

# Connections with Elites in the World of the Early Christians

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## Introduction

SOCIAL SCIENTISTS have long recognized the significance of social networks—intricate webs of connection that exist within a social structure—for understanding and explaining the workings of society. But only in recent decades have scholars begun to appreciate their importance in the ancient context and among early Christians in particular. Such study promises to provide new insights into a long-standing problem with respect to where and how Christianity fit within the social structures and strata of cities in the Roman Empire. Approaching the subject this way helps detail the social avenues whereby Christianity made advances within various strata of society, including the pre-Constantinian elites, and the nature and significance of the interactions between social-religious groups (“associations”) and those elites within social networks of benefaction.

## Conceptual Preliminaries

Before turning to social structures and networks in the ancient context, it is important to say a few words about four concepts. First, sociologists attempting to understand the social structures of society use the term “stratification” to refer to the hierarchical distinctions or social categories (strata) that develop within virtually all societies as a result of differential access to goods and resources of various kinds, and to power and prestige (cf. Berquist 1995). Second, the concept of “social status” refers to one’s position or standing in relation to others within the stratification of a particular society or within a given social structure or group (Harper 1995: 1360). A variety of factors play a role in defining one’s status within a social structure, including family background, sex, age, ethnic origins,

education, occupation, wealth, and ability. Third, “social mobility” refers to movement from one status category to another (a changing of position in relation to others in the hierarchy of a social structure or group), usually upward, through the acquisition of desired qualities or characteristics, such as education, or through links with others with higher status within social networks (e.g., patronage) (cf. Breiger 1990). The potential for social mobility can vary from one society to another, with some societies (such as modern North American society) being far more open to such movement than others (such as ancient Roman society, where mobility was relatively closed).

The fourth important concept to be outlined here is the “social network,” which refers to the webs of ties among actors (individuals, groups, communities) within a social structure. Since the mid-1950s social scientists have come to use the term “social network” as an analytical tool for studying specific phenomena within society in relational terms (cf. Mitchell 1969, 1974; Boissevain 1974; Wellman 1983; Wasserman and Faust 1994); several sociologists have employed this tool in the study of modern religious groups (Kecskes and Wolf 1996; Lofland and Stark 1965; Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 307–24; Welch 1981, 1983). J. Clyde Mitchell defines the social network “as a specific set of linkages among a defined set of persons [or groups], with the additional property that the characteristics of these linkages as a whole may be used to interpret the social behaviour of the persons [or groups] involved” (1969: 2). Relational ties among actors serve as channels for the exchange or flow of resources (tangible or intangible, such as honor) while also providing opportunities and imposing constraints upon those involved in the social relations. We shall find that several insights of the social sciences regarding the patterns of ties that make up a social network serve as helpful exploratory tools for finding what might otherwise remain unnoticed in ancient society, despite the fact that our evidence for social relations in this context is meager and partial. Recent studies by scholars such as L. Michael White (1991), John K. Chow (1992), and Harold Remus (1996) suggest the value in employing such tools in the study of antiquity and early Christianity.

### **Social Stratification in Greco-Roman Society**

A brief discussion of social stratification in the society of the Roman Empire is in order before proceeding to social-religious groups within that context. It is worthwhile distinguishing between the official and the less formal factors that affected one’s access to resources, influence, and power within society. The official or *formal* social structure can be illustrated in terms of a steep pyramid of hierarchy, with an extremely small portion of the population at the top and the rest at the bottom (cf. MacMullen 1974b; Alföldy 1985; Garnsey and Saller 1987).

There were four main orders of society: senatorial, equestrian (knights), decurion, and plebeian.

At the very top of the hierarchy were those belonging to the senatorial and equestrian orders, which I refer to as the *imperial elites* (probably about 1 percent of the total population).<sup>1</sup> The emperor and his direct family members were at the peak of power and influence. The senatorial aristocracy consisted of a few families (there was a total of about 600 members, all men, in the Roman senate), who were expected to possess property worth about one million sesterces,<sup>2</sup> from which senators were chosen by the senate or the emperor, the supreme patron. There was a typical career path (*cursus honorum*) through which a senator could pass, culminating (sometimes) in the position of consul and then proconsul of one of the more prestigious provinces (such as Asia).

Membership in the equestrian order required a minimum of 400,000 sesterces, and these knights filled the important offices within the army and sometimes moved into the more prestigious administrative positions in Rome and the provinces. Equestrian standing was also hereditary. Patronage connections within networks, especially with the emperor himself, were an essential factor in advancement through the ranks appropriate to one's official order. And there were occasions when these connections together with success within a family from one generation to the next could mean movement from the equestrian to the senatorial order.

This group of imperial elites had its counterparts, though usually on a more modest scale, in the decurions or *civic elites* (probably about 10 percent or less of a city's population). These were the wealthy families of the provincial communities who assumed the more important positions in the cities, including membership on the council, places on the board of archons, or other important civic positions (e.g., director of contests); they, like the imperial elites, also played the social role of benefactors within the cities, to which I return in a later section. From the mid- to late first century, a very small number of these provincial families with imperial connections began to attain equestrian and, eventually, senatorial standing over generations.

Below the elite lay the vast majority of the population (about 90 percent), the plebeians or masses, including both rural and urban dwellers. City dwellers of this stratum, who are our central focus here,<sup>3</sup> could be quite diverse socially and economically. Mention of this diversity within this nonelite segment of the population brings us to the more *informal* features of social stratification that played an important role both in conjunction with and independently of the official orders and hierarchies. Social mobility from one official order to another was extremely limited, and largely dependent on one's patronage connections with the imperial elites, especially the emperor. However, a variety of factors that affected one's social status and mobility went beyond the legally defined categories; some of these

factors, or status indicators, included family, ethnic background, legal standing (free, freed, or slave), occupation (artisans, traders, physicians, etc.), citizenship (civic or imperial), wealth, education, skill, and achievement (cf. Hopkins 1965: 14; Meeks 1983: 54–55). There were, therefore, occasional inconsistencies between a person's official position or order and one's actual status in relation to others within society (see Hopkins 1965). The case of imperial slaves and freedmen within the emperor's household, discussed more fully below, is one of the clearest areas of status inconsistency and vertical social mobility in the empire. Yet there was also a range of possibilities in social status among the (formally) nonelite segments of the city populations, and at least some potential for mobility. Shippers or traders, for instance, could hope to attain greater wealth and prestige within the civic community than, say, local tanners whose work involved undesirable odors and fullers (clothing-cleaners) whose work involved the burning of sulfur and urine. There were some cases where those with origins in the nonelite segment of society acquired some of the status indicators mentioned above, especially wealth, and could then take on the role of benefactor within the city, thereby increasing her or his prestige within the civic context. Social mobility in this sense could result in increased influence and power; we even have some exceptional examples of those formally low on the social ladder, including traders and artisans, actually attaining positions on important civic boards or in significant offices.<sup>4</sup>

## Social Networks as Avenues of Group Formation and Dissemination

### *Group Formation and Recruitment*

Sociologists studying the formation and growth of religious groups in the modern context have increasingly recognized the importance of preexisting social ties within networks for the dissemination or expansion of sects, cults, and churches. In studies of the Korean-based Unification Church of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon (Lofland and Stark 1965) and of recruitment to Pentecostal churches (Gerlach and Hine 1970) it was found that, more often than not, prior social contacts or interpersonal connections (through friendship or family) between members of a religious group and a nonmember preceded entrance of new recruits into the group.<sup>5</sup> Subsequent sociological studies confirm the vital importance of social networks not only as a precondition of conversion or membership, but also as a continuing factor in explaining the social workings of a given religious group, be it a cult, sect, or more traditional church (cf. Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 307–24; Welch 1981; Cavendish, Welch, and Legee 1998). Given this stress on social networks and group membership, it is important to consider what types of social

connections were at work in the ancient context; this may provide important clues about the social avenues for expansion available to associations of various kinds, including Christian groups.

