

SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY
OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY
Faculty of Arts



MACQUARIE
University
SYDNEY - AUSTRALIA

SSEC newsletter

ISSUE 91 FEBRUARY 2020



Dr. Lyn Kidson

Macquarie graduate / lecturer in New Testament Alphacrucis

From the President's desk:



Welcome to the **March 2020 SSEC** newsletter. We are glad to have you as members.

Since our last newsletter in August 2019 we have been privileged to have a visit from Professor Ben Witherington III (Asbury) who spoke on *The Character of Christianity in the Province of Asia* (the full text can be found later in this Newsletter).

We also heard from Macquarie's A/Professor Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides, who spoke on the language of divine inspiration from Plato to the early Christians, Professor Craig Keener (Asbury), who spoke on "Christobiography" (the literary genre of Biblical Gospels, the topic of his most recent book), and at the end-of-year function Dr. Gareth Wearne (ACU Sydney) spoke on new approaches to the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Several Society members are publishing books in 2020 which will be of interest to members. First cab off the rank is A/Professor Paul McKechnie's *Christianizing Asia Minor: Conversion, Communities, and Social Change in the Pre-Constantinian Era*, which will be launched at Macquarie on 3rd March (see "Calendar of Events" at the end of the Newsletter). More book news to follow!

Our annual conference for 2020, will be held on Saturday 2nd May, with the theme "**God or Mammon: the Economy of the Early Churches in the Roman Empire.**" The visiting Fellow for 2020 and keynote speaker will be Dr. Michael Theophilos (ACU Melbourne). Professor Larry Welborn (Fordham/Macquarie) will be our distinguished international speaker. Further details are given in the following pages. Papers by various other distinguished individuals will be presented throughout the rest of the year, and are shown on the "Calendar of Events."

We hope to see you at one of these great public events and encourage you to bring along a colleague, neighbour or friend.

SSEC Newsletter

SSEC Newsletter is published twice yearly for the Society of the Study of Early Christianity.

"The emphasis of our Society is one of history: the study of Early Christianity in its Jewish and Graeco-Roman setting."

February 2020 edition: Number 91

Editors: Lesley Mascal
Alanna Nobbs

Contributions: SSEC Members

Next newsletter is planned for August 2020 — deadline for articles is 4 July 2020.

For further information about the Society for the Study of Early Christianity, to update your contact details, or to subscribe to the **SSEC**

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(last resort — they are flat out!)



[here](#) for SSEC
Facebook link.

[Click](#)

FROM the SECRETARY (Karyn Young)

SSEC supports students who are involved in the history of early Christianity, including The Tyndale scholarship, small travel grants, the various SSEC prizes and the Patricia Geidans Bequest. See reports in this newsletter.

SSEC has a very important role to play in investigating the history of early Christianity with its non-sectarian, historical approach, allowing a freedom to investigate this particular area of ancient history with academic rigour. Many SSEC members who were and are pursuing research in to the history of Early Christianity have been supported by SSEC and have won international recognition.

Current office bearers for the Society are **President:** Chris Forbes, **Vice-President:** Alanna Nobbs, **Secretary/Treasurer:** Karyn Young. And the committee members are Don Barker, Bruce Barnes, Stephen Burford, Malcolm Choat, Peter Eyland, Lyn Kidson, Lesley Mascall, Margaret Mowczko, Ryan Strickler, and Gareth Wearne.

SSEC is indebted to Lesley Mascall, Kerrie Worboys, and members of the committee who handle much of the business of SSEC, and assist with the conference and seminars.

Thank you to Gareth Wearne, and Louise Gosbell for managing the SSEC Facebook site, and to Lyn Kidson and Louise Gosbell for managing the website.

On behalf of SSEC, I would like to thank all the speakers who so willingly present outstanding papers at our seminars and conferences on a completely voluntary basis.

Finally, a big thank you to our wonderful and loyal SSEC Members. Your support through membership and donations allows SSEC to make a valuable contribution to the study of early Christianity.

A financial report will be presented at the end of the financial year and included in the next newsletter

SSEC NEWS ITEMS:

For your diaries: next year's **SSEC ANNUAL DAY CONFERENCE** will be on Saturday, 2nd May, 2020, with the theme "**God or Mammon: the economy of the early churches.**"The conference curtain raiser will be held on the preceding Thursday 30th April. Thank you for all those who have offered papers.

