

JAN N. BREMMER

Maidens, Magic
and Martyrs in
Early Christianity

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament*

379

Mohr Siebeck

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Herausgeber / Editor
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379



Jan N. Bremmer

Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity

Collected Essays I

Mohr Siebeck

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e-ISBN 978-3-16-155438-4

ISBN 978-3-16-154450-7

ISSN 0512-1604 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament)

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was typeset and printed on non-aging paper by Gulde Druck in Tübingen and bound by Buchbinderei Spinner in Ottersweier.

Printed in Germany.

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 resolved⁴. 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.

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), *Middeleeuwen 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, 2010³); 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 Entrepreneurs', 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

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. Fabbrini, *Magica antiqua. Indice e guida a una bibliografia 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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Abbreviations

<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année Épigraphique</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
<i>ARW</i>	<i>Archiv für Religionswissenschaft</i>
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CPh</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CRAI</i>	<i>Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>FGrH</i>	F. Jacoby, <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> (Berlin and Leiden, 1923–)
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>HSCPb</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>HTbR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IDBSup</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplement</i>
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>
<i>IGR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes</i> (Paris 1906–1927)
<i>JAC</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JThS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>LEC</i>	<i>Les Études Classiques</i>
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> (Zurich, 1981–1999)
<i>MAMA</i>	<i>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua</i> (London et al., 1928–)
<i>MÉFRA</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'École française de Rome (Antiquité)</i>
<i>NTA</i>	W. Schneemelcher (ed.), <i>New Testament Apocrypha</i> , tr. and ed. R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1992 ²)
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OF</i>	A. Bernabé, <i>Orphicorum et Orphicis similium testimonia et fragmenta. Poetae Epici Graeci. Pars II. Fasc. 1–3</i> (Munich and Leipzig, 2004–07)
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
<i>PIR²</i>	<i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani Saec I. II. III</i> , second edition (Berlin, 1933–2015)

<i>RAC</i>	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> (Stuttgart, 1950–)
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> (Stuttgart, 1984–1973)
<i>REA</i>	<i>Revue des Études Anciennes</i>
<i>REAug</i>	<i>Revue d'Études Augustiniennes et Patristiques</i>
<i>RECAM</i>	<i>Regional Epigraphic Catalogues of Asia Minor</i>
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des Études Grecques</i>
<i>RhM</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum</i>
<i>SBL</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>SCI</i>	<i>Scripta Classica Israelica</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i> (Leiden, 1923–)
<i>SMSR</i>	<i>Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
<i>TAM</i>	<i>Tituli Asiae Minoris</i> (Vienna, 1901–)
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>ThesCRA</i>	<i>Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum</i> (Los Angeles, 2004–2012)
<i>TRE</i>	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> (Berlin and New York, 1977–2004)
<i>TWNT</i>	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> (Stuttgart, 1932–1979)
<i>VigChris</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>ZAC</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
<i>ZWT</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie</i>

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

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, Papyrus 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 Smyranean 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).

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. Pellegriano, *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, 2010²).

⁹ See also K.H. Rengstorff, '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.

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, Papyrus 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

¹⁵ E.R. Urciuoli, "Quella ὁδὸς 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, 1924³) 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?', *REAug* 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 clique')²⁶ and Galbani (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

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 Ἡρώδιανοί 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*

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. Zwielerlein, *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 Pédachthoë 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', *Vig-Chris* 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*, 89f.

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. John 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

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 Fukuyama, 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 *betaeria* 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 become more popular in recent times,²¹ and can certainly

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 thiasos 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 (Es-senes); 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*

be accepted, although in that debate, there is, as far as I can see, little distinction being made between emic and etic views. We might think of these groups as associations, *thiasoi* or *collegia*, but I do not see *the early Christians themselves* using this terminology before Tertullian.²² Moreover, a more detailed investigation into this problem should note differences with pagan associations too, such as the exclusive character of the Christian cult, a much wider social recruitment (below) and the interregional connections of the congregations (below).²³ Still, there can be little doubt that the Jesus groups resembled ancient associations in many respects. Yet the pluriformity of those groups as well as that of the associations should warn us for claiming simple similarities when we have so little evidence on the early Christian side.

After these introductory remarks we will now take a look at the social capital of the early Christians of which I will discuss four kinds: their charity (§ 1), their interconnectedness (§ 2), their family aspect (§ 3), and the processes of bonding and bridging (§ 4). We will conclude with some observations on Christianity's religious capital (§ 5), but let us start with charity.

1. Charity

In the ancient world, the Jews were exceptional because of their charity: witness observations by pagan authors such as Juvenal, Artemidorus and Julian the Apostate.²⁴ This was not normal practice among the Greeks and Romans, as my compatriot Hendrik Bolkestein (1877–1942) was the first to analyse properly in a book that, hardly surprisingly, appeared during the depression of the 1930s.²⁵ Bolkestein showed that Greco-Roman cities did not recognise a

(London and New York, 1996); C. Colpe, 'Genossenschaft C', in *RAC* 10 (1978) 117–42 at 141–2; P.A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations* (Minneapolis, 2003). For recent surveys, see R. Ascough, 'Paul, Synagogues, and Associations: Reframing the Question of Models for Pauline Christ Groups', *Journal of the Jesus Movement in its Jewish Setting* 2 (2015) 27–52 and 'What Are They Now Saying about Christ Groups and Associations?', *Currents in Biblical Research* 13 (2015) 207–44.

²² Cf. E.R. Urciuoli, "Factio Christiana". Nouvel examen du rapport entre les premiers groupes de croyants en Christ et les associations volontaires antiques', *Apocrypha* 22 (2011) 253–64.

²³ E. Rebillard, *Religion et sépulture* (Paris, 2003) 55f.

²⁴ Juvenal 3.296; Artemidorus 3.52; Cleomedes 2.1.91; Julian, *Ep.* 84 Bidez–Cumont 430d. For the Christian debt to Judaism in this respect, see the bibliography in M. Cohen, *Poverty and Charity in the Jewish Community of Medieval Egypt* (Princeton and Oxford, 2005) 5–8; note also G.E. Gardner, *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge, 2015).

