed ambobus gratia fontis adest.
lex antiqua novam firmat, veterem nova complet;
in veteri spes est, in novitate fides.
sed vetus atque novum conjungit gratia Christi;
propterea medio fons datus est spatio.

This atrium has two porches, as the Church has two testaments
 But the temple and the Church are each blessed with one fount.
 The old law gives strength to the new, the new completes the old;
 In the old was hope, in the new is faith.
 But old and new are joined by the grace of Christ:
 Which is why a fountain has been put in the space between.

(ll. 15–20, transl. Hamman 1961, 205).

The fountain represents the grace of God in Christ which joins the old and new covenants, and the whole complex of fountain, building and epigram celebrates God, Christ and *fides*. It marks the church complex as a place where *fides* takes place, not just for community members and those who attend liturgies and listen to sermons, but for any passer-by at any time. Faith here has become something which it is appropriate to adorn equally with architecture and literature, and we can infer that it is imagined as being confirmed and strengthened by this visual representation and tribute to itself.²⁸

Unlike Paulinus, the pilgrim nun Egeria did visit Jerusalem, in c.381–4. There she saw the sights and sites, took part in liturgies, and heard a set of cat-echetical lectures something like those delivered a few years earlier by Cyril,

²⁶ Cf. Valerian, *Hom.* 3.5: faith possesses the inmost hearts of the faithful when they assemble in church. On what faith means when it is most fully expressed by going to church see Morgan forthcoming.

²⁷ Cf. e.g. Leo, *Hom.* 274 on St. Peter's at Rome.

²⁸ The church complex was also highly decorated with symbolic and educational mosaics and paintings for the education of the illiterate (e.g. *Carm.* 27.552–98).

later Bishop of Jerusalem, of which a version survives. Both Cyril and Egeria are deeply interested in the role that church buildings play in the life of the faithful: above all at the festival of Easter.

Egeria (32.1–38.1) records in detail how, day by day in Holy Week, the bishop and his congregation move between the church on Mount Eleona (where Jesus' apocalyptic predictions are read at the place where they were traditionally made), the Imbomon (for the gospel reading of Jesus' arrest and trial), the Martyrium (incorporating the traditional site of the crucifixion) and the Anastasis (the site of the resurrection).²⁹ In this carefully choreographed sequence, myth and ritual, past and present, heaven and earth, historical place and ecclesial space converge to maximize the experience of those present. The faithful respond: Egeria describes (34, 36.3) how people groan, weep and lament at hearing the narrative of Jesus' betrayal; how they are moved by the readings, mourn and weep at the crucifixion (37.7).³⁰ She does not say in so many words that the surroundings increase the intensity of people's response, but that is surely their intention and effect. "It is wonderful, says Egeria (37.7), "how stricken and groaning everyone is at the [Good Friday] readings and prayers".³¹ One of the high points of the week is when the faithful line up to kiss the wood of the cross (36.5–37.2), which everyone believes (*credere*) brings them salvation, in the place where it stood at the crucifixion.

Egeria's is the earliest surviving account of the combined power of place and liturgy to generate an emotional response from Christian worshippers.³² Egeria does not say explicitly in this passage that *fides* is increased by the Holy Week liturgies, but other pilgrims describe pilgrimage as strengthening their πίστις/*fides* and, given the central importance of the Holy Week rituals to Egeria and

²⁹ The bishop begins the daily liturgy by blessing first the catechumens, then the faithful, from within the rail of the Anastasis, the meeting place of earth and heaven. Egeria is impressed not only by the buildings themselves and the movement between them, but by their ornaments, the "veils and hangings", lamps, and what are probably the clergy's gold vestments: e. g. 25.7, 8, 24.9, 36.2.

³⁰ *tantus rugitus et mugitus totius populi est cum fletu, ut fortisan porro ad civitatem gemitus populi omnis auditus est.*

³¹ Phrases such as "it is wonderful" and "you would hardly believe" become *topoi* of pilgrimage literature. They recall the reports of strange, faraway places and strange peoples in paradoxography (Morgan 2015, 161–3), but their aim is less to tease or toy with readers' credulity, as often seems to be the case in paradoxography, than to emphasize the value of locations and holy spaces.

³² Faith is at most weakly marked as an emotion in early churches (Morgan 2015, ch. 11), but is becoming more emotional through this period. Egeria does not distinguish between individual and group emotion, but in this context probably both are involved.

her fellow-worshippers, we can assume with some confidence that the development of emotion through the week is understood as matched by a development in faith.³³

Cyril's catechetical lectures were delivered during Lent 347/8 in the Constantinian church complex in Jerusalem, before the catechumens were baptized on Easter Sunday. *Procatechesis* 2 warns the catechumens that they should not approach baptism saying, "Let us see what the faithful are doing!" "Do you expect to see and not be seen?" he says. "God will be investigating you!"³⁴ A church is not a place where people go to satisfy their curiosity. It is not a place where they are in control. It is a place of mystery, divine encounter, risk and change.³⁵ The church here has become a unique environment: both safe (because God is there) and radically unsafe (because being baptized is only the beginning of one's encounter with God).³⁶ In telling catechumens that a church is a place where they can especially hope (or risk) to encounter God, Cyril affirms the opposite of what the hymnist said in the Odes of Solomon and early Christian theology claims about the ubiquity of God in creation.³⁷ He also goes beyond the vision of Eusebius: his church not only shares the role of miracles, preaching or scripture in spreading the gospel, but has a role of its own.³⁸