There will 8 speakers — at this stage we are awaiting final confirmation.

- Our visiting Fellow, Dr Michael (Theophilos ACU)
- Our distinguished international speaker, Professor Larry Welborn (Fordham/Macquarie)
- together with Dr. Chris Forbes (Macquarie)
- Peter Docherty (UTS/Morling)
- Prof Jim Harrison (SCD)
- Dr Lyn Kidson (Alphacrucis)
- Dr Adam White (Alphacrucis)
- Dr Amelia Brown (UQ)

SSEC members	\$130	Pensioner (age)	\$95
Alumni	\$140	Full-time students	\$55
Non- members	\$145	Individual lectures, per lecture	\$25
		SSEC concession rate, per lecture	\$20

Reminder:
Membership fees are now due.

For online payments to the Society, *Trybooking* is now available.

For membership payments
<https://www.trybooking.com/BIAZB>

For donations
<https://www.trybooking.com/BIAZD>
Donations

For conference
<https://www.trybooking.com/BIAZO>

We are kicking the year off on Tuesday 3rd March with a talk by Associate Professor Paul McKechnie on the theme of Christianising the Roman Empire. It will given in the Australian Hearing Hub Rec Room at 6.30pm. At this event, Dr Rosalinde Kearsley will launch McKechnie's book ***Christianising Asia Minor: Conversion, Communities and Social Change in the Pre-Constantinian Era***. (Cambridge University Press 2019).

OTHER NEWS ITEMS:

The Sir Asher Joel Foundation supports the participation of Macquarie people (and the public) in archaeological field work in Israel through our agreement with Tel Aviv University, and offers post graduate scholarships and brings a visiting fellow in Early Jewish studies to Australia each year.

The Asher Joel Fellow for 2020 is Emeritus Professor Haskel Greenfield of The University of Manitoba, Canada. He will give the Sir Asher Joel Oration — ***Finding Goliath: evidence from the dig at ancient Gath*** — on Sunday 15th March 2020 at 7:30pm, at North Shore Temple Emanuel, 28 Chatswood Avenue, Chatswood to which **SSEC** members are cordially invited. A light kosher supper is provided. There is plentiful secure parking available and it is a level walk from Chatswood train station. Booking is preferable for catering purposes, but not essential.

Charge \$5. Register at: <https://www.nste.org.au/event/Sir-Asher-Joel-2020> or contact Dr Gil Davis by email at gil.davis@mq.edu.au, or phone 0439-817299

SSEC SCHOLARSHIPS

The Macquarie/Tyndale Cambridge Travelling Scholarship (for Masters, and HDR candidates in Ancient history at Macquarie and graduates of such programs within five years of award) is kindly funded by some **SSEC** members who designate donations for this purpose. Details on applying for this and other Ancient History scholarships is on the Ancient History website, [scholarship page](#).

Further enquiries:

Phone 9850 8833 (Dept of Ancient History Office)

Email: ancienthistory@mq.edu.au

The 2019 Macquarie/Tyndale Cambridge scholarship, to Tyndale House Cambridge, was awarded to Charles Thorne, who sadly has been prevented by illness from taking it up in the immediate future. The 2020 scholarship will be advertised on the department's website in March with the specifications and application details.

Previous winners of the Tyndale Scholarship are:

2009: Bernard Doherty and Gerald Donker

2010: Murray Smith

2011: Shin Min Seok

2012: Bradley Bitner

2013: Julien Ogereau

2014: Lyn Kidson

2015: James Unwin

2016: Lydia Gore-Jones and Rory Shiner

2017: Benjamin Overcash

2018: Marty Feltham

2019: David Evans

2020: Charles Thorne

SSEC POSTGRADUATE TRAVELLING GRANTS

Each year **SSEC** offers up to 4 travelling grants to members who are also postgraduates enrolled in higher degree work in Ancient History at Macquarie. These are awarded competitively and are worth up to \$500. Please apply to the secretary outlining your proposed travel, how it helps your thesis completion and how the money is to be spent. Winners are asked please to provide a short report for the **SSEC** newsletter.

Other items of interest to **SSEC** members.

The Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum (CRINT) Foundation is pleased to announce that the 2019 CRINT Essay Prize has been awarded to **Lydia Gore-Jones** of St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College, Sydney, Australia — **SSEC** member and former committee member and MQ/AH graduate — for her paper entitled ***Torah as Wisdom in Late Second Temple Judaism, by Example of 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch.***



The Award Committee, which consisted of Profs. Shaye Cohen, David Goodblatt (z"l) and Huub van de Sandt, found this a masterful essay. The Committee was particularly impressed by Gore-Jones's bibliographical reach, her philological precision, and her careful collection of data. In the judgment of the Committee, the essay is well written, well argued, and provides the reader with an insightful understanding of the subject.

Dr. Gore-Jones is currently Lecturer in Biblical Studies at St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College, a member institute of Sydney School of Divinity. Prior to returning to university she worked as a radio journalist and English language teacher. She received her PhD from the Department of Ancient History at Macquarie University in 2018. Her research areas cover Jewish and Christian apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, religious ideas in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity, and Christian exegesis of scriptures in the early centuries. She lives with her husband and daughter in Sydney, Australia.

The CRINT Essay Prize is an initiative of the CRINT foundation, which seeks to encourage high-level scholarship by up-and-coming academics working on the early history of Jews and Christians. The prize is awarded bi-annually to the best essay that illuminates how Jews and Christians shared and/or developed their own traditions and identities during the first six centuries CE. The amount of the prize is €1,000.

Dr Gareth Wearne: lecturer in biblical studies in the Australian Catholic University's Faculty of Theology and Philosophy — **SSEC** member and current committee member and MQ/AH graduate — studying the Dead Sea Scrolls and their resonance within contemporary religious debates was recently named as one of the recipients of the 2019 Top 5 Humanities and Social Sciences Media Residencies. This award is to enable some of Australia's brightest minds to share their expertise with audiences hungry for credible and informed debate.



The fifth annual reception sponsored by Macquarie university with Australian College of Theology and the Sydney College of Divinity was held at the society of Biblical Literature meeting in San Diego in November 2019. Dr Lyn Kidson reports:

The 'Down Under' reception held on Saturday 25th November was well attended by approximately 60 to 70 people. There was a diverse range of people and was well attended by Macquarie University graduates including Dr Edwina Murphy, Dr Bradley Bitner, Dr Constantine Campbell, Dr Zachery Thomas (there were others but I can't recall everyone). This would have to be one of the great benefits of this reception- the continued relationships and the new networking opportunities that come about because it is a type of alumni reunion. Unfortunately the program in 2019 meant that some people were not able to attend. I was intending to chair the presentations but my session I was presenting in clashed with the reception time. This meant that our numbers were in fact on the low side. Dr Paul Yeates (Macquarie University graduate) representing the Australian College of Divinity set up and chaired the event for me. Paul presented briefly on the work being done at the ACT, followed by Dr Jim Harrison (also Macquarie University graduate), who presented about the Sydney College of Divinity and the up-coming *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* volume. Lastly, Professor Lawrence Welborn described the opportunities that are available at Macquarie University in early Christianity/ancient history. He spent some time describing many of the positive outcomes of researching at Macquarie University, which many of us in the room could attest to. He then launched Professor Edwin Judge's book, *Paul and the Conflict of Cultures - ed. Jim Harrison*. I left it until later in the conference to buy my copy, and it was the last of small number left on the stand. If this is a measure of success of the reception in promoting Macquarie University and its scholars, then it was a very worthwhile exercise. The only downside was the cost of the food, which was far more expensive than the reception in Denver. I included a comment about this in the hotel's feedback form they sent me. We were given a generous donation of individually wrapped Tim Tams to give away as gifts to the attendees, and given the number of wrappers at the end of the night, this made contributed to a positive impression of Australian scholarship. Personally, I found the reception beneficial as I was asked to contribute to the *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* because of a conversation began at the reception. As a Macquarie University Honorary Postdoctoral Associate, this is one of the many positive outcomes of the reception.

The following **SSEC** members (all of whom but Carole are staff, honoraries or graduates of Ancient History at Macquarie) have published one or more books in the last year or so. More will be said about these splendid achievements at the Conference, with a couple of these in the pipeline. .

Larry Welborn	Jim Harrison	Edwin Judge
Lyn Kidson	Edwina Murphy	Carole Ferch-Johnson
Paul McKechnie	Gillian Spalding Stracey	

The Society would like to congratulate them all on their splendid achievements.

The Ancient HISTORY department's **Continuing Education Programme**, and the full list of units on offer, is on our website.- The cost is \$145 per unit for this semester. Dates for sessions can be found if you [click here](#).

