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Jan N. Bremmer

Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity

Collected Essays I

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For Christine

Nearly fifty years later

Preface

Although I am the son of a Dutch Calvinist minister, the grandson of a Calvinist minister and the great-grandson of a Calvinist professor of theology, the last thing I ever imagined was that I would publish my collected essays in the distinguished series of the *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*. I never was a theologian, a New Testament specialist or a patristic scholar, but after about fifteen years as ancient historian in Utrecht, I ended my scholarly career in the Chair of Religious Studies at Groningen. Yet the invitation by the editor, Jörg Frey, to publish my collected essays in his series was too attractive and honourable not to accept. After some deliberation, I decided to divide my essays into three volumes. The first one concentrates on Christianity in its first two centuries, the second on Greek and Roman mythology and religion, and the third on the interplay of Christianity and Judaism with the Greco-Roman world. The division is of course somewhat artificial, as all essays deal with the ancient world or its reception by modern scholars. It is therefore more a question of focus than of an always clear-cut division between the various volumes.

The invitation also enables me to reflect on my scholarly career and to say something about the essays presented in the first volume. I began my career in 1974 as a lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Utrecht. My first articles were on the social and religious history of Greek and Roman religion, and ancient myth and ritual, especially, have continued to fascinate me, as the second volume will amply document. However, at the end of the 1970s, my then colleague, Jan den Boeft, himself a patristic scholar and later Professor of Latin at the Free University, Amsterdam, proposed that we should give a course together on the Acts of the Christian martyrs. This course led to a series of articles with notes on these Acts as well as a Dutch translation of the most important ones.[1] In these articles Jan den Boeft usually commented from a more theological and linguistic point of view, whereas I was responsible more for the social and historical aspects of these Acts. The course introduced me to a world that was new to me, but which also intrigued me. Moreover, Jan den Boeft also

[1] J. den Boeft and J.N. Bremmer, 'Notiunculae Martyrologicae I–V', *VigChris* 35 (1981) 43–56; 36 (1982) 383–402; 39 (1985) 110–30; 45 (1991) 105–22; 49 (1995) 146–64; 'Notiunculae Martyrologicae VI: *Passio Perpetuae* 2, 16 and 17', in J. Leemans (ed.), *Persecution and Martyrdom in Late Antique Christianity. Essays in Honour of Boudewijn Dehandschutter* (Leuven, 2010) 47–63 = this volume, Chapter 25, and *Martelaren van de Oude Kerk* (Kampen, 1988).

introduced me to the Dutch Society for Early Christian Studies, where I made the acquaintance of two great Dutch patristic scholars, Toon Bastiaensen (1926–2009) and Gerard Bartelink, whose *Festschriften* made me think of wider problems in early Christianity.[2]

The earliest of these contributions, on upper-class Christian women (Ch. 3), continued an interest of mine that started to develop in the early 1980s. It was the time when second-wave feminism reached Europe from the US and women's history became popular. At first I looked only at women in ancient Greece,[3] but gradually I realised that early Christianity also offered many fascinating perspectives in this respect, and this interest in women's history remains visible all through this volume. In addition to the elite women, in the first section this interest is reflected especially in the chapters on widows (Ch. 4) and prophecy (Ch. 6) and in those on the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (Ch. 22–26). At the same time, the study of the martyrs' Acts introduced me to other aspects of early Christian life, such as the martyrs' love of Christ, which I connect with the actual name of the Christians (Ch. 1), but which also made me think about the social and religious capital of the early Christians (Ch. 2). It is only when we come to grips with the factors that made Christianity attractive to outsiders that we can perhaps understand why the early Christians attracted so many people from outside their ranks.

The latter question, although discussed by some of the very best (church) historians in the course of the last centuries, has still not been resolved [4]. In fact, the problem has been analysed too little because most ancient historians do not study ancient religion, let alone early Christianity. It has been one of my aims all through the book to bridge this gap between students of the Greco-Roman world and those of early Christianity by combining evidence from both areas. That is also why I looked closely at the figure of Peregrinus (Ch. 5), whose life as described by Lucian gives us an unparalleled view of Christianity through the eyes of a pagan intellectual in the later second century.[5] We may perhaps have too little ancient information ever to understand the rise of Christianity in detail, but that is all the more reason that we should exploit all the evidence we have.

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[2] See this volume, Chapters 1 and 3.

[3] J.N. Bremmer, 'La donna anziana: libertà e indipendenza', in G. Arrigoni (ed.), *Le donne in Grecia* (Rome, 1985) 74–91, 177–82 and 'De vrouw in de Griekse wereld', in R. Stuip and C. Vellekoop (eds), *Middeleeuwers over vrouwen 2* (Utrecht, 1985) 25–36, 180–81.

[4] For example, see my *The Rise of Christianity through the Eyes of Gibbon, Harnack and Rodney Stark* (Groningen, 2010[2]); from an early Christian perspective, L.W. Hurtado, *Destroyers of the Gods* (Waco, 2016).

[5] See also my 'Lucian on Peregrinus and Alexander of Abonuteichos: A Sceptical View of Two Religious Entrepeneurs', in G. Petridou *et al.* (eds), *Beyond Priesthood* (Berlin and Boston, 2017) 47–76.

A new world opened up to me when I moved from Utrecht to Groningen in 1990. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the communist regimes, the Dutch government provided funding for cooperation with universities in Eastern Europe. On the initiative of the then Head of the Department of Church History, Hans Roldanus, the Groningen theological faculty initiated links with the Károli Gáspár University of Budapest, where our main partner was the then Professor of New Testament Studies, the humane János Bolyki (1931–2011). It was decided to focus on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles as a genre that had been quite neglected until that time following the work at the turn of the last century by Richard Adelbert Lipsius (1830–1892) and Maximilien Bonnet (1841–1917). The choice proved to be a fortunate one. In a series of annual conferences, various aspects of all the main Apocryphal Acts as well as the, arguably, related Pseudo-Clementines, have been illuminated in a manner not done before. The advantage of this Groningen-Budapest cooperation was that it included not only Old Testament and New Testament scholars but also classicists and ancient historians. As a result, the volumes regularly contain a more varied approach to the Apocryphal Acts than many other publications in this field, which often are more interested in their relations to the canonical Scriptures.[6]

In my own contributions to these volumes (Ch. 7–16), I usually looked at the position of women, as already explained, but also at the many occurrences of magic. In the middle of the 1980s, a new interest arose in magic in the ancient world,[7] which also caught my attention. Although the occurrence of magic in the Apocryphal Acts had not gone unnoticed,[8] it appeared that the subject was still largely unexplored. Its study throws a light on a less noticed aspect of early Christianity, which in this respect seems to have been fairly close to its non-Christian environment. The many miracles of Jesus and the apostles must have been hard to distinguish from contemporary magic, as the efforts of the early Christians to differentiate themselves from the pagan magicians clearly show (Ch. 13). The confusion which this closeness seems to have caused lasted until the third century, when increasing acquaintance with the Christians must

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[6] For example, J.-M. Roessli and T. Nicklas (eds), *Christian Apocrypha. Receptions of the New Testament in Ancient Christian Apocrypha* (Göttingen, 2014). For the most recent review of the relationship between the Canonical and Apocryphal Acts, see the nuanced analysis of J. Snyder, 'Relationships between the Acts of the Apostles and Other Apostle Narratives', in J. Frey *et al.* (eds), *Between Canonical and Apocryphal Texts: Processes of Reception, Rewriting and Interpretation in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (Tübingen, 2017), forthcoming.