²⁵ H. Bolkestein, *Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege in vorchristlichen Altertum: ein Beitrag zum Problem "Moral und Gesellschaft"* (Utrecht, 1939); see now also P. v.d. Horst, 'Organized Charity in the Ancient World: Pagan, Jewish, Christian', in Y. Furstenberg (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Communal Identities in the Roman World* (Leiden, 2016) 116–33.

category of persons labelled 'the poor' in their moral code. If they thought of less well-off or poor persons, it would always be their worse-off fellow citizens. Now the ancient body of citizens was very much a closed shop, and if one were not a citizen, there would not be any support. This is the fundamental difference from the much more inclusive charitable activities of the ancient Christians, who were an open community that welcomed any new members, wealthy or poor.²⁶

Yet unlike most contemporary Christian charities, they would not go out and look after the non-Christian poor. Their main targets were the 'poor saints' as Paul calls them in his Letter to the Romans (15.26), and the importance of charity can also be seen in the prominence of the theme at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles (2.44–5, 4.34–7). Widows are mentioned in particular (Acts 6.1, 9.39), but orphans already occur in James (1.27). Tertullian (*Ad uxorem* 2.4; *Apol.* 39.6) also mentions old servants, the shipwrecked or those condemned to the mines, isolated islands and prisons for their belief. Another intriguing text is the already mentioned *De morte Peregrini*, where Lucian presents Peregrinus as visited by 'old crones, some widows and orphans' (13). As it is hard to see what spiritual help these categories would be to Peregrinus, it seems more likely that we have here a fine example of the help that the early Christians gave to categories that were of very low standing in the pagan world, as old women, widows and orphans had a hard time in a world without social welfare.²⁷ Another example will have been the Christian help during epidemics. Although our sources in this respect start to flow only in the third century, there seems little reason to doubt that also during the famous plague under Marcus Aurelius Christians will have nursed not only their fellow members but also others. Even if some pagans may have sneered at this altruism, its effect can hardly be doubted.²⁸

Naturally, given the ideology of euergetism in the ancient world, the receivers of money and goods must have had their counterparts in the givers, who would thus accumulate symbolic capital as generous members of the community. The benefactress Dorcas, who is resurrected by the apostle Peter, is an evident example of such a woman having acquired a high standing in the congregation of Joppa (Acts 9.36).²⁹

²⁶ W. Schwer, 'Armenpflege', in *RAC* 1 (1950) 689–98; W. Reinbold, *Propaganda und Mission im ältesten Christentum* (Göttingen, 2000) 323–26; various studies by Peter Brown: *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover NH, 2002: to be read with the review by B.D. Shaw, *New York Review of Books* 21–11–2002), *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton and London, 2012) and *Treasure in Heaven* (Charlottesville, 2016).

²⁷ J.N. Bremmer, 'The Old Women of Ancient Greece', in J. Blok and P. Mason (eds), *Sexual Asymmetry* (Amsterdam, 1987) 191–215 and this volume, Chapters 3 and 5.

²⁸ The importance of Christian help during epidemics, also for demographic reasons, is argued by R. Stark, 'Epidemics, Networks, and the Rise of Christianity', *Semeia* 56 (1993) 159–75 and *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, 1996) 73–94.

²⁹ More in general, see also S. Destephen, 'L'évergétisme aristocratique au féminin dans

2. *Interconnectedness*

Lucian's pamphlet on Peregrinus is informative also in another respect, our second kind of social capital. He tells us that as soon as Peregrinus had been arrested and put into jail, congregations in Asia Minor sent representatives in order to help, defend and comfort him. Moreover, Lucian (13) notes their speed in action and their generosity in gifts. In other words, Christians felt themselves parts of a much wider community, a community that transcended the borders of the individual *poleis*. This becomes very clear from the intensive traffic in letters, books and writings between the Christians and from the many letters written and preserved in the period of early Christianity. People like Paul, the pseudo-Pauls, Clement and Ignatius surely expected their letters to be read and circulated. The well-known letter of the congregations of Lyons and Vienne about their persecution to those in Asia and Phrygia is an excellent demonstration of the close ties that the Christians had developed among themselves. This development was unique at the time, and there is nothing comparable in either contemporary Judaism or pagan religions.³⁰ Given this importance of letters and literacy for the early Church, we could even call the early Christian congregations 'textual communities', a term introduced by the medievalist Brian Stock.³¹

It is therefore hard to accept Keith Hopkins' (1934–2004) suggestion that early Christianity spread at an amazing rate despite the fact that most Christian communities were unable to read or understand a single Christian treatise,³² whereas everything we know seems to point to Christianity being a movement connected and maintained by the written word. Hopkins takes too little account of the fact that the major Jewish contribution to early Christianity must have positively influenced the level of early Christian literacy.³³ And indeed, it would be impossible to think of Christian communities without a single literate person, as Hopkins imagined many to be, as we know from Justin Martyr (*1Apol.* 67) that the Christians read texts in their services: 'On the day called the

l'Empire romain d'Orient', in B. Caseau (ed.), *Les réseaux familiaux. Antiquité tardive et Moyen Âge* (Paris, 2012) 183–203 (with excellent bibliography).

³⁰ As is stressed by K. Waldner, 'Letters and Messengers: The Construction of Christian Space in the Roman Empire in the Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch', in I. Henderson and G. Oegema (eds), *The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity, and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity* (Gütersloh, 2006) 72–86 at 73; see also J.S. Kloppenborg, 'Literate Media in Early Christ Groups: The Creation of a Christian Book Culture', *J ECS* 22 (2014) 21–59; L.W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods* (Waco, 2016) 105–41, 235–52 (notes).

³¹ B. Stock, *The Implications of Literacy. Written language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, 1983) 88–240.

³² K. Hopkins, 'Christian Number and Its Implications', *J ECS* 6 (1998) 185–226.

³³ See the considerations by H.Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven and London, 1995) 1–41; I. Henderson, 'Early Christianity, Textual Representation and Ritual Extension', in D. Elm von der Osten et al. (eds), *Texte als Medium und Reflexion von Religion im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart, 2006) 81–100.

day of the sun there is an assembly of all those who live in the towns or in the country (an interesting sociological observation!), and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read for as long as time permits. Then the reader ceases, and the president speaks, admonishing and exhorting us to imitate these excellent examples'. Only after these readings and exhortations the Eucharist takes place. This use of the written word must go back to the earliest times of Christianity, as the apostle Paul already says in the First Letter to the Thessalonians (5.27): 'I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brothers and sisters'. We can follow these exhortations to read in the Letter to the Colossians (4.16), the Book of Revelation (1.3) and the First Letter to Timothy (4.13) where the congregation is admonished 'to give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching'. In brief, it is clear that reading must have been an indispensable part of the early Christian congregations.