Please note, the department now has a different set of offering from the past.

This programme offers a really wonderful opportunity for students of all ages to study a variety of Ancient History subjects, and gives access to top class teaching — without the stress of dreaded exams.

Learning knows no limits!

and all are welcome.

Macquarie Ancient Languages School (MALS) offers a wide range of courses in Classical & Koine Greek, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, Classical Hebrew, Akkadian, Coptic, Sanskrit and others, including Hieratic and Aramaic. The program, timetable and application form will be available on the Ancient History website at <http://www.anchist.mq.edu.au/mals.html>. To add your name to the MALS mailing list, email: mals@mq.edu.au

Macquarie Ancient History Association (MAHA) – For enquiries telephone 9850-9965, 9850-8833, or email: ancienthistory@mq.edu.au or website: www.ancienthistory.com.au/news.php

Australian Centre for Egyptology email: egypt@mq.edu.au
website: egyptology.mq.edu.au

ALL ARE WELCOME

ARTICLE

by Ben Witherington III, Asbury Seminary

THE CHARACTER OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE PROVINCE OF ASIA—A.D. 50-100: CHRISTIANITY COMES OF AGE

That Christianity spread rapidly, especially in urban environments, in the second half of the first century A.D. few scholars would care to dispute. And even fewer would dispute that Asia Minor was a locale where Christianity in various forms found especially fertile soil for the spreading of the seed of the Word. It cannot be an accident that the longest period Paul spent time in a single locale, according to Acts, was in Ephesus for over two years. But he and his co-workers, for instance Priscilla, Aquila, Apollos, and Timothy were not the only ones there planting those seeds. And in any case, it is a mistake to assume some sort of monolithic, centrally controlled, (from Jerusalem? from Antioch?) movement, despite the best attempts of the roving Jerusalem based circumcision party Paul had to deal with in Galatia and apparently elsewhere too. At stake was just what sort of religion Christianity would become--- would it be just another sect of Judaism like at Qumran, or would it indeed become a world religion populated by Gentiles and Jews alike?

The Gospel was spread by both apostles and their co-workers and others we today would call lay persons, both intentionally and accidentally, and we must take seriously the clues we do have that even when it came to the organized spread of the Gospel there were several different streams of tradition and missions involved. The agreement referred to by Paul, in what may have been his earliest letter, Galatians, tells us that in about A.D. 50 approval or blessing was given for a mission to the 'uncircumcision' spear-headed by Paul and his co-workers, but also a mission to the 'circumcision' spear-headed by Peter and his associates. Now this division of labor was *not*, so far as we can tell, *geographical* in character but rather *ethnic and religious* in character. Broadly speaking, Paul would focus on Gentiles, including those who were already God-fearers, and Peter would focus on Jews and converts to Judaism. Even Paul however, in his most famous letter largely directed to Gentiles in Rome, recognized the principle that the Gospel about the Jewish messiah Jesus was for the Jew first, and also for the Gentile (Rom. 1).

While recent scholarly attempts to depict earliest Christianity as not merely multi-formed but in fact rather like dueling banjos, and so Christianities plural, must be said to be not solidly based in the evidence we have about first century Christian communities (e.g. Gnosticism *per se* and the Gnostic Gospels did not exist yet), nevertheless it is definitely true that there were several different forms that earliest Christianity took, and we find at least two of these in Ephesus itself--- Pauline Christianity, and Johannine Christianity. It is clear on closer inspection that earliest Christianity spread in various ways and places, including in Asia, without the help of the Twelve, and in some cases without the help of apostles. For example, Christianity was already in Rome long before Paul, or Peter seem to have ever arrived in the Eternal City. But our focus must be on the western end of the province of Asia. What can we say happened there, particularly in Ephesus, but also in the places we now call 'the seven churches of Revelation'?

We might wish that there was clear evidence of Peter and Paul working together, or Paul and the Beloved Disciple, whoever he may have been (and my view is he was not one of the Twelve but rather as Richard Bauckham has described him—a Judean disciple of Jesus from the Jerusalem environs who was eyewitness to some of the things Jesus did in that region, particularly at the end of Jesus' ministry) sadly, such evidence of working together is entirely lacking for the earliest period.