[7] For good bibliographies, see P. Brillet and A. Moreau, 'Bibliographie générale', in A. Moreau and J.-C. Turpin (eds), *La magie*, 4 vols (Montpellier, 2000) 4.7–159; J.L. Calvo Martínez, 'Cien años de investigación sobre la magia antigua', *MHNH* 1 (2001) 7–60; P. Fabrini, *Magica antiqua. Indice e guida a una bibliografía informatica* (Pisa, 2006); R. Gordon and F. Marco Simón (eds), *Magical Practice in the Latin West* (Leiden, 2010) 1–4.

[8] G. Poupon, 'L'accusation de magie dans les Actes Apocryphes', in F. Bovon *et al.*, *Les Actes Apocryphes des Apôtres* (Geneva, 1981) 71–93.

have lessened the need to stress the difference with the pagans in this respect. The Apocryphal Acts are thus an important witness to this aspect of early Christianity, which is much less visible in other early Christian writings.

The Apocryphal Acts are also valuable testimonies to Christian life in general in the second half of the second century. They show us something of the variety of the Christian movement, which, from a theological point of view, was being kept together by family resemblances rather than by its constitution as a monolithic group. It was the centrality of Christ, the acceptance of the Old Testament as authoritative together with the, somewhat flexible, Christian ritual that were the main unifying factors. Yet within this unity there was a large 'interactive diversity',[9] as is also very noticeable in the Apocryphal Acts, which clearly reflect different theological ideas and ritual practices, but also react to one another.

For a proper view, though, of the development of early Christianity, we should be able to locate these writings in time and place, the more so given the relative rarity of second-century Christian texts.[10] In my earliest articles I took over the then current opinions, but increasing familiarity with the texts has led me to new insights. Attention to the theological themes, onomastics, social terminology and intertextuality of the Apocryphal Acts has now made me conclude that we must study them in the chronological order of *John*, *Andrew*, *Peter*, *Paul* and *Thomas* (Ch. 7–11, 14.2), noting that the first three were written in Pontus/Bithynia, the *Acts of Paul* in South West Asia Minor and the *Acts of Thomas* in Edessa. The location in Pontus/Bithynia may surprise, but the famous correspondence of Pliny with Trajan shows that Christianity was already widespread in that area at the beginning of the second century.

After the Apocryphal Acts, the Groningen/Budapest conferences turned to the early Apocryphal Apocalypses (Ch. 17–21). Here my attention was first drawn to the problem of Greek influence on the *Apocalypse of Peter*. As explained in more detail in the various relevant chapters, classicists at the beginning of the last century wanted to explain the Christian ideas about hell through the influence of Orphism, whereas Martha Himmelfarb in her excellent *Tours of Hell* (1983) stressed the Jewish background to the Apocalypses. In the course of my investigations I have gradually come to the conclusion that the historical reality was more complicated. As I now see it, in the earliest Christian Apocalypses we can observe a merging of both Jewish and Greek traditions. Moreover, even regarding the Jewish traditions, we should be aware of the fact that

[9] L. Hurtado, 'Interactive Diversity: A Proposed Model of Christian Origins', *JThS* 64 (2013) 445–62; T. Nicklas, *Jews and Christians?* (Tübingen, 2014).

[10] R. Pervo, 'Narratives about the Apostles: Non-canonical Acts and Related Literature', in A. Gregory and C. Tuckett (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha* (Oxford, 2015) 65–89 is unhelpful in this respect. Better: H.-J. Klauck, *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction* (Waco, 2008).

recent research has increasingly shown the pervasive influence of Greek in Palestine from the Seleucid period onwards. Even if Greek did not become the language for religious discourse, all educated Judeans, and even some non-elite ones, if probably to a much smaller extent, must have been proficient in Greek at the time of emerging Christianity.[11] As the origin of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, whether Egypt or Palestine, is still debated (Ch. 18.1), it is important to realise that educated Judeans, too, had access to Greek literature.

Very early on, the Christians appropriated the Jewish genre of the tour of hell, adapted the genre to their own needs and fashions, and composed a number of such writings up to Late Antiquity. Although the oldest Apocalypses were still steeped in Jewish traditions, over time Christian influence on the genre increased. In fact, in the late fourth-century *Apocalypse of Paul* Christian sins have replaced most of the traditional Jewish ones (Ch. 19). Interestingly, we also notice that the descents of the early Apocalypses influenced a number of ascents in Gnostic writings, which were also influenced by Orphic traditions (Ch. 21.5). One of the fascinating aspects of this particular subject is the realisation of the entanglement of the various religious traditions, which previous generations of scholars often liked to keep as separate as possible.

The final section of this book focuses on the Acts of the Christian martyrs, in particular on the, undoubtedly, most interesting one, the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* (Ch. 22–26). The *Passio* is a unique document, as it gives us an unparalleled insight into the mind and behaviour of a young woman who had converted to Christianity. But it also shows us something of her family circumstances as well as of the attitude of the Roman government and of her fellow Christians. It is no wonder that such a unique document has received much scrutiny in recent times. The problem with the early Acts of the Martyrs is not one of a simple choice between authenticity or forgery, but of determining to what extent these texts have used earlier Acts as intertexts, embedded the Acts in other writings or adapted them to the liturgy in which they were read. In the case of *Perpetua*, it is clear that we do not simply have a writing left by a young woman. There are indications that the editor modestly edited her 'diary', but he also influenced the reader by adding the vision of Saturus, his description of the deaths of the martyrs and by adding his own prologue and epilogue (Ch. 22.2). Yet despite the adaptation of Perpetua's text to the ideological aim of the editor and his embedding it into a new context,[12] the modest scale of the editor's textual interventions and his chronological closeness to the original death of Per-

[11] See now W. Ameling, 'Epigraphy and the Greek Language in Hellenistic Palestine', *SCI* 34 (2015) 1–18; M.O. Wise, *Language and Literacy in Roman Judaea: A Study of the Bar Kokhba Documents* (New Haven and London, 2015).

[12] For the editor's aims, see J. den Boeft, 'The Editor's Prime Objective: *Haec in Aedificationem Ecclesiae Legere*', in J.N. Bremmer and M. Formisano (eds), *Perpetua's Passions* (Oxford, 2012) 169–79.

petua and her fellow martyrs (Ch. 24.2) seem to guarantee the authenticity of the text.