Cyril makes much of the choreography of baptism (Lecture 19.2, 9, 11). First, baptizands enter the baptistery, and there, facing west (away from the church and its altar, towards the "realm of darkness" (4)), are commanded to stretch out a hand and renounce Satan. Then they turn from west to east (9), towards the body of the church and the altar, to symbolize their turning towards light and paradise, and affirm their πίστις towards God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. After baptism they enter the church for the first time as insiders. The spatial or-

33 Below, pp. 87–88.

34 μή τις ὑμῶν εἰσέλθῃ λέγων· Ἄφες, ἰδωμεν τί ποιοῦσιν οἱ πιστοί· εἰσελθὼν ἴδω, ἵνα μάθω τὰ γινόμενα. Ἰδεῖν προσδοκᾷς, τὸ δὲ ὀφθῆναι οὐ προσδοκᾷς; καὶ νομίζεις ὅτι σὺ μὲν πολυπραγμονεῖς τὰ γινόμενα, Θεὸς δέ σου οὐ πολυπραγμονεῖ τὴν καρδίαν;

35 In the background to Cyril's thinking may be the tradition that certain locations, such as Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai, and the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple, are special places of divine encounter.

36 For Cyril (ch. 14), the period around baptism is one of special vulnerability and therefore special requirements to behave virtuously and fix one's mind on God. The faithful, who are secure in their relationship with God, can be more relaxed.

37 It also preserves orthodoxy (18.26).

38 On churches as changing those who visit them cf. J. Chrys. *Hom De paen.* 8.3, *Hom. St. Ioh. Apost.* 53.

ganization of the church reflects the progress of the faithful from baptism to faithful life and the celebration of the Eucharist.³⁹

By the late fourth century the activity of churches has become a complex discursive field. Churches can behave like portents or miracles to express the power of God, or like human followers of Christ and the words of scripture to teach both outsiders and insiders about the gospel and confirm its truth. Like human communities and the “bond of faith” itself, churches offer a – even the – context in which faith is articulated, practised, and developed.⁴⁰ They create a space in which worshippers encounter God and Christ and are changed by that encounter. The movement of enquirers, catechumens, baptizands and community members through church space is beginning to reflect their journey into and in “the faith” itself.

On one level, all these activities constitute an evolution within Christian thinking, extending to buildings the traditional actions of individual miracle-workers, evangelists, communities, written and oral traditions, and Godself.⁴¹ Evolution, however, can be revolutionary. The fourth century marks a major shift in Christian mentality, away from the idea of divine-human πίστις/*fides* as a relationship practised anywhere and everywhere, towards the idea of faith as practised above all through shared rituals in God’s house.⁴² The church has become the definitive locus and symbol of Christianity.

None of these developments is inevitable. Christians might, like Jerome, have followed scripture and tradition, and never created large, elaborate places of worship or never attributed such theological and ecclesiological significance to them. One reason for the change must be the continuing dominance of πίστις/*fides* in Christian mentality. For an aspect of the faith so visible and increasingly significant as churches not to be integrated into the discourse of faith would

39 Cf. Prud. *Cath.* 5, describing being in church at night. The hymnist asks Christ to restore light to his *fideles* at dawn (1–4). During the liturgy, the congregation looks up at the lamps as at the starry sky; the lights and church as a whole express the gratitude of the faithful for creation and embody God’s *fides* that light will come again (137–64). Like Eusebius’ cathedral, Prudentius’ church embodies the assurance of salvation which the faithful historically associate with scripture and tradition.

40 Morgan 2015, 221–3; cf. Cypr, *Ep.* 25.4–5: reading the letters of Paul and other writings ‘inflames’ his *fides*.

41 The attribution of evangelical activity to churches suggests that evangelism may have been a more significant activity in the fourth century than we usually assume.

42 This, of course, is not the whole story: other aspects of the faith in simultaneous evolution include ideas about orthodoxy, interiority, mysticism, fideism, and the increasing identification of socially role-specific forms of faith (see Morgan forthcoming).

surely have discomfited many theologians and worshippers. For other reasons, we need to look beyond Christianity, to the role of buildings in other cults.

