JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN SELF-DEFINITION

Volume One
The Shaping of Christianity in the
Second and Third Centuries

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'It is obvious', wrote Donald Riddle in 1927, ‘that the famous statement to the effect that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” is an interesting datum; that it is an important datum, while not so obvious, is none the less true. For if the nature of Christianity as a social movement is to be understood, its achievement of self-consciousness is a factor of prime importance in thus understanding it.’ In the search for identity the act of naming is an essential step, reverberating back on the thing itself to alter, expand, limit or, in other ways, define the self-consciousness of those who bear it. As significant as it is that the followers of Jesus of Nazareth were given the name of Christians at Antioch, it is equally, if not more, significant that they did not name themselves. In Antioch they were first ‘called’ Christians (Acts 11.26), i.e. they were given the name by others. The name indicates how the Christian movement appeared to outsiders.

Appearances, it is sometimes said, are deceiving. Knowledge based on what one sees and hears is superficial, for what we see and hear is never the sum of things. Yet is it not equally true that how something appears, how it is perceived, is an aspect of what it is? In the social world where the attitude of others, and the roles assigned by society to individuals or groups define and shape identity, the perceptions of others, misplaced or otherwise, create the world men and women inhabit. To ignore these perceptions in the formation of self-understanding, assuming that the true self lies hidden within, is to invite delusion and self-deception. How a group is understood by others, no matter how much this understanding is at variance with the group’s self-understanding, is an essential part of the reality that makes the group what it is.
The Christians as the Romans (and Greeks) Saw Them

In any effort to understand how the Christian movement achieved self-definition in the Roman world the perceptions of outsiders, especially in the early years, deserve as much consideration as the statements of Christians themselves. For the attitudes of outsiders not only defined the world Christians inhabited; they were also a factor in making Christianity what it eventually became. What is said critically by pagans in one generation will be mirrored positively by Christians in the next.

From the beginning of the second century until the end of the fourth century an extensive, though largely fragmentary, collection of sources exists to document and chronicle pagan attitudes towards the Christians. Among these sources are Pliny’s famous letter to Trajan (Ep. 10.96) and the emperor’s reply (Ep. 10.97), several passages in the satirist Lucian, excerpts from Galen (some preserved in Arabic), the works of Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, offhand references and allusions in writers such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, as well as the responses of Christians to pagan charges, e.g. the writings of the apologists.

Although the writings of pagan critics of Christianity are well known to students of early Christianity, and most are conveniently edited and accessible (Porphyry excepted), they have been neglected in the interpretation of the period. Frequently pagan observations are enlisted to support and corroborate information drawn from Christian sources, e.g. the penchant of Christians for martyrdom, and the letter of Pliny has been endlessly scrutinized to illuminate liturgical history and the legal basis for persecution of Christians. But with one or two exceptions the comments of pagans on Christians have not made a deep impact on the understanding and interpretation of early Christianity. Such neglect arises no doubt because the material is fragmentary, many of the observations are made in passing, with little interest in the Christian movement as such, and, of course, some of the charges of pagans, when measured against other knowledge about early Christianity, seem more the result of prejudice than of understanding.

Nevertheless the views of pagan contemporaries, who lived alongside Christians in the cities of the Empire, who knew Christianity at first hand, cannot be dismissed. Indeed, as Gadamer has reminded us, prejudice is a form of ‘pre-judgment’ based on tradition and experience and if used critically can be as useful in understanding. Why, one might ask, regardless of what Christians called themselves, did observers choose to iden-
Jewish and Christian Self-Definition

tify Christians in one way rather than another? Why, in light of the various terms and ideas current within the society, did pagans choose one set of categories rather than another? How did the Christian movement ‘appear’ to men and women of the Graeco-Roman world when it first emerged into the public light?

Since the objections of pagans to Christianity were first compiled and analysed by Nathaniel Lardner in the eighteenth century, and since J. L. Mosheim, the great church historian, published a translation and commentary on Origen’s Against Celsus, pagan critics of Christianity have been studied, chiefly for the purpose of analysing their arguments against Christianity. Many of the pagan arguments, as Labriolle has observed, are similar to those set forth by Enlightenment critics of Christianity. The debate between paganism and Christianity in antiquity was seen by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars as a debate between rationalism and Christian revelation. In recent years, as a result of Joseph Vogt’s perceptive essay on the piety of the persecutors and Carl Andresen’s acute analysis of Celsus’s True Word, we are in a much better position to understand the pagan critics on their own terms and to use their comments to illuminate not only the religious complexion of the Roman world but to give fresh insight into the Christian movement itself. In this essay I should like to examine these same sources to depict what, from the perspective of outside observers, seemed to constitute Christian identity in the years the Christian movement was first coming to public attention. To do this I shall concentrate particularly on the earliest pagan comments, drawing on later observations only for corroboration. The material can be divided into three broad categories: (1) Christianity as a philosophical school. (2) Christianity as a religious association devoted to Christ. (3) Christianity as a rebellious Jewish sect.

Before moving directly into these areas, however, we should pause to note that the notion of religious identity was not foreign to the ancients, even though the term has a distinctly modern ring. We do so by focusing on Judaism and on the differences between it and Christianity in pagan eyes.

Jewish and Christian identity as seen by pagans

Pagans sensed that certain elements of Jewish life were unique, not in the sense that other people did not, on occasion, practise similar customs or share certain beliefs, but that certain charac-
teristics were constitutive of what it meant to be a Jew. Other ancient peoples, for example, were known to practise circumcision but in the eyes of the Greeks and Romans circumcision was thought to be constitutive of Judaism. It is singled out by pagan authors from Hellenistic times up through the later Roman Empire. Its importance for Jewish identity can also be seen in Jewish sources dealing with proselytes. In Midrash Rabbah Exodus it is reported that Aquila once went to the Emperor Hadrian and announced, 'I wish to be converted and become an Israelite'. To which Hadrian replied, 'You wish to ally yourself to the lowliest of peoples; what do you see in them that you now wish to become converted?' Aquila replied, 'The least among them knows God created the world and what was created on the first and second day, and how long it is since the world was created and on what the world is founded. Moreover, their law is one of truth'. Hadrian said, 'Go and study their law, but do not be circumcised'. To which Aquila responded, 'Unless one is circumcised, even the wisest in your kingdom, and even an old man of a hundred years, cannot study their Torah...'.