In my analyses, I have tried to elucidate the visions of Perpetua and Saturus, but also visions of heaven (Ch. 27), by combining Christian motifs and the Roman *Umwelt*. It is my strong conviction that we should try to understand these visions not from pre-conceived modern ideas, like those of psychoanalysis, but from the contemporary world these martyrs were living in. At the time of writing the original version of the chapter on the motivation of the martyrs (Ch. 24), I was struck forcefully by the events of 9/11 and their aftermath. It seemed to me that we all had to reflect on the motivation of the perpetrators and try to understand, as far as that is possible, what moved them and the Palestinian suicide bombers, who were much in the news due to the Second Intifada (2000–2005). I therefore compared several aspects of their behaviour and context with that of Perpetua and her group.[13] I further reflected on these problems in the original version of the chapter on Felicitas (Ch. 23). In the present book, I have merged and updated the two versions (Ch. 24.3). At the time of writing this Preface, the summer of 2016, Europe has been faced with a series of (suicide-)attacks by followers of ISIS, usually males with a career of petty criminality and/or an unstable mentality. They constitute a different category from those discussed in my chapter, but the need to understand remains, and that is why I have reprinted my reflections.

I would like to thank Brill (Leiden), Cambridge University Press, De Gruyter (Berlin), *Hephaistos* (Hamburg), Oxford University Press, Peter Lang (Berne), Routledge (London), Steiner Verlag (Stuttgart), Wolters Kluwer (Deventer) and, especially, Peeters (Leuven) for their permission to reprint the articles mentioned in the Acknowledgements. Any scholar who collects his earlier writings is faced with the problem of possible revisions and updating. It is of course impossible to completely redo one's own research of several decades. Yet I did not want to reprint views I no longer advocate. This is particularly the case regarding the place and time of the Apocryphal Acts. In some cases I have even completely re-written the original text in this respect, as in the chapter on the *Acts of John* (Ch. 7, Appendix). In other cases, I have simply updated the bibliography, made small corrections, removed overlaps where possible, reorganised a few sections and added more evidence, as in the discussion of the name of the Christians (Ch. 1.3) and in the chapter (16) on Apion and Anoubion, where very recently new evidence has enriched our understanding of these figures. Naturally, this could not be done in every case, but I have always tried to bring the volume up to date to 2016 in the more important issues I discuss.

[13] The idea is not unique: see the implicit comparison in S. Weigel (ed.), *Märtyrer-Porträts* (Munich, 2007).

Most of the revisions were made in the wonderful environment of the Max-Weber-Kolleg in Erfurt, where I was a fellow during the Sommersemester of 2016. I would like to thank here Jörg Rüpke for his invitation to this most stimulating institution. The final corrections and the proofs were done in the stimulating Käte Hamburger Kolleg 'Dynamics in the History of Religion between Asia and Europe' in Bochum, where I was a fellow in the academic year 2016–2017. I am most grateful to its director Volkhard Krech for inviting me. The many debts I have incurred in the course of these articles, I mention at the end of each chapter. Here I would single out Jan den Boeft, who, as already mentioned, was instrumental in introducing me to the world of early Christianity, and my Groningen colleague Ton Hilhorst, who has been a long standing critic of my articles and whose eagle eye and erudition have often saved me from mistakes. I am also grateful to Tobias Nicklas, who not only first suggested that I collect my articles but with whom I was able to resume the study of the apocryphal literature through his great hospitality in Regensburg. Last but not least, these articles would not have been written without my wife Christine, who created the ideal circumstances to work and who also often accompanied me to the many conferences that lie at the basis of this volume.[14]

[14] I am grateful to Orla Mulholland for her correction of my English.

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Section I

Aspects of Early Christianity

Chapter 1

Why Did Jesus' Followers Call Themselves 'Christians'?

As a rule, ancient historians pay hardly any attention to the figure and role of Christ in the Christianisation of the Roman Empire. The neglect is not only modern: Gibbon too disregarded him in his famous analysis of the rise of Christianity.[1] This omission has something curious about it, since studies of the rise of early Christianity might naturally have been expected to say something about the relevance of the founder of the faith to his followers. It is therefore my aim to show in this chapter (§ 1) that early Christianity had an affective relationship with Christ, (§ 2) that a proper evaluation of the position of Christ in early Christian belief is a precondition for the understanding of the meteoric rise of early Christianity and (§ 3) that this relationship played a major role in the self-designation of the early followers of Christ as 'Christians'.

1. The Importance of Christ

It is certainly true that in certain sectors of early Christian literature Christ did not figure very clearly as an identifiable human being who had been crucified on Golgotha. Second-century apologetics, which tried to make the Christian faith respectable in the eyes of educated pagans, portrayed Christ as the incarnation of the Logos – hardly a figure to be very intimate with.[2] And in the later second-century apocryphal *Acts of the Apostles* Jesus is not pictured as really human but as God; in these *Acts* Jesus remains 'invisible' and the apostles have taken his place as the person to imitate.[3] However, a rather different picture emerges when we look at the early Christian *Acta martyrum*.[4]

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[1] E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. D. Womersley, 3 vols (London, 1995) 1.446–581; R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (New Haven and London, 1984) 21; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth, 1986) 112; K. Hopkins, *A World Full of Gods: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London, 1999).

[2] Cf. R. Grant, *Gods and the One God* (London, 1986) 105–11; J. Roldanus, 'Verdediging of verbastering? Over subversieve elementen in het vroege christendom en de ontkenning daarvan', in *De historie herzien. Vijfde bundel 'Historische avonden' uitgegeven door het Historisch genootschap te Groningen* (Hilversum, 1987) 135–64 at 148–52.

[3] L. van Kampen, *Apostelverhalen* (Diss. Utrecht, 1990); Hopkins, *World Full of Gods*, 156–60. It may be asked – but space does not permit an answer – whether the martyrs' love for

We will take as our point of departure the martyrdom of Polycarp. When the Roman governor asked Polycarp to curse Christ, he answered, 'For eighty-six years I have been his slave (cf. below) and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme against my king and saviour?' (*Polycarp* 9.3). The account of his death states, in reaction to Jewish agitation, 'little did they know that we could never abandon Christ, for it was he who suffered for the redemption of those who are saved in the entire world, the innocent one dying on behalf of sinners. Nor could we worship anyone else' (17.2); Carpus cried out when the fire was set beneath his cross, 'Lord Jesus Christ, you know that we suffer this for your name's sake' (*Carpus, Papylus and Agathonice* [Latin version] 5); Perpetua walked to the arena 'as a *matrona* of Christ' (*Perpetua* 18.2); Maximillian has 'the sign of Christ' and is therefore unable to accept 'the seal of the world' (*Maximilian* 2.4); Marcellus can only serve 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, the almighty Father' (*Marcellus* 2.2); Euplus has received the holy Gospels 'from my Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (*Euplus* 1.5) and Gallonius is *Christi devotus*.[5]

We even find a mystical presence of Christ in some of the martyrs. When the Lyonese martyr Sanctus was cruelly tortured, 'Christ suffering in him achieved great deeds of glory' (*Martyrs of Lyons* 23), and when Felicitas, labouring in the pains of childbirth, was asked how she would endure the terrors of the arena, she answered, 'then there will be another one in me who will suffer for me, just as I shall be suffering for him' (*Perpetua* 15).[6] The mystical presence may also explain the state of ecstasy which helped martyrs bear their tortures. In its account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, the Smyrnean church relates that 'some indeed attained to such courage that they would utter not a sound of a cry, showing to all of us that in the hour of their torment these witnesses of Christ were not present in the flesh, or rather that the Lord was there present holding converse with them. Fixing their eyes on the favour of Christ, they despised the tortures of this world, in one hour buying themselves an exemption from eternal fire' (*Polycarp* 2.2). And after Blandina was being tossed a lot by a bull, 'she no longer perceived what was happening because of the hope and possession of all she believed in and because of her intimacy with Christ' (*Martyrs of Lyons* 56).

