PART I

Introduction

CHAPTER I

Understanding religious identity in fourth-century Antioch

IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS INTERACTION IN ANTIOCH

I hate and I turn away from such a woman for this reason above all others, because she uses the name of God as an insult and because, while she says she is a Christian, she displays the actions of a Greek.

(John Chrysostom, *Ad Illum. Catech.* 2.5
(*PG* 49.240) = Harkins, *Baptismal Instruction* 12.59)[1]

By the gods, whom you have admired for a long time and now admit to, exceed Hyperchius' own father's goodwill towards him and imitate my own.

(Libanius, *Ep.* B.74.5 (F.804))[2]

The question of religious identity lies at the heart of understanding religious interaction. Talking about religious interaction means first saying something about the religious entities that we see to be taking part in that interaction. As Markus noted long ago, rather than try to assess how Christianized fourth-century society was, we need to 'set ourselves the task of tracing the shifting boundaries drawn by late antique people which determined how far their society measured up to what they saw as properly Christianised society'.[3] At the same time, because what it means to be the member of one religion can only be constructed in relation to what it means to be a member of another religion, religious interaction is always a

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[1] Where possible I have used modern editions of the text of John Chrysostom's writings, usually in the Sources chrétiennes series. Otherwise, I have used the text reproduced in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*.
[2] Throughout this work, I have used Foerster's text of Libanius' writings (F.). When I have mentioned a letter for which there is a translation into English by Norman or Bradbury I have marked it with N. or B. respectively. Both these translations and existing translations of Chrysostom's work have been very useful in making my own translations. In this current work, however, all translations of more than a few words are my own, except occasional examples where I adapt those found in the Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers and the Fathers of the Church series.
[3] Markus 1990: 8.

prerequisite for the existence of religious identities.[4] Religious identities do not have an objective existence that naturally arises out of an essential and distinct package of religious traits. Rather, they result from boundaries that are constructed by human actors, who choose to identify themselves with some people and differentiate themselves from others.[5] Understanding religious interaction thus also means understanding the complex processes by which religious identities, religious boundaries and religious differences were constructed where they did not automatically exist. In fact, the assumption that everyone in late-antique society even thought in terms of religious identities must itself be scrutinized. Some late-antique people might not have chosen to see religious interaction as interaction between two mutually opposed and strongly bounded entities. Instead, they might have played up the similarities across religious boundaries, emphasized areas of compromise and allowed people to switch easily between religious allegiances. This means that we need to think about religious interaction in late antiquity not simply in terms of how people defined what it meant to be Christian or an adherent of Graeco-Roman religion. We also need to think of it in terms of how far late-antique individuals wanted to work with permanent religious identities in the first place. In exploring religious interaction in fourth-century Antioch I shall thus avoid a descriptive approach that seeks to measure how far Antioch was or was not Christianized, as scholars have usually done in the past, implicitly at least.[6] Instead, I shall seek to understand how people in the city might have defined religious identity and whether they even thought in terms of clear-cut religious identities. To do this I shall turn to the works of the Christian preacher John Chrysostom and the teacher and orator Libanius, who both lived and worked in Antioch in the mid to late fourth century.

John Chrysostom was a priest and preacher in the city of Antioch between 386 and 397. He used his many writings to outline what it meant to be truly Christian and to present an ideal image of strong Christian identity. In the passage quoted at the head of this chapter we see Chrysostom directly contrasting a woman's claim to be Christian with what he considered to be her 'Greek' behaviour in using amulets. Chrysostom's concern here was

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[4] Throughout this work I shall be using the term 'identity' in the constructionist and relational model as used by social theorists following Frederick Barth.

[5] Barth 1969: 14 and Jenkins 2003: 4. On the construction of similarity within groups, see Jenkins 2003 80, 90 and 104–19 and Cohen 1985.