Whether the story is historical or apocryphal is incidental. What it does indicate is that proselytes were attracted to Judaism because of the scriptures and the teaching about God as creator, but that in attempting to embrace Jewish teaching they met resistance from Jewish law. As interesting as Jewish teaching may appear to proselytes, it is not the sum of what it meant to be a Jew. Without submitting to the Jewish law, one could not become a Jew.

In Midrash Tanhuma a similar point is made in a different context. Abraham is said to have complained about the effect circumcision had on his relation to strangers. 'As long as I was uncircumcised, nomads would lodge with me; now that I am circumcised, they no longer come and do so.' The implication is that circumcision stood in the way of non-Jews embracing Judaism. Put in other terms, circumcision is a sure sign of Jewish identity, recognized alike by Jews and pagans. Which is to say that one test of religious identity is 'resistance', i.e. certain characteristics of a religious tradition refuse to bend even when there is pressure to do so. Of course this is not an infallible criterion, but when used with others it gives a sense of what adherents, without reflection, recognize as authentic marks of their religion.

If we look closely at the many statements about Jews in the ancient world it is apparent that they are not all of equal
Jewish and Christian Self-Definition

significance. The malicious and scurrilous charges are mixed in with the appreciative and perceptive. Nevertheless certain characteristics persist from writer to writer and from generation to generation. Among these are circumcision, the observance of the Sabbath, abstention from certain foods, the worship of one God. That these same characteristics are held up for ridicule and caricature is further evidence of how constitutive they were of Jewish identity in the eyes of pagans. Even though many of the statements of pagans were hostile to Jews, their sense of what constituted Jewish identity conforms rather closely to Jewish self-understanding.

The situation was quite different for the Christians for two reasons. As modern studies have repeatedly emphasized, in the early second century, the period when we have our first testimony to Christianity by outsiders, there was not one but several forms of Christianity present within the Roman world. To be sure, there were also varieties of Judaism. But the parallel, tempting though it is, is not close. Viewed from within there may have been deep differences among the Jews, but to the Greeks and Romans the ways of the Jews were familiar from first hand experience extending over several centuries. Because Jews had been living in the cities of the Mediterranean world long before Christianity arose, in some cases before the time of Alexander the Great, the inhabitants of these cities had a sense of what the Jews were like and what distinguished them from others. In comparison the Christians were not only unknown, but were themselves searching for a clearly defined identity. They presented varying faces to outsiders, as Celsus was quick to observe (CC V.61–62).

The second reason is that the Jews were a people with a history. Once they had ruled their own land; they had fought wars and made treaties with neighbouring peoples. Even when they settled in cities among foreign peoples they were able to win certain privileges which were protected by the laws of the cities. Christianity was a newcomer, with no land to call its own, no history, no book recording this history, and little to win admiration or engender hostility.

Christianity as superstition and as philosophical school

The first references to Christianity by pagan writers occur, coincidentally, in the decade between 110–120 CE. Tacitus, describing the fire in Rome under Nero, mentions that Nero fabricated a
The Christians as the Romans (and Greeks) Saw Them

story that it had been started by the Christians, ‘a class of men loathed for their vices’.

Christus, the auctor of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pernicious superstition (exitabilis superstition) was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.

Members of the sect were arrested, he continues, ‘not so much on account of arson as for hatred of the human race (odio humani generis)’ (Ann. XV.44.2–4). Suetonius, also writing about Nero, mentions that ‘punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition (genus hominum superstitionis novae ac maleficae)’ (Nero, 16). Finally, Pliny, reporting to Trajan about his interviews with Christians in Bithynia, says that after hearing from apostate Christians, he interrogated two deaconesses from whom he learned further details, but as far as he could judge Christianity was nothing more than a ‘depraved and excessive superstition’ (superstitionem pravem, immodicam) (Ep. 10.96).17

According to our earliest sources, then, the Christian movement appeared to outsiders as a superstition. Each writer has his own qualification of the term, superstition prava, immodica, superstition exitabilis, superstition nova et malefica, but the key term is superstition. In general usage at this time superstition designated practices and customs foreign to Rome, such as the religion of the Celts in the British Isles, customs of Germanic tribes, Druid religion, certain customs of the Egyptians and also of the Jews. Coupled with this was the further idea that such religions nurtured vulgar and base conceptions about the gods, encouraged irrational and bizarre practices, and generated fantasmism, as the Bacchic rites had done in the second century BC before they were proscribed. ‘Religion’ [i.e. true religion], says Cicero, ‘has been distinguished from superstition not only by philosophers but by our ancestors. Persons who spent whole days in prayer and sacrifice to ensure that their children should outlive them were termed “superstitious” and the word later acquired a wider application. . . . Hence “superstitious” and “religious” came to be terms of censure and approval respectively’ (Nat. deorum 2.72). By calling Christianity a superstition Roman writers called attention to its origin, as well as to its character. One person’s superstition, of course, another person’s piety, and the term varies in its
Jewish and Christian Self-Definition

meaning from age to age, and from culture to culture. But in Roman usage at this time it signified a religious group whose practices were at odds with those of the Romans and did not promote genuine religion.

In the mind of the pagans superstition is closely linked to irreligion and impiety. According to Plutarch superstition promoted impiety because the superstitious man believed in gods who are 'rash, faithless, fickle, vengeful, cruel and easily offended'. Superstition, which encouraged fanatical and irrational devotion to the gods, led eventually to a denial of the gods, i.e. atheism. 'It occurs to me to wonder at those who say that atheism is impiety (asebeia) and do not say the same of superstition. The man who does not believe in the existence of the gods is unholy. And is not he who believes in such gods as the superstitious believe in a partner to opinions far more unholy?' (De superst. 169–170a, 168–b, 171b–f).