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and dedication to a human Christ was not an important factor in the victory of 'orthodox' Christianity over those Christians with strong docetist interests.

[4] For the texts, editions and historical value of these *Acta*, see this volume, Chapter 22.1. I cite the *Acta* by their main protagonist(s).

[5] P. Chiesa, 'Un testo agiografico Africano di Aquileia: Gli *Acta* di Gallonio e dei martiri di Timida Regia', *AB* 114 (1996) 241–68 at 265 (martyrdom of AD 303/4).

[6] The presence of Christ in the martyr can also be found in Tertullian, *Pudicitia*, 22.6 and in Augustine, cf. J. den Boeft, 'Martyres sunt homines fuerunt', in A.A.R. Bastiaensen *et al.* (eds), *Fructus Centesimus. Mélanges G.J.M. Bartelink* (Steenbrugge and Dordrecht, 1989) 115–24 at 120.

These quotations demonstrate that the early Christians had an affective relationship with Christ.[7] They also show that students of early Christianity have to be attentive to the mode of discourse in that literature. Schematically we could say, using a favourite distinction of modern French historiography, that early Christian apologetic, theological and fictional literature shows Christianity *conçu*, whereas the *Acta martyrum* illustrate more how it was *vécu*. A proper evaluation of early Christianity has to take into account both these aspects.

2. *Christian and pagan adhesion to one god*

Ancient historians' misjudgment of the position of Christ also precludes a proper understanding of the rise of early Christianity.[8] Naturally we cannot here analyse the whole of this complicated issue, as a proper understanding has to account for the various ways Christianity fulfilled the religious, social, moral and intellectual needs of its time. Here I want to limit myself to some observations as to how the love for Christ fitted into the religious climate of the Roman Empire. The close relationship between Jesus and his followers is regularly characterised in Paul (Romans 1.1, Philippians 1.1, Titus 1.1),[9] the Apostolic Fathers (*1 Clement* 60.2; Ignace, *Magn.* 2), the apocryphal *Acts of the Apostles* (*Acta Petri* 30, 41) and the *Acta martyrum* (*Polycarp* 9.3) by the term *doulos*, 'slave'.[10] This self-designation of Jesus' followers as his 'slaves' has its counterpart in the designation of Jesus himself as the *Kyrios*, the 'Master' or 'Lord', a

[7] For the central place of Christ in the life of the early Christian martyrs, see also M. Pellegrino, *Ricerche patristiche*, 2 vols (Turin, 1982) 1.385–425; H. Crouzel, 'L'imitation et la "suite" de Dieu et du Christ dans les premiers siècles chrétiens ainsi que dans leurs sources gréco-romaines et hébraïques', *JAC* 21 (1978) 18–41; V. Saxer, *Pères saints et culte chrétien dans l'Eglise des premiers siècles* (Aldershot, 1994) Ch. VIII ('La professione di fede del martire negli Atti autentici dei primi tre secoli'); C. Pietri, *Christiana respublica*, 3 vols (Rome, 1997) 2.1229–30; H. Bakker, *Exemplar Domini. Ignatius of Antioch and His Martyrological Self-Concept* (Diss. Groningen, 2003) 149–57; C.R. Moss, *The Other Christs* (Oxford, 2010) and *Ancient Christian Martyrdom* (New Haven and London, 2012) 49–76. The theme remains important in the later 'passions épiques': M. Taveirne, 'Das Martyrium als *imitatio Christi*: Die literarische Gestaltung der spätantiken Märtyrerakten und -passionen nach der Passion Christi', *ZAC* 18 (2014) 167–203. In general: L.W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, 2003).

[8] R. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, 1996); Hopkins, *World full of Gods*; J.N. Bremmer, *The Rise of Christianity through the Eyes of Gibbon, Harnack and Rodney Stark* (Groningen, 2010[2]).

[9] See also K.H. Rengstorf, '*doulos* etc.', in *TWNT*, 2.264–83 at 276–80; D. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation* (New Haven and London, 1990) 50–85; G. Theissen, *Social Reality and the Early Christians* (Minneapolis, 1992) 187–201.

[10] For the later, very normal, usage, note P.J. Sijpesteijn, 'Apphus and Pascentius: *servi dei tempore*', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 40 (1994) 69–70; R. Haensch, 'Bescheidenheit ist eine Zier: Der Gebrauch der Demutsformel δοῦλος θεοῦ in den Kirchenbauinschriften der spätantiken Patriarchate Antiochia und Jerusalem', in A.B. Kuhn (ed.), *Social Status and Prestige in*

title occurring more than 180 times in the New Testament.[11] A.D. Nock (1902–1963), like W. Bousset (1866–1920) and A. Deissmann (1866–1937) before him, rightly connected this title of Christ with a development in Hellenistic piety, in which gods are represented as absolute rulers and addressed by such titles as *Kyrios*, *Despotês* and *Tyrannos*. According to Nock, in Christianity the title *Kyrios* 'implies a belief in the divine overruling of the individual, who receives commands from on high.' This is certainly too one-sided a view, as Nock paid insufficient attention to the correlation between the title *Kyrios* and the self-designation of the faithful as slaves of god so-and-so. It is this self-designation, which has been studied in an important contribution by my compatriot Pleket, who has demonstrated that even before the Hellenistic-Roman period we can find traces of a close affective relationship between deity and worshipper. This dependency was strengthened and disseminated in the Hellenistic-Roman period, as he argued, under oriental influence and in connection with the rise of autocratic political systems. Like Nock before him, Pleket noted that 'these elements acted as a sort *of praeparatio evangelica* for the common man whose head was not crammed with theological dogma, and facilitated the transition to a structurally subservient religion (Christianity)'.[12]

The shift from polytheism to adhesion to one god first manifested itself in the so-called oriental cults of the later classical era, but in the Roman period its spirit also pervaded established pagan religion.[13] However, in early Christianity this adhesion to only one god seems to have assumed more intense forms than in competing, pagan cults.[14] Consequently, a neglect of Christ overlooks an important aspect of early Christianity.

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the Graeco-Roman World (Stuttgart, 2015) 315–39. For the Old Testament background of the Christian usage, see J.P. Floss, *Jahweh dienen – Götter dienen* (Cologne, 1975).

[11] E. Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian Religion*, 3 vols (Leiden, 1976–86) 3.148–9 wrongly derives the terminology from Persia where the word 'slave' was used to denote high officers of the king, cf. G. Widengren, *Der Feudalismus im alten Iran* (Cologne, 1969) 21–34.

[12] A.D. Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Z. Stewart, 2 vols (Oxford, 1972) 1.77; H.W. Pleket, 'Religious history as the history of mentality: the "believer" as servant of the deity in the Greek world', in H.S. Versnel (ed.), *Faith, Hope and Worship* (Leiden, 1981) 152–92.