One of the best experts on early Christian literacy, Harry Gamble, has rightly stressed that we cannot fail to notice a difference with contemporary Jewish practice, which most carefully and exactly transcribed the Torah according to fixed conventions.³⁴ We may add, though, that this Jewish practice most likely did not precede the fall of the Temple. The texts from Qumran have shown that different texts of the Torah already circulated before the beginning of our era, even though the differences were not of tremendous importance. Yet the fall of the Temple seems to have had the effect that the authority of the priests was transferred to the text of the Torah that now became literally sacred.³⁵

Such a belief in the literal value of the text was not yet present in early Christianity. It could perhaps not even have been that way, given the fact that the earliest Christian books were informal, unconventional and undistinguishable. These earliest books were not works of art, such as the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages, but they were practical handbooks for the communities. As such, they were written not in a literary style of writing but in a script that approaches that of the documentary papyri. The books even liberally used abbreviations for the *nomina sacra*, just as documentary materials commonly used abbreviations. Gamble also notes that they used more reading aids than other manuscripts, such as punctuation, accents, breathing marks and, sometimes, fewer letters to the line.³⁶

The fact that they were written in the codex form also testifies to their, originally, sketchy and ephemeral use. We do not have examples left of very early

³⁴ H. Gamble, 'Literacy, Liturgy, and the Shaping of the New Testament Canon', in C. Horton (ed.), *The Earliest Gospels* (London and New York, 2004) 27–39.

³⁵ A.S. van der Woude, 'Pluriformity and Uniformity. Reflections on the Transmission of the Text of the Old Testament', in J. Bremmer and F. García Martínez (eds), *Sacred History and Sacred Texts in Early Judaism: a symposium in honour of A.S. van der Woude* (Kampen, 1992) 151–69.

³⁶ Gamble, 'Literacy, Liturgy', 34–35; L. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts* (Grand Rapids, 2006).

papyrus or parchment notebooks, but the excavations of Vindolanda in the '70s and '80s of last century have given us 'thin slivers of smooth wood which are written with pen and ink'. These so-called 'leaf-tablets' were used for letters but also for literary texts. It is here that we may see the birth of the codex. The few parchments, papyri and references we have suggest that in the beginning pagan and Christian circles made use of the codex. Small notebooks with sayings of Christ or apostolic letters may have been the preferred medium to carry the Christian message all over the Mediterranean. Yet the rise of the codex and its triumph over the papyrus scroll is hardly imaginable without a sizable number of reading and writing Christians, even though the definitive triumph of the codex did not take place before the conversion of Constantine.³⁷ The Christian stress on reading may have even been an important factor in the rise of the phenomenon of the Holy Book that becomes visible in Late Antiquity.³⁸

3. Family aspects

The third noteworthy kind of social capital is the family aspect of early Christianity. It is a rather amazing characteristic of early Christian life that the members of the congregation addressed one another as 'brother' or 'sister'; Paul, especially, must have sounded rather like a contemporary American preacher with his frequent use of 'brother'. It has been suggested that the usage derives from Jewish tradition,³⁹ but earlier Jewish scripture does not mention 'sisters' on the same footing as 'brothers'. Neither do we find many 'sisters' in pagan associations, although sometimes 'brothers' are present, if to a much lesser degree, as for example in the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus and the Theos Hypsistos.⁴⁰

³⁷ For the rise of the codex, see T.C. Skeat, 'The Origin of the Christian Codex', *ZPE* 102 (1994) 263–68; G. Cavallo, 'Between *Volumen* and Codex: Reading in the Roman World', in Cavallo and R. Chartier (eds), *A History of Reading in the West* (Cambridge, 1999) 64–89; G.H. Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge, 2004) 165–91 ('Why were early Christians addicted to the codex?') at 174 (quotation); Bremmer, 'From Holy Books to Holy Bible: an Itinerary from Ancient Greece to Modern Islam via Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity', in M. Popović (ed.), *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden, 2010) 327–60 at 348–49; M. Walraff, *Kodex und Kanon* (Berlin and Boston, 2013).

³⁸ G. Stroumsa, *La Fin du sacrifice* (Paris, 2005) 63–101; Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London and New York, 2002) 50 (influence of early Christianity on the birth of the written *Avesta*); note also C. Marksches, *Das antike Christentum* (Munich, 2006) 94–104.

³⁹ W. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven and London, 1983) 87, who underestimates the terminological innovations of the early Christians in an otherwise excellent discussion.

⁴⁰ See Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 32; E. Ebel, *Die Attraktivität früher christlicher Gemeinden* (Tübingen, 2004) 203–13; P.A. Harland, 'Familial Dimensions of Group Identity: "Brothers" (*Adelphoi*) in Associations of the Greek East', *JBL* 124 (2005) 491–513; J. Erdtmann, 'Mehr als Zechbrüder und Gründungsväter? Zu quasi-verwandtschaftlichen Verhältnissen und Beziehungen in hellenistisch-römischen Kultvereinen',

It is clear that this aspect struck pagan observers as something noteworthy. Lucian (*De morte Peregrini* 13) noted that the first lawgiver of the Christians, probably meaning Christ himself, had persuaded them that they would be ‘brothers’ after they had converted. The designation is also defended by Tertullian in his *Apology* (39.8–10), but he limits himself to the designation *frater*, whereas in the *Octavius* Minucius Felix has the opponent of Christianity state that: ‘... hardly have they met when they love each other, throughout the world uniting in the practice of a veritable religion of lusts. Indiscriminately they call each other brother and sister, thus turning even ordinary fornication into incest by the intervention of these hallowed names’ (9.2, tr. G.W. Clarke). The designation, then, must have helped the early Christians to feel part of an alternative family in a world in which descent was of the highest importance for one’s place in society.⁴¹

It is true that Judith Lieu has warned against ‘a rosy and a cosy picture of homeliness, into which the lonely, the oppressed, and the dehumanized were warmly welcomed’.⁴² Such a warning is of course always welcome, and it would be foolish to suppose that Christian congregations were devoid of the normal problems of everyday life. However, such a general admonition is less satisfactory when we actually have evidence that people preferred the Christian family, so to speak, to the family of their own blood. That we have such evidence is probably not surprising. After all, Jesus himself was reported to have said: ‘From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law’.⁴³

Admittedly, Jesus’ words have to be seen in an eschatological, if not apocalyptic perspective. Yet the *Acta martyrum* furnish several examples that Christians did prefer their own congregations above their family members.⁴⁴ The

in N. Leisner and J. Erdtmann (eds), *Ad familiares – Familie und Verwandtschaft in der griechisch-römischen Antike* = *Hephaistos* 31 (2014 = Münster, 2015) 149–67.