No doubt Plutarch's exposition of the term 'superstition' reflects a sensitivity to religious questions (cf. his other works, e.g. De Defectu oraculorum or Isis and Osiris) which was not characteristic of Pliny or Tacitus. But the term and its corollaries, impiety and atheism, is not simply part of Plutarch's private religious universe. Superstition and piety were defined less by the specific ideas of a particular thinker than they were by the public context of life within the cities of the Graeco-Roman world. Inscriptions from Greek cities, for example, praise and honour the ephebes 'on account of their piety (eusebeia) toward the gods and respect (philotimia) for the council and people'. Many coins from the period bear the legend PIETAS, PIETAS AUGUSTA, sometimes accompanied by an altar for sacrifice, other acts of religious devotions, and the phrase VOTA PUBLICA. On some coins the orans, a figure with hands uplifted in a gesture of supplication, appears. This figure, as T. Klauser has shown, is a symbol for eusebeia or pietas.¹⁸

In all of these instances piety signifies acts of public devotion to the gods. Such religious acts stand in contrast to the private, foreign, idiosyncratic practices and beliefs of specific religious groups and peoples. Even Porphyry, the student of Plotinus, the philosopher of religious interiority, once said, writing to his wife Marcella, 'The greatest fruit of piety is to worship god according to the traditions of one's fathers' (Ad Marcellam 18). The terms superstition and impiety carry cultural and religious overtones. Reflecting a judgment drawn primarily from the realm of public
religion, it asserts not only that Christians had foreign origins but that their religious practices did not contribute to the well-being of society. If piety disappears, wrote Cicero, the other virtues will also disappear. For where piety and religion are gone ‘life soon becomes a welter of disorder and confusion; and in all probability the disappearance of piety towards the gods will entail the disappearance of loyalty and social union among men as well, and of justice itself, the queen of all the virtues’ (Nat. deorum 1.4). Impiety is not simply false religion; it creates faithlessness, disloyalty, moral laxity. It is not surprising, then, that superstition and impiety were contrasted to the life of philosophy. In this period philosophy was thought not only to give men an explanation about the larger questions of life, the gods, and the world; it also showed them how to live, a ‘plain solid path in life’. Philosophy helped men avoid superstition and live a life of philantropia towards other men and eusebeia toward the gods. ‘Philosophy’s sole function’, wrote Seneca, ‘is to discover the truth about things divine and things human. From her side religion never departs, nor pietas, nor justice, nor any of the whole company of virtues which cling together in close united fellowship’ (Ep. 90.3).

In the spiritual milieu of the Graeco-Roman world the life of philosophy contrasted sharply with the practices of a superstitious man, just as piety was contrasted with atheism. Although the initial use of the term superstition to identify Christianity may have resulted from Christian origins in Judaea, the Christian movement inevitably acquired, in the minds of pagans, the other characteristics associated with superstition: impiety, atheism, immorality and the like. No doubt early Christian hostility to philosophy only confirmed this impression. Paul’s rash assertion, ‘God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish’, (I Cor. 1.17, 25) was known to pagans by the middle of the second century. And those who had not read any Christian books had picked up the cant of some Christians, ‘Do not ask questions, just believe’, or ‘Your faith will save you’. Some Christians fitted the caricature rather closely. Celsus compares Christians to the ‘begging priest of Cybele and soothsayers, to worshippers of Mithras and Sabazius’ (CC 1.9); Lucian pokes fun at the credulity and stupidity of Christians. One group adopted the charlatan Peregrinus as their leader, honouring him as a god (Peregrinus 11).

For other Christians, however, the identification of Christianity as a superstition, and the similar charge that Christians were impious and atheistic, offered a challenge. These men, the earli-
est Christian apologists, who were at home in the spiritual world of Graeco-Roman paganism, understood the logic which led from superstition to impiety on the one hand, and from philosophy to piety on the other hand. If Christianity were identified as a superstition it would not only be seen in the same light as other cults which had invaded the Roman Empire, it was unlikely that it would be taken seriously by thoughtful men and women. What they set out to accomplish was a presentation of Christianity as a philosophical school, thereby reversing the logic which led from superstition to atheism. They link Christian morality to Graeco-Roman piety, arguing that Christianity offered men and women a way of life which can compete with other philosophical schools within the Empire.\(^{21}\)

Their efforts were aided by another pagan critic of the Christians, the philosopher-doctor Galen. Galen, somewhat surprisingly in light of what others had said, speaks of the ‘school (\textit{diatrace}) of Moses and Christ’, comparing their followers to physicians and philosophers who ‘cling fast to their schools’ without listening to arguments to the contrary. Whether Galen distinguished between Jews and Christians in this passage is unclear, but in another text, where he is discussing only the Christians he writes: ‘In their contempt of death . . . their restraint from cohabitation . . . their self-discipline and self-control in matters of food and drink, and in their keen pursuit of justice, have attained a pitch not inferior to that of those who truly live philosophically’.\(^{22}\) To Galen Christians exhibited moral discipline, that is, they lived ‘philosophically’. They did not, however, offer cogent reasons for their way of life, for they appealed not to reason but to stories and parables, threatening men with tales of rewards and punishments. In rational argumentation they are deficient; in moral achievement exemplary. Somewhat reluctantly Galen praises the Christians while expressing grave reservations about the theoretical grounds for their way of life.

If we return now to the question posed at the beginning of this essay, we can see that pagan attitudes toward the Christians provided a framework in which Christian attempts to achieve identity were forced to move. At the one extreme the Christians were called a superstition, a judgment which involved, as we have seen, social, moral and religious implications. On the other hand at least one observer took the Christians to be a type of philosophical school, inferior in some respects to other schools,
but worthy of admiration for their self-discipline and moral earnestness. In his *Philosophies for Sale*, a humorous dialogue on the schools, Lucian enumerates the various philosophical options, listing the pros and cons of each one. With less wit, Galen had, in the course of his travels and studies, done the same, eventually deciding that none was worthy of his allegiance. But in the thinking of these men, as well as in others of that time, there was a set of cultural and religious convictions which set the standards by which any new school would be judged.

The early apologists, notably Justin and Athenagoras, created a self-understanding of Christianity which responded directly to the pagan attitudes towards the Christians. In the *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin presented his conversion as conversion to philosophy (*Dial.* 1–8), and in the I Apology he describes Christ as a ‘teacher’ (4.7) who instructed his followers concerning God and the moral life. Just as Socrates was condemned because he was ‘impious and atheistic’ (5.3), although he taught mankind about the true worship of God, so the Christians are attacked when in fact their teacher taught them to lead a life of ‘temperance, righteousness, philanthropia’ (10.1). Illustrating this teaching, Justin cites maxims from the gospels which closely parallel philosophical maxims passed on within the Graeco-Roman world. Athenagoras responds more directly to the charge of atheism (i.e. impiety), arguing that if Christians held views such as Diagoras held (a paradigmatic atheist in antiquity) ‘we could not complain of having acquired a reputation for impiety’ (*Leg.* 4), but we confess one god maker of the universe, his word, the spirit, angels. ‘If we are impious because our religious devotion has nothing in common with theirs, all cities and nations are impious; for all men do not recognize the same gods’ (14.2). As W. Schoedel has observed, Athenagoras avoids the charge of practical atheism (which could hardly be answered), choosing to deal with the theoretical problem; but the point here is simply that his presentation of Christianity conforms closely to what one would expect from a philosophical school.