[13] Pleket, 'Religious history'; P. Veyne, 'Une évolution du paganisme gréco-romain: injustice et piété des dieux, leurs ordres ou "oracles"', *Latomus* 45 (1986) 259–83, repr. in his *La société romaine* (Paris, 1991) 281–310; H.S. Versnel, *Ter Unus* (Leiden, 1990) 88–94.

[14] Cf. A. Hilhorst, '"Servir Dieu" dans la terminologie du judaïsme hellénistique et des premières générations chrétiennes de langue grecque', in Bastiaensen *et al*., *Fructus Centesimus*, 177–92.

3. Jesus' followers as 'Christians'

An additional argument for the importance of Christ can be found in the name 'Christian', since the early Christians not infrequently connected their name with Christ. For example, in his *Scorpiace* (9.8–9) Tertullian observes that whoever confesses to be a Christian also testifies to belonging to Christ (*Christi se esse*), and a similar connection between 'Christian' and 'Christ' occurs in the Greek version of *Carpus, Papylus and Agathonice* (5). The connection looks only natural to us: surely, the followers of Christ called themselves 'Christians'! Yet this was not the case in early Christianity. Other names, such as 'the Way',[15] 'the believers', 'the saints' or 'God's people' were more popular in the first two centuries.[16]

The term 'Christian' is still absent from Paul, *1 Clement* and Tatian, and it is rare in Irenaeus and Hippolytus. Aristides, Ignatius and Athenagoras even speak of the 'so-called Christians'.[17] Which factor(s), then, helped to get the name established? Various solutions have been proposed, of which that of Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) has been the most influential: 'er (i.e. the name 'Christian') allein war gegen jede Verwechslung geschützt'.[18] However, his very practical solution takes insufficient account of the fact that at one particular occasion the utterance of the name 'Christian' was not only normal but virtually obligatory.

Before studying this occasion, we will first look at the origin of the term 'Christian'. In the canonical Acts, Luke relates that 'it was in Antioch that the disciples were called Christians for the first time' (11.26: χρηματίσαι τε πρώτως ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τοὺς μαθητὰς Χριστιανούς). This is the usual translation, but Elias Bickerman (1897–1981) argued that the Greek usage of χρηματίζω obliges us to accept a translation which has these followers style themselves Christians.[19]

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[15] E.R. Urciuoli, '"Quella ὁδός che essi chiamano αἵρεσις". Alle origini dell'autocomprensione filosofica dei seguaci di Gesù', *ASE* 28 (2011) 117–36.

[16] Cf. A. von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Leipzig, 1924[3]) 410–45; H. Karpp, 'Christennamen', in *RAC* 2 (1954) 1114–38; K.H. Kritzer, *Selbstbezeichnungen der Christen in der frühchristl. nichtbibl. Literatur des I. und II. Jhrdts.* (Diss. Salzburg, 1970: *non vidi*); A. Ferrua, *Scritti vari di epigrafe e antichità cristiane* (Bari, 1991) 12–25 (on the spelling of *Christianus/-os*, first published in 1933); T. Hegedus, 'Naming Christians in Antiquity', *Studies in Religion* 32 (2004) 173–90; A. Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord* (Cambridge MA, 2008) 38–40; P. Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge, 2012); M. Bile and B. Gain, 'Une nouvelle étymologie de χριστιανός?', *RÉAug* 58 (2012) 141–53, D.G. Horrell, *Becoming Christian* (London, 2013) 164–210 ('The Label *Christianoi*: 1 Pet 4.16 and the Formation of Christian Identity', first published in 2007).

[17] Aristides 15; Ign. *Magn.* 4, *Rom.* 3; Athen. *Leg.* 1.3.

[18] Harnack, *Mission*, 428, who is followed by Karpp, 'Christennamen', 1134, although also noting the connection of the name with Christ.

[19] Bickerman, *Studies*, 3.96–9, largely accepted by E. Peterson, *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis* (Freiburg, 1959) 64–87; C. Spicq, 'Ce que signifie le titre du chrétien?', *Studia Theolo-*

Moreover, he sees in the choice of the word 'Christian' the wish of the Christians to avoid the term *doulos*, 'slave', as it would sound too much like the terminology of oriental gods. Instead, so Bickerman claims, they styled themselves *Christiani* as, 'agents, representatives of the Messiah'. Both these views of Bickerman are unpersuasive. Firstly, recent studies of the verb have established that the verb means 'a person carries a particular name, title, ethnic officially and in public'.[20] Thus the passage in Acts tells us that in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians in public, perhaps (officially) by the Roman authorities. We may add that it would indeed be hard to understand why it took so long for 'Christians' to become the accepted self-designation of the early followers of Christ, if the followers themselves had coined the term. Secondly, Bickerman's translation of 'Christian' will hardly do. From comparable early word formations – Caesariani ('Caesar's army'),[21] Pompeiani (Pompey's followers'),[22] Pisoniani ('Piso's soldiers'),[23] Ciceroniani ('friend/*cliens* of Cicero'),[24] Herodiani ('followers of Herodes'),[25] Augustiani ('Nero's claque')[26] and Galbiani (Galba's troops')[27] – we can see that at the narrated time of Acts the meaning of 'Christian' can hardly have been understood otherwise than as 'follower of Christ'. Moreover, various passages in the New Testament show that early Christians called themselves 'slaves of Christ' (§ 2). We really have no sufficient information to solve the problem definitively, but Peterson's hypothesis that Jesus' followers received their designation from the Roman authorities at least explains the fact that the Jewish-Hellenistic followers of Christ eventually adopted a Roman word-formation.[28]

If the precise origin of the term 'Christian' is still debated, we can perhaps be more certain about the way the name became the accepted self-designation of

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gica 15 (1961) 68–78; T. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History = Tria Corda* 5 (Tübingen, 2010) 2; B. Shaw, 'The Myth of the Neronian Persecution', *JRS* (2015) 73–100 at 80.

[20] C.P. Jones, 'Epigraphica [I-III]', *ZPE* 139 (2002) 108–16; Y. Broux *et al*., 'ὡς χρηματίζει and the Importance of Naming in Roman Egypt', *ZPE* 174 (2010) 159–66 at 164 (quotation).

[21] 'Hirtius', *Bell. Alex*. 13.1, *Bell. Afr.* 14.3, 24.3, 59.1, *Bell. Hisp*. 34.1; *Senatus consultum de Cnaeo Pisone patre* 55 of AD 20, cf. W. Eck *et al*., *Das senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* (Munich, 1996) 175–7.

[22] 'Hirtius', *Bell. Alex*. 59, *Bell. Hisp*. 34.1.

[23] *Senatus consultum de Cnaeo Pisone patre* 55, cf. Eck, *Das senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre*, 175–7.

[24] Sen. *Contr.* 7.2.12: *Buteo hoc colore: 'vocetur' inquit 'ille Ciceronianus [ille] cliens, amicus'*.