⁴¹ For more evidence, see A. von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums* (Leipzig, 1924⁴) 417–19; H. Pétré, *Caritas. Étude sur le vocabulaire latin de la charité chrétienne* (Louvain, 1948) 140–40.

⁴² J. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford, 2004) 167, comparing H. Moxnes, ‘What is Family? Problems in Constructing Early Christian Families’, in id. (ed.), *Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (London and New York, 1997) 13–41; similarly, J.S. Kloppenborg, ‘Egalitarianism in the Myth and Rhetoric of Pauline Churches’, in E. Castelli and H. Taussig (eds), *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack* (Valley Forge, 1996) 247–63.

⁴³ Luke 12.52–3, note also Mark 10.29–30; Luke 14.26; *Gospel of Thomas* 101; S. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge, 1994).

⁴⁴ K. Bradley, ‘Sacrificing the Family: Christian Martyrs and their Kin’, *Ancient Narrative* 3 (2003) 150–81, reprinted in his *Apuleius and Antonine Rome: Historical Essays* (Toronto, 2012) 104–25, whose discussion I here supplement and correct. For the genre of the *Acta mar-*

Passion of Marian and James is the description of the martyrdom of a group of North-African Christians, who were arrested near Cirta in Numidia during the Valerian persecution and executed in the spring of AD 259.⁴⁵ The description itself dates from the early fourth century, but it uses an earlier eyewitness report.⁴⁶ It (8.2) contains an extensive report of a dream with a dialogue between the martyr Aemilian and his *frater carnalis*, who is not mentioned by name. When Aemilian was led out of prison, his brother asked him 'in a taunting voice' how he was getting on with the darkness and starvation of prison. One cannot escape the impression that the brothers did not get on very well. More interestingly, the brother also inquired whether all the martyrs would receive the gift of eternal life. It seems as if Aemilian used his dream to consider several pressing problems, but it is also clear that his conversion had driven a wedge between him and his brother.

We have two more interesting cases where we can see how Christianity damaged the bond of brothers. In the *Acts of Phileas*, the report of the trial and execution of a bishop of Egyptian Thmuis about AD 306, we find the following scene in the older and more reliable Greek version. After Phileas had declined the judge's offer of time for reflection, 'the brother of Phileas cried out saying "Phileas requests amnesty". Culcianus (the judge) summoned Phileas and said to him: "What, did you make an appeal?" He replied: "No, I did not. Pay no attention to this most unfortunate man. Rather, I am deeply indebted to the emperors and the (local) government because I have been made a coheir of Jesus Christ".'⁴⁷ Here we can see how the martyr's conviction leads him to reject any help from his family.

Our third example also comes from North Africa. In the winter of AD 303–4 a group of forty-nine Christians was surprised in a private house (below), where they celebrated the Sunday meal. We still have what looks like an official report of the first hearing of the martyrs. During the interrogation, which was combined with terrible tortures, 'Fortunatianus, the brother of the most holy martyr Victoria, arrived on the scene. He was a quite distinguished Roman citizen, but at that time he was hostile to the most holy practice of the Christian religion. After having reproved the martyr (Dativus) as he hung on the rack with

tyrum and the problem of their trustworthiness and authenticity, see this volume, Chapter 22.1.

⁴⁵ I use the text and translation (albeit adapted) of H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972) 194–213, which is based on P. Franchi de' Cavalieri, *La Passio SS. Mariani et Iacobi* (Rome, 1900) 42–63. For a French translation, introduction and some notes, see V. Saxer, *Saints anciens d'Afrique du Nord* (Vatican City, 1979) 88–103 and P. Maraval, *Actes et passions des martyrs chrétiens des premiers siècles* (Paris, 2010) 211–27. For the date, see the excellent discussion by A.R. Birley, 'A Persecuting Praeses of Numidia under Valerian', *JThS* 42 (1991) 598–610 at 603.

⁴⁶ R. Herzog and P.L. Schmidt (eds), *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike IV* (Munich, 1997) 427–9 (by A. Wlosok, with the most recent bibliography).

⁴⁷ A. Pietersma, *The Acts of Phileas, Bishop of Thmuis* (Geneva, 1984) 70–2.

unholy words, he said: “This is the man, Sir, who in the absence of our father, while we were studying here, tried to seduce our sister Victoria. He lured her from this most splendid city of Carthage all the way out to the town of Abitina along with Secunda and Restituta. He never came into our house except to lead their young hearts astray with his proselytising”. But Victoria, the most distinguished martyr of the Lord, did not endure her associate and fellow martyr being assailed by the lying senator. With Christian candour she immediately said: “No one persuaded me to leave and it was not with him that I went to Abitina. By the testimony of citizens I can prove this. I did everything on my own initiative and by my own free will. Certainly I have been a member of the assembly and I have celebrated the Lord’s Supper with the brothers because I am a Christian” (7).⁴⁸ During her interrogation, the proconsul Anulinus ‘said to her: “Have some regard for your situation. You see that your brother wants to provide for your welfare.” The martyr of Christ said to him: “My mind is made up. I’ve never changed. I was in the assembly and I celebrated the Lord’s Supper with the brothers because I am a Christian”’ (17).⁴⁹

These three passages are eloquent testimonies to the problems between siblings caused by Christianity. Clearly, Christian brotherhood was sometimes preferred above the *fratres carnales*. The last passage also shows that Christianity appealed to rather young people, as we are told subsequently that Victoria had refused to marry the spouse selected for her by her parents (17). In fact, on the basis of modern evidence, Keith Hopkins had indeed postulated a higher incidence of the young as possible sources of Christian recruitment.⁵⁰ However, we have very little information in this respect. Around the 160s (?) both Tatian (*Or.* 32.1, 33.1) and Celsus (Origen, *CC* 3.44) mention the presence of young boys and girls among the Christians. Towards the end of the second century, a presbyter in Asia Minor, perhaps in Iconium, published a kind of Christian novel, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.⁵¹ In the novel, a young girl, Thecla, sees many girls entering the house of Onesiphorus in order to listen to the apostle Paul (*APTheclae* 7). In the *Book of the Laws of Countries*, the Edessan philosopher Bardaisan rebukes his pupil Awida, who had started to put theological questions to his own friends, by saying ‘You should learn from somebody older than them’ (p. 5 Drijvers). Perhaps the best information is to be found in the *Acts*

⁴⁸ For the expression ‘I am a Christian’, see this volume, Chapter 1.3.