3 The power of God's house

The reference to ritual, with its inescapable associations with Greek and Roman cult and Second Temple Judaism, raises an obvious question. Are the developments we have seen wholly internal to Christianity, or do they also have roots in the wider world? The idea that a church is God's or Christ's house on earth has obvious precedents throughout the ancient world. The idea that a building might preach, teach, convert or change potential or actual worshippers, is largely unexplored. We need not expect Greek, Roman or Jewish buildings specifically to be cultivating πίστις or *fides*, but the possibility that they act on worshippers in some fashion deserves consideration.⁴³

A large literature in classical history, art history and archaeology discusses what the impact of buildings, spaces and urban assemblages may have been on the inhabitants of ancient cities and visitors to them. This is a sophisticated and illuminating body of scholarship, but the focus of this essay are different. I am interested not in what modern scholars can imagine that the impact of churches or temples may have been, but with the presence or absence and content of explicit ancient discourse: what is said or not said by contemporary sources about buildings, and why. The advantage of keeping these two approaches separate is clear if, for example, we consider the difference in the volume of Greek and Roman discourse about the impact of temple buildings on viewers and that about the impact of statues, especially the effect of statues of gods on worshippers and visitors to shrines. The appearance of statues, their effect on those who view them, and their sometimes dramatic actions are discussed extensively by Greek and Latin writers.⁴⁴ The appearance and impact of buildings are men-

⁴³ Though there is some language of πίστις/*fides* between gods and Greek, Roman and Jewish worshippers (Morgan 2015, 128–42).

⁴⁴ See e.g. Pirenne-Delforge 2004, Mylonopoulos 2010, Bremmer 2013. The space Christians give to attacks on images correlates with the space Greek and Roman writers give to describing their impact on worshippers. Even when divine statues are described as having powers of attraction, it is unlikely that this language is a source for Christian writing about buildings, not least because explicitly attractive statues tend to be problematic in some way: see notably stories of the statue of Cnidian Aphrodite (Pliny, *HN* 36.20; Lucian, *Amor.* 3; *Imag.* 16, with the discussion of Nasrallah 2010, ch. 7). Though they are becoming increasingly common in this period, images in churches are not described as exercising power or attraction: perhaps a lingering effect of pre-Constantinian Christians' often-voiced objection to "graven images".

tioned rather rarely; the difference (though little discussed and outside the scope of this essay) must be significant. It is when we recognize what contemporary discourse deals explicitly with the effects of buildings on most ancient viewers or users, and in what terms, that we will best appreciate, first, the changes in Christian discourse in the fourth century, and, secondly, how these changes relate to the surrounding world.⁴⁵

The Jewish scriptures are a natural place to look for precedents for Christian thinking about churches. In the psalms and prophetic writings, however, though God is often closely identified with his temple and is said to act from the temple or the temple mount, no passage describes the temple building itself as a power for creating or strengthening, for instance, piety or righteousness.⁴⁶ The scriptural idea that the temple broadcasts God's light or glory is taken up by the Book of Revelation (21.23–6), where the New Jerusalem is said to have “no need for the sun ... The nations will walk by its light...”, but (in an echo of Psalm 43.3) the city's light is the glory of God, not a light of its own (21.23). Perhaps the nearest Jewish precedent for fourth-century Christian ideas is Josephus' *Antiquities* 8.225–6, where Josephus reports that King Jeroboam built a sanctuary at Bethel to rival King Solomon's new temple in Jerusalem because he was afraid that, if his people went to Jerusalem to worship, they might be captivated by the grandeur of the temple and the ceremonies performed in it and desert him.⁴⁷ Jeroboam seems to think that for a temple building to have an impact on viewers would be a mistake, and perhaps even that its grandeur risks replacing pious wonder at God with impious wonder at the works of humanity. His attitude is therefore the opposite of fourth-century Christians', but it does suggest that Josephus thought that buildings could have an effect on piety.

In her 1989 article on Eusebius' Oration at Tyre, Christine Smith traces the precedents in Greek and Latin literature for praise of buildings and cities and shows that, from Isocrates' *Panegyricus* to Libanius' *Antiochicus*, nothing in Greek or Latin panegyric parallels the idea that buildings have an intrinsic

⁴⁵ Temples are frequently described as *thaumata* for their architectural beauty and the wealth of their contents, but not for their effect on the piety or emotions of visitors. On the value of beautifying one's city, including temples, to impress visitors on a human level, see e.g. D.C. 47.15.

⁴⁶ Closest is perhaps Ps. 43.3, but it is God's light and truth that act here, not those of the building. At Ps. 48.1–2, Mount Zion is the “joy of all the earth”, and God is “renowned ... as a stronghold” within her defences (transl. NAB): here too God is identified closely with the temple but it is God's power that protects his people (cf. 84.2). Ezek. 43.1–4 emphasizes the glory of the temple but not its active power on worshippers or others. On going to the temple to see the “face of God” see Neis 2013 41–5, 73.

⁴⁷ In an echo of early Christian and post-70 Jewish thinking, Jeroboam also tells his people (8.227–8) that they do not need to go to Jerusalem because God can be worshipped anywhere.

power to attract worshippers or non-worshippers or alter their response to the gods. Casting the net more widely in Greek and Latin literature, however, produces a handful of partial parallels.⁴⁸

Temple buildings, like statues, not infrequently act as portents: for instance by opening, quaking, or catching fire.⁴⁹ In *On Superstition* (166e), Plutarch observes that one can claim asylum by touching a temple building as an alternative to a statue. Like statues, temple buildings can represent and even channel the god's power or protection. In the same essay (169e) Plutarch describes how the superstitious man approaches the temples of the gods as fearfully as he would the dens of bears or snakes or the lairs of sea monsters. He expresses his fear by over- or under-washing, extreme prostration to images of the gods, obsessive praying, panic, and even madness at the sound of ritual drumming. Here, though, the buildings are confined to representing their gods: the superstitious man is afraid of the gods and of buildings as places where he expects to encounter them.⁵⁰