### *Associations and Their Social Makeup*

Several webs of social network connections, at times intersecting, framed social relations in the Greco-Roman world and could also play a role in the formation and growth in membership of associations, including Christian groups.<sup>6</sup> These overlapping webs include connections associated with family/household, common ethnic or geographic origins, occupational activities, and cultic interests. The social connections that predominate as the basis of a particular group may provide clues regarding the social makeup of a group and avenues for expansion within particular social strata of society. We shall see that similar sets of social connections were at work in the case of both associations and Christian groups, and that both reflect a similar spectrum of possibilities in social composition.

First, the ties of the family and household could play a fundamental role in affiliations and in the membership of associations. Family networks encompassed a far greater set of relations in the ancient context than in the modern West. Household relationships seem to account entirely for the membership and existence of groups like the Dionysiac initiates headed by Pompeia Agrippinilla in Torre Nova, Italy (*IGUR* 160, c. 160 C.E.; cf. *LSAM* 20 = Barton and Horsley 1981 [Philadelphia, Asia]<sup>7</sup>), where the whole range of social strata found in the ancient household or *familia* belonged to the group, in this case including free, freed, and servile dependents alongside members of the imperial elites such as Agrippinilla herself, who was married to the influential M. Gavius Squilla Gallicanus (a senator and consul who became proconsul of Roman Asia in 165 C.E.; see Vogliano 1933; Scheid 1986).

Second, one's occupation and the networks of relations it entailed were in many ways a determining factor in social-religious affiliations; daily social contacts in the workshops and marketplaces could often develop into a guild of the more permanent type. A wide range of these occupationally based associations existed in the cities of Asia Minor: producers and dealers of foods (bakers, fishers), clothing manufacturers (leather-cutters, linen-workers, purple-dyers), builders (carpenters, masons), other artisans (potters; copper, silver, or gold smiths), and merchants or shippers. Soldiers fit the bill as well; the dissemination of Mithraism throughout certain segments of the army illustrates the importance of occupational social networks for the formation and growth of associations (Gordon 1972: 103–4). There were also elite associations, such as the Arval Brethren at Rome, formed from the social connections among those whose "occupation" included senatorial imperial

offices. On the whole, membership in occupational associations was predominantly male, and in many cases the social makeup of a guild was rather homogeneous in socioeconomic terms; most bakers, for instance, came from a similar background and stratum of society. Nevertheless, there are clear examples of guilds reflecting a spectrum of socioeconomic levels. The fishers and fishmongers at Ephesos (*IEph* 20 = *NewDocs* V, 50s C.E.), for instance, together with their families, contributed toward the building and dedication of the fishery toll office; the one hundred (or so) contributors included Roman citizens (approximately forty-four members) and a mixture of persons of free or freed (between thirty-six and forty-one) and servile status (between two and ten), who are listed in order of the size of their donation, ranging from the Roman citizen who could afford to provide four marble columns to those who could afford to give five denaria or less.

A third important set of social network links, which could often overlap with others, were those formed within the neighborhood where one lived and worked. There are numerous examples of ongoing social-religious groups in Asia Minor that drew primarily on these connections and whose identity was expressed in neighborhood terms (cf. *IEph* 454, 3080; *IGR* IV 788–91 [Apameia, Phrygia]; *IPergamon* 393, 424, 434; *ISmyrna* 714). Apart from elite households, which included dependents, persons living or working in a particular area were more likely to reflect similar social brackets of society, yet such neighborhood associations could include a mixture in terms of occupation (cf. *IPergamon* 393) or gender.

Fourth, social contacts associated with regular attendance at a particular cultic site or common religious interests (i.e., honoring a particular deity), for example, could become the basis for an ongoing association. Remus's (1996) study of social networks at the Asklepios sanctuary of Pergamon demonstrates well the complicated webs of connection that formed in a cultic setting; these connections could also be translated into an association. In the case of the sanctuary at Pergamon, there were groups who called themselves *therapeutai*.<sup>8</sup> Once again, though, there was a range of possibilities in the social levels reflected in these groups; while many associations would have been formed by those of a similar socioeconomic background, others would have more accurately reflected the range of those devoted to honoring a particular deity at a particular site on a regular basis, including both men and women.<sup>9</sup> In the case of socially mixed groups, quite often those with greater wealth and higher social status would act as benefactor and, thereby, acquire leadership positions in the group as a result (cf. *IEph* 4337 [worshippers of Demeter]; White 1997).

A fifth important set of social contacts were those established on the basis of common ethnic background or geographical origin, which could constitute another source of membership for an ongoing group (often devoted to honoring a deity of the homeland). There were various associations of Romans and Alexan-

drians in the cities of Asia Minor and other provinces (cf. *IGR* I 392, 446, 800), for instance, and groups of Sardians and other Asians in the cities of Italy (*IGUR* 85–87; *IGR* I 147, 458) and Macedonia (*IG* X.2 309, 480; Edson 1948: 154–58). The social makeup of these groups could, of course, vary, with some reflecting a greater spectrum of socioeconomic levels than others. Some associations of Romans in Asia Minor, for instance, drew members from various levels of trade and varying socioeconomic status; a few members could assume local citizenship, attain considerable wealth, and act as benefactors within the city (cf. Hatzfeld 1919: 101–31, 148–74, 297–309).

Not to be forgotten within this category, of course, are the diaspora groups of Jews or Judaeans who could be found in cities throughout the empire. Within the broader context of ethnically or geographically based Jewish networks, several other subsets of social connections, corresponding to the networks outlined above, could be operative in the formation and membership of particular synagogues. The case of the synagogues in Rome, of which there were at least eleven in the first two centuries (some existing simultaneously), is instructive in this regard (see Leon 1995 [1960]: 135–66; Richardson 1998). Three derive their names from the neighborhood where they lived: the Calcaresians from the Limeburner's district, the Campesians from the Campus Martius, and the Siburesians from the Subura district. Two others may very well have been founded by Jews initially from cities elsewhere: the Tripolitans from the city of their namesake either in Phoenicia or North Africa, and the "synagogue of Elaia," perhaps consisting of some former residents (or citizens?) of Elaia in Asia. Both neighborhood and occupational factors played a role in the organization of the Jewish population at Alexandria as well (cf. Philo, *Flaccus* 55; *CPJ* III 454, 468; Kasher 1985: 352–53). Recent studies of the social makeup of Jewish diaspora groups also point to diversity in social levels, occupations, and degree of wealth and influence from one group to the next in various cities (cf. Trebilco 1991; van der Horst 1991: 99–101); the presence of wealthy benefactors among some groups is clear, as at Smyrna, where Rufina, the head of the synagogue, also had a contingent of clients, both freedpersons and slaves (*ISmyrna* 295 = *CII* 741).