[6] See Soler 1999: 15–27. Soler's 1999 PhD dissertation was published as a book in the final stages of writing this current work so my references throughout this work are to the original dissertation. Even the original came into my hands only at a late stage and I was not able to incorporate it as fully as I would have liked.

primarily to clarify one aspect of Christian identity – Christians should not use amulets – but he could only do so by making a contrast with Greekness in his definition of the use of amulets as Greek. This is because constructions of identity must always be relational, in that they are constructed from the marking out of differences from others.[7] Neither Christian nor Greek nor Jewish identity existed essentially or objectively in Chrysostom's world. Rather, Chrysostom continually had to construct them out of a situation where many practices were shared by people whatever their religious allegiance. In this, Chrysostom was following a long Christian tradition of constructing Christian identity. As Lieu has shown, Christian writers constructed 'Christianity' from a direct contrast with 'Judaism' and 'paganism', despite the many similarities shared between the religions.[8] They sought, as Boyarin has pointed out, to 'eradicate the fuzziness of borders, semantic and social, between Jews and Christians and thus produce Judaism and Christianity as fully separate (and opposed) entities . . .'[9] Making strong assertions of religious identity was Christianity's way of bringing itself into existence, and Christians had to work at this continually. In the second century AD the North African Christian Tertullian was still struggling with this problem, as the earliest Christians had done. In his treatise *On Idolatry* we see him asserting appropriate Christian behaviour through comparison with what he defined as idolatry or the behaviour of Gentiles. He argues that the 'servants of the god' or the faithful (*fideles*) should not share in any of the 'dress', 'food', 'rejoicings', or any other aspect of life of the 'Gentiles (*nationes*)' (Tertullian, *De Idolatria* 13.1).[10] Christian authors after Tertullian continued to have to deal with these problems. Each Christian leader or writer might use different characteristics to define what it meant to be Christian or Jewish, but they were all concerned with this differentiation and consistently sought to maintain the boundary between Christianity and other religions over time.[11]

What was new in the fourth century was the scale on which these ideas about Christian self-definition could be propagated. The much larger audiences that filled the new basilica-style churches from the time of Constantine onwards opened the Christian message to a mass-market. This meant that questions about Christian identity, which before had been confined to smaller, more exclusive groups, were now becoming more and more central to social life. The increased centrality of Christianity to Roman society

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[7] Barth 1969: 14. See also Jenkins 2003: 93 and Eriksen 1993: 38.   [8] Lieu 2004.
[9] Boyarin 2004: 2 and also 1–33. On early imperial Antioch, see Zetterholm 2003: 53–74.
[10] The whole work is full of comparisons between heathen and Christian behaviour.
[11] Lieu 2004: 62–146.

in turn made questions of religious identity more pertinent to Christian leaders than they had ever been.[12] Precisely because Christians were losing their position as a persecuted minority, excluded from mainstream society, they had to work harder to define what it meant to be Christian. It is in these terms that we must see Chrysostom's attempts to outline what it meant to be Christian in opposition to Greekness: he was attempting to construct a distinct Christian identity in a situation that challenged such a construction. Despite years of Christian attempts to assert such categories, Chrysostom had to continually define and reinforce his own particular versions of them. As external observers, *we* can see that Chrysostom had to construct Christian and Greek identities where they did not objectively exist. However, it is clear that *he* saw both being Christian and being Greek as fixed identities. It is also clear that he saw religious interaction as inter-action between fixed and clear-cut identities. For Chrysostom, people had to choose whether they were a Christian or a Greek and there was to be no space for ambiguity between the two because religious identity had to be displayed visibly in every action at all times.