Strabo (5.3.8), in his description of the Campus Martius in Rome, also attributes a degree of agency to buildings. Of one section he says that it is so thick with temples that they appear to be proclaiming the rest of the city incidental to their holiness (ὥς πάρεργον ἄν δόξαιεν ἀποφαίνειν τὴν ἅλλην πόλιν). Rich and famous Romans have responded by erecting family tombs in the area: the temples' declaration that this is a holy place has apparently affected the behaviour of worshippers.⁵¹ Vitruvius (*Arch.* 4.9) seems to confirm this possibility with a hint that architects can design places of worship to elicit a response from worshippers.

Let altars face east and always be placed lower than the images which will be in the temple, so that those who pray and sacrifice may look up to their divinity from various levels, as is appropriate to each person's god. The heights of altars should be arranged so that those to Jupiter and the gods of heaven are as exalted as possible, and those to Vesta, Earth and Sea are placed low.

48 The following examples focus on the early principate, but earlier sources would not significantly change the picture.

49 E.g. Diod. 17.10.2–5; D.C. 1.8.1–2, 17.60, 61.35.1; Plu. *Vit. Alex.* 3.5–6; Suet. *Aug.* 94.5.

50 Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.36.

51 Origen's Celsus (CC 7.62) claims that atheists (including Christians) cannot bear even to see temples, altars or images. Since atheists do not believe that the gods exist, this must be a reaction to the objects themselves: the antitype to what Celsus expects to be the reaction of the pious.

Vitruvius does not describe the response he aims to provoke (awe? confidence?) but he implies that altars and temple buildings play a role in reflecting, and even enhancing the experience of those who use them.⁵²

Perhaps the most promising precedents for Christian ideas, at first sight, are the concepts of *numen* or *genius loci*, which describe the religious feeling that moves worshippers unexpectedly in certain locations. Seneca, for example, describes to Lucilius (*Ad Luc.* 41.3) how when a person suddenly comes across a grove of ancient trees in a forest, or a natural cave under a mountain, “your soul will be shaken by a certain sense of reverence” (*animum tuum quadam religionis suspitione percutiet*) which indicates the presence of the divine.⁵³ If a sense of reverence is normal and appropriate in the presence of the divine, then no doubt Seneca expects people to feel it in temples too. It is not clear here, however, that it is the place itself, as opposed to the presence of the god, that has the impact on worshippers, while the fact that one can feel the presence of the divine in a natural environment suggests that the presence of human structures is not important. Recent scholarship, moreover, downplays the significance of *numen loci* in Roman and finds it even less important in Greek religiosity, making it an unlikely precedent for Christian thinking about churches.⁵⁴

These examples suggest that Christian thinking about churches has some roots in the world around it, but that these are, at best, slender and peripheral. Two Greek cults, however, offer more significant parallels. Initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries involves an elaborate ritual, carefully choreographed. As initiands enter the sanctuary, they are given a wreath and then led in procession to the great hall, the Telesterion. There the main rituals are conducted by priests, the senior of whom occupies a throne near the entrance to the Anaktoron, the most sacred part of the building. As neophytes leave the Telesterion they are given new clothes as a symbol of their new status (Dillon 1997, 156–7, 179; Myer 1999, esp. 17–45; Nielsen 2014, 200–203). The staging of initiands’ progress

52 Cf. Arr. 4.11.2; D.C. 52.35.4–6, both arguing in different ways that temples raised to men cannot make them divine and should not be used to attempt to influence potential worshippers. On temples as impressing potential worshippers (who in this case are disappointed by the actual cult) cf. Origen, *CC* 3.17. Lib., *Or.* 30.9–10, 23 makes a unique plea for the maintenance of Greek temples in villages, even when sacrifices are no longer offered in them, on the grounds that they are a focus for communities’ hopes and a place of rest. His argument, addressed to a Christian emperor, is surely influenced by Christian thinking.

53 Cf. Ov., *Met* 1.545; *Fasti* 2.641–2, 3.296, 5.673–4; Verg., *Aen.* 5.744 with Phillips 1976.

54 Fenech 2008; cf. Rose 1935 (Greeks are more likely to describe a place as containing a *daimon*; this does not necessarily imply a different understanding of the source of one’s experience).

through the building prefigures Cyril's account of baptizands' movements through a baptistery and church building in the course of baptism. One might object that what changes the status of initiands at Eleusis is less the spaces they move through than the liturgy during which they move, but a comment by Plutarch suggests otherwise. In *How a Man may become Aware of His Progress in Virtue*, Plutarch uses the mysteries as an image for initiation into philosophy:

Just as those who are being initiated crowd together at the beginning with noise and shouting, and shove each other, but when the rites are being performed and revealed they immediately attend, in awe and silence, so too at the beginning of philosophy: around its doors you will see a lot of noise and babble and boasting, and some vulgarly try to shove their way to a reputation by force; but the man who has got inside and seen a great light, as though a shrine had been opened, adopts a different attitude of silence and amazement, and "humbly and in good order attends on" reason as on a god (ὁ δ' ἐντὸς γενόμενος καὶ μέγα φῶς ἰδὼν, οἷον ἀνακτόρων ἀνοιγομένων, ἕτερον λαβὼν σχῆμα καὶ σιωπὴν καὶ καὶ θάμβος ὥσπερ θεῶι τῷ λόγῳ ταπεινὸς συνέπεται καὶ κεκοσμημένος). (81d–e)

At first it seems to be the rites that change the attitude of the initiand, but in the second half of the image the building itself, when one steps inside it, changes people too.