To summarize. One way in which the Christian movement began to achieve self-identity in the formative years of the second century was to respond to the charge that Christianity was a superstition. By presenting Christianity as a philosophical school, i.e. a way of life marked by piety (not superstition) towards the gods and moral earnestness, Christian apologists forged a self-understanding which diverged sharply from the
self-understanding of the rank and file of Christians and from earlier Christian thinking. As this self-understanding became more widespread, and Christians gained access to artists and sculptors, some wealthy Christians buried their dead in sarcophagi portraying piety (the orans figure) on one end, philanthropy (the chiroporos) on the other, and a philosopher sitting in the middle.\textsuperscript{25} The theological and ethical topics which arose out of the philosophical life will also provide many of the major themes of early Christian thought: God as a transcendent spiritual being, freedom of the will, moral reformation, reasonableness of Christian belief, and of course the insistence that Christianity offers the genuine path to piety. ‘It is for the reader of his [Celsius’s] treatise’, writes Origen at the end of the \textit{Contra Celsum}, ‘and of our reply against him, to judge which of the two breathes more of the spirit of the true God and of the temper of piety (eusebeia) toward Him and of the truth attainable by men, that is, of sound doctrines which lead men to live the best life’ (CC VIII.76). At later time, the philosophical life will be identified with the monastic life, transferring the ideal of philosophy from the Christian community at large to a segment of the community. This will precipitate new tensions within Christianity because the bios philosophikos was still thought to be the ideal for all Christians.\textsuperscript{26} But this later development does show how the identification of Christianity as a philosophical way of life continued to reverberate through the Christian consciousness throughout the patristic period.

\textit{Christianity as a religious association devoted to Christ}

The course of development we have just traced (in barest outline) led Christians to present themselves as a philosophical way of life founded by Christ. Like other schools the secta of the Christians ‘bears the name of its founder’, says Tertullian. ‘What is unusual about a discipline giving its adherents (sectatoribus) a name from its teacher? Are not the philosophers named from their founders – Platonists, Epicureans, Pythagoreans? Do not some receive their name from the places in which they assembled and stationed themselves, e.g. Stoics and Academics? Are not physicians named from Erasistratus, grammarians from Aristarchus, cooks even from Apicius?’ (Apol. 3.6). Understood as a way of life which taught men about God and how one should live, the Christian movement stressed the role of Christ as founder and teacher. Hence the name Christiani.
In the third century Porphyry appealed to this understanding of Christianity to criticize the Christians. Citing several Greek oracles, he said that Jesus was a ‘wise man’ because he ‘turned religious persons from these very wicked demons and minor spirits, and taught them rather to worship the celestial gods, and especially to adore God the Father’. Through their folly, however, the disciples misunderstood Christ’s teaching, choosing to centre not on what he taught but on Christ himself. The oracles praised the soul of Jesus as ‘that of a man foremost in piety’, but his disciples began to ‘worship it [his soul] because they mistake the truth’. 27

Evidence that Christians had early begun to make the worship of Christ, not simply his teaching, central to Christian self-understanding can be found in our earliest pagan sources. Pliny observed that Christians were in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before it was light to ‘recite a carmen to Christ as to a god’. This passage from Pliny can be placed alongside another, not less interesting, but often overlooked text, from the work mentioned above, Lucian’s Peregrinus. In the same passage where Lucian discusses the gullibility of Christians he also says that Christians revered Peregrinus as a god, made use of him as a lawgiver, and set him down as a protector, next after that other, to be sure, whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult (teletēn) into the world’ (Peregrinus 11). Later in the same passage Lucian says: ‘Furthermore, their first lawgiver [Christ] persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws’ (Peregrinus 13). 28

Neither Pliny nor Lucian had any first hand acquaintance with Christian literature. 29 What they report about Christian attitudes towards Christ (the title Christos has already become a name) is based only on hearsay or what they have learned from their travels. In both cases, however, they had noticed that one of the distinctive characteristics of the Christians was that they worshipped Christ as god. Lucian, making sport of Christian gullibility, says that Christians also revered Peregrinus as a god, but he qualifies this statement in the next sentence. The veneration shown to Peregrinus is second to that offered Christ. To describe the veneration of Peregrinus Lucian uses the term aideomai and for Christ sebō and proskyneō. I do not think the terms should be emphasized because there are a wide range of words in Greek to
express worship, devotion and reverence each with different shadings. But it seems clear from this text that even a casual observer recognized that the worship offered Christ was not in the same category as the veneration shown to the charlatan Peregrinus.

The impression of Lucian and Pliny is confirmed by a Christian source, the Martyrdom of Polycarp. After Polycarp’s death some Christians wanted to take his body away, but several pagans pleaded with the magistrate not to give up the body ‘lest they abandon the crucified and begin to worship this man’ (17.2). To which the narrator responds: ‘They did not know that we shall never find it possible either to abandon Christ who suffered for the salvation of those saved in all the world, the blameless for the sinners, or to worship any other. For him we worship as the Son of God; but the martyrs we love as disciples and imitators of the Lord . . .’ (17.2).

It is, I think, noteworthy that all three of these texts, as well as the passage cited from Porphyry, do not simply say that Christians considered Christ god, but that they worshipped him as god. The text from Pliny explicitly refers to a cultic setting. From Christian sources we know that Christians had begun at an early date to ascribe divine status to Christ, calling him the ‘son of god’, or in rare cases ‘god’. But it is not so clear that Christ was the object of Christian worship. In this period Christian worship was directed primarily to God the Father. ‘To judge from all that survives in documents and accounts of the church’s life in this period’, writes Josef Jungmann, the liturgical scholar, ‘liturgical prayer, in regard to its form of address, keeps with considerable unanimity to the rule of turning to God . . . through Christ the high priest. . . . It was not until the end of the fourth century that we meet, by way of exception, prayers to Christ the Lord, and these are not within the Eucharistic celebration proper but in the fore-Mass and in Baptism.’