The Libanius quotation given at the head of this chapter reveals a very different approach to issues of religious identity and religious allegiance. Libanius was an orator and teacher in Antioch between 354 and the early 390s. He was clearly an adherent of traditional Graeco-Roman religion, but his approach to this religious allegiance and to religious issues generally was very different from that of John Chrysostom. References to religion and religious allegiance appear far less frequently in Libanius' writings than they do in Chrysostom's writings. When they do appear, they rarely have as their goal the construction of religious identities. In the letter quoted above, we see Libanius writing to his friend Modestus 2 soon after Modestus had been appointed prefect of Constantinople by the emperor Julian.[13] The main purpose of this letter was for Libanius to express his delight that Modestus was planning to help an ex-pupil of his, Hyperchius, become a senator in Constantinople (something in which Hyperchius eventually failed). It is only at the very end of the letter and almost in passing that we see any mention of Modestus' religion. We see Libanius referring to the change of religious allegiance that Modestus had undergone between the reigns of Constantius and Julian: once Julian had come to power, Modestus was able

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[12] Markus 1990: 27–44.
[13] On their friendship, see *Ep*. B.61 (F.583 of 358). Where numbers appear after a name in this fashion, they refer first to Jones's numbering in *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* and second to Petit's numbering in his *Les fonctionnaires dans L'œuvre de Libanius: analyse prosopographique*. Where there is only one number, this will refer to *PLRE*.

to 'admit to' or 'confess' the gods that he had only been able to 'admire' in private in the reign of Constantius. This brief reference shows that Libanius was concerned, to some degree at least, with the religious allegiance of individuals and that he saw it as something worth mentioning. Living in the fourth century, he could not help being aware that there were now different religious options open to people, and different gods that they could worship. The attempts by Christian leaders to impose distinct religious categories on social life had had some impact on society, and Libanius must have been aware that different emperors could hold different religious allegiances. The whole question of religious differentiation and categorization must thus have become relevant for Libanius in a way that it had not been for adherents of Graeco-Roman religion in earlier centuries.[14] But he refers to religious allegiance rather differently, much more obliquely than the Chrysostom passage: he does not say that Modestus had once been 'Christian' but under Julian had become 'pagan' or 'Greek', as Chrysostom might have done. Instead, he uses the more vague way of referring to the situation as a shift from admiring the gods in private to admitting them openly. Libanius also does not see the discrepancy between what Modestus truly felt religiously and his outward appearance under Constantius as evidence of his failure to live up to a distinct religious identity, as Chrysostom would do. The reason for these differences is that Libanius mentions religious allegiance not to construct an ideal religious identity but in order to make a specific point. To see this we have to understand the context of the letter to Modestus a little better.

Modestus had been 'count of the east' (*comes orientis*) under Constantius (358–62) but continued to be favoured by Julian and was made prefect of Constantinople by him when he became emperor. Libanius sent the letter under discussion to Modestus in Constantinople in the winter of 362/3, soon after he had taken up this position of prefect. In this context of the changeover from a Christian emperor to one who adhered to Graeco-Roman religion, we can see why it might suddenly become relevant to refer to Modestus' religious allegiance. Modestus' high position under Constantius and the fact that he had not been able to admit his admiration of the gods during this time might have put his loyalty to Julian and his religious policies into question, at least among some supporters of the new emperor. The reference to Modestus as someone who had always admired the gods, even under Constantius, could be used to counteract these doubts. It was a way to imply Modestus' credentials as a worshipper

[14] North 2005: 137.

of the gods and to recommend him to the supporters of Julian who were
based in Constantinople. As it was common in antiquity for people to read
letters aloud or to pass them on to others, Modestus could use this letter
from Libanius as a way to silence doubts that people might have had about
his religious loyalties. In referring to Modestus' religious allegiance in this
way, Libanius was not trying to define what it meant to be a worshipper
of the gods or to make a permanent statement about Modestus' religious
identity. Rather, he was using the reference in a practical sense in order
to achieve a specific purpose and to make a specific point about Modes-
tus (and I paraphrase): 'Modestus may have looked like a Christian under
Constantius but he is really one of us.' What is clear from this example is
that Libanius himself was much less interested than Chrysostom in creat-
ing permanent religious identities. Instead, his use of references to religious
allegiance to make a point is more akin to the modern ideas about iden-
tity as something that can be constructed. In such a model, individuals
can choose or change social identities in order to gain the best material
outcome for themselves.[15] Religious identity is something that can be sup-
pressed or expressed, depending on whether it is stigmatized, useful, or
meaningful to do so at a particular time.[16] What we can thus suggest is that
Libanius, in comparison to Chrysostom, did not see religious interaction
in terms of interaction between well-defined religious identities. Rather, he
allowed people a more flexible approach to religious interaction in which
they could play down their religious allegiance in certain circumstances in
order to ease relations with others and then emphasize it again when it was
useful or necessary to do so.