[25] *Mark* 3.6, 12.13, cf. Bickerman, *Studies*, 3.22–33 ('Les Hérodiens', first published in 1938), improved upon by H.H. Rowley, 'The Herodians in the Gospels', *JThS* 41 (1940) 14–27; most recently, G. Ringshausen, 'Das Rätsel der Ἡρῳδιανοί im Markusevangelium', *ZNW* 106 (2015) 115–25.

[26] Tac. *Ann*. 14.15.5; Suet. *Nero* 25.

[27] Tac. *Hist*. 1.51.3.

[28] Peterson, *Frühkirche*, 78.

the followers of Jesus. Once again, we take our point of departure in a passage from the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*. After the proconsul had insisted that Polycarp should swear by the emperor's Genius, the bishop answered, 'If you delude yourself into thinking that I will swear by the emperor's Genius, as you say, and if you pretend not to know who I am, listen and I will tell you plainly: "I am a Christian"' (10: Χριστιανός εἰμι). This straightforward statement did not deter the proconsul from continuing his attempts to persuade, but finally he sent his herald to the centre of the arena to announce, 'Three times Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian' (12).[29]

Evidently, this was the essential information which had been gathered in the course of the interrogation and it firmly established Polycarp's guilt. In its direct or indirect form, this formula of 'I am a Christian' occurs in virtually all the *Acta* that have been recognised as authentic; it is only lacking in the reports of the martyrdoms of *Montanus and Lucius* and of *Felix*. Usually, the confession is placed right at the beginning of the proceedings, but in some cases the declamation is the climax of the hearing, following the refusal to participate in pagan ritual.[30] The Christians even volunteered this confession without being asked, as *Euplus* well illustrates: 'In the consulship of our lords Diocletian (for the ninth time) and Maximian (for the eighth time) on the 29th of April (304), in the most famous city of Catana, in the court room, in front of the curtain, Euplus shouted out: "I wish to die, for I am a Christian"' (1).

The statement 'I am a Christian' clearly is the answer to the simple question 'Are you a Christian?'.[31] This question enabled the Roman magistrates to minimise the rather embarrassing situation that they were trying people who were not really guilty of any obvious crimes. As the Christian Lucius said to the urban prefect Urbicus after he had ordered Ptolemaeus to be executed: 'What is the charge? He has not been convicted of adultery, fornication, murder, clothes-stealing, robbery, or of any crime whatsoever; yet you have punished this man because he confesses the name of Christian' (*Ptolemaeus and Lucius*

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[29] This translation follows a punctuation which differs from the traditional one, cf. J. den Boeft and J.N. Bremmer, 'Notiunculae Martyrologicae III', *VigChris* 39 (1985) 110–30 at 111–3, accepted in the new edition by O. Zwierlein, *Die Urfassungen der Martyria Polycarpi et Pionii und das Corpus Polycarpianum*, 2 vols (Berlin and Boston, 2014).

[30] Direct: *Polycarp* 10; *Justin* 3.4, 4 passim; *Lyons* 19–20, 50; *Scillitani* 9–10, 13; *Apollonius* 2; *Perpetua* 3.2, 6.4; *Carpus* 3.5, 23, 34; *Pionius* 8.2 and 4, 9.5 and 7, 15.7, 16.2, 18.6; *Cyprian* 1.2; *Fructuosus* 2.3; *Maximilian* 1.2–3, 2.6 and 9; *Julius* 1.3; *Agape* 3.2 and 7; *Euplus* 1.1; P. Maraval, *La passion inédite de S. Athénogène de Pédachthoé en Cappadoce (BHG 197b)* (Brussels, 1990) 75 (martyrdom under Diocletian); Chiesa, 'Un testo agiografico', 265 (martyrdom of Gallonius); A. Pietersma, *The Acts of Phileas, Bishop of Thmuis* (Geneva, 1984) 107 (*ca.* AD 306: Latin version). Indirect: *Ptolemaeus and Lucius* 11, 16; *Lyons* 10, 26, 50; *Potamiaena and Basilides* 5; *Marianus* 4.9, 5.2; *Marinus* 3; *Marcellus* 2.1; *Abitinian Martyrs* 5, 10, 13–18; P. van Minnen, 'The Earliest Account of a Martyrdom in Coptic', *AB* 113 (1995) 13–38 (a martyrdom of AD 305). Climax: *Scillitani* 9; *Justin* 3.4.

[31] Cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.2: *interrogavi ipsos an essent Christiani*; *Ptolemaeus and Lucius* 10.

15–16). The magistrates' embarrassment with the situation clearly appears from their hesitation in putting martyrs to death. In order to reach their goal, which was apostasy and not destruction, they offered the martyrs delays ranging from three hours to three months.[32]

The magistrates' embarrassment is shared by many a modern ancient historian. Why, indeed, were the Christians persecuted? In the best modern analysis of the problem, Geoffrey de Ste Croix (1910–2000) summarised his views on the reasons for the condemnation of the Christians by quoting with approval the following words of E.G. Hardy (1852–1925): 'The Christians subsequently to, as *before* [my italics], the rescript of Trajan were punished generally for the name, i.e. […] for the inherent disloyalty to the state involved in their *atheotês* [atheism], and manifested in the *obstinatio* with which they clung to it.' It must be stressed that these reasons are hard to find in early reports of martyrs' processes, and Peter Brunt (1917–2005) therefore rightly questioned the validity of this view for the second century. As he observes, it leaves unexplained why Trajan did not order the tracking down of these elements so dangerous to the state: all he did was to require that the Christians sacrificed to the gods.[33] This approach was indeed slavishly followed by all Roman magistrates whose behaviour we can observe in the earliest *Acta martyrum*. By making sure of the fact that the persons in front of them were guilty of being Christian, they could cut short the unpleasant task of interrogating and torturing civilised people.[34] Lane Fox has well noted that this conclusion risks 'becoming circular, as if Christians were persecuted because they were Christian.' His own solution is that with the

[32] For examples, see J. den Boeft and J.N. Bremmer, 'Notiunculae Martyrologicae', *VigChris* 35 (1981) 43–56 at 47–8; add the Coptic martyrdom of Coluthus in E.A. Reymond and J.W. Barns, *Four Martyrdoms from the Pierpont Morgan Coptic Codices* (Oxford, 1973) 146.

[33] G.E.M. de Ste Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (Oxford, 2006) 151–52 (first published in 1974); P. Brunt, 'Marcus Aurelius and the Christians', in C. Déroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* I (Brussels, 1979) 483–520. For the problem, see also P. Jobert, 'Les preuves dans les procès contre les chrétiens (I^{er} – IV^{e} siècles)', *Revue Historique* 54 (1976) 295–320; J. Walsh and G. Gottlieb, 'Zur Christenfrage im zweiten Jahrhundert', in G. Gottlieb and P. Barceló (eds), *Christen und Heiden in Staat und Gesellschaft des zweiten bis vierten Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1992) 3–86; F. Vittinghoff, *Civitas Romana*, ed. W. Eck (Stuttgart, 1994) 322–47 ('"Christianus sum" – das "Verbrechen" von Aussenseitern der römischen Gesellschaft', first published in 1984).