We cannot, of course, expect pagan observers to be privy to the subtleties of Christian worship or modern liturgical scholarship, but it may be that pagans caught something of the spirit of the early Christian movement which was rapidly turning the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth into a cultic figure. Interestingly, the one area where prayers to Christ were widespread was in the ejaculatory prayers of the martyrs, the pleas for divine deliverance in times of danger. Popular devotion to Christ then, as always, outstripped what was sanctioned by the official liturgical
The Christians as the Romans (and Greeks) Saw Them

practice or by the theologians. Origen, it will be remembered, was critical of the practice of praying to Christ. He defended prayer in the proper sense as appropriate only to God, not Christ, because 'we ought not to pray to anyone born [of a woman]' (De nat. 15.1). Among Christian theologians there may have been debates about the status of Christ, but to pagan observers, and to many Christians, Christian identity centred on the worship of Christ.

Before examining this aspect of Christian identity further, particularly in Celsius, we should clarify what was meant by the term god when applied to Christ by pagan authors. In Greek and Latin writers from this period the term god (or divine) designated a category of being stretching from the one high God in a pyramid down through the Olympian gods and the visible gods (e.g. stars), to daimones, and finally to heroes. Unlike our modern term which designates a category including only one member, the ancients thought of the divine as having many different forms. To sophisticated thinkers such as Porphyry (or Celsius) there was one high god, but this did not prevent there being other gods. The one high god presided over a company of gods. Although the one god was the source and origin of the other gods, he nevertheless had many similarities with the lesser gods.

Each type of god required a different form of worship. To the one god only spiritual worship of mind and heart was appropriate, whereas to other gods it was proper to bring sacrifices. Distinctions were made between different types of sacrifices and the places where they should be made. The ancients, said Porphyry, 'consecrated to the Olympian gods temples, shrines, and altars, to terrestrial deities and heroes sacrificial hearths, and to the gods of the underworld ritual pits or trenches . . . [and] they dedicated caves and grottoes to the Cosmos' (De antro nympharum 6).

In his work On Abstinence from Animal Food, Porphyry outlines the different types of worship suitable to the various deities. 'The first God, being incorporeal, immovable, and indivisible . . . is in need of nothing external to himself'. To this god, 'who is above all things, one sacrifices neither with incense, nor dedicates anything sensible to him . . . Neither is vocal language nor internal speech adapted to the highest god . . . but we should venerate him in profound silence with a pure soul, and with pure conceptions about him' (De abstin. 2.37; 34). To his 'progeny', however, 'hymns, recited orally, are to be offered'. To other gods, e.g. the
stars, sacrifices of inanimate objects are fitting whereas to lower
gods religious observances and other sacrifices should be offered. The daimones, for example, love the smell of burning flesh (De
abstin. 2.42).

It is essential, in attempting to understand the pagan concep-
tion of deity, to remember that the various categories of deity are
not firmly fixed. It is possible for certain deities, in the course of
time, to move up or down on the hierarchy of divinity. This can
be seen particularly in the case of heroes, for heroes were once
outstanding men who were originally elevated to divine status
because of the character of their lives or their wondrous works.
Plutarch says that some heroes are ‘borne upward, even so from
men into heroes and from heroes into daimones . . . But from the
daimones a few souls still, in the long reach of time, because of
supreme excellence, come, after being purified, to share com-
pletely in divine qualities’ (De orac. 415c). For this reason daimones
are sometimes called ‘gods’.

It is in this context that we should place the remarks of Pliny
and Lucian on the worship of Christ by Christians. In the Greek
pantheon there were numerous gods who had once been men,
e.g. Heracles, Orpheus, the Dioscuri brothers, et al. Even the
more obscure figure Empedocles is described by Diogenes Laert-
tius to have ‘become god,’ thereby earning the right to be offered
sacrifices (D.L. VIII.68). But the more common figures were men
such as Heracles, Alexander, Asclepius (who is a mortal in the
Iliad); and the writings of Lucian and others from this period refer
regularly to such divine men or heroes, most of whom lived so
long ago that the historical memory had been completely trans-
formed into myth, as was the case with Orpheus.

A somewhat closer parallel was the devotion and veneration
shown to philosophical teachers, particularly Pythagoras. He
was venerated by his followers as a teacher and founder of their
school, his memory was recalled and celebrated in stories and
tales of his life, and in some circles he was revered as divine. One
story reported by Diogenes Laertius says that when he
climbed out of a subterranean cave which was thought to be the
entrance to Hades, his followers ‘believed that Pythagoras was
divine’ (D.L. VIII.21). Lucian, in his sarcastic account of the
buying and selling of philosophies, put these words into the
mouth of a man who wished to buy the Pythagorean philos-
opher: ‘Come, strip, for I want to see you unclothed, By Heracles!
His thigh is of gold. He seems to be a god and not mortal, so I shall
certainly buy him' (Philosophies for Sale, 6). An even closer parallel can be found in Apollonius of Tyana, who was not a mythical figure nor a philosopher who lived before Plato, but a man of recent times. Philostratus writes his life to tell men of the things he did, his habits, his wisdom 'by means of which he succeeded in being considered a super-natural and divine being' (Vita Apollonii 1.2).

If we return now to Pliny and Lucian with these considerations in mind, it is clear that in their eyes the Christians had elevated Jesus to a divine status in the same way that adherents to other religious groups had exalted their teacher or cult object. The role of Christ as teacher, stressed by the apologists, is placed in the background, giving way to Christ as an object of veneration and worship. It is likely that this understanding of Christianity led pagans to view Christianity as a religious association, a thiasos, or collegium devoted to Christ. It was customary for religious groups to organize themselves into associations for the purpose of mutual support and worship. These associations were usually dedicated to a particular god or goddess to whom worship was offered when the group gathered. In the by-laws of a burial society in Lanuvium in Italy dating from 136 CE it is said that one of the elected officials 'is to conduct worship with incense and wine and is to perform his other functions clothed in white, and that on the birthdays of Diana and Antinous [the patron deities] he is to provide oil for the society in the public bath before they banquet'. A number of the terms used by Lucian to describe the Christian group are familiar, not from Christian literature, but from inscriptions and other sources dealing with religious associations. We also know from archaeological excavations at Porta Maggiore that a group of followers of Pythagoras had constructed a meeting hall in Rome in which they met regularly for religious worship including a cultic meal.

That Christians were willing to accept such an identification and to present themselves as a religious association is evident from Tertullian's Apologeticum.