An even more striking pre-echo of fourth-century Christian thinking is inspired by the cult of Asclepius in the second century CE. Aelius Aristides' *Oration* 39.1–18 praises the well in the Pergamene temple of Asclepius. We should ornament this well with speech, he says, and address the saviour god whose work and creation it is (3). The well is in the most beautiful place on earth, in the most beautiful part in the sanctuary, and flows from the very foundations on which the temple stands, "so that this opinion and belief forces itself on everyone, that the water flows from a place that is healthy and gives health" (ὥστε παντί γε ταύτην τὴν δόξαν καὶ πίστιν ὑπεῖναι, ὅτι ἀπὸ ὑγιεινοῦ καὶ ὑγείας χορηγοῦ χωρίου φέρεται) (6). Aristides describes the well not just as expressing the god's power but as the god's co-worker and a miracle-worker in its own right (14). The water is as superior among waters as the god is among gods (18). He even uses *πίστις* language: the fountain creates a belief among worshippers in the healing powers of the water.

Here – whether or not Eusebius knew this speech – is surely an ancestor of Eusebius' preaching cathedral. Here too the patterns of explicit Greek and Roman discourse add something to our understanding of Greek, Roman, and Christian religiosity alike. On some level, common sense suggests that all Greek and Roman temples, sacred boundaries, altars, sacred groves and other cult sites probably had some effect on worshippers: framing and guiding their

experience as well as their ritual actions.⁵⁵ These effects, however, are rarely marked in contemporary sources as a matter of interest. They are explicitly marked almost entirely in connection with the cult of Asclepius and the Eleusinian Mysteries (and, admittedly, only rarely there). In most respects, mysteries and Asclepius cults are rather different from one another, but they have in common that – by healing worshippers, blessing them or paving their way to a happy afterlife – they significantly change some aspect of their adherents' current state or expectations of the future.⁵⁶ Cults, it seems, which are particularly interested in the power of buildings are those whose worshippers are most marked as being changed by participation in ritual. The houses of the gods have a distinctive status when entering them, sleeping in them or being initiated in them changes the worshipper's life.⁵⁷

Cults of Asclepius and mysteries, especially the Eleusinian Mysteries, share another quality: both are particularly disliked by Christians. Christians seem to have seen them as key competitors: Asclepius cults because they offer healing, mysteries because they offer blessedness in this or the afterlife, and both because, like Christianity, they are thought to change their worshippers' lives for the better.⁵⁸ This suggests another reason why fourth-century Christians begin to discuss the active power of church buildings. It may have been a rhetorical move to position churches as more powerful, more attractive and more transformative than popular competing temples and cults.

Church politics doubtless played a role in the development of Christian discourse too. Once churches were built, bishops and presbyters must have wanted the faithful to use them and be seen to use them, preferably more than other worshippers used nearby temples. They must also have wanted their congregations' help in improving them, which led them to encourage investment (spiritual and financial) by emphasizing churches' importance for the practice of faith. Clergy competed fiercely among themselves, so the more pilgrim sites advertised

55 The absence of ancient writing about the significance or impact of sacred boundaries is a longstanding puzzle: e.g. Bergquist 1967, 126.

56 I am grateful to Theodora Jim for preventing me from using “salvation” language here: her forthcoming monograph on σωτηρία makes clear that hope of salvation plays at most a modest role in mystery cults, and that such salvation as is invoked in the mysteries or cults of Asclepius is this-worldly and (given the Christian connotations of salvation) better translated as “help” or “protection”.

57 Participation in cult, of course, affects worshippers' lives regularly to some degree, through divine advice, protection or punishment; the difference here is one of degree rather than kind.

58 Remus 1983, 97 (noting that both non-Christians and Christians recognize the hostility between cults of Asclepius and Christianity); Bowden 2010, 24, 206–11; Gasparro 2014.

the benefits to faith of travel, the more the clergy of other churches will have emphasized that faith could equally well be practised at home.

Christian discourse about faith and churches is not, in principle, confined to churches in cities. In practice, though, it is urban churches – grand in scale, lavish in decoration (inside if not always outside), and locations of conspicuous euergetism – that Christians talk about, and it is their new ability to build such churches (together, no doubt, with the fact that many of the most spectacular temples of other cults are located in cities) that encourages Christians to talk about the power of buildings in the terms we have seen. The linking of churches with faith is essentially an urban phenomenon.