[34] Brunt, 'Marcus Aurelius', 515, states that the early Christians 'must have appeared pretty worthless to pagans of high rank and education'. It is highly doubtful, though, that many 'lower-class' Christians appeared in front of the magistrates: Justin was a philosopher, Polycarp and Cyprian were clearly wealthy, and Carpus and Dioskoros (*P.Oxy.* 50.3429) were members of the *boulê*. In fact, a number of Christians were probably 'middle-class', cf. T. Schleich, 'Missionsgeschichte und Sozialstruktur des vorkonstantinischen Christentums. Die These von der Unterschichtreligion', *Geschichte, Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 33 (1982) 269–96; W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven and London, 1983) 51–73; H.W. Pleket, *VigChris* 39 (1985) 192–6; G.H.R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* V (North Ryde, 1989) 111; especially, A. Weiss, *Soziale Elite und Christentum. Studien zu ordo-Angehörigen unter den frühen Christen* (Berlin and Boston, 2015).

conviction of Paul, 'The Emperor's justice had distinguished Christians from Jews, a point which was not lost on senators, the provincial governors of the future.' This may be doubted. Would the Roman elite have had any interest in the execution of a Jew of modest status?[35]

However this may be, it is in any case certain that the only occasion when the followers of Jesus publicly used the self-designation 'Christian' was in confrontation with Roman magistrates. The inference seems therefore justified that the affirmative response 'I am a Christian' to the question of the Roman magistrates 'Are you a Christian?' became the main factor in the self-designation of Jesus' followers as 'Christians'.[36] The importance of the persecutions in promoting the name 'Christian' seems to be confirmed by the non-literary evidence. In papyri, the term first appears in the earlier third century, becomes more popular only after AD 250 and is still rare as a self-identification in the fourth century.[37] This is also the case with inscriptions,[38] in which, perhaps not surprisingly, the term first turns up in Phrygia, an area where the difference in religiosity between pagans, Christians and Jews was much less pronounced than elsewhere in the Roman Empire. Surely, these dates can hardly be separated from the empire-wide persecution of Decius.[39] It was only now that the term 'Christian'

[35] Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 428.

[36] Peterson, *Frühkirche*, 86, makes the same observation without noticing the central place of the formula 'I am a Christian' in the martyrs' processes.

[37] Papyri: *SB* 16.12497, cf. P. van Minnen, 'The Roots of Egyptian Christianity', *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 40 (1994) 71–85 at 74–7 (early third century but before AD 256); *P.Oxy.* 42.3035 (AD 256); *P.Oxy.* 43.3119 (AD 259–260?); *SB* 12.10772 (later third century?); E.A. Judge and S.R. Pickering, 'Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-Fourth Century', *JAC* 20 (1977) 47–71 at 66–9; O. Montevecchi, *Bibbia e papiri. Luce dai papiri sulla bibbia greca* (Barcelona, 1999) 155–72; Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 38–40. Rarity of the term: M. Choat, *Belief and Cult in Fourth-Century Papyri* (Turnhout, 2006) 47.

[38] *SEG* 58.1538 (AD 150–250); *MAMA* XI.164 (second or third century AD); *MAMA* XI.95 (*ca.* AD 200–225); *TAM* V.3.1840 (AD 229/230); W. Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia* (Macon, 1997) nos. 9 (*ca.* AD 210, but E. Gibson, *The "Christians for Christians" inscriptions of Phrygia* [Missoula, 1978] 98, 107 suggests the fourth century), 10 (dated to before AD 212, but the absence of Aurelia/us is no absolute guarantee of a pre-212 date), 17 (AD 243), 19 (*ca.* AD 230); *MAMA* XI.122 (AD 253/4); for further epigraphical evidence, see Tabbernee, *passim*; M. Guarducci, *Epigrafia Graeca*, 4 vols (Rome, 1967–78) 4.433–34; Pietri, *Christiana respublica*, 3.1583–1602. On the spelling: Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions*, 89 f.

[39] On Decius' persecution, see, most recently, R. Selinger, *Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Decius: Anatomie einer Christenverfolgung* (Frankfurt/M, 1994); J.B. Rives, 'The Decree of Decius and the Religion of Empire', *JRS* 89 (1999) 135–54; B. Bleckmann, 'Zu den Motiven der Christenverfolgung des Decius', in K.-P. Johne *et al.* (eds), *Deleto paene imperio Romano. Transformationsprozesse des Römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert und ihre Rezeption in der Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2006) 57–71; W.G. Claytor, 'A Decian *Libellus* at Luther College (Iowa)', *Tyche* 30 (2015) 13–18; S. Corcoran, 'From Unholy Madness to Right-mindedness: or how to Legislate for Religious Conformity from Decius to Justinian', in A. Papaconstantinou *et al.* (eds), *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond* (Farnham and Burlington, 2015) 67–94; P. Schubert, 'On the Form and Content of the Certificates of Pagan Sacrifice', *JRS* 106 (2016) 1–27.

would come to everybody's attention and would be adopted by the followers of Jesus in defiance of the Roman government. What may have originated as a term of derision, now became a term of honour, legitimised by the blood of those women and men who preferred to die for their faith instead of sacrificing to the Roman emperor.[40]

[40] I would like to thank Ton Hilhorst, Peter van Minnen and Eric Rebillard for their comments on the various versions of my text and Orla Mulholland for her skilful correction of my English.

Chapter 2

The Social and Religious Capital of the Early Christians

It was around 1980 that Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) launched the terms cultural and social capital in two small articles in his own journal, the *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*.[1] Due to the limited number of Francophones in the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic worlds, he soon expanded upon these initial efforts in a much more detailed article that appeared first in German (1983) and subsequently in English (1986), his well-known 'The Forms of Capital'.[2] Yet it was not this article that popularised the notion of social capital in the wider world, but the Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam. He really started the ball rolling, after an initial boost through the work of the sociologist James Coleman (1926–1995),[3] through his 1995 article with the catchy title 'Bowling alone', which proved to be of enormous influence.[4] Its impact can easily be gauged from the fact that on May 9, 2006 a Google search of 'social capital' scored around 9.090.000 and 'Robert Putnam' 342.000 hits, which is considerable, although still a lot less than Germany's most famous sociologist, the late Niklas Luhmann (1927–1998), who scored 1.560.000 hits.[5] In fact, there are now several websites devoted to the notion of social capital with bibliographies and detailing fields where it might be of use.[6]

This popularity does not mean that the notion itself can be defined in a crystal-clear manner. A page on – take note – the World Bank website defined it as

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[1] P. Bourdieu, 'Les trois états du capital culturel', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 30 (1979) 3–6 and 'Le capital social', *ibid.* 31 (1980) 2–3

[2] P. Bourdieu, 'Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital', in R. Kreckel (ed.), *Soziale Ungleichheiten* (Göttingen, 1983) 183–98, translated as 'The Forms of Capital', in J.G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, 1986) 241–58.

[3] J.S. Coleman, 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital', *American Journal of Sociology,* Suppl. 94 (1988) 95–120 and *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge MA, 1990) 300–21 ('Social Capital').

[4] R. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy* 6 (1995) 65–78; see also his 'The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life', *American Prospect* 13 (1993) 35–42; 'The Strange Disappearance of Civic America', *ibid.* 24 (1996) 34–48; *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, 2000) and (ed.), *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (New York, 2002).