History is sadly messy, and this is all the more the case when it comes to earliest Christianity in the province of Asia. As I have said in a previous study the waters from the various important streams of earliest Christianity that flowed out of a central shared reservoir of beliefs and behaviors, especially about Jesus, sometimes intermingled, but mostly stayed within their own boundaries, heading in their own respective directions, and this trend continued into the post-apostolic era. The Pauline stream tended to go in its own direction, mainly carrying along Gentile converts, and the more Jewish-Christian stream also went in its own direction.

Perhaps nowhere is it clearer that there were parallel but largely independent streams of earliest Christianity than in Asia where we find fully formed Pauline and Johannine communities, the former *largely* composed of Gentiles, and the latter *largely* composed of Jews and converts to Judaism. One may wish to ask--- what happened to these communities after the death of Paul in the 60s, or the later death of the Beloved Disciple perhaps in the early 90s? Did the Pauline and Johannine communities then merge? What about the cataclysm in Jerusalem in A.D. 70?

Paul Trebilco, in a very important study of Ephesus has examined the life of Christians in that city and in the surrounding region, and has shown there were several different groups of earliest Christians in the period A.D. 80-100--- the Pauline group addressed and organized by the Pastoral Epistles, the Johannine group addressed by 1-3 John, in addition to which there are those who split off from the Johannine group mentioned in those letters, and also the Nicolaitans mentioned in Revelation. Trebilco goes on to show that the Pauline and Johannine communities were distinct and distinguishable groups that likely maintained non-hostile contact, but such interactions are not described in either the Pauline or the Johannine documents, including Revelation. Rather those documents are too busy dealing with problems within and split offs from *their own groups* in various forms.

The evidence that these two major forms of 'orthodox' Christianity existed 'side by side' is shown by Trebilco by examining the major themes and forms in their respective documents--- for instance the attitude to the wider world differs in these two groups (with the Johannine community drawing more tight boundaries around their believers), their differing leadership structures, differing views on authority, differing views on women's roles, differing uses of self-designations, and differing rhetoric used in dealing with problems within the community. Trebilco argues that John the prophet in Revelation is one of the first to try and address all the Christian communities in the cities he mentions, and somewhat later Ignatius of Antioch seeks to do the same. In both cases, these are some of the first efforts to bringing the diverse communities of Jews and Gentiles in Christ under one roof, so to speak.

One of the most crucial aspects of Trebilco's study is the evidence he presents in regard to the social impact of Christians meeting in households, rather than in public places. This simply reinforced the separations between the Pauline and Johannine communities, for which we have no evidence of joint ventures before the 90s. He is right that persecution, of both largely Jewish and largely Gentile forms of Christianity reinforced this insular character of Christian meetings. John the elder, in 2-3 John, is addressing satellite Johannine communities outside of Ephesus that appear to have been church plants by the mother community. If John the Seer is the same person as John the elder (and I think he is), he is addressing mainly Johannine communities, since he was previously part of that community in Ephesus before his exile, but perhaps he is spreading the net wider in Rev. 2-3 than we previously realized. Or perhaps, both Johannine and Pauline forms of Christianity had also been planted in places like Laodicea as well as Ephesus.

In the end, Trebilco opts for the peaceful co-existence theory between Johannine and Pauline Christianity, rather than the take-over or merger theory about the two communities. He stresses, rightly in my view, "It is noteworthy that neither group would have regarded each other in the same way as they saw their 'opponents'. Neither group would have failed the various litmus tests that the other group has used with regard to their 'opponents' and which their respective opponents had failed." In my view this is spot on, as the British would say, and it means that while both communities allowed for some diversity in faith and praxis, there were also clear boundaries, both theological and ethical, the crossing of which led to polemical and rhetorical responses like 'they have made shipwreck of their faith' or 'they went out from us but were not of us'.

The Johannine communities, largely composed of Jewish followers of Jesus were more exclusivistic and concerned about firming up the boundaries of the communities whilst the Pauline communities, largely composed of Gentiles, were prepared to be a bit more open to pagans and more concerned to "translate significant theological ideas into more acculturated forms" This comports with the Pauline mission's greater concern to reach out to pagans, whereas the Jewish Christians were more concerned to preserve their Jewish identity while remaining followers of Christ. And as things would

turn out, the latter form of Christianity, while still existing into the early Middle Ages decreased in size and influence, being largely rejected by Jews, whereas the former sort of Christianity grew exponentially over the next few centuries, and with its growth sadly also came rising anti-Semitism among other flaws.

