PREFACE

Like the society in which we live, the society in which Early Christianity took shape was replete with people who were socially disadvantaged: orphans, women, widows, slaves, the poor, the hungry, prisoners, the oppressed, and so on. These are the people that are the focus of the essays in this volume. How did they survive? What were the attitudes to these unfortunate human beings? How did Early Christianity alleviate or perhaps aggravate their situation? Such issues, and more, are addressed in this volume.

The majority of the essays in this volume were originally presented at a scholarly meeting on this theme, held at the Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, on 23rd and 24th October 2014. During this meeting, academic peers thoroughly discussed the various contributions that are now published in this volume in a revised form, after the inputs made at the meeting as well as those from reviewers during peer-review process were taken into account.

The essays may be divided into three groups. The first group focuses on *general perspectives. Peter Lampe* offers a broad picture of the background of the issues investigated in this volume. He points out what was possible in terms of *Greek and Roman social-welfare morals and practices*, and then indicates how these were taken over by the Christian church and reviewed in light of Hebrew and Hellenistic-Jewish moral traditions. *John Fitzgerald* discusses the problem of *orphans* in the ancient Mediterranean world and identifies ways in which various societies acknowledged the plights of orphans and how they sought to address it. He then focuses on the way in which orphans were treated in Early Christianity, in particular in the pre-Constantinian period. *Tobias Nicklas* examines ancient Christian care for *prisoners*, in particular in the first and second centuries CE. He shows that the evidence for Christian care for prisoners is earlier and more widespread than usually assumed. *Peter Kirchschlaeger* draws our attention to *slavery*, in particular to the hermeneutic challenge when we engage with texts from Early Christianity from an ethical perspective in order to reach normative propositions for our day. He illustrates how this matter could be addressed from a human rights perspective. *Paul Decock* provides yet another important perspective in terms of the broader background by showing how *respect and care for the disadvantaged* were firmly embedded in Philo's interpretation of the Decalogue. Philo did not turn to social structures and coercive laws to move society to a more humane level, but he emphasised education and formation into the image and likeness of God.

In the second group of essays, the emphasis falls on New Testament texts. *Llewellyn Howes* discusses the parable of the loyal and wise *slave* in Q 12:42-44. He argues that this parable recalls the traditional slavery metaphor and that the message that it tries to put across is that Jewish leaders are appointed by God in order to take care of the physical needs of their subjects. If this happens, the Kingdom of God takes shape within the physical world. Two essays address issues in the Gospel of Matthew. *Bill Domeris* poses the question: "Who were *the meek* (οἱ πραεῖς) that Matthew's Jesus had in mind? Were they the meek of emerging Christianity or the poor and humiliated peasants who made up the majority of his Palestinian audience?" *Andries van Aarde* argues that the Jesus saying in Matthew 26:11 does not contradict the Jesus tradition about the care for the *poor* – as is often assumed. According to Van Aarde, Bultmann's insight into the dialectical disassociation between Christian and Stoic ethics helps us find coherence in Jesus' view on caring for the poor. *Alfred Friedl* draws our attention to the important role that the reception of the Deuteronomic *social law* played in the depiction of the Primitive Church in Jerusalem in the Book of Acts. Its concept of the holy people of God, which lives according to the social order given by YHWH and which stands in contrast to the gentile world, formed the social model for the Primitive Church in Jerusalem. *Jeremy Punt* investigates the Pauline Letters, and draws our attention to the role of the Roman Empire and the impact of its military forces on the lives of its people, thus enabling us to better grasp first-century social location. *Michael Tilly* investigates *social equality* and Christian life in First Corinthians. He shows that, although Paul regarded the coming world as already present, he nevertheless believed that the actual differences between *Jews and Greeks*, *freemen and slaves, male and female* should not be annulled or reversed in the Corinthian congregation. The last essay in this section is devoted to apocalyptic groups. *Pieter de Villiers* investigates the notion that apocalyptic texts originated in, and reflect the convictions and activities of *socially disadvantaged groups on the margins of society*. He shows that, ironically, apocalypses generally reflect a learned hermeneutical movement wishing to discover the ongoing relevance of sacred traditions in new situations.

In the last group of essays, the focus is on the later phase in Early Christianity. In his contribution, *Chris de Wet* discusses the views of some selected Church Fathers on the punishment of slaves. In particular, he points out how the punishment of slaves was conceptualised by these Church Fathers. *Francois Tolmie* investigates the reception of Apphia (Philm. 2) by Church Fathers in the fourth and fifth centuries CE, and highlights the role that specific views on women played in this regard. In the last essay, *Cilliers Breytenbach* discusses the graffiti that were carved

by *prisoners* into the floor of ancient Corinth's prison, using this to shed light on the hopes, beliefs and opinions of a forgotten group of Christians from late antiquity.

We trust that the essays in this volume will be well received by the scholarly community and that they will stimulate further research on this important topic!

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Guest Editor
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