### *Christian Groups and Their Social Makeup*

Evidence shows that many of the kinds of social networks outlined above played a role in the growth of Christian groups. Consequently there was diversity in the social composition of various Christian groups, with variations from one group to the next, as was the case with the associations discussed above. First, family-based networks played a key role in the case of some early Christian groups. A pattern of "conversion" and communal gathering portrayed in Acts, but also substantiated elsewhere, is

suggestive: again and again an entire family of dependents was baptized along with the head of the household, and then the home was used as a meeting place (Acts 11.14, 16.15, 18.8, cf. 1 Cor 16.19; Phlm 2; Rom 6.10–16; Col 4.15).

Second, social connections related to ethnicity and geography served as an avenue for the spread of Christianity. Networks among diaspora Jews provided an important matrix within which Christianity could make an entrance into certain cities.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, it is not hard to imagine regional movements within Christianity, such as Montanism (called the “Phrygian heresy” by opponents), making advances within other areas of the empire by way of emigrants from regions such as the Phrygian region of Asia Minor.

Neighborhood connections were also important. A third-century grave-inscription from Akmonia is suggestive: a Christian named Aurelius Aristeas promises “the neighborhood of those by the gateway” provisions for regular banquets if they fulfill their obligation by putting roses on his wife’s grave once a year (Ramsay 1895–97: 562–63, numbers 455–57).<sup>11</sup> The neighborhood association in question may or may not be devoted to the Christian god as well, but this evidence of social links within networks is significant either way.

Occupational networks were also important for early Christianity, as Hock’s work (1980) shows. The Christian group at Thessalonica addressed by Paul seems to provide a good example of a guild of hand-workers, perhaps mainly men (cf. 1 Thes 2.9, 4.9–12; Ascough 2000). Although we should not take at face value Celsus’s characterization of the whole Christian movement as predominantly lower class, there is truth in his observation, about a century after Paul, that attachments through workshops of wool-workers, shoemakers, and clothing-cleaners continued as a key resource for newcomers to some Christian groups (Origen, *Cels.* 3.55). Humphries’s (1998) recent case study also suggests the importance of social contacts through trade networks in the dissemination of Christianity and other religious groups in trade centers of northern Italy (third and fourth centuries C.E.). If the purge of Christians from the army in the time of Diocletian is indicative of their considerable presence there by that time (c. 303 C.E.), then it seems that social connections within this arena played some role in the spread of Christianity in the years following our earliest clear evidence of some Christians within a legion in the time of Marcus Aurelius (c. 173 C.E.; Eusebius, *Hist. ecl.* 8.4; cf. Helgeland 1974). In cases where a Christian group drew its membership primarily from occupational or trade networks, the makeup of the group could be more homogeneous, both in socioeconomic level and gender, than was the case with some other Christian groups; but as noted in connection with the fishers at Ephesus, there were cases of socially heterogeneous membership in guilds as well.

It is worth placing the present discussion of social networks and the composition of Christian groups, which suggests variety from one group to the next and



a range of possibilities from heterogenous to homogeneous membership, within the broader context of debates concerning the social level of early Christianity. Until recent decades, it was quite common for scholars to speak of early Christianity as, in the words of Adolf Deissmann, “a movement of the lower classes” (1910/1927: 8–9). The notion that most, if not all, early Christian groups drew their membership primarily from the most dispossessed and deprived segments of Greco-Roman society is also reflected in some recent studies (cf. Elliott 1990[1981]: 59–100, esp. 70–72). Yet recent years have seen a shift away from this sort of characterization toward an acknowledgment that Christian groups were “more nearly a cross section of society than we have sometimes thought,” as Filson observed (1939: 111). Paul’s comment to the Corinthians that “not many [of you] were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (I Cor 1.26), for instance, suggests that *some* were, and recent studies of the Corinthian correspondence show that the presence of both wealthier patrons and those of low social standing within this community accounts for several of the problems that Paul perceives, including the issues of court cases (ch. 6), eating food that had been offered to idols (ch. 8–10), and social divisions at the Lord’s Supper (ch. 11; cf. Theissen 1980; Chow 1992; Clarke 1993). Studies by Malherbe (1983[1977]: 29–59), Meeks (1983: 51–73), and others emphasize that although we lack sufficient information to provide detailed profiles of the social level of Christians, the indications we do get suggest that many groups reflect a mixture of socioeconomic levels representing a “fair cross-section of urban society” (Meeks 1983: 73; cf. Judge 1960; Theissen 1982; Holmberg 1990: 21–76). Within this mixture Meeks suggests that the “typical” Christian (in Pauline groups) was the “free artisan or trader” (1983: 73), though, as I have shown, there was certainly a range of possibilities of wealth, prestige, and status within such segments of society. Grant’s (1980–81) survey of literary evidence for Christianity in the second century likewise finds a range of possibilities in the wealth, education, and overall status of Christians. It is worth mentioning Pliny the Younger’s general observation as Roman governor of Bithynia-Pontus (c. 110 C.E.) that the Christians brought before him represented “individuals of every age and class, both men and women,” among them some Roman citizens and two female deaconesses (*Ep.* 10.96.4, 8–9).

Although this emerging scholarly consensus is insightful in most respects, the discussion of social networks and associations above should caution us in generalizing too much concerning the overall social composition of Christianity (or other associations). Meeks (1983: 79), for example, contrasts the (supposed) typically heterogeneous Christian groups to the (supposed) homogeneous character of other associations, which does not do justice to the range of evidence discussed above. Viewing the issue of social composition from the perspective of ancient social networks complicates broad generalizations and points to some of the shared

avenues of expansion into certain social strata open to groups of various kinds. Moreover, we need to remain attentive to the differences from one group (Christian or otherwise) to the next, with some groups being more homogeneous, others more heterogeneous, in both social level and gender makeup.

### *Christians within Elite Strata and Networks: Paths of Vertical Mobility*

In the case of the *civic* elites, the wealthier segment of the population who could attain civic office and exert local influence within the cities, we do not have much Christian evidence to work with until the third century; but there are some indicators. There are clear signs that Christianity had to some degree penetrated the ranks of the wealthier stratum in some cities in the first and second centuries; concern for the proper management of wealth within Christian literature confirms the fact that some Christians in Asia Minor and elsewhere were wealthy enough to act as benefactors (and leaders) within the group (cf. pastoral Epistles; *Shepherd of Hermas*). However, we are short on clear evidence of Christians drawn from the segments of society that filled civic offices, with some important exceptions.