Rodney Stark, a sociologist who has analyzed the rise of Christianity in some detail points out that particularly in the more Gentile forms of Christianity certain social factors favored its growth. He puts the matter this way:

Christian subcultures in the ancient world rapidly developed a very substantial surplus of females, while in the pagan world around them males greatly outnumbered females. This shift was the result of Christian prohibitions against infanticide and abortion and of substantial sex bias in conversion....Christian women enjoyed substantially higher status within the Christian subcultures than pagan women did in the world at large. This was especially marked vis-à-vis gender relations within the family, but women also filled leadership positions within the church....[G]iven a surplus of Christian women and a surplus of pagan men, a substantial amount of exogamous marriage took place, thus providing the church with a steady flow of secondary converts...[T]he abundance of Christian women resulted in higher birthrates—that superior fertility contributed to the rise of Christianity.

Despite the cautions in 1 Cor. 14 and 1 Tim. 2 about certain forms of behavior in worship that women should avoid, ironically, it was the more Gentile, more Pauline forms of Christianity that grew rapidly, in part because it attracted far more women who were allowed a variety of religious roles, often comparable or even superior to the ones they had before in pagan religions. Growth in early Christianity did not just happen by evangelism, it happened also through encouraging the growth of families, protecting women and orphans, and much more. No wonder pundits like Celsus, in his treatise entitled *True Doctrine* in about 170 A.D. criticized the growing form of Christianity as being chiefly populated by 'women, slaves, and minors'. Of course, that was an exaggeration, but he was right that women were very much involved. And there is evidence that Christians were buying slaves out of bondage, manumitting them, or simply freeing their own slaves (see Philemon).

If we are to get a clearer fix on what was going on in earliest Christianity as it grew and changed, due attention has to be paid especially to what was happening in cities like Ephesos, Smyrna, Pergamon, Sardis, and Laodicea, as the study of the social and archaeological context can only enhance our better understandings of the growth or diminution of various streams of earliest Christianity on the way to the post-apostolic age. However, there was danger lurking on the horizon, in the form of persecution, prosecution, and in some cases, like that of Antipas, execution. It is not an accident that the Book of Revelation is probably the first to seriously discuss the likelihood of martyrdom, even beginning to use the term *martus* to mean something more than just a witness.

What form did this danger take? Firstly, there was the issue of the character of a particular Emperor. Was he paranoid about new eastern religions, and more to the point was he keen on Emperor worship? While I think that the imperial cult card has been played in far too many ways and places in NT studies in the last couple decades, there is no doubting that it spread in the first century A.D. in various places in the Empire as a new cult or religion. In fact, one could argue that it and the new 'Christian' religion were the two fastest growing new religions in the second half of the first century A.D. in the Empire. But there was this difference: 1) the Emperor cult grew because cities and regions wished to have the Emperor offer patronage in various forms to their locales and cities, and indeed there were inducements to these places in the provinces to build Imperial cult temples, or to rename their cities after the Emperor (see Claudiconium, Caesarea Philippi etc). This had as much to do with economics and politics as it had to do with religion; 2) by contrast, Christianity spread, not because of external sponsorship and certainly not because of political pressure, but indeed in spite of political pressure. So far as I can see *Christianity was genuinely the first evangelistic religion, in the history of the region, that was in a sense primarily if not purely religious in character in the broad sense.* 3) But another factor had to do with the rise in the number of Gentile followers of Jesus, which caused increasing tensions with already established Jewish communities in various places. While Christianity flew largely under the Imperial radar in the early and middle parts of the first century A.D.,

despite sporadic and limited scapegoating of Christians by Nero, and later Domitian and others, when the Jewish community increasingly was prepared to protest the activities of the followers of Christ in the synagogues and in competition with the synagogues, precisely because Judaism was a religion of recognized antiquity with exemptions from having to worship the Emperor, these protests were taken seriously and Christians were taken to court.

What could have caused Jews in Asia to be even more concerned than in the past about their fragile existence in a dominantly Gentile environment? How were they to avoid complete Hellenization in a situation where they already had to deal with some of their youths trying to remove the marks of circumcision so they could participate in Olympic style games, or had to cope with the pagan aesthetic influences on their synagogue buildings which resulted in pagan signs of the zodiac in their synagogue floors from Sepphoris to Sardis?