[5] To put these numbers in perspective, note that Pierre Bourdieu had about 1.980.000 hits at that date.

[6] See Wikipedia s.v.

follows: '*Social capital* refers to the norms and networks that enable collective action. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion – social capital – is critical for poverty alleviation and sustainable human and economic development'.[7] This definition does not mention religious organisations, but Francis Fukayama, in a 1999 paper prepared for a – note again – IMF conference, interprets the notion as follows: 'social capital is an instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals. The norms that constitute social capital can range from a norm of reciprocity between two friends, all the way up to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity or Confucianism'.[8]

It is clear from these and other definitions, which could be multiplied many times over, that leading modern institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, see 'social capital' primarily as a notion to apply to society as a whole in order to promote social cohesion. Yet such quotations only show the applications of the notion at the present moment. However, for a better understanding we should also look at the applicability of the notion to the past. That is what I want to do in my own contribution. I have chosen to discuss briefly the social capital of the early Christians, even though at least some of them did not want to be part of society as a whole. On the contrary, quite a few early Christians saw themselves as strangers in this world and were perceived as such by their contemporaries.[9] As Caecilius reproaches Minucius Felix in the early third-century *Octavius*: 'You do not go to our shows, you take no part in our processions, you are not present at our public banquets, you shrink in horror from our sacred games' (12.5, tr. G.W. Clarke). In other words, many early Christians completely shied away from ancient civic life. Current American ideas, then, clearly do not apply to them, the less so as the early Christians did not move in the public sphere as such. However, that did not mean that Christian congregations lacked social capital for their members. In fact, I would like to mention four kinds of social capital that are relevant to the rise of the Christian church from a small Jewish sect to the dominating religion of the Roman Empire.

Before I proceed with that discussion, let me first note that it may perhaps cause surprise to find the early Christian churches in a volume dedicated to ancient 'associations' (*thiasoi* or *collegia*).[10] However, Pliny already talked about them as a *hetaeria* in a letter to Trajan,[11] and Tertullian (*Apol*. 38–9) used a wide spectrum of terms such as *factio*, *coetus* and *congregatio* to denote the associa-

[7] The original page has disappeared, but the definition can be easily found by googling.

[8] www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/seminar/1999/reforms/fukuyama.htm#I (accessed 7-1-2017).

[9] R. Feldmeier, *Die Christen als Fremde* (Tübingen, 1992) 105–32.

[10] This chapter originally appeared in an issue of *Hephaistos* dedicated to associations.

[11] Pliny, *Ep*. 10.96.7, cf. C. Marek, *Pontus et Bithynia. Die römischen Provinzen im Norden Kleinasiens* (Mainz, 2003) 117–25. Note that Philo, *Hypothetica* 5, uses the term for the Essenes.

tion character of early Christianity.[12] It is perhaps this character as an association that made Lucian describe Peregrinus as a *thiasarchês,* 'head of a *thiasos*' in his *De morte Peregrini* (11);[13] similarly, Celsus speaks of the Christians as *thiasôtai* (Origen, *CC* 3.23). Lucian's description has been criticised as being wholly wrong,[14] but the term *thiasos* was widely used to denote a religious association and certainly not limited to the Dionysiac ones; in fact, *thiasoi* of Jews,[15] of Heracles,[16] of the Mater Oureia (*SEG* 41.1329A.4), of the Agathodaimôn (*SEG* 48.1120), of Hekate (*SEG* 57.779), of the Theos Hypsistos (*CIRB* 1259) and of the followers of Sarapis (*SEG* 55.1463bis) are well attested.[17] Lucian probably adapted his description to what he knew of Judaism, Christianity and the cult of the Theos Hypsistos, cults that, initially at least, clearly showed strongly overlapping features. His only partial knowledge of Christianity also appears from the fact that he presents Peregrinus as a *prostatês*, a patron. This title too occurs in several Jewish communities,[18] but it is not attested for males in early Christian congregations.[19] Given these pagan interpretations, several scholars at the turn of the twentieth century, in particular Georg Heinrici (1844–1915) and Edwin Hatch (1835–1889), already concluded that the early Christian congregations could be seen, from one point of view, as a religious association.[20] This point of view has be become more popular in recent times,[21] and can certainly

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[12] Also note K. Zamfir, 'The Community of the Pastoral Epistles – a Religious Association', in V. Gabrielsen and C.A. Thomsen (eds), *Private Associations and the Public Sphere* (Copenhagen, 2015) 206–40.

[13] For Peregrinus, see this volume, Chapter 5.

[14] H.D. Betz, 'Lukian von Samosata und das Christentum', *Novum Test*. 3 (1959) 226–37 (reprinted with "Nachtrag" in his *Hellenismus und Urchristentum*, Tübingen, 1990, 10–21) at 229–30; C.P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian* (Cambridge MA, 1986) 122.

[15] Cf. J. Scheid, 'Communauté et communauté. Réflexions sur quelques ambiguïtés d'après l'exemple des thiases de l'Égypte romaine', in N. Belayche and S. Mimouni (eds), *Les communautés religieuses dans le monde gréco-romain* (Turnhout, 2003) 61–74 at 66 note 31; add *Corpus inscriptionum regni Bosporani* [= *CIRB*] 1260–1, 1277–87, 1289; Philo, *Probus* 85 (Essenes); M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, *Cynisme et christianisme dans l'Antiquité* (Paris, 2014) 199.

[16] *IG* II² 2345; *SEG* 51.224; S.D. Lambert, 'Thiasoi of Heracles and the Salaminioi', *ZPE* 125 (1999) 93–130.

[17] For its use in Christianity, see G.J.M. Bartelink, '*Thiasos* and *thiasôtês* chez les auteurs chrétiens', *Or. Christ. Per.* 45 (1979) 267–78.

[18] W. Ameling, *Inscriptiones Iudaicae Orientis II*, *Kleinasien* (Tübingen, 2004) 93; M.H. Williams, *Jews in a Greco-Roman environment* (Tübingen, 2013) 127, 132.

[19] But note Phoebe in Paul's *Letter to the Romans* 16.2.

[20] C.F. Heinrici: 'Die Christengemeinde Korinths und die religiösen Genossenschaften der Griechen', *ZWT* 19 (1876) 464–526; 'Zur Geschichte der Anfänge paulinischer Gemeinden', *ibid.* 20 (1877) 89–130; 'Zum genossenschaftlichen Charakter der paulinischen Christengemeinden', *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 54 (1881) 505–24. E. Hatch: *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches: Eight Lectures Delivered Before the University of Oxford in the Year 1880* (London, 1881), cf. J. Kloppenborg, 'Edwin Hatch, Churches and Collegia', in B.H. Maclean (ed.), *Origins and Method: Towards a New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity* (Sheffield, 1993) 212–38.

[21] J. Kloppenborg and S. Wilson (eds), *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*

Index of names, places and passages

* The *Acta martyrum* are quoted by the name of their protagonist(s) or cities. I mention only the names of modern scholars in the main text and concentrate on the most important pagan and patristic passages.