Although those of “noble birth” and “power” (I Cor 1.26) among the Corinthian Christians (mid-first century) *could* be among those who assumed important civic positions, it is only in the case of Erastus at Corinth that we have more solid confirmation of this possibility. Paul mentions that Erastus is a civic functionary of some type, an “*oikonomos* of the city” (Rom 16.23). That Erastus was a civic functionary is significant in itself, but it is not clear precisely what position Erastus filled and its level of importance (Paul is speaking in Greek, and the positions in the Roman colony of Corinth would usually be expressed in Latin). The fact that Paul singles out Erastus in mentioning an occupation suggests that the position is one of relatively high status (cf. Theissen 1980: 75–76). Mason’s study of Greek equivalents of Latin terms shows that the term *oikonomos* (1974: 71) could be used to describe a number of positions, including treasurer (*dispensator*), overseer (*vilicus*), or even aedile. Any of these positions are candidates in this case, but the position of aedile would be the most influential. The two civic aediles, elected annually, were responsible for management of public streets, buildings, and revenue in a Roman colony, and their position was second only to the chief magistrates, the *duoviri*. If Erastus was an aedile (which we cannot say for sure), it is possible that he can be identified with his namesake in an inscription from first-century Corinth: “Erastus in return for his aedileship laid (the pavement) at his own expense” (see Clarke 1993: 46–57 for full discussion). Perhaps there were other Christians, like Erastus, among the civic elites in the first century, who continued to offer their services to their home city, but we can only speculate.

It is only in the late second and early third centuries (beginning c. 180 C.E.) that we begin to find surviving artifactual evidence for Christians that is distinguishable from the more general archeological record (cf. Snyder 1985). So it is significant that some of the extant monuments or inscriptions, many of which come from Asia Minor, provide glimpses of Christians among the civic elites, playing a significant role in the life of the city. Besides those inscriptions that clearly indicate pride in at least civic citizenship (e.g., Snyder 1985: 138–41, note 5), there are several examples of Christians as members of civic councils in Asia Minor in the mid- to late third century. At Sebaste there was a Christian physician on the council, and at Eumeneia there were several Christians on the council.<sup>12</sup> Membership on the civic council (*boule*) was reserved for those with considerable wealth who could contribute, as benefactors, to the well-being of the city; only those with high social status within the community would attain the position.

Even more telling is an earlier inscription from Claudiopolis in Bithynia (late second to mid-third century C.E.), which involves a Christian as an important civic magistrate and benefactor of the city:

For the two purest ones who also had faith in God: Marcus Demetrianos, who served as foremost archon, civic administrator, and director of contests with honor, and the dearest mother, Aurelia Pannychas. Aurelia Demetrianne, their daughter, and Domitios Heliodoros, their son-in-law, together with her brother Demetrianos and her uncle Chrysispos erected this tomb as a memorial. (Early-Christian Epitaphs from Anatolia: 80–81, note 3.I [tr., with adaptations] = *IBithDörner* II 159)<sup>13</sup>

The board of archons was the most influential civic body in this region, and the post of head of this board would be reserved only for the most wealthy benefactors of the city. Demetrianos's benefactions had evidently included sponsorship of the contests that were so much a characteristic of social life in the city. Here we have a Christian couple of high social status and great influence within the civic context being honored on an epitaph by a family that is proud of both their civic achievements and their "faith in God."

Due to the nature of our evidence, it is difficult to know how representative the cases at Sebaste, Eumeneia, and Claudiopolis are, but they certainly show the potential (and perhaps increasing) presence of some Christians among the civic elites, especially by the third century. It remains most likely, however, that elite members among Christian groups were in the minority, probably reflecting the ratio of elites to general population in civic society more generally. Though evidence is lacking, it is quite possible that the Christian groups at these localities might have used their

connections with the city councilors or an archon to further their own interests; gaining permission from the civic authorities to build a meeting place, for instance, would be a plausible benefit of these social network connections.

The presence of Christians among *imperial* elite families or networks is also a difficult area to assess due to the vagaries of our evidence (cf. Harnack 1961[1908]: 33–52; Cadoux 1925 [throughout]; Eck 1971). There is, however, clear and early evidence of Christians belonging to the imperial household or *familia Caesaris*. A few words are in order concerning the imperial household and social mobility before outlining some of the Christian evidence. The *familia Caesaris*, which encompassed all those slaves (*servi*) and freedpersons (*liberti*) in the direct service of the emperor, was divided into two branches: domestic and public (Weaver 1967, 1972). The former, which involved the upkeep of imperial establishments and gardens in Rome and on imperial estates elsewhere, would indeed involve direct social contacts with the emperor and hence access to the most powerful and influential patron in the Roman Empire; yet it was in the public imperial administrative service that there was a wide range of posts, some of which could involve considerable power and influence. In fact, recent scholarship stresses the fact that the civil service of the imperial household was the most important avenue of social mobility in the Roman Empire (cf. Weaver 1967: 4).

Individuals in the administrative service who demonstrated ability and exploited their patronage connections with the emperor usually followed a typical career path leading them to acquire characteristics conducive to social advancement and access to networks of influence, as Weaver's studies (1967, 1972) show. Imperial slaves aged twenty to thirty began in the junior post of assistant (*adjutor*) and would often achieve manumission (transition from the legal status of slave to free) during this period. Next (between the ages of thirty and forty) would come the intermediate posts, including record officer (*a commentarius*), correspondant (*ab epistulis*), accountant (*tabularius*), or paymaster (*dispensator*), positions that entailed some level of education, acquisition of considerable wealth, and exercise of power. Finally, at about the age of forty the imperial freedman would be eligible for the senior posts, including chief accountant, chief correspondent, or supervisor (*procurator*); some procurators would serve alongside their equestrian counterparts in provinces such as Roman Asia. As Finn points out, by retirement (if not earlier) the imperial freedman "had acquired a considerable measure of the criteria which signaled upward change in status" and "his descendants started life fairly well up on the status ladder and could go much further" (1982: 32). The line between imperial freedmen and the official equestrian order was seldom crossed, however (see Weaver 1972: 282–94); yet, as noted earlier, social status and access to networks of influence involved factors beyond the officially or legally defined orders of society.

It is significant that this area of society in which social mobility was most prominent is precisely where we find the clearest evidence (limited though it is) of Christian presence. Moreover, this points to one of the more important processes of vertical mobility whereby Christianity moved up socially in the pre-Constantinian empire, gradually gaining influence in some of the more important social networks (cf. Finn 1982). As early as Paul's letter to the Christians at the Roman colony of Philippi (Phil 4.22, c. 60 C.E.), we hear of Christians as members of "Caesar's household," probably at Rome. Toward the end of the century there is mention of Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Vito in the church at Rome (*1 Clem.* 65.1), and their names suggest strongly that they are freedmen of the Claudian and Valerian households (cf. Jeffers 1991: 29–31).