I would suggest that while the community of Christ followers, being largely Gentile, did not suddenly have a panic attack when the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 through the Roman victory over the Jewish zealots, *the effect on the Jewish community was more devastating*. Whether they fully realized it or not right away, the religion of Temple, territory, and Torah, had been whittled down to one T--- Torah. Going forward into modernity Judaism would be a Torah-centric religion, they would be some sort of resident aliens throughout the Empire, with no territory they could call their own, and no Temple for sacrifices and festivals. Just how much that affected early Judaism can be seen in the second century in the last ditch desperate bar Kokhba revolt trying to reinvigorate messianic belief and retake Jerusalem and other territory, which resulted in the absolute suppression of any Temple and territory dreams centered on Jerusalem, as the city was rebranded as a pagan city Aelia Capitolina, with a pagan temple on the Temple mount! So much for 'next year in Jerusalem'.

Now all of these changes from the A.D. 60s to the latter third of the second century that happened to the traditional apparatus of Jewish religion, also drastically affected Jewish Christianity whose center was Jerusalem. In A.D. 62 James the Just was martyred and Christians fled the city before the final conflagration in A.D. 70. The early church would no longer have as its center, and mother church, Jerusalem, even though Jewish Christianity, in diminished capacity continued to exist there and elsewhere--- in Damascus and Antioch for instance. In any case, even before 70 A.D., the center of the church was heading west towards Rome, the eternal city and the center of the Empire as Acts chronicles.

It is no accident that 1 Peter, perhaps written sometime in the 60s, already addresses Jewish Christians and other as 'resident aliens' on the earth, whilst Jerusalem is nowhere mentioned, and Rome is called Babylon! Gentile followers of Jesus, unlike Jewish ones, had not previously seen themselves as 'in exile' or in some Diaspora. But 1 Peter encourages all Christians to view themselves that way, as resident aliens whose commonwealth or controlling center is in heaven, and also to view themselves as a priesthood of all believers--- note, not a class of priests serving a temple somewhere in Jerusalem or elsewhere. These changes in the whole *Gestalt* of a Jewish view of the world, and in turn a Jewish Christian view of the world, definitely affected the relationships between Jews and Christ followers in the post-70 A.D. world. The world of early Judaism, the world of Temple-centric, territory possessing, and Torah believing had come to an abrupt end in A.D. 70. Henceforth, the synagogue would provide the various centers of religious gravity for Jews, and anything that threatened those fragile institutions in an overwhelming Gentile environment had to be taken seriously. One such threat was the rising tide of Christianity especially in places like the province of Asia.

We begin to see this in Asia already in Rev. 1-2, where we have the polemics about a synagogue of Satan, but still the problem seems to have been, at least from a Roman viewpoint, in the main regional and sporadic for the growing Christian movement. The fact that Pliny could write the Emperor Trajan in the early second century asking what to do about Christians, in that famous passage, shows there was *not* already a set policy of how to deal with this new faith in the provinces. By way of reminder I quote Pliny here at length....

Pliny to the Emperor Trajan

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.

Trajan to Pliny

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it--that is, by worshiping our gods--even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

Now I submit that this passage reveals a few things we too seldom take note of: 1) while some Christians due to their '*atheism*' (i.e. refusal to worship the traditional gods or the Emperor) got punished or sent into exile (cf. Acts 18 about Priscilla and Aquila to John of Patmos in Rev. 1) *there was no settled Imperial policy yet in 111-13 A.D. about Christians* not long after John wrote Revelation; 2) in fact it would not be until we get to rulers like Decian or Diocletian that we can really talk about Emperor induced more general persecutions; 3) it would appear that the public denouncing of Christians came from both Gentiles and Jews who saw them as agitators of various sorts. It will be remembered that even in the 50s when Paul was in Ephesos, the real flash point was that Christianity was messing with the economy, specifically with the sale of Artemis silver shrines. What all this means is that while Christianity had no semi-official religious status in Rome and with Rome's officials in the Empire of a somewhat positive sort, as did Judaism, it also had no official banning or labeling as a pariah, *officially*. A *superstitio* it might be called, but it was not yet under some sort of omnibus ban; 3) but also, what we see with Trajan, perhaps not for the first time is making the worship of the Emperor or the like the litmus test of a person, as well as whether they would renounce their own faith in Christ. *Notice that non-Christian Jews were not being asked to do either of these things!* In short, the more Christianity emerged from its religious mother Judaism, and the more Gentiles became involved in it, the more precarious the position of the Christian faith until the time of Constantine in the fourth century. It is not an accident that still in the late second and early third centuries the touting of martyrdom was going on, remembering the cry of that great Latin theologian Tertullian—'the blood of the martyrs is seed for the church'.