⁴⁹ For the text, see P. Franchi de’ Cavalieri, *Note agiografiche* 8 (Vatican City, 1935) 1–71, translated by M.A. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories* (Liverpool, 1996) 33 (slightly adapted); H.R. Seeliger and W. Wischmeyer, *Martyrerliteratur* (Berlin and Boston, 2015) 311–59; see also F. Dolbeau, ‘La “Passion” des martyrs d’Abitina: remarques sur l’établissement du texte’, *AB* 121 (2003) 273–96; A. Dearn, ‘The Abitinian Martyrs and the Outbreak of the Donatist Schism’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55 (2004) 1–18. This passage has been overlooked by Bradley, ‘Sacrificing the Family’.

⁵⁰ Hopkins, ‘Christian Number and Its Implications’, 205.

⁵¹ For its date and place, see this volume, Chapter 10.4.

of the *Abitinian Martyrs*. It is not only Victoria who was clearly already a Christian before her intended marriage, but we also hear of an *adolescens* Saturninus (15) and a *puer* Hilarianus (18). In another North African martyr story, the *Passio SS Maximae, Donatillae et Secundae*,⁵² describing a martyrdom of AD 304, we hear of the twelve-year old Secunda (4) and the fourteen-year old Maxima (2). It is probably hardly chance that we find these young people among North African Christians, which have left us so many reports of martyrdoms.⁵³

Siblings could of course also be supportive. In the famous *Passio Perpetuae*,⁵⁴ Perpetua mentions contact with her Christian brother, like her a catechumen (2.2), whom she comforts (3.8) and whom, just before her execution, she encourages to keep the faith (20.10). Everything points to a close relationship, probably strengthened by their shared conversion to Christianity. The Christian faith, then, could also bring siblings closer together. On the other hand, the relationship between Perpetua and her father had been seriously damaged because of her conversion.⁵⁵ Such a gap between the martyr and the rest of her family is graphically illustrated by the *Passio s. Irenaei episcopi*, which narrates the martyrdom of a bishop of Sirmium in AD 304.⁵⁶ When he was tortured ‘on the one side his children cried, embraced his feet and said: “father, have pity on yourself and on us”, whereas, on the other, the face of his sad wife prayed for his youth. He was hard pressed by the weeping and mourning of all his relatives, the groans of his servants, the wailing of his neighbours, and the crying of his friends, all of whom cried out to him and said: “have pity on your youth!”’ (3.1–2, tr. Musurillo, adapted). Yet Irenaeus stubbornly rejects all attempts to move him, and in the end he is beheaded.

One can easily imagine that conversion and opting for martyrdom must have been a painful event in many a family in these early centuries. We may perhaps compare the agony of a modern family, when they realise that their son or daughter has opted to become a jihadist or suicide bomber. Unfortunately, strong ideologies cause deep rifts that are not always easy to understand or to sympathise with by those who have no real stake in the realities of the conflict.

This language, that does not distinguish between older and younger siblings but also addresses the members of the congregation as ‘saints’ and ‘elect’,⁵⁷ must have given the early Christians a feeling of being equal before God, even if not equal in the world. The sense of being equal is perhaps also evident in the choice

⁵² Edited by C. de Smedt, *AB* 9 (1890) 107–16, tr. Tilley, *Donatist Martyr Stories*, 13–24.

⁵³ Note also the fifteen-year old Ponticus in *Mart. Lugd.* 53 and the 21 year old Pamoun in *P. Oxy.* 70.4759; see also this volume, Chapter 12.3.

⁵⁴ See this volume, Chapters 22–26.

⁵⁵ See this volume, Chapter 22.3.

⁵⁶ See the new edition of F. Dolbeau, ‘Le dossier hagiographique d’Irenée, évêque de Sirmium’, *Antiquité. Tardive* 7 (1999) 205–14, reprinted with *addenda* in his *Sanctorum societas*, 2 vols (Brussels, 2005) 1.147–68.

⁵⁷ Titus 1.1, 2 Tim 1.9–10, 2.10.

of the word *ekklêsia*, the technical term of the democratic Athenian assembly, for the congregation, even if the contemporary *ekklêsiai* were no longer democratised to the same extent as the Athenian one of the classical period. It is true that *ekklêsia* also meant ‘assembly’ in general and had Jewish roots as well,⁵⁸ but we cannot escape the impression that, like the Stoics, some of the earliest Christians liked to use terms derived from the political sphere, such as *politewô*, *politeuma*, *leitourgia* and *chorêgia*,⁵⁹ even if this vocabulary was largely depoliticised. In any case, the political meaning seems to have been still present in the times of Paul: witness his First Letter to the Thessalonians, which begins with: ‘Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. To the *ekklêsia* of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the recent New Revised Standard Edition’s translation ‘Church’ manages to conceal any existing relation to the Greek political term.

4. Bonding and bridging

We come to our fourth and last kind of social capital, the processes of bonding and bridging. The fact that in the beginning the early Christians did not yet have churches but met in private houses will have been an important contribution to the process of bonding people together.⁶¹ From Paul’s Letter to the Romans alone we can deduce the existence of about eight of such house churches in Rome and later testimonies confirm this picture.⁶² The best known house church still is the ‘Christian house’ in Dura Europos, on the Euphrates, but more recent excavations have also revealed two third-century house churches in Israel.⁶³ It is clear that this is also the situation presupposed by the *Apocryphal Acts* that purported to describe the missions of the apostles. In the apocryphal

⁵⁸ S. Mimouni, ‘Comment désigne-t-on une communauté dans le monde juif au 1^{er} siècle de notre ère’, in Belayche and Mimouni, *Les communautés religieuses dans le monde gréco-romain*, 21–28.