We can go further, and see it as political both in the sense that it takes place in *poleis* and in the sense that it becomes part of the discourse of politics.⁵⁹ From Constantine's reign onwards, Christians periodically took the opportunity to celebrate the Emperor as entrusted with the Empire by God and as Christ's representative on earth.⁶⁰ In that context, the *πίστις/fides* enacted towards God and Christ in church begins to converge with the *πίστις/fides* which loyal subjects traditionally offer to the Emperor in other locations (Morgan 2015, 77–89). A story of the Emperor Theodosius II, told by Socrates (*HE* 7.23.11–12) underlines this connection and vividly describes how political and ecclesial space sometimes converge to form one powerful locus of faith in God, Christ and the Emperor. Some time in the year 426, Theodosius was watching the sports in the Constantinopolitan hippodrome when he heard good news of the suppression of an attempted coup against him in Ravenna.

καὶ τὰ μὲν τῆς θεᾶς ἐπέπαντό τε καὶ ἡμέλητο· διὰ μέσου δὲ τοῦ ἵπποδρόμου πάντες συμφώνως ἅμα αὐτῷ εὐχαριστηρίως ψάλλοντες, ἐπὶ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐπορεύοντο· καὶ ὅλη μὲν ἡ πόλις μία ἐκκλησία ἐγένετο· ἐν δὲ τῷ εὐκτηρίῳ τόπῳ γενόμενοι ἐκεῖ διημέρευνον.

They immediately abandoned the spectacles; everyone trooped out of the hippodrome singing thanksgivings together and went to the church of God. And the whole city became one congregation, and when they had assembled in the church they spent the rest of the day there.

59 Not only were Christians unusual (though not unique) in the Roman empire in not having sizeable public places of worship; they were unusual in being, in their own eyes, a community and polity (βασίλεια, πολιτεία, ἐκκλησία, γένος, ἔθνος) without conspicuous meeting places. Christians' long self-identification as a political community, independent of their increasingly close links with the Empire, may be one reason why the basilica form was popular for fourth-century churches.

60 E.g. Eus. *Laus Const.* 2.1–3.1; cf. Ambros. *De fide* 1 prol. 2.

At a moment of high political emotion the city becomes a congregation, its principal church becomes a triumphant symbol of empire, and the city/church becomes a prime locus and expression of politico-religious faith.

4 Faith on pilgrimage

Early Christian pilgrimage is much discussed, and the idea that pilgrimage may be an expression of faith has not gone unnoticed, though it has not been explored systematically. The language of faith on pilgrimage has particular interest, however, in the context of Christian discourse about πίστις/*fides* as a whole.

Several fourth-century sources indicate that pilgrimage was undertaken both as an expression of faith and in the hope of increasing the quantity or quality of one's faith.⁶¹ When the pilgrim Egeria, for example, reaches Edessa (19.5), the local bishop, Eulogios, says, "My daughter, I can see what a long journey this is on which your *fides* has brought you ... So please let us show you all the places Christians should visit here." In 394, a group of seven monks from Palestine travelled down the Nile to see some of its holy sites. In the account of their journey, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (1.19) they say,

We have come ... from Jerusalem for the good of our souls, so that what we have heard with our ears we might perceive with our eyes – for the ears are naturally less trustworthy than the eyes – and because very often forgetfulness follows what we hear, whereas the memory of what we have seen is not easily erased but remains imprinted on our minds like a picture.

The monks are invoking a long tradition that autopsy is the best basis for trust or belief, including trust or belief in the divine and the truth of a tradition (Morgan (2015) 39–45, 241–6). They are confident that autopsy will improve their souls.

Pilgrimages are made over long and short distances to a huge range of destinations, but many of the best-known in this period are to Jerusalem and its environs. It is not only physical seeing that is enabled by travel. Jerome (*Ep.* 108.10.2) reports that during his protégée Paula's first visit to Bethlehem, real and spiritual vision blurred and she saw "with the eye of *fides* ... a child

⁶¹ The tombstone of Abercius of Hierapolis (Wischmeyer 1980, 24–6, cf. Thonemann 2012) records that Abercius made a journey to Rome and 'Πίστις everywhere led the way' (l. 11). In addition to being an early example of the personification of πίστις, this may be an early example of faith prompting a pilgrimage if we can call the aim of the journey pilgrimage in at least an informal sense. (The tombstone (ll. 6–9) reports that Abercius went to see the city, the Christian community and perhaps a physical as well as human church.)

wrapped in swaddling clothes, crying in the Lord's manger." Since seeing is regarded as an especially reliable basis for conviction, it is a reasonable inference that Jerome understands Paula's vision as both expressing and confirming her faith. The eye of faith is also evident throughout Egeria's journey. Everywhere she travels she finds beautiful and wonderful sites and churches, while all the monks she meets are helpful, kind, hospitable and informative.⁶² Monks receive pilgrims in their cells and bless them; Egeria's response is gratitude, thanks and admiration.⁶³ The landscape through which she travels, impelled by *fides*, is an idealized one, in which faith is everywhere illustrated and enacted.⁶⁴