But there was also a price and dark side to the rising tide of Gentile Christianity, namely the increasing anti-Semitic tendencies that grew with the movement. Already in Origen we see this at play in *contra Celsum*, even though that is pushing back against a not entirely unfair critique of some Christian behavior. And sadly, by the time we get to someone like John Chrysostom, anti-Semitism has come to full flower in the church, even among its greatest thinkers and theologians. No wonder post-70 Judaism basically jettisoned the LXX in favor of the Hebrew texts, for Gentile Christianity had co-opted that Greek translation for their own purposes, though it was an entirely Jewish product of the Jewish Diaspora mainly in Egypt.

The problem for the church in Asia, was in short, its necessary and inherent commitment to evangelism of anyone outside the community, in ways the world had not seen before, at least to the degree Christians zealously promoted their faith. The push back and persecution and occasional prosecution caused the more Jewish Christian communities to draw even stricter boundaries around themselves, and consequently their numbers began to dwindle. The more Gentile communities continued to grow despite the persecution, not least because pagans were used to adding a new deity to their pantheon, or even trying out a new eastern religion. Not so most traditional Jews. In terms of group-grid analysis, what one sees in the more Pauline communities is an attempt to have a mid- or high group emphasis by way of self-identification, and also a mid-grid approach to stratification and leadership structures. They remained somewhat charismatic in character well into the second century. The more Jewish Christian communities seem to have sought stricter boundaries, not least because they got more heavy criticism from their fellow Jews, as being beyond the pale of Judaism.

There is still a great deal to learn about Asian Christianity, and Trebilco and others have helped us see that labels matter, especially those that are self-generated by the community. After all, the term *christiano*i was not originally a self-chosen label, but rather an external statement--- 'they are partisans of Christ', just as *Herodiano*i meant partisans of the Herods. While Paul proclaimed in perhaps his earliest letter that 'in Christ, there was neither Jew nor Gentile, but all were one', this sadly is not how things entirely turned out, as the overwhelming number of converts continued to be Gentiles. And ironically the impetus for this we trace back to the Apostle to the Gentiles himself who made that proclamation in Gal. 3.28. The churches in Asia survived, as through fire, from Gentiles and Jews alike, and finally from the government itself. Perhaps after all that man from Nazareth knew what he was talking about when he said 'the gates of Hades' will not prevail against my community.'

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SSEC CALENDAR OF EVENTS AS AT 23RD JANUARY 2020

DATE AND TIME	EVENT
Tuesday 3rd March 6.30pm* Australian Hearing Hub	Associate Professor Paul McKechnie (Macquarie University) Title: TBA Book launch by Dr Rosalinde Kearsley of his book: <i>Christianizing Asia Minor: Conversion, Communities, and Social Change in the Pre-Constantinian Era</i>
Thursday 30th April 6.30pm Venue TBA	SSEC Conference Curtain Raiser
Saturday 2nd May 8.45am to 5pm Venue:	SSEC 2020 Conference Theme: <i>God or Mammon: The Economy of the Early Churches in the Roman Empire.</i> Robert Menzies College
Late May Venue and Date TBA	Proposed Event: Professor Ashraf Sadek Coptic Speaker Proposed Topic: <i>Who were the Maccabees and who was Herod (and his offspring)?</i>

Parking - It has been advised that parking after 6pm is now free. Members should park in the X3/W4 Carpark for easy access to both the Museum of Ancient Cultures, 29 Wally's Walk and the Australian Hearing Hub, 16 University Avenue.

There is easy public access to the University by both bus and train.

Costs: The SSEC Committee voted to abolish all entry costs for meetings. There is instead a strictly optional gold coin donation.

For further details, please visit the SSEC Website:

<https://www.mq.edu.au/about/about-the-university/faculties-and-departments/faculty-of-arts/departments-and-centres/department-of-ancient-history/engage/the-society-for-the-study-of-early-christianity> or contact us as follows: T: +61 (2) 9850 8844, E: SSEC@mq.edu.au (preferred)

- **Please note that the start time is 6.30pm, as we need to start well and truly before the time the building is closed by security.**

