



---

Volume 59 | Issue 1

Article 40

---

2016

## Beggiani's "Early Syriac Theology, with special reference to the Maronite tradition" (Book Review)

Jonathan Loopstra  
*Capital University*

*The Christian Librarian* is the official publication of the Association of Christian Librarians (ACL). To learn more about ACL and its products and services please visit [//www.acl.org/](http://www.acl.org/)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl>

---

### Recommended Citation

Loopstra, Jonathan (2016) "Beggiani's "Early Syriac Theology, with special reference to the Maronite tradition" (Book Review)," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 59: Iss. 1, Article 40.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.1191>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Christian Librarian by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

field, advice for subject specialists on how to get started with digital humanities in their institutional context, and real-world examples and case studies of successful digital humanities initiatives.

The book is divided into four parts and fourteen chapters with more than 27 contributors, offering advice, both theoretical and practical, from a variety of institutional contexts. While the volume is primarily geared toward subject specialists/bibliographers and special collections professionals any librarian, or humanities scholar, interested in learning more about the particulars of digital humanities will find much to enjoy in this book. Additionally, readers will also be pleased to know that the book is available as an Open Access publication.

This book is recommended for graduate students, faculty, and professionals.

---

**Early Syriac Theology, with special reference to the Maronite tradition,**  
by Chorbishop Seely Joseph Beggiani. Revised edition. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014. 192 pp. \$29.95. ISBN 9780813227016

*Reviewed by Jonathan Loopstra, Associate Professor of History,  
Capital University, Columbus, OH*

This is the second edition of Chorbishop Seely Joseph Beggiani's *Early Syriac Theology*. The first edition was published in 1983. As Beggiani explains in the Preface (pp. ix-x), his purpose is two-fold: to present a "complete but concise synthesis" of the theological insights of Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh and to show the reader "how Maronite theology can be delineated" using excerpts from the Maronite liturgy. The Maronites are a later branch of the Eastern Syriac Church with a significant historical presence in Lebanon. They have been in communion with Rome since the eleventh century.

In regard to both of the above aims, Beggiani's work remains a unique resource; no other comparable survey of early Syriac theology is so highly accessible to both beginners and scholars. This new edition provides additional evidence from the Divine Office to support his premise that themes from the Maronite liturgy find their theological context in the works of early Syriac writers.

The book is divided into twelve main themes, which Beggiani suggests represent "a complete but concise synthesis of the theology of St. Ephrem" (p. ix). These themes are God's hiddenness, creation, revelation, the Incarnation, redemption, divinization, the Church, Mary, baptism, Eucharist, eschatology, and faith. Yet, as Beggiani himself readily recognizes, any attempt to systematize early Syriac theology using Western

categories falls short and “can be only partially successful” (p. xiii). Syriac writers, after all, paint a highly poetic theological vision using the language of symbols, types, and paradox – a road less travelled in the Greek and Latin West.

The real strength of Beggiani’s work is that he is able to communicate this sense of paradox and reverence in early Syriac Christianity while employing Western categories. The reader gains a vision of how, in the Syriac worldview, Christology, Pneumatology, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, and Anthropology are interconnected within a holistic view of salvation history. Taking their cues from a strong biblical and liturgical foundation, Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh, and other Syriac writers approach these themes with an attitude of wonder and worship, not to define or scrutinize. Moreover, as Beggiani rightly points out, the early Syriac theological vision is decidedly Christocentric: the stream of *raze* (‘symbols’) in nature and in the Scriptures point ultimately to Christ, the central paradox of the Christian faith.

This second edition of Beggiani’s work provides welcome additions and clarifications. In particular, references to Theodore of Mopsuestia and Narsai have been pared back or removed in order to clarify the earlier Ephremic tradition. Yet, as Beggiani warns in the preface, “This revised edition is not a comprehensive one” (p. xiii). Although he does provide valuable updates, many translations are still taken from older editions (i.e. *The Post-Nicene Fathers*), while newer versions are now available. In future editions Beggiani might consider providing more background on post-fourth-century writers, particularly when their later theological context differs from that of Ephrem or Jacob.

In short, this is a highly articulate and concise introduction to the main themes of early Syriac theology with a focus on the Maronite tradition. At present, no other resource brings together so many diverse aspects of this rich theological tradition within a single volume.

---

**Empire, Power and Indigenous Elites:  
A Case Study of the Nehemiah Memoir,**  
by Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley. Leiden: Brill, 2015.  
327 pp. \$168.00. ISBN 9789004289888

*Reviewed by Joseph Baumstarck, Jr., Library Technical Assistant, Acquisitions, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky*

This book is a scholarly work published as volume 169 of the series *Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism*. In the light of current research on ancient Persia and the Middle East it discusses the local elites whom Nehemiah, and to a lesser extent