The eye of faith can even be extended beyond the person who travels. Egeria explains (5.8) that she writes her account of her travels in order to help her sisters visualize all the places where the events of scripture occurred. The implication is that their *fides*, like hers, is hungry for direct experience of the place, and is confirmed and fortified by what she sees.⁶⁵

As we have seen, not everyone thinks pilgrimage either necessary or desirable. Much of Jerome's Letter 58 to Paulinus is an attack on the idea of pilgrimage:

I do not presume to enclose the omnipotence of God within a tight boundary, nor to restrict One whom heaven cannot contain to a small patch of earth. [But] every believer (*credens*) is judged not by the variety of places he inhabits but according to the merit of his *fides*; and true worshippers worship the Father neither in Jerusalem nor on Mount Gerizim, because 'God is spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4.24)....' (58.3)

Those, says Jerome (3), who say, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!" (Jer. 7.4) should listen to the words of Paul: "You are the temple of the Lord" (2 Cor. 6.16). "Access to the courts of heaven is as easy from Britain [the farthest, least spiritual place he can imagine] as it is from Jerusalem..." (3).⁶⁶ "The true temple of Christ is the soul of the faithful person", he insists (7).

⁶² Paula, according to Jerome (*Ep.* 108.14) goes further and throws herself at the feet of the "saints" she meets on pilgrimages, seeing Christ in each one.

⁶³ E.g. 3.1, 3.7, 5.12, 11.1.

⁶⁴ Egeria and the earlier fourth-century *Itinerarium Burdigalense* (e.g. 594, 595, 599), like mainstream Greek and Roman writers, regularly mark the places and monuments they visit as wonders, without describing them as having a specific effect on pilgrims.

⁶⁵ Touch is another sense which is often regarded as fundamentally trustworthy (Morgan 2015, 49, 41–2); Egeria also attests to the importance of touching to the faithful, who pick up stones in places they visit (V3), and can even bite off a piece of the true cross in their enthusiasm (37.2).

⁶⁶ Between the time of Hadrian and Constantine, the site of the resurrection was a cult of Jupiter, but "polluting our holy places" had no effect on our "*fides* in the passion and in the resurrection" (3).

The length at which he writes is powerful testimony to how deeply involved both holy places and buildings and pilgrimage to places and buildings had become as an expression and a means of developing faith.

Gregory of Nyssa's Letter 2 to the otherwise unknown Censitor (PG 461009–46) offers a series of reasons not to go on pilgrimage, especially not to Jerusalem, which include the dangers of travel (particularly for women) and the prevalence of theft, murder, and other moral and practical dangers in the Holy Land (2.6–7). The Holy Spirit, he says, is everywhere, and Christians (2.8–9, 16–17, 19) receive the gifts of the Spirit in proportion to their πίστις, not according to their location. Nor has travel to Jerusalem increased his own πίστις towards Christ (2.15).⁶⁷ Gregory, like Jerome, strengthens our impression that, for many by the late fourth century, πίστις/*fides* was increasingly connected with place and, in particular, that it was thought to be most fortified and to yield the most spiritual gifts in Jerusalem.

The discourse connecting πίστις/*fides* and pilgrimage is closely related to that connecting faith and churches, but has its own *color*. Pilgrims are impelled to go on pilgrimage by faith and holy sites are imagined as places where πίστις or *fides* is justified or confirmed and strengthened; where God, Christ and the Spirit are especially encountered and their gifts received. Several sources refer to the extravagant joy which the first sight of Jerusalem stimulates in pilgrims looking forward to the gifts they may receive there (Greg Nyss. *Ep.* 3.3; Joh. Ruf. *Vit. Petr. Hib.* 38). By no means all pilgrimage sites, of course, are in cities, but, as in the case of churches, some of the most significant and most celebrated are..

Travel enriches the imaginative participation of the faithful in the stories of Jesus and his followers. It can never have become (at any period) indispensable to faith, because it can never have been possible for all the faithful to travel.⁶⁸ The enthusiasm, though, with which increasing numbers of people did travel significant distances, to Jerusalem and other places, and report on their travels, must also have fuelled interest in smaller scale journeys such as visits to local shrines. Between them, going to church and going on pilgrimage must have

⁶⁷ Cf. *Ep.* 17.1–14; on similar arguments in other fourth-century authors see Brakke 2001. Augustine, notoriously, in *CD* does not explicitly discuss pilgrimage or the importance or otherwise of the holy places of Jerusalem, but the book assumes that no earthly city can be an ideal context for faith, so his view is presumably close to that of Jerome and Gregory.

⁶⁸ Neither did church buildings, though from the fourth century it must have been increasingly possible for most worshippers to reach one. Canon 21 of the Council of Elvira (if this council did take place in c. 305/6, which is uncertain), provides for the punishment of those who do not go to church for three consecutive Sundays, but only in cities.

helped to strengthen faith in local as well as global networks of journeys, places and spaces of faith.

5 The desert a city

Desert monasticism may seem an unlikely coda to an essay about faith and the city. Monasticism, however, had a complex relationship with cities, and the connection between cities, monasticism and πίστις/*fides* deserves a brief mention.