We are a corpus bound together by our religious profession, by the unity of our way of life (disciplina) and the bond of our common hope. . . . We pray for the emperors. . . . We assemble to read our sacred writings. . . . With sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast, and no less by inculcations of God's precepts we confirm good habits. . . . The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honour not by
purchase, but by established character... Though we have our
treasure chest, it is not made up of purchase-money... On the
monthly meeting day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation...
The gifts are, as it were, an offering for piety (*deposita pietatis*)...
(Apol. 36–39).

To pagan observers Tertullian’s benign description of the
Christian association missed the point. Already in 170 CE Celsus
had written his frontal attack on the Christian movement in
which for the first time a critic of the Christians had carefully read
the Christian writings, observed the practices of different
Christian groups, and had spoken with Christians about their way of life. 38 As Andresen has shown, Celsus’s familiarity with
Christianity, and with the particular approach of apologists such as Justin, led him to formulate a cultural-religious argument based on his understanding of traditional religion. 39 Christians
had apostasized from the ‘ancient logos which had existed from
the beginning, which had always been maintained by the wisest
nations and cities and wise men’ (CC I.14).

For our purposes several sub-themes running throughout Celsus’s book can serve to illustrate how the early perceptions of less informed observers such as Pliny and Lucian are likewise emphasized by Celsus. Early in his work Celsus singles out the
veneration of Christ as God as the characteristic mark of Christianity. This Christ, says Celsus, who is the ‘chief’ (*hegemôn*) of the
group which was begun by his teaching a ‘few years ago’ is
‘considered by the Christians to be the son of God’ In the final
section of the work he returns to this same theme, criticizing the
Christians because they have established a religious society
devoted not to the worship of the one high God, but to a lesser
being Christ (VIII.15). Christians ‘want to worship only this Son
of man, whom they put forward as leader under the pretence that
he is a great God’ (VIII. 15). Such worship detracts from the
worship of the true god, creating a rival society which does not contribute to the ends of the larger society (CC VIII. 68, 73, 75).

Our purpose here is not to analyse Celsus’s arguments but to use his work as a source to portray Christian self-understanding during this period. To appreciate Celsus’s comments, however, we must grasp something of his argument. Celsus does not dispute that Jesus could be considered god or son of god. Like Plutarch, Porphyry and others he conceived of the divine as a category of being which included several different levels of divinity. Believing that an extraordinary man could become
The Christians as the Romans (and Greeks) Saw Them

divine by his splendid deeds, he points to heroes such as Heracles, Orpheus and the Dioscuri brothers as examples of divine men. For Celsus it is theoretically possible for Jesus to merit such a title. The question which runs throughout Celsus’s work centres on the grounds by which one would, legitimately, elevate Jesus to divine status. Conversely, Origen’s task in his work against Celsus was to show that ‘Jesus was worthy of the proclamation that he [Jesus] is son of God’ (CC I.28).

Celsus argues his case on several different grounds. In some places he adopts the position that Jesus is a magician and sorcerer. Repeating the story that Jesus was brought to Egypt by his mother to escape the shame of an illegitimate birth, Celsus says that in Egypt Jesus learned the magic arts, and finding himself successful in the use of sorcery, returned to Palestine ‘full of conceit because of these powers’. On this account, because of the wonders he could work by magic, he ‘gave himself the title of god’ (CC I.28). In other places he argues that Jesus’ teaching, when compared with the teaching of ‘other philosophers’ ‘contains nothing that is impressive or new’.

How much better it would have been for you, since you conceived a desire to introduce some new doctrine, to have addressed your attentions to some other man among those who have died noble deaths and are sufficiently distinguished to have a myth about them like the gods. For example, if Heracles and Asclepius and those who since early times have been held in honour failed to please you, you had Orpheus, a man who, as all agree, possessed a pious spirit and also died a violent death (CC VII.53).

He then enumerates a number of other heroic figures, Anaxarcrus, Epictetus, even the Sibyl.

However, you have had the presumption to interpolate many blasphemous things in her the [Sibyl’s] verses, and assert that a man who lived a most infamous life and died a most miserable death was a god. A far more suitable person for you than Jesus would have been Jonah with his gourd, or Daniel who escaped from wild beasts, or those of whom stories yet more incredible than these are told (CC VII.53).

Celsus’s criticism is instructive. Assuming that doctrine makes a philosophical teacher noteworthy he expects Christians to offer something new and impressive as Christ’s teaching. But Christians seemed fixed less on what Christ taught than on his worship. Since most of the things taught by Jesus were expressed much better by the ancient sages (VII.58) or even by Jewish teachers,
Jewish and Christian Self-Definition

why, says Celsius, do Christians insist on worshipping Jesus when more distinguished and exemplary figures are available within Judaism and other ancient traditions? 'What new thing has happened since then [when Jesus suffered] which might lead one to believe that he was not a sorcerer but the son of God?' (CC VIII.41).

Arguing in this fashion Celsius is led to the conclusion that Christians 'worship not a god, nor even a demon, but a corpse' (CC VII.68). This point is reiterated in several places throughout the work. 'You make yourselves a laughing-stock in the eyes of everybody when you blasphemously assert that the other gods who are made manifest are phantoms, while you worship a man who is more wretched than even what really are phantoms, and who is not even any longer a phantom, but in fact dead'. In Celsius this theological observation also has social overtones because he sees the Christian movement as a religious association cultivating attitudes which can only work to the harm of the public order. In a more superficial way Pliny makes a similar point when he mentions the consequences of Christian belief for public piety. The villages and districts, he says, were infected with this new cult, but now that he had begun to check its growth 'the people have begun to throng the temples which had been almost entirely deserted for a long time; the sacred rites which had been allowed to lapse are being performed again . . .' (Ep. 10.96). No doubt Pliny, a great flatterer of his correspondents, exaggerates his success to Trajan, but his point is clear enough. Religious devotion has social implications.

The model of a philosophical school and the model of a religious association devoted to the worship of Christ accent different, though not mutually exclusive, aspects of Christian identity during this period. As we have seen, philosophical teachers, e.g. Pythagoras and Epictetus (mentioned by Celsius), were sometimes venerated as divine men. Within the milieu of the Graeco-Roman world, Jesus could be seen both as teacher and as the object of religious worship. In the later history of Christianity both aspects will serve as identifying marks of Christianity, at times one gaining the ascendancy, at times the other. But the recognition by pagan observers that Christianity had a stake in the worship of Christ is certainly the most important observation, religiously and historically. That this aspect of Christianity should loom so large and appear so obvious to outsiders, at a time when Christian identity was only in the process of formation,
The Christians as the Romans (and Greeks) Saw Them

suggests how important the doctrinal and liturgical elements would become in the later history of the church.