The very differences between Libanius' and Chrysostom's approaches to
religious identity and religious allegiance are what make them so useful.
If we look at Chrysostom's writings, we see a world in which issues of
religious identity were of the greatest importance and in which he wanted
religious interaction to be between a number of distinct and clearly defined
religious identities. If we focus only on his writings, we would go away
with a one-sided view of the religious situation. As Markus points out
in his seminal 1990 work, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, 'the image of
society neatly divided into "Christian" and "pagan" is the creation of late
fourth-century Christians, and has been too readily taken at face-value by
modern historians'.[17] In fact, constructions of identity rarely reflect the
situation on the ground. As Erikson puts it, 'empirically, social identities

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[15] Barth 1969: 24–6; S. Jones 1997: 72–4; Eriksen 1993: 45–6.
[16] S. Jones 1997: 76.   [17] Markus 1990: 28.

appear fluid, negotiable, situational and analogic (or gradualist)'.[18] In actual
existence people could hold a religious identity to some degree, almost
completely, or very little. They might lay claim to two or more social
identities simultaneously and so hold multiple or overlapping identities.[19]
We thus need to question how far Chrysostom's categorization of the world
into clear-cut religious identities translated into the practice of individuals.
Attempts at boundary construction are often found in situations where
individuals continue to interact across those boundaries and we need to
recognize the significance of this.[20] As Lieu says, 'the rhetoric of difference
should not blind us to the threads of continuity . . . the challenges of
the ambiguities of actual living'.[21] We need to be able to understand that
Chrysostom's audiences may have been acting in very different ways to
those outlined in his preaching. While calling themselves Christian they
may not have defined this as strictly as Chrysostom did and may not have
seen it as exclusive of the same behaviours as he did. It is for this reason
that it is so important to look at Libanius' writings in conjunction with the
preaching of Chrysostom.

Libanius shows us someone making use of notions of religious allegiance
and labelling in a more practical and less ideal way. Studying Libanius'
approach to religious allegiance alongside Chrysostom's approach will give
us a more subtle picture of the religious situation of the fourth century,
one that does not have to rely on a notion of clear-cut identities interact-
ing with each other. It allows us to see the same religious situation from
two very different points of view and to understand the different models
of religious interaction that were circulating within fourth-century soci-
ety. What might have been taking place was interaction between different
approaches to religious identity and religious allegiance. On the one side
were those who sought to construct religious identities as distinct and fixed.
This included Christian preachers such as Chrysostom but also the emperor
Julian who, during his brief reign, sought continually to make people decide
on their religious identity. On the other side we see those who accepted
the importance of religious allegiance in the fourth century, but used it
in looser and more practical ways. This included men such as Libanius
and Themistius but also, I would like to suggest, the majority of ordinary
people in fourth-century society and even perhaps large sections of John
Chrysostom's audiences. While the voice of the former group might appear
stronger due to the number of surviving Christian texts, I shall argue that it

[18] Eriksen 1993: 158.   [19] Eriksen 1993: 66–7, 154 and 156–8.
[20] Barth 1969; Eriksen 1993: 11–12 and 37–8; Jenkins 2003: 92–3.   [21] Lieu 2004: 177.

is actually the voice of the latter that we should favour. This new approach allows us to revise how we think about processes of Christianization. Rather than measure how far the fourth century was becoming Christian, we can ask what impact Christian ideas about the importance of religious identities had on society. We can ask which approach to religious allegiance was more representative: that seen in Chrysostom's sermons or that exemplified by Libanius' writings. We can also assess how far we see religious interaction in the fourth century in terms of conflict between religious identities, as Chrysostom would have it, or in terms of coexistence between people who were very often willing to play down religious differences, as Libanius presents the situation.