Not all monks lived in deserts. An anonymous visitor to fourth-century Oxyrhynchus observes that it hosts so many monks that the whole city has been turned into one great Christian ἐκκλησία. “It is impossible to do justice to the marvels which we saw there. For the city is so full of monasteries that the very walls resound with the voices of monks ... all the citizens as a body are catechumens and πιστεύοντες, so that the bishop is able to bless the people publicly in the street” (*Lives of the Desert Fathers* 5.1–4, transl. Russell 1981, 67.). At Oxyrhynchus, the faithful have turned the whole city into a church.

The lifelong quest of monks who retreat to the desert is to practise and perfect their faith (usually glossed in hagiographies as faithfulness or obedience; see Morgan 2015, *passim*). In the desert, however, some monks immediately form quasi-cities. Athanasius’ *Life of Antony* (14 (13)–15 (14)) tells how Antony inspired so many others to become monks that “the desert was turned into a city by monks” who, having left their earthly cities, registered for citizenship in heaven.⁶⁹ This passage is usually read as ironic, even paradoxical, but the discourse we have seen about faith and cities suggests another interpretation. By the middle of Antony’s life, cities and discourses of faith are becoming deeply intertwined. Perhaps, for some monks, building a city in the desert is not merely an unfortunate accident, but an expression of the importance of cities as places where faith can be developed. Others (including Antony himself (*Vit.* 49) are torn between the monastic city and the call of solitude, and repeatedly move further into the desert, away from their communities, only to be pursued by fellow monks and others who want to visit them (presumably to confirm and develop their own faith and perhaps to create a new city). Cities are so ingrained in late antique thinking, as environments both natural for human beings and potentially ideal, that it comes naturally to writers of the fourth century and later to think of faith, even extreme and world-denying faith, as taking place

⁶⁹ *Vit. Ant.* 14 (the political language is characteristically Greek: the Coptic version says simply that the desert filled with monks); cf. 21 (the desert as ideal city).

in some type of city, and the city as a natural, even the natural environment for faith.

6 Conclusion

In the modern western world, religious buildings (across many traditions) and places with religious associations are widely seen as attractive, numinous and potentially transformative. By their location, their architectural beauty and/or their associations, they speak both to the curious and to the reverent. Once inside, visitors expect to find them mysterious and powerful. Some visitors do not expect to remain fully in control of their experience; some hope to encounter the divine and in some way to be inspired or changed.

This cluster of discourses is substantially the creation of fourth century urban Christians.⁷⁰ The idea, explicitly articulated, that church buildings, places of pilgrimage, and certain other spaces have the ability to create, alter and increase πίστις/*fides* springs into being and spreads with remarkable speed in the years after 313. Fourth-century churches and other significant locations become central to the thinking of many, if not all worshippers. Church buildings attract ἄπιστοι to themselves, taking over some of the traditional functions of miracles, preaching, scripture, and the example of the faithful in drawing people to Christ. They act as a proof of the reliability of revelation and scripture, giving traditional assurances an encouragingly solid superstructure. They take catechumens step by step from curiosity to their affirmation of faith at baptism and beyond. Movement within them differentiates the faithful from the unbaptized and clergy from lay people. For the first time, the faithful expect to encounter God, Christ in certain physical locations, and churches become the principal places in which the faithful practise the complex of attitudes, relationships, and actions that constitute faith.⁷¹ In places of biblical and historical significance, above all in Jerusalem, churches and symbolic locations combine with stories of the past in a powerful fusion of heavenly and earthly space, history and theology. Travel to such places becomes increasingly explicitly an expression, test, and proof of faith: a new way of affirming the gospel.

⁷⁰ Later centuries draw periodically on it to reinvent churches as places that preach, teach, convert, challenge and deepen the faith of the faithful (see e.g. Whyte 2018 on the nineteenth century, though he does not note what are surely the patristic roots of the thinking of the Tractarians and their followers).

⁷¹ Cf. Lact. *De mort. persec.* 2.19–30 on St. Peter's, Rome as *templum fidele*.

By manipulating the emotions of the faithful, not least through liturgy, churches and other significant places help to make πίστις/*fides* a more emotional and interior concept, experienced more intensely in the heart and mind of the believer (Yasin 2012). We have barely touched here on the growing importance of liturgy and liturgical choreography, but Cyril's Mystagogical Lecture 23, on the Eucharist, hints at a developing discourse of location-specific ritual and πίστις. When you are invited to the communion table, says Cyril (23.20), do not judge what you receive with your physical palate but with πίστις, because you are bidden to taste not physical bread and wine but the body and blood of Christ. There are signs that the Eucharist is becoming a more mystical and more fideistic religious experience in the new, vast, dim, decorative, fragrant, lamplit halls of the great fourth-century churches. In extreme cases or at moments of high emotion, meanwhile, whole cities can become identified with congregations or churches as locations of faith, emphasizing in Christian minds the takeover of the earthly Roman empire by God and the reorientation of the earthly empire to God through faith. The biblical and theological objections even of such eminent authorities as Gregory, Jerome and Augustine had no power to stem the tide of change.

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