Christianity as a rebellious Jewish sect

As the Christian movement became better known, its critics observed that Christians disagreed among themselves. In the form that we have it this observation is decidedly polemical, intended to undercut Christian claims by showing that Christians ‘slander one another with dreadful and unspeakable words of abuse’ (CC V.63). It is a charge against Christianity that ‘there are several sects among Christians’, says Origen (CC V.61). According to Clement of Alexandria both Jews and Greeks say ‘that the diversity of sects [among Christians] shows belief to be wrong, for the voice of truth is drowned amid the din of conflicting assertions’ (Str. VII.15.89). That the charge was polemical does not make it less true. Neither Clement nor Origen deny it. In the True Word Celsus mentions Gnostics (Origen takes them to be Valentinians), Jewish Christians, Simonians, Hellenians, Marcellians, Carpocratians, Marcionites, et al. Origen, writing in the mid-third century, does not contest Celsus’s assertion.

In spite of the possibilities such divisions offered for criticism of Christianity, Celsus does not develop such an argument. The charge that there are divisions among Christians is a formal criticism, lacking specific content. When he wishes to offer philosophical objections to Christianity, as he does throughout most of the work, he treats the Christian movement as a whole (CC V.65). From Celsus’s point of view the differences among Christians were significant, but not significant enough to make them an object of philosophical criticism. Instead, after calling attention to them, he goes on to criticize the things Christians had in common. Even in the case of the Jewish Christians whom Celsus describes as ‘accepting Jesus’ but who ‘still want to live according to the law of the Jews like the multitude of the Jews’, (CC V.61), Celsus does not develop this difference as a theological criticism of Christianity.

This latter point is all the more surprising because a major theme throughout the work is the apostasy of Christianity from Judaism. We have already noted that Celsus argued that Christianity had revolted against the ‘ancient logos’ which had been preserved among ancient peoples. Because Christianity is neither old nor traditional it cannot be true. But this argument is com-
Jewish and Christian Self-Definition

plemented by another, more specific argument, which has to do with the relationship between Christianity and its source, Judaism.

Celsus charges that the Christians diverged from the Jewish law even though their founder was a Jew. To set forth this criticism Celsus, using the literary device of a Jewish interlocutor, puts his arguments into the mouth of a Jewish critic. 'Why do you [Christians] take your origin from our religion [Judaism], and then, as if you are progressing in knowledge, despise these things, although you cannot name any other origin for your doctrine than our law?' (CC II.4.)

That the Jews would criticize Christians because they deserted the Jewish tradition, while claiming Jewish origins, is obvious enough and well documented in our sources. In the Dialogue with Trypho for example Trypho says, 'But you, despising this convenant, rashly reject the consequent duties, and attempt to persuade yourselves that you know God, when, however, you perform none of those things which they do who fear God' (Dial.10). 40 But that similar criticism would come from a pagan is not self-evident, especially when one considers that Celsus is also critical of the Jews who themselves had apostasized from the 'ancient logos'. 'The Jews were Egyptian by race, and left Egypt after revolting against the Egyptian community and despising the religious customs of Egypt' (CC III.5). 41 Christians are a rebellious sect from a people who themselves were rebels.

Celsus, then, does not simply attack the Christians for their apostasy from the 'ancient logos', i.e. from the religious traditions Celsus finds acceptable; he criticizes Christians for revolting from a religious tradition he despises. I suppose one could simply view Celsus's ploy as a rhetorical flourish, an ad hominem appeal, which portrays the Christians as more despised even than the degenerate and rebellious Jews. On the other hand, it could be that Celsus, a great respector of tradition, has a grudging admiration for the Jews because they have been around for a long time. There are hints of this now and then in the book (CC V.25). In this reading his criticism of the Christians as rebellious Jews is simply part of his central argument that they are an upstart group, scornful of the past, disrespectful of traditional worship, with nothing worthwhile to offer.

I am inclined to think, however, that there is a simpler explanation. The link to Judaism was an obvious mark of Christian identity. One did not have to be a Jew to offer Jewish arguments
against the Christians, because Christians claimed the Jewish tradition as their own. Justin, according to his own account, was converted simply by reading the prophetic writings (of the Jews) (Dial. 7). Because Christians claimed a link to the Jews, they had to acknowledge the appropriateness of 'Jewish arguments', no matter from which quarter they came. As Celsus sensed, Christians were extremely vulnerable at this point.

Such an argument can never be simply theoretical. If there were no Jewish communities, it would make little sense to say Christianity had abandoned Jewish ways. But if there are Jews who continue to observe Jewish traditions, keep the laws of Moses, and use the Jewish scriptures, 'Jewish arguments' are extremely effective because they are supported not simply by logic but by history and experience. The Jewish law was not only written in the Torah; it was an actual code of law currently in force in Jewish communities. Celsus's argument presupposes that there were Jewish communities within the cities where Christians lived and who by their existence confuted the Christian interpretation of the Jewish scriptures. At the very least, the existence of Jews made the Christian claims appear arbitrary and capricious.

Jews continued to be a lively presence within the cities of the Roman Empire and in the consciousness of Greeks and Romans throughout the Roman period. In the cities of the Empire evidences of Jewish life were plain to see: synagogues, the regular observance of the Sabbath (which required that shops be closed, business dealings postponed), Jewish food in the markets, the recurring pattern of yearly festivals whose preparations were observed by non-Jews, and the Jewish scriptures written in Greek. Although the Jews of Palestine suffered greatly in the war with the Romans in 70 CE and the Bar Kochba revolt (132–135 CE), and Jews in certain cities, e.g. Alexandria, were bitterly persecuted early in the first century CE, the overall situation of the Jews in the Diaspora had not changed greatly. Even in Eretz Israel, particularly in Galilee, Jewish life was being renewed in the later second century. In cities such as Caesarea, Apamea, Antioch, Laodicea in Palestine and Syria, and in cities in western Asia Minor, e.g. Ephesus, Sardis and Hierapolis, the Jews were a significant and visible segment of the population. In many cities the Jews served on the city councils, some held posts in the provincial administration, the sons of the wealthy had access to a Greek education, and both sons and daughters bore Greek
names. In this milieu where the Christian movement was a newcomer and Christians were only beginning to attract attention, it perplexed pagans that the Christians claimed the Jewish tradition but rejected the Jewish community and its ways.