⁵⁹ A. Hilhorst, ‘Termes chrétiens issus du vocabulaire de la démocratie Athénienne’, *Filología Neotestamentaria* 1 (1988) 27–34 at 29.

⁶⁰ This is well argued by E.W. and W. Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement* (Edinburgh, 1999) 263f.

⁶¹ For these small churches in the beginning, see H.-J. Klauck, *Hausgemeinde und Hauskirche im frühen Christentum* (Stuttgart, 1981); Marksches, *Das antike Christentum*, 177–80; C. Osiek and M.Y. MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, 2006); E. Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* (London, 2013). For possible Jewish roots (house synagogues), see C. Claussen, *Versammlung, Gemeinde, Synagoge* (Göttingen, 2002) 37–9.

⁶² P. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus* (Minneapolis, 2003) 359–65.

⁶³ U. Mell, *Christliche Hauskirche und Neues Testament: Die Ikonologie des Bapisteriums von Dura Europos und das Diatessaron Tatians* (Göttingen, 2010); J. Patrich, ‘The Early Christianization of the Holy Land – The Archaeological Evidence’, in O. Brandt and G. Castiglia (eds), *Costantino e i Costantinidi: L’innovazione Costantiniana, le sue radici e i suoi*

Acts of John (46) of about AD 160, the apostle John not only preaches in the house of Andronicus on Sunday, but also performs a prayer, celebrates the Eucharist and lays hands on all those present.⁶⁴ In the somewhat later *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Paul preaches in Iconium in the house of Onesiphorus (5–7) and in Ephesus in the house of Aquila and Priscilla.⁶⁵ In his more or less contemporaneous *Apology* (1.67), Justin mentions a Sunday service in a private location, but not in one central public Roman place. How would that have been possible anyway, given ancient means of transport? This meeting in houses will have been an important factor in contributing to the social cohesion of the early Christians. At the same time, it may have also fostered the pluralisation of theology, as it is quite amazing how many different kinds of Christian groups there were in second-century Rome, the city about which we are best informed: Marcionites, Valentinians,⁶⁶ Quartodecimans and so on. On the one hand, then, house churches did lend themselves to an intensified cohesion, but, on the other, the growing pluralisation of the Church may have led also to the tendency to preserve orthodoxy and combat heresy. Here is an area that still needs further research.

The egalitarian nature of early Christianity meant that slaves and free people, even if not of the highest classes, were all members of the same organisation. This must have promoted a sense of bridging social distances that was also encouraged by the small groups in which the early Christians met.⁶⁷ In other words, the close relationships within the congregations must have enabled lower-class persons to interact with people of higher classes, which thus contributed to their self-esteem and well-being. Pagan observers, such as Celsus (Origen, CC 1.27, 3.44), liked to stress that the Christians – all of them – belonged to the lowest strata of Roman society. This picture was happily embraced at the turn of the twentieth century by anti-Christian classicists, but it has increasingly been recognised for what it is, namely a caricature.⁶⁸ Undoubtedly, there were developments over time in this respect. In the beginning of the Church, in Jeru-

sviluppi, 2 vols (Vatican City, 2016) 1.265–93 at 268–72 ('Christian Houses of Assembly (*Domus Ecclesiae*)').

⁶⁴ Note the same order in cc. 106–110, except for the laying of hands.

⁶⁵ See R. Kasser and P. Luisier, 'Le papyrus Bodmer XLI en édition princeps. L'épisode d'Épiphane des *Acta Pauli* en copte et en traduction', *Le Muséon* 117 (2004) 281–384.

⁶⁶ E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: the Church of the "Valentinians"* (Leiden, 2006).

⁶⁷ For this terminology of bonding and bridging, see R. Wuthnow, 'Religious Involvement and Status-Bridging Social Capital', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41 (2002) 669–84.

⁶⁸ See the observations by T. Schleich, 'Missionsgeschichte und Sozialstruktur des vor-konstantinischen Christentums. Die These von der Unterschichtreligion', *Geschichte, Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 33 (1982) 269–96; Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement*, 288–316; Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 138–40; A. Weiss, *Soziale Elite und Christentum. Studien zu ordo-Angehörigen unter den frühen Christen* (Berlin and Boston, 2015): this volume, Chapter 1, note 34.

salem, there must have been some poverty, as Paul collects money for the Jerusalem poor in the Diaspora, but in his Letters Paul does not mention cases of contemporary poverty.⁶⁹ This situation seems to have lasted until well into the first decades of the second century.

It is understandable that as the church grew, so the number of poor must have increased. The *Shepherd* of Hermas (about AD 130?) well illustrates this development, as it mentions the number of the poor and exhorts the rich to look properly after them.⁷⁰ We do not have sufficient information to see to what extent the many Christian communities conformed to the exhortations of Jesus and his more socially active followers. Surely, reality will have often been different from the lofty ideals of Christianity's founder. Yet there must have been some bridging between the rich and the poor, free and slaves. The famous letter of Lyons of AD 177 mentions a slave Blandina who clearly had a close relationship with her Christian mistress,⁷¹ just like the slave Felicitas with Perpetua, who was from a higher social rank, in the *Passion of Perpetua*.⁷² The *Martyrdom of Pionius* (9) of 250 tells of a female slave Sabina who had been cast out on the mountains by her mistress, but saved by her fellow Christians.⁷³ In fact, Paul's Letter to Philemon (16) well illustrates the Christian ideal, as he recommends that the runaway slave Onesimus is taken back 'no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother'.

Another kind of bridging must have been that of the gender gap. There is plenty of evidence that early Christian women could move much more freely among men than their pagan counterparts. Yet here too we must be careful in distinguishing different periods. It seems clear from the Gospels that most of the women connected with Jesus belonged to the lower strata of Jewish society. The mention or suggestion of women of doubtful morals may well be an indication of the social cost of participation in the Jesus movement by women of the higher classes. This situation changed relatively quickly, as we find already 'women of high standing' among Paul's followers in Acts (13.50, 17.12) and well-to-do business women in the *Shepherd* of Hermas (*Mand.* 5.2.2). As time went on, we can notice, on the one hand, a steady growth of the number of poor women, but also the gradual infiltration of Christianity into the higher female circles of the Empire. Elsewhere in this volume, I have collected evidence to suggest that one of the attractions of Christianity was that better educated and intellectually curious women were offered the opportunity of mixing with in-

⁶⁹ Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement*, 218–9, 296.