There is just one last problem that I need to raise: the terminology to use to describe the different religious allegiances that we see in the fourth century. Historians have long been dissatisfied with simply adopting the term 'pagan', because it is a Christian category that flattens out the diversity of religious experience of those in the Graeco-Roman world.[22] However, they have also had to acknowledge that we do need terminology if we are to talk about the religious situation.[23] Some scholars have thus sought to develop alternatives to the term 'pagan', such as 'polytheist',[24] while others have continued to rely on 'pagan' because they feel we have no viable alternatives.[25] I myself do not find 'polytheist' a useful replacement as it implies a stark contrast with Christianity, namely that all Christians are monotheists while all non-Judaeo-Christians worship many gods, which is questionable.[26] I do have some sympathy with those who use the term 'pagan' and can see that on many occasions it is the best shorthand for all those who did not adhere to Judaism or Christianity in some form. However, in the context of the current work I shall avoid it because it does suggest a Christian view that the world is permanently drawn into distinct, all-defining religious identities. Because I am taking a constructionist approach to religious identity, I would also like to give some sense, at least, of how people at the time were talking about these issues, rather than simply to find terms that are convenient for me to use. Thus, when talking about Chrysostom's writings, I shall use his label of 'Greek' to describe those who were not Jews or Christians. When referring to Libanius' writings, the situation is not so easily resolved as he does not have a simple set of vocabulary for those who share his own religious allegiance, as we shall see in chapter 4. The

[22] North 2005: 127–8.
[23] Fowden 1991: 119 and 1993, 44 and 100; Trombley 1994: ix–x; and Ando 1996: 171–207.
[24] Fowden 1993: 44 and 100.   [25] Ando 1996: 175–6. See also North 2005: 127.
[26] North 2005: 135–6.

wide range of terminology that he uses to refer to those who worshipped the Graeco-Roman gods would make for some very unwieldy sentences. When discussing Libanius' writings I shall thus use the terms 'adherent of Graeco-Roman religion' or 'of traditional religion' (or similar phrases) as shorthand for his terminology. Although this is no more ideal than any other solution to the problem of terminology and will probably at times sound a little clumsy, it does at least constantly remind us that there is a problem and that it needs to be thought about.

Generally, problematization of the term 'Christian' is less common than that of the term 'pagan'. 'Christian' is easier to accept because Christians themselves used it as a self-referential term. I will use it in the chapters on Libanius, even though Libanius does not use it himself. However, I do need to acknowledge that it flattens the variety that can be seen in fourth-century Christianity and that in using it I will often only be referring to the branch of Nicene Christianity represented by Chrysostom. I shall also use the term 'Jew' throughout. This is probably the least problematic of the labels for religious allegiance, although again we need to be aware that there were many different kinds of Jews and that there are problems about whether the label is purely a religious one.

In order to understand the different approaches to religious allegiance exemplified in Chrysostom and Libanius we need to devote some time to exploring how they wrote about religion. *How* each wrote about religion and *what* each wrote were intimately connected and we need to gain a better understanding of this relationship. This will provide a stronger basis on which to decide whose approach to religious allegiance was more successful and more representative in the fourth century: that of John Chrysostom or that of Libanius.

CHRYSOSTOM AND PREACHING AS DISCOURSE AND IDEOLOGY

One of the primary purposes of Chrysostom's sermons was to construct and re-emphasize the defining features of Christian identity. Through his preaching he educated his audience about what it meant to be Christian and imposed on them Christian ways of thinking about the world. This was the case whether he was giving exegesis of the writings of Saint Paul or the Old Testament, trying to shape his audience's moral values or trying to convince them of theological points. When Chrysostom preached about the appropriate gender relations for Christians, or about proper attitudes to self-display and ostentation he was ultimately laying down guidelines for