There are further literary references to Christians among these segments of the imperial household, especially beginning in the late second century. We hear of an imperial slave named Euelpistos in connection with the martyrdom of Justin, the apologist (*Mart. Justin*, c. 165 C.E.). Callistus, Hippolytus's archrival who became bishop of Rome, was the slave of a Christian imperial freedman named Carpophoros, probably a paymaster in Commodus's household (Hippolytus, *Haer.* 9.12, c. 172–92 C.E.; cf. Finn 1982: 34). In Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* we encounter several Christians who were imperial slaves or freedmen (mid- to late third or early fourth centuries), some apparently in important positions of the imperial administration. These include Dorotheus, who was appointed by the emperor to take charge of the purple-dye works at Tyre (7.32); Dorotheus, who was honored as though he were a "ruler or governor" (8.1, 6) before being purged from Diocletian's household along with two other Christians, Peter and Gorgonius; Philoromus, who was entrusted with judicial functions in the imperial administration at Alexandria (8.9); and Audactus, who "had advanced through every grade of honor under the emperors, so as to pass blamelessly through the general administration of what they call the magistracy and ministry of finance" (*Hist. eccl.*, Lake 8.11).<sup>14</sup>

Epigraphical evidence happens to confirm the picture we get from the literature (at least for the third century). An inscription from about 240–50 C.E. sheds much needed light on this issue and provides us with information about two such Christians as members of the imperial household (*CIL VI 8987 = ICUR X 27126 = Clarke 1971*).<sup>15</sup> Alexander, an imperial slave, erected a memorial for his deceased son, Marcus, who had been the keeper of the wardrobe in the domestic service of the emperor. Most importantly for our purposes is the fact that Marcus had acquired an education—a key factor in social advancement—at the *paedagogium ad Caput Africae*, a senior administrative training center for the young of the imperial family (see Mohler 1940: 270–80). As G. W. Clarke points out, the better graduates of this school "would be well read, well spoken; they would expect to marry non-servile wives (though not yet manumitted themselves), to own

considerable property and other slaves, to receive entree into (though not equal status with) the major social and governmental circles, and thus to wield themselves considerable *de facto* power” (1971: 122–23). Here, then, is a clear example wherein a Christian family was making advancements socially in the service of the emperor, and it is likely that there were others like them.

It is worth mentioning another monument—less securely, though likely, identified as Christian—from the vicinity of Rome (dated 217 C.E.) that provides a similar picture of social mobility. The grave of Marcus Aurelius Prosenes—set up by several of his own freedpersons (*liberti*)—reveals that this imperial freedman had moved his way through the hierarchy of imperial service, even holding several procuratorships (senior positions of considerable influence) under Commodus. Though nothing in the original inscription suggests Christian identity, one freedman named Ampelius later inscribed on the stone the fact that Prosenes was “welcomed before God” (*receptus ad deum*) on March 3, 217, an expression that may best be explained in terms of Christianity (*ICUR VI 17246*; cf. Mazzoleni 1999: 153). Finally, there is evidence in an inscription from Ostia (which is probably Christian), the grave of Basilides, who was an imperial slave serving as assistant to Sabinus, the imperial paymaster for the port, probably around 250 C.E. (*CIL XIV 1876*).<sup>16</sup>

Emperor Valerian’s edict of 258 C.E. (soon reversed by Gallienus) not only confirms the presence of Christians within the imperial household, but also suggests that by this time Christianity had begun to make at least some limited headway through elite family networks into the equestrian and senatorial orders. According to a letter of the Christian bishop Cyprian (*Ep.* 80), the edict took measures to eliminate the practice of Christianity among the upper echelons of the imperial elites.

Senators, prominent men and Roman equestrians are to lose their position, and moreover be stripped of their property; if they still persist in being Christians after their goods have been taken from them, they are to be beheaded. Matrons are to be deprived of their property and banished into exile. But members of Caesar’s household (*Caesariani*) are to have their goods confiscated and be sent in chains by appointment to the estates of Caesar. (Trans. Harnack 1961[1908]: 38–39; see Keresztes 1989: 67–81, 258–59)

Specific examples of Christians among the equestrian and senatorial orders in the period before Valerian, however, are few and far between (which may simply be due to the fragmentary nature of surviving evidence). As to Christians of equestrian status, the “brothers” of many ranks that were sifted from the army under Diocletian and his co-emperors (c. 303–305 C.E.) may have included such officers, as Harnack (1981 [1905]: 93) imagined; but we are left with very little in-

formation concerning the rank of any Christians who were in the army before this time (since about 173 C.E.; see Helgeland 1974).

We are also short on evidence regarding the senatorial order. Several scholars have argued that the senator and consul (95 C.E.) T. Flavius Clemens and his wife Domitilla, executed for “atheism” by Domitian, were Christians (based primarily on Eusebius’s claim [*Hist. eccl.* 18.4] that Domitilla was a convert); but the evidence for this is extremely tenuous. It seems more likely that the “atheism” in question is actually Judaism (see Keresztes 1989: 87–93, against Sordi 1986: 43–54). Beginning in the late second century, we hear mention of women from these circles of influence who maintained positive contacts with Christians and were likely converts, such as the wife of a governor of Cappadocia (L. Claudius Hieronymianus) and the wife of a governor of Syria (Tertullian, *Scap.* 3.5; Hippolytus, *Comm. Dan.* 4.18.1–3 [c. 202–4 C.E.]). One could well imagine Christianity making its way through social connections within the households of these influential women. Eusebius mentions Astyrius as “a member of the Roman senate” immediately following Valerian’s time (under Gallienus), and all of the other certain pre-Constantinian examples date to the early fourth century (see Eck 1971: 388–91).

It is only beginning with Constantine that Christian senators and equestrians are more commonly attested. Even then, Ramsay MacMullen (1984: 47) can estimate that at least two-thirds of Constantine’s government at the upper echelons remained non-Christian (cf. Markus 1974: 90–91). Studies by MacMullen (1984), Markus (1974), Brown (1961), von Haehling (1978), and others are beginning to discern some of the processes through which families of the Roman aristocracy were gradually Christianized in the fourth and fifth centuries. Moreover, although there were few Christians among the imperial elites in the first centuries, there was another important area of potential contacts between Christian groups and both the civic and imperial elites within society: social networks of benefaction or patronage.

## Contacts between Associations and the Elites within Networks of Benefaction

### *Networks of Benefaction and Insights from the Social Sciences*

Social networks are not static entities working on the same principles throughout history, but rather systems guided by particular cultural conditions. So it is important to discuss some of the key cultural and social norms, expectations, and roles characteristic of networks of benefaction in the cities of the Roman Empire (especially the Greek East). Virtually all social-religious groups in the world of the Christians, including both Jewish and Christian groups we shall see, were in some

way involved in these networks and dependent upon benefaction or patronage for their continued existence.