⁷⁰ Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 90–9.

⁷¹ For Blandina, see E. Goodine and M. Mitchell, 'The Persuasiveness of a Woman: The Mistranslation and Misinterpretation of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.1.41', *J ECS* 13 (2005) 1–19.

⁷² For Felicitas, see this volume, Chapter 23.

⁷³ See also Reinbold, *Propaganda und Mission*, 306–08.

tellectual men.⁷⁴ The *Passion of Perpetua* even gives a moving account of the close tie between the spiritual leader Saturus and the young woman Perpetua, both of whom were executed on the same day in 203 AD.⁷⁵ In other words, even if we have little concrete information, everything we know about early Christianity indicates that the early congregations were relatively egalitarian and supplied important bridging and bonding opportunities.

Yet there must have also been another side to this bridging and bonding. Clearly, Christianity's isolation from the world must have had a negative influence on the social capital of those whose networks were well developed through important positions in the local communities. That is undoubtedly why, initially, we rarely hear of male members of the upper classes being Christians and why male aristocrats kept themselves away from Christianity until well into the third century.⁷⁶

5. Religious capital

Having looked at the social capital of the early Christians, let us conclude with a few observations on their religious capital. Bourdieu himself had but little interest in religion. His publications are hardly more than a dozen in this field and clearly influenced by his French experience.⁷⁷ So it is not surprising that he is not of much use as a source of inspiration in this respect. Does Google perhaps help? Not really. When originally writing this article, a search with 'religious+capital' resulted in 2900 hits, but virtually all of them referred to cities such as Benares, Ayacucho (the holy city of Peru) or Jerusalem. Much more successful was a search for 'spiritual+capital' with a score of 5400 hits, even though that number was also polluted by holy cities. According to the website of the John Templeton Foundation, "The specific term "spiritual capital" refers to that as-

⁷⁴ Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 95–128; this volume, Chapter 3. Unfortunately, E.A. Clark, 'Thinking with Women: the Uses of the Appeal to "Woman" in Pre-Nicene Christian Propaganda', in W.V. Harris (ed.), *The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries. Essays in Explanation* (Leiden, 2005) 43–51 has limited herself to an analysis of discourse.

⁷⁵ See this volume, Chapter 26.

⁷⁶ W. Eck, 'Christen im höheren Reichsdienst im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert? Zu zwei Thesen Th. Klausers', *Chiron* 9 (1979) 449–64 and 'Religion und Religiosität in der soziopolitischen Führungsschicht der Hohen Kaiserzeit', in W. Eck (ed.), *Religion und Gesellschaft in der römischen Kaiserzeit. Kolloquium zu Ehren von Friedrich Vittinghoff* (Cologne, 1989) 15–51; T.D. Barnes, 'Statistics and the Conversion of the Roman Aristocracy', *JRS* 85 (1995) 135–47; M. Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy. Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2002); Al. Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford, 2011) 173–205; Weiss, *Soziale Elite und Christentum*.

⁷⁷ But note P. Bourdieu, 'La production de la croyance: contribution à une économie des biens symboliques', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 13 (1977) 3–44, cf. D. Swartz, 'Bridging the Study of Culture and Religion: Pierre Bourdieu's political economy of symbolic power', *Sociology of Religion* 57 (1996) 71–85.

pect of social capital linked with religion and/or spirituality... In one sense, then, spiritual capital might be seen as a significant subset of social capital. According to Robert Putnam's influential work, religion is by far the largest generator of social capital in the United States, contributing to more than half of the social capital in the country'.⁷⁸

The term 'spiritual capital' may well take off in the near future but still seems to be under construction, so to speak.⁷⁹ Things are somewhat different with the term 'religious capital', which has found its place in the work of the well-known rational-choice sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, who state: '*Religious capital* consists of the degree of mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture'.⁸⁰ Yet this definition is not satisfactory. As with their definition of social capital ('interpersonal attachments'),⁸¹ this definition too is excessively individualistic. It does not look at the organisations and surroundings in which these interpersonal attachments take place. Membership of a church, for example, may be attractive because of the pleasant persons one meets there, but also because of its atmosphere, the satisfaction of spiritual needs or the inspirational doctrines, whereas a football club clearly satisfies rather different needs.

Probably, we can better speak of 'religious capital', in a context where religious organisations have religious doctrines or ideas that empower people and thus make it attractive to become or stay member of that organisation. If these ideas become less attractive, religious organisations will start to lose members and may even go 'bankrupt'. It would make sense that any history of Christianity would come up with the importance of religious capital to early Christianity, but a search in this respect soon becomes disappointing. General histories usually describe, but rarely reflect on the reasons of its success. When we look at early Christian communities from this perspective, we may mention three aspects that I would count as typical of the religious capital of the early Christians in addition to its social capital.

The first is the love of God. Any reader of the New Testament will be immediately struck by expressions, such as the fact that He is 'the Father' and the Christians his 'children'. He loves his children and has chosen them. To quote Wayne Meeks, 'the common language of the Pauline Leaders, which in these

⁷⁸ <http://www.templeton.org/spiritualcapital/background.html> (unfortunately, the page is no longer accessible, as I noted in the summer of 2016).

⁷⁹ See B. Verter, 'Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu', *Sociological Theory* 21 (2003) 150–74; P. Bourdieu, *Il campo religioso*, edited, translated and postfaced by R. Alciati, E.R. Urciuoli and E. Pace (Turin, 2012).

⁸⁰ R. Stark and R. Finke, *Acts of Faith* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2002) 120–5 at 120; R. Finke and K. Dougherty, 'The Effects of Professional Training: The Social and Religious Capital Acquired in Seminaries', *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 41 (2002) 103–20; see also S.H. Clain and C. Zech, 'A Household Production Analysis of Religious and Charitable Activity', *American Journal of Economy & Society* 58 (1999) 924–46.

