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The Sources  
of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius :  
The case of Josephus

To better understand Eusebius' use of Josephus, we must address two preliminary issues : What was Eusebius's purpose in writing his *EH*? What were his techniques in doing so?

In contrast to earlier historians in antiquity, Eusebius used the writing of history in his *Ecclesiastical History* as an efficient medium for the promotion of the Christian mission. His writing might thus be defined as 'media historiography'.

Not only did Eusebius himself consider his *EH*, which took him many years to write and edit, as a work of tremendous missionary potential, but if the methods of modern media studies are applied to the work, one may come to far-reaching conclusions as to its thesis. Eusebius writes almost like a modern journalist. The composition is not linear, that is, presenting a sequence of events in chronological order, but compartmentalized, according to themes: martyrs, Jews, heresies, the canon. Eusebius used this particular literary genre intentionally, and one would be hard put to extract from *EH* a continuous account of the history of the Christian church.

Eusebius's innovation is evident not only in his choice of literary genre, but also in his use of the narrative to publicize the church's victory, its transformation from an esoteric

Palestinian sect to a world religion, officially recognized by the emperor Constantine early in the fourth century CE.

The conventional wisdom among scholars is that Christianity was a persecuted, silent faith, virtually an 'underground' religion, until Constantine made it the official state religion in 313 CE. Until then, only some ten percent of the subjects of the Roman Empire had been Christian. In my study of *EH*, presented in my book *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity*,<sup>1</sup> I argued that, according to Eusebius himself, the Eastern Church (whose emergence is the subject of the ten books of his work) rose to greatness not only because of its inspired theology, but also because the church operated from the very start as a colossal media machine. While the church found some media channels 'ready-made' and used them as the opportunity arose, in some cases it actually created new media to promote its massive propagation.

In *EH* Eusebius demonstrates the dynamics of the expansion of Christian presence from the inner public sphere of believers to the institutional sphere—the army, the bureaucracy, the local senates—and to the outer public sphere—the temples, the market, the theatre, the bathhouse and the like.

What, then, were the churchly media that play a part in Eusebius' work? One powerful media asset, which brought Christianity clearly and forcefully to the forefront of the public, outer and institutional spheres, was martyrdom. In describing martyrs, Eusebius writes that so many Christians' readiness to sacrifice themselves was motivated not only by eagerness to emulate Jesus (*mimesis*), but no less by a drive to achieve exposure in the outer public sphere. Would—be martyrs, he implies, were offered a golden opportunity to appear before audiences numbering in the hundreds and thousands, whether in the theatre or on other stages (such as the arena). This was one of the main reasons that people in

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1. *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity. An Essay on Eusebius' 'Ecclesiastical History'* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge, UK, 1999).