Placed within this context the effectiveness of Celsus’s Jewish arguments is apparent. Whether Celsus agreed with his Jewish interlocutor is irrelevant; what was relevant was the effectiveness of using the Jews as an argument against Christianity. What is more, his argument did not rest on any particular form of Judaism, nor on certain Jewish ideas or beliefs. It rested simply on the existence of Jewish communities who followed, in whatever form, the Mosaic Law. Christians refuted themselves by claiming Jewish support for non-Jewish ways. Celsus’s Jew asks: ‘What was wrong with you, citizens, that you left the law of our fathers, and being deluded by that man whom we were addressing just now [Jesus], were quite ludicrously deceived and have deserted us for another name and another life’ (CC II.1.). Celsus, like anyone else who knew the Jews, realized that the distinguishing marks of the Jews were their peculiar customs and laws. And he also realized that Christians did not observe the laws given by Moses and found in the Jewish scriptures. Hence, he combs the scriptures to find points where Christ’s teaching clashes with Jewish law and promises made to the Jews. Why, he asks, did God ‘give contradictory laws to this man from Nazareth, his son?’ On point after point Jesus taught different things than Moses. ‘Who is wrong? Moses or Jesus? Or when the Father sent Jesus had he forgotten what commands he gave to Moses? Or did he condemn his own laws and change his mind, and send his messenger for quite the opposite purposes?’ (VII.18).

Celsus’s argument, then, is that the Christian disregard for its origin proves its illegitimacy. In a very revealing offhand reply to Celsus Origen says, ‘What sort of objection is it to Christianity that John who baptized Jesus was a Jew?’ (CC II.4). The answer obviously is that it was a fundamental objection because Christians were no longer recognizable as Jews. Just how incisive this objection was can be seen in later critics, particularly Julian (but also Porphyry). ‘Why’, asked Julian, ‘is it that you do not abide even by the traditions of the Hebrews or accept the law which God has given them?’ (Adv. Gal. 238b). It will be remembered that Julian attempted to provide historical evidence in support of his theological arguments by rebuilding the temple and returning the Jews to Jerusalem. If the temple were restored, its existence
would not only prove that Jesus’ prophecy was false (cf. Matt. 24.2), but that the Jewish interpretation of the scriptures was valid. No longer would Christians be able to appeal to the loss of the city and temple as a reason to abandon the Jewish law.  

The persistence of such arguments throughout the patristic period is significant for the history of Christian apologists, itself an important source for Christian self-understanding. The Christian apologists, contrary to the view of Harnack and his school, were engaged not in a two-fold debate between Christianity and paganism, but a three-part debate in which one factor is the continuing existence of Jewish communities well into the fifth century. Attempts to legitimate Christian religious claims had to deal not only with the philosophical objections of pagans, but with scriptural and historical arguments, offered by pagans (and Jews), but supported by the existence of a rival tradition of interpretation.

In any attempt to comprehend Christian efforts to achieve self-understanding and identity during the early centuries of the common era, the continuing presence of the Jews is a major, and neglected, factor. The link with Judaism was perceived to be a constitutive part of Christian self-identity by pagans in the early period even though there were some Christian groups who severed the tie with the Jewish tradition. As important as Marcionism may seem to modern scholars, it is ignored by Celsus even though he knew of the existence of Marcionites. Christianity, as Celsus knew it, insisted on an indissoluble link to Judaism, not as a historical accident but as a necessary component of what it meant to be Christian. It may be that Marcionism was more important than our pagan critic would allow. If so we would have to acknowledge the limitations of relying on the observations of outsiders to depict Christian self-identity in the early Roman Empire. I would, however, be inclined to think that the way things appeared to Celsus was the way they were.

Conclusion

On the basis of the comments of pagan observers of Christianity in the second century I have singled out three characteristics of the Christian movement: (1) a philosophical school whose teacher and founder was Jesus; (2) a religious association whose cult-hero was Christ; (3) an apostate Jewish sect. Several observations are in order. Presentation of Christianity as a philosophical
school is a self-conscious attempt on the part of Christian apologists to revise the image of the Christian movement. Responding directly to the designation of Christianity as a superstition, and the charge that Christians were impious and atheistic, they attempted to forge a self-understanding which would make Christianity acceptable to Greeks and Romans. The pagan characterization is, as it were, a negative starting point which provides the categories in which Christian identity will be moulded. In the case of the latter two characterizations, pagan critics took note of something which sprang from internal developments within the Christian movement. The second point in particular, elevation of Christ to a cult figure, seems not to have been a self-conscious effort on the part of Christian thinkers to define Christian identity but the result of spontaneous and untutored religious feeling. In the case of the link to Judaism, traditional forces were at work, stemming from the primitive Christian communities, but an intellectual choice was made by Christian thinkers to defend the latent assumptions of earlier Christian tradition.

The significance of these three aspects of Christian identity will change as the Christian movement increases in size and establishes itself more securely within the cities of the Roman world. But they will not disappear. Transformed, each will in its own way continue to define Christianity. It is curious that pagan observers make little reference to institutional marks of Christian identity such as church organization or ecclesiastical offices. Except for a mention of deaconesses by Pliny (Ep. 10.96) and Lucian’s statement that Peregrinus was ‘prophet, cult-leader, head of the synagogue, and everything, all by himself’ (Peregrinus 11), pagan observers say little about the organization of early Christian groups. Whether this is significant I cannot say, but the omission is noteworthy in the light of the importance of the bishop in Christian sources, such as Clement of Rome and Ignatius, but also in Irenaeus’s arguments against the Gnostics. In this respect pagan critics shed no light on an important aspect of early Christianity. But in calling Christianity a philosophical school, they accent the moral aspirations of the Christian movement, and in highlighting the centrality of the worship of Christ, they call attention to the theological dimension, that is, how Christ is to be understood; and of ritual – how he is to be worshipped, in the formation of the Christian tradition. Finally, by accenting the intimate link to Judaism in Christian self-
The Christians as the Romans (and Greeks) Saw Them

understanding, pagan critics of the church presage the hostile, and often tragic, relation between Christianity and Judaism which will mark later Christian history.