⁸¹ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 118.

particulars is probably shared generally by the members, represents God as participating personally in the direct, feeling-charged community of the house churches'.⁸² One can easily see that this close connection with God or Christ, sometimes not easily distinguished, helped the early Christians through their hardships. The *Acts* of the Christian martyrs provide many eloquent testimonies to this belief.⁸³

A second and highly precious good must have been the belief in salvation. It is true that the amount of belief in an afterlife varied considerably in pagan circles, and believers were probably long in a minority, perhaps even as late as the Byzantine Empire. Yet it is also true that Paul and his associates firmly believed in the resurrection and held this belief out as a consolation to the Thessalonian Christians (1 Thess. 4.13–8). The same belief, but perhaps more literally, is more than apparent in the *Acts* of the martyrs who happily underwent their execution in firm belief of their immediate salvation. In the case of the Spanish bishop Fructuosus, this belief was so intense that his parishioners saw the bishop, still bound to the stake, shoot like a rocket straight to heaven after being burned alive (*Passio Fructuosi* 5).

Moreover, a pendant of this belief was that in damnation. Just as the early Christians believed in their going straight to heaven, so they firmly believed in their opponents going straight to hell. When the Roman governor told the aged Smyranean bishop Polycarp: 'Since you are not afraid of the animals, then I shall have you consumed by fire – unless you change your mind'. But Polycarp answered: 'The fire you threaten me with burns merely for a time and is soon extinguished. It is clear you are ignorant of the fire of the everlasting punishment and of the judgement that is to come, which awaits the impious. Why then do you hesitate? Come, do what you will.' (*Martyrium Polycarpi* 11.2). And when the already mentioned Perpetua was led into the arena and came into sight of the governor who was responsible for their execution, she and her fellow martyrs told him: 'You condemned us, but God you!' (*Passio Perpetuae* 18.8).⁸⁴

Last but not least, as a corollary of their belief in the life everlasting, the Christians were prepared to die for their faith. Unfortunately, we can rarely make a proper analysis of the motives of Christians who were prepared to die for their faith in the same manner as we would do for today's suicide bombers, who are considered as 'martyrs' by Al-Qaida and their kind.⁸⁵ It is only in the case of Perpetua that we can see how a young woman gradually accepts her fate and even starts to glorify in her martyrdom. It is perhaps not by chance that, in a society that so much appreciated spectacles, the Christians sometimes even turned their own death into a spectacle. Once again the martyr *Acts* present us

⁸² Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 170.

⁸³ See this volume, Chapter 1.1.

⁸⁴ See also this volume, Chapter 25 on c. 17.

⁸⁵ See this volume, Chapter 24.3.

with many an example, from the steadfast attitude of Polycarp (*Martyrium Polycarpi* 11) to Cyprian binding his eyes with his own hand (*Acta Cypriani* 5.5). Such behaviour so impressed the contemporaries that an onlooker could openly express his sympathy for the martyrs and be executed with them (*Acta Eupli* 1). As Tertullian (*Ap.* 50.13) already noted: *semen est sanguis Christianorum*.

Conclusion

We need not speculate here if Christianity would have also won without Constantine and his vision.⁸⁶ It is clear that at the beginning of the fourth century it was still expanding and gradually penetrating into the highest echelons of Roman society. This success has to be explained in comparison with the less successful and even failing cults of the competition. The notions of social and religious capital may be useful in this respect, as I hope to have illustrated. Unfortunately, the ancient world has left no records of a religious consumers' association. This means that we have to make the comparisons ourselves. Why was Christianity more successful than the Mithraic, Isiac and other cults? Answers to this question have to take into account both the material and ideological properties of the ancient cults. Such a quest does not offer easy answers. The religious economy of the ancient world still poses many questions.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Cf. J.N. Bremmer, 'The Vision of Constantine', in A. Lardinois *et al.* (eds), *Land of Dreams. Greek and Latin studies in honour of A.H.M. Kessels* (Leiden, 2006) 57–79.

⁸⁷ Various versions have profited from audiences in Bremen (2004), Hamburg (2005) and Berlin (2006) as well as from comments by George H. van Kooten and Onno van Nijf. Stephen Harrison kindly corrected my English.

Chapter 3

Why Did Early Christianity Attract Upper-class Women?

Any reader of the *Acts* of the early Christian martyrs will be struck by the prominence of women. Fierce Perpetua, noble Blandina and fearless Crispina are the best known, but the Neronian persecution already saw a number of female martyrs performing in mythological spectacles. What attracted them to Christianity? Did they all have the same motives for joining the Church, or did early Christianity offer a variety of possibilities to all kinds of women? Here I will concentrate on one particular group of women. Some of the best-known female martyrs, such as Perpetua and Crispina, were members of the upper class. Which aspects of the early Church must have been particularly appealing to them?¹

The fullest exposition of the place of women in the early Church is still Harnack's study of the mission and expansion of Christianity, in which he convincingly demonstrates the great importance of women; women were apparently even in the majority. Harnack, though, did not explain the reasons why it attracted so many women. In fact, he rather proudly stated in the preface to the fourth German edition that his work 'so gut wie keine Hypothesen enthält, sondern Tatsachen zusammenstellt'. His collection of the evidence is indeed near-exhaustive.² It is therefore not so much in enlarging the evidence as through interpreting the material that progress can be made in understanding why the early Church attracted women on a large scale. More recent studies of the rise of Christianity have not really advanced beyond Harnack in this respect. MacMullen only notes the fact that ancient men usually described women as credulous beings, and apparently accepts this picture as a sufficient explanation. He argues that 'women, except at the absolute top of society, did in fact enjoy far less access to advanced education and wide reading than men; land women, except at the very bottom of society, did in fact enjoy far less liberty to stir about in the towns and gain a wide experience than men'. In his massive study of the

¹ Female martyrs: A. Valerio, 'Le figure femminili negli Atti dei martiri del II secolo', *Rassegna di Teologia* 22 (1981) 28–44. Neronian persecution: H.C. Brennecke, 'Danaiden und Dirken. Zu 1 Clem. 6,2', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 88 (1977) 302–08 and, especially, T. Schmitt, 'Des Kaisers Inszenierung: Mythologie und neronische Christenverfolgung', *ZAC* 16 (2012) 487–515, who situates the reference in contemporary Rome.

² A. v. Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums* (Berlin, 1924¹) 589–611; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth, 1986) 310; A. Di Berardino, 'Women and Spread of Christianity in the First Centuries', *Augustinianum* 55 (2015) 305–36.