The late Hellenistic and Roman eras witnessed the emergence of a systematic pattern of benefaction (“*euergetism*”) that worked through social networks and was accompanied by a particular developing cultural worldview, especially in the Greek East (cf. Veyne 1990 [1976]; Gauthier 1985; Wallace-Hadrill 1990: 150–54; Sartre 1991: 147–66). This system is perhaps best explained in terms of webs of reciprocal relations within social networks marked by a clearly differentiated hierarchy, though the potential for relations was quite fluid at all levels. The ultimate patron or benefactor, alongside the gods, was the emperor himself, with the imperial elites coming in second; but perhaps more important for the everyday life of the average city were the civic elites and other inhabitants who had attained considerable wealth (as well as the more successful of those involved in trade or other occupations). The most prominent characteristic of relations within these networks was the exchange of benefits or gifts of numerous kinds (protection, financial contributions for various purposes, legal or other assistance) in return for appropriate honors (monumental inscriptions or statues, leadership positions within the group, yearly proclamation of honors). A clearly defined set of social roles or expectations corresponded to one’s position or status within the social structure. Failure of the wealthy to appropriately provide such benefactions was a threat to the position and status they strove to maintain within society. In this sense benefaction became a duty or obligation, not simply a voluntary action. Failure of a beneficiary (individual or group) to fittingly honor a benefactor resulted in shame (cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Rhod., Nest., 3 Fort., Lib.*) and jeopardized the potential for future benefactions, whether this be protection of the community by a god or financial support from a local notable.

Associations were, as we shall see, among the groups and individuals competing within this social system to maintain links with the elites. Several sociological insights are of help in approaching the study of social networks of benefaction and the place of associations within them. Wellman (1983) summarizes several of the most important principles evident in the work of many network analysts, some of which are relevant here. First, ties in a social network are often asymmetrically reciprocal, involving the exchange of resources that may be either material or intangible (e.g., honor, popularity). Thus although the members of a local association or guild differ greatly in status from the wealthy civic or imperial official, relations between the two involve an exchange of resources: money and the prestige of links with a member of the elites for the association, and both honor and nonfinancial forms of support, bringing advantage in competition with other members of the elites, for the official.

Second, ties link network members indirectly as well as directly; that is, links within a network should be understood within the context of larger network



structures. Connections between an association and a Roman proconsul or imperial cult high priest, for example, involve a link between the local social networks (in which the association is a clear participant) and larger networks that link the city to province and empire. Third, links connect clusters of relations as well as individuals. The link of an individual association member to someone outside the group links all of the association members to that person. That outside person may be linked to other associations in the same way. Thus clusters of relations lead out to broad networks that often involve influential personages. Finally, networks structure collaboration and competition to secure scarce resources (whether material or otherwise). This principle is particularly apt for our present discussion. We have seen that associations themselves are groups based, in part, on preexisting sets of social network connections, allowing collaboration among members to secure resources, such as benefaction from the elites. On the other hand, associations may compete with one another for access to the limited resource of benefactors within broader social networks.

Mitchell (1969) analyzes social networks in terms of two kinds of dimension. First, there are the morphological dimensions that pertain to the overall shape of the web of ties within a particular social network, something that is difficult to assess owing to the fragmentary nature of ancient evidence. Second, there are interactional dimensions that pertain to the nature of the links themselves; these are “crucial in understanding the social behaviour” (1969: 20). Among the interactional dimensions are *content*, pertaining to the purpose for which a particular link has come into being, be it economic assistance, kinship, religious, or occupational purposes; *directedness*, regarding the direction of the flow of interaction, be it reciprocal or otherwise; *durability*, relating to whether the ties are temporary or ongoing; and, *intensity*, regarding the “degree to which individuals are prepared to honor obligations, or feel free to exercise the rights implied in their link to some other person” (27). All of these dimensions play a role in shaping the social behaviors and interactions of the actors.

### *Associations and Connections with the Elites*

Associations could be among the beneficiaries of family traditions of beneficence, maintaining important links with the provincial imperial elites. The case of a certain Julian family of Asia Minor is illustrative; they were descendents of Galatian and Attalid royalty who entered into imperial service as equestrians and then senators as early as the late first century.<sup>17</sup> Members of this family habitually included associations (though no known Christian ones) as recipients of their benefactions, illustrating the sorts of links that could exist between the elites and local social-religious groups. C. Antius Aulus Julius Quadratus was a prominent Pergamene and senator who

assumed the consulate in 94 and 105 C.E. He held numerous provincial offices in the Greek East, including legate in Asia, Bithynia-Pontus, Lycia-Pamphylia, and Syria, and proconsul of Asia in 109–10 C.E. Numerous cities, including his hometown of Pergamon, honored him for his services and benefactions (*IEph* 614, 1538; *ISide* 57; *IPergamon* 436–51). But he was also the benefactor of local associations at home including the synod of young men (*neoi*) and, on more than one occasion, an association devoted to Dionysos, which called itself the “dancing cowherds” (*IPergamon* 440; Conze and Schuchhardt 1899: 179–80, notes 31–32). The cowherds, whose meeting place has been recently excavated (see Radt 1988: 224–28), came into contact with him directly when he was priest of Dionysos Kathegemon. Another relative, Julius Amyntianus, probably Quadratus’s cousin, was a member in the Panhellenion institution of Athens, but also the priest of Isis and Sarapis at Tralles for a time, for which the initiates of these Greco-Egyptian deities honored him with a monument (*ITral* 86; post-131 C.E.).

A few sociological observations would be fitting at this point before turning to one final member of this family that had connections with local associations. Considering some of the interactional dimensions of these links in social networks between members of this family and associations of various kinds can help us better to understand the nature of such connections. First, the content or purposes of these instances of interaction—“the meanings which the persons in the network attribute to their relationships” (Mitchell 1969: 20)—are similar, though not necessarily identical. In these cases of asymmetrically reciprocal contacts between the elites and local associations, the participants would clearly understand the links in terms of a benefactor–beneficiary relationship: the exchange of tangible financial aid in return for the far less tangible, though extremely valuable, return of honors. There is more to it than that, though. At one point both men were priests of the deities to whom the associations were devoted, and this would have been a key factor in ensuring benefaction in the first place. The service of these men as priests would on its own warrant reciprocation from the associations, so the content of the link is not limited to a financial component. It should be stressed, however, that the role of benefactor did not necessarily require common religious practice or concerns, which the case of Julia Severa will illustrate.

Owing to the partial nature of inscriptional evidence, it is difficult to assess the durability of links between a certain person and a given association. However, if Quadratus’s relations with the Dionysiac cowherds is any indication, there was potential for ongoing links over time. In such cases, the social pressures on both the elites to make further benefactions and the association to respond with appropriate honors (i.e., the intensity of the link) would be considerable. Failure of an association to respond to a benefaction with clearly visible honors in return would be disastrous in its hopes of maintaining links for financial or other rea-

sons with this or any other wealthy person. From this elite family's perspective, such links with local associations were part of a larger set of connections within city, province, and empire that helped to secure family members' high social position and degree of honor within society. These sociological observations concerning the nature of social relations within these networks would also apply to some Jewish and Christian groups.

Some Jewish groups were clearly participants within these same social networks, even maintaining connections with the civic and imperial elites (irrespective of the religious affiliation of a benefactor). Julia Severa, a relative of Quadratus and the others, was a prominent figure in Akmoneia in the mid-first century, acting as director of contests and high priestess in the local temple of the imperial family ("the *Sebastoi* gods"). She was not a Jew, as some have assumed (e.g., Ramsay 1895–97: 639, 650–51, 673; see also Trebilco 1991: 57–60). This prominent and wealthy benefactor maintained links with some local associations, including the elders' organization (*gerousia*), which honored her with a monument (*MAMA* VI 263). Yet an inscription from the late first or early second century (our earliest epigraphical attestation to a synagogue in Asia Minor) reveals that the Jews of the city also had ties with this influential woman:

The meeting-place, which was built by Julia Severa, was renovated by P. Tyrronius Klados, head-of-the-synagogue (*archisynagogos*) for life, Lucius son of Lucius, also head-of-the-synagogue, and Publius Zotikos, archon, from their own resources and from the common deposit. They decorated the walls and ceiling, made the windows secure and took care of all the rest of the decoration. The synagogue honored them with a golden shield because of their virtuous disposition, goodwill and diligence in relation to the synagogue. (*MAMA* VI 264 = *CII* 766 [tr. mine])

Severa had apparently shown her beneficence by contributing the building in which the Jewish group met sometime around the period 60–80 C.E. (cf. Lk 7.1–5). Along with others who later renovated the building, Severa was honored by the Jewish group with a golden shield and this monumental inscription. The links between these Jews and the civic elites at Akmoneia seem to go beyond this connection with an imperial cult high priestess; P. Tyrronius Klados, the head of the synagogue, was evidently connected with the influential Tyrronius family, either as a relative, freedman, or client (cf. *MAMA* VI = *IGR* IV 654).

This instance of connections between a Jewish group and the elites might be passed off as an interesting exception if not for considerable evidence that further confirms other Jewish groups' links with and honors for (non-Jewish) members of the imperial elites (cf. Harland 2000). Philo mentions that it was customary among Jewish groups in Egypt to set up honorary monuments for the supreme patrons of the empire, the emperors, including "shields, golden crowns, plaques and

inscriptions” (*Lg.* 133; cf. *Flaccus* 97–104). We also hear of specific officials of the equestrian or senatorial orders that had links with Jewish groups within networks of benefaction. Jewish groups of Asia passed an honorary decree (c. 12 B.C.E.) for both Emperor Augustus and Gaius Marcius Censorinus, an imperial official of senatorial (consular) rank; a copy was set up (by order of the emperor) in the provincial imperial cult temple (Josephus, *Ant.* 16.165; cf. Bowersock 1964). A Jewish group at Berenike in Cyrenaica set up an honorary monument for Marcus Tittius (c. 24 C.E.), an imperial official of either the equestrian or (more likely) senatorial order; he had acted in a beneficent way toward the city as a whole as well as the Jewish group within it (Reynolds 1977: 244–45, note 17 = Roux and Roux 1949 = *IGR I* 1024; cf. *NewDocs* IV 111). Several inscriptions from the city of Rome show that one synagogue called itself the “Augustesians” and another the “Agrippesians,” in honor of their patrons, Augustus and Agrippa (*CII* 365, 425, 503; *CII* 284, 301, 338, 368, 416, 496; cf. Richardson 1998; Leon 1995 [1960]: 140–42). Like other associations, Jewish groups could be among the competitors for connections with influential figures within civic and imperial contexts.

### *Christian Groups and Connections with the Elites*

There is neglected evidence that some Christian groups, like some Jewish groups, participated in these networks of benefaction, sometimes including links with the civic and imperial elites. We know for sure that Christian groups, like their non-Christian counterparts, relied on the benefactions of wealthier members of the group for, among other things, a place to meet, often within the patron’s own house (cf. White 1997). Yet the discussion of Jewish groups illustrates well the fact that observance of a common religious practice or cult was *not* a precondition of links with influential figures. Despite the lack of surviving material remains or inscriptions for Christianity in the first two centuries,<sup>18</sup> there is literary evidence that suggests that Christian participation in networks of benefaction could extend beyond the membership of a Christian group, including honors for the elites within society.

There were clearly some Christian leaders, such as the author of Revelation, who condemned honoring influential outsiders (e.g., the emperor, Roman officials) in any way. But others in the first and second centuries were more open to at least some positive contacts with outsiders and some even encouraged Christian groups to engage in typical honorary activities (cf. Harland 2000). The case of I Peter is illustrative of at least one trajectory of Christianity. One of the most important sections in this diaspora letter, which addresses Christian groups throughout Asia Minor (using the metaphor of “exiles”), relates how these Christians were to “conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though

they malign you as evil-doers, they may see your honorable deeds (*tôn kalôn ergôn*) and glorify God when he comes to judge" (I Pt 2.12 [NRSV]). Immediately following this comes a passage filled with the conventional vocabulary of benefaction ("good works," "praise," "honor") that advocates subjection to and honors for influential persons, including the emperor, as one of the means by which tensions with outsiders could be ameliorated.

For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right (*epainon de agathopoiôn*). For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. . . . Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor (*timate*) the emperor. (2.13–17)

The context of this passage suggests that these are not just empty words or merely "a stock phrase taken over from some current formula of instruction in civic duty" (Beare 1958: 117), but rather practical exhortations with direct implications regarding the concrete behaviors of Christian groups and their members that would be observed or even "praised" by influential persons (cf. van Unnik 1980 [1954]; Winter 1994: II–40; Harland 2000). Together with other evidence from the pastoral Epistles, Polycarp and other Christian leaders in Asia Minor and elsewhere,<sup>19</sup> this evidence suggests it is conceivable that Christians would follow the suggestion of their leaders by actively honoring those in positions of authority, engaging to some degree in social networks of benefaction in Roman society.

A similar mentality concerning the establishment or maintenance of positive connections with the elites seems to be advocated by the author of Luke–Acts (c. 90 C.E.), for instance (cf. Walasky 1983). The author often portrays Roman officials in a neutral or positive light, such as the Roman centurion at Capernaum (Lk 7.1–10; cf. Acts 10), who had (like Julia Severa) built a synagogue for the local Jews. The proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, summons Paul and Barnabas "to hear the word of God," and he ultimately believes the message, according to the author (Acts 13.7–12). It is evidence such as this that leads Vernon K. Robbins to argue that Luke–Acts reflects "a narrative map grounded in an ideology that supported Christians who were building alliances with local leaders throughout the eastern Roman empire" (1991: 202). It seems that the author of Luke–Acts was not alone in his approach.

Some evidence suggests that these alliances and connections between some Christian groups and the elites within social networks would continue in the centuries leading up to Constantine's official adoption of Christianity. Authors of the third and early fourth centuries mention in passing what seems to have been a common practice within some areas. Writing in the mid-third century, Origen of

Alexandria complains that the practice of Christian groups accepting benefactions from the (non-Christian) elites was an increasing problem:

I admit that at the present time perhaps, when on account of the multitude of people coming into the faith even rich men and persons of position and honor and ladies of refinement and high birth, favourably regard the adherents of the faith, one might venture to say that some become leaders of the Christian teachers for the sake of a little prestige. (*Cels.* 3.9, Chadwick)

Although certainly exaggerating the point, Eusebius's comment that "the rulers in every church were honored by all procurators and governors" (*Hist. eccl.* 8.1) suggests at least some cases of connections between Christian groups and the imperial elites in the years before Constantine. Christian groups, like other associations and Jewish groups, were participants within the networks that dominated social relations in Greco-Roman society.

## Notes

I would like to thank Michel Desjardins (Wilfrid Laurier University) and Teresa Harland who provided helpful suggestions for revision.

1. On the following discussion of the senatorial and equestrian orders and civic elites, including numerical information and estimates, see Suetonius, *Aug.* 41.1 and Dio 54.17.3 (1,000,000–1,200,000 sesterces requirement for senators beginning under Augustus); Hopkins (1965: 12); Garnsey and Saller (1987); Alfoldy (1985) (on the social structure of the Roman Empire); MacMullen (1974b: 88–120, 183 note 1); and Millar (1977: 275–361, esp. 297–300).

2. To give some sense of the magnitude of this wealth, it is worth noting that an average laborer made about 1,000 sesterces *per year*, and would, therefore, have to work a total of 1,000 years without spending a penny in order to approach senatorial wealth. Due to the nature of inflation and differences in the standards of living from ancient Rome to the modern world, it is very difficult to give equivalents of value in modern currencies (Shelton 1988: 459).

3. Since the Roman economy was primarily agricultural, peasant farmers in the countryside made up the majority of this segment of the population (on the peasantry see Garnsey and Saller 1987).

4. At Thyatira, for instance, there was both a slave merchant (*somatemporos*) and a dyer who at one point assumed the relatively important office of market overseer (*agoranomos*; *TAMV* 932, 991 [second–third centuries C.E.]). There were those who rose to membership in the civic council such as shippers at both Ephesos and Nikomedia, a purple-dyer at Hierapolis, goldsmiths at Sardis (including Jews or god-fearers), and even a baker at Korykos in Cilicia (*1Eph* 1487–88; *SEG* 27 828; *IHierap* 156; *DFSI* 22–23; *MAMA* III 756 [1–3 C.E.]).

5. The focus on networks revises in part an earlier theoretical framework that emphasized relative deprivation and corresponding ideological appeals of a given group (cult or

sect) as the primary factor in growth of membership. See Gurney and Tierney (1982) on problems with the relative deprivation perspective.

6. Both outsiders and insiders in Roman times described Christian (and Jewish) groups using terminology common to associations generally (cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.97; Lucian, *Perogr.* II; Tertullian, *Apol.* 38–39; and Josephus, *Ant.* 14.215–16, 235). For recent studies of associations, which often argue for the value in comparing associations to Christian or Jewish groups, see Kloppenborg (1993); Schmeller (1995); Kloppenborg and Wilson (1996); Harland (1996, 1999, 2000); and Ascough (1997). Classic studies include Waltzing (1895–1900) and Poland (1909).

7. Abbreviations for inscriptional collections follow the standard outlined in Horsley and Lee (1994).

8. Quite often it is hard to know for sure whether an association is based primarily on such temple connections or on a combination of the networks outlined above, since religion was embedded within the life of virtually all associations and guilds.

9. Remus (1996: 155–64) notes that the orator Aristides did indeed maintain links with those of differing socioeconomic standing at the Asklepios sanctuary, but the most dominant links were those that Aristides maintained with others of similar social, educational, and economic backgrounds.

10. Though Acts may exaggerate the extent to which synagogues were the context for the activity of Paul and other early missionaries, we should not err in the reverse direction by dismissing the importance of Jewish networks for a movement that began as a sect within Judaism and clearly included Jews among its adherents in some cities.

11. The inscription is categorized as Christian based on the warning against violation, which says that if anyone violates the grave, “they will have to reckon with the righteousness of God.” This is a variation on the so-called “Eumeneian formula” (see note below).

12. Sebaste: Johnson (1995: 92–93, no. 3.6) = Ramsay (1895–97: 560, no. 451). Eumeneia: Johnson (1995: 82–83, no. 3.2) = Ramsay (1895–97: 519–20, no. 359); Johnson (1995: 84–85, no. 3.3) = Ramsay (1895–97: 525, no. 368); Johnson (1995: 86–87, no. 3.4) = Ramsay (1895–97: 522, no. 364); Ramsay (1895–97: 520–21, no. 361). These are categorized as Christian primarily based on the so-called “Eumeneian formula,” which warns that if anyone should disturb the grave, “he will reckon with (the living) God.” At Eumeneia and the surrounding Phrygian region, at least, the phrase indicates Christian identity, but not necessarily in the case of inscriptions from other regions (see Calder 1939; Robert 1960: 405–13; *Early-Christian Epitaphs from Anatolia*: 41–43).

13. Both F. K. Dörner (1952: 59–60) and L. Robert (1978: 414) categorize the inscription as certainly Christian based on the phrase “To the most holy ones who also had faith in God”; the use of “faith” (*pistis*) in conjunction with monotheism is characteristically Christian in inscriptions (cf. *IBithDörner* II 160).

14. Eusebius is prone to exaggerate the positive role of Christians in relation to the empire in the pre-Constantinian era (cf. 5.21, 7.10, 8.1ff.), but the examples provided here seem quite plausible, especially considering our other evidence for Christians within the imperial household.

15. The inscription was identified quite securely as Christian in connection with the phrase “I beg of you, kind brothers, by the one God” (*fratres boni, per unum deum*) by Clarke (1971: 121–22) and has been accepted as such by other experts in Christian epigraphy (cf. Mazzoleni 1999: 153–54).

16. The inscription is categorized as Christian based on the phrase “he sleeps” (*hic dormit*), which seems to have been a Christian usage at Ostia (cf. *CIL* XIV 1877–78), sometimes adding “in peace” (*in pace*) (cf. *CIL* XIV 1887, 1888, 1889). See Cadoux (1925: 560, note 6), who mentions this and two other Ostian Christian inscriptions (*CIL* XIV 1878–79), the latter involving slaves or freedmen of the imperial family in the early fourth century.

17. For the family connections see especially *IGR* III 373–75; *PIR*<sup>2</sup> I 147, 507, 701; Halfmann (1979: nos. 5a, 17); and White (1998: 366–71). C. Julius Severus at Ankyra is known to be an *anepsios* (often meaning cousin) of C. A. A. Julius Quadratus of Pergamon, and C. Julius Severus’s brother was definitely a man named Julius Amyntianus (*IGR* III 373). Follet (1976: 133) convincingly argues for the probability that this is the same Julius Amyntianus whom we find at Tralles (below), if not a relative in some other way. Scholars are in general agreement that Julia Severa is most likely a relative of C. Julius Severus of Ankyra, and therefore of the others, though we lack an inscription that states it explicitly. The Attalid and Galatian royal ancestry includes Attalos II, Deiotaros, and Amyntas (*IGR* III 373).

18. The lack of surviving *realia* concerning Christian participation in social networks of benefaction is relatively unsurprising in light of the generally partial nature of survival and discovery and the fact that Christians were such a numerically insignificant portion of the population in the first two centuries. The case of Jews at Alexandria in the first century is illustrative: although we know that Jewish groups in Alexandria (a central locus of diaspora Jews) did conventionally erect honorary monuments for imperial or other figures, none have in fact survived.

19. I Timothy 2.1–2; Titus 3.1–2; *Mart. Pol.* 10.2; and Polycarp, *Phil.* 12.3. Compare Romans 13.1–7; *1 Clem.* 60.4–61.3; Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.1; and Melito in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.7–9.