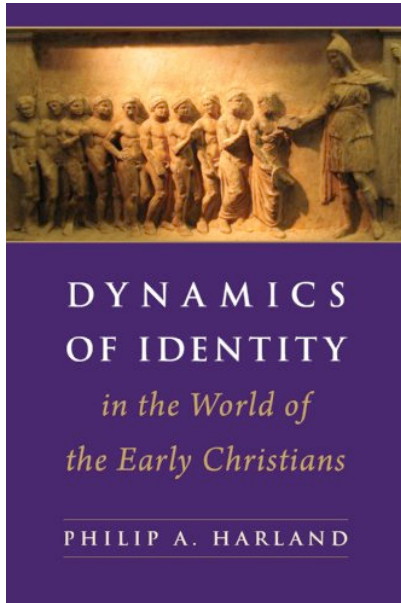


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Harland, Philip A.

Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities

New York: T&T Clark, 2009. Pp. xii + 239. Paper.
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One increasingly important aspect of early Christian studies is an understanding of the group identity of the early Jesus movement, that is, how insiders and outsiders defined that group. Harland's *Dynamics of Identity* makes a valuable new contribution to this topic. Harland focuses primarily on archaeological evidence as it pertains to local congregations of Christians in comparison with other similar groups, namely, voluntary associations. Thus, Harland follows up his previous monograph on voluntary associations, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, with one that applies some of the lessons learned in that study to the topic of Christian identity. In those respects this book also complements the important recent works of Judith Lieu on Christian identity, which have focused on ways that early Christian identity is expressed in literary sources as a translocal entity.

Harland's introduction summarizes the social-scientific concepts that he employs throughout the rest of the book, the most important of which are social identity theory and ethnic studies. The former focuses on one's self-conception as defined by membership in a group, the latter on how immigrants relate both to a host society and to their homeland. Harland also introduces the concept of a *cultural minority group* as a

category that includes both ethnic minorities and other similar groups that, unlike ethnic groups, are not defined by a perceived geographical origin, such as Christian congregations.

Chapter 1 presents a wealth of primary source evidence related to voluntary associations and argues for the inclusion of Judean synagogues and Christian congregations within that category. Harland defines *voluntary associations* as “small, unofficial (‘private’) groups, usually consisting of about ten to fifty members (but sometimes with larger memberships into the hundreds), that met together on a regular basis to socialize with one another and to honor both earthly and divine benefactors, which entailed a variety of internal and external activities.” He rejects a purpose-based typology of associations as occupational, cultic, or burial associations, favoring a membership-based typology of associations as primarily drawing their membership from the household, the neighborhood, the workplace, the sanctuary, or common geographic origin/shared sense of ethnic identity. Various associations could combine these sources of membership, such as some Judean associations that, in addition to defining themselves ethnically, also were specific to certain neighborhoods, occupations, or cities of origin. One potential flaw to Harland’s typology is that it is not obvious where Christian congregations fit in it, although his fifth category could accommodate them if he means “ethnic” in the broader sense of “cultural minority.” Harland points to association terminology applied to Judean synagogues (especially *θίασος* and *σύνοδος*) in Philo, Josephus, and various inscriptions. While he admits that inscriptional evidence is lacking for early Christianity, he points to several non-Christian authors who classified Christian groups as associations and notes important parallels between Christian use of the terms *ἐκκλησία* and *οἱ φίλοι* and the vocabulary of associations.

In chapter 2 Harland attempts to illustrate the helpfulness of classifying Christian congregations as associations by a treatment of some of Ignatius’s metaphors, showing that they borrow concepts from associations of Asia and imbue them with Christian meanings. These include Ignatius’s use of terms that relate to mystery rituals (48–51) and to his use of the suffix *-φοροι* (52–58), paralleling terminology for individuals who bore items in processions honoring deities. Harland helpfully illuminates the letters of Ignatius with numerous parallels. This chapter would be a valuable contribution to scholarship as a stand-alone article for that reason alone. However, its role in the larger thesis of Harland’s book seems debatable. As some of Harland’s examples illustrate, mystery rituals and cultic processions appeared in official temple cults of various cities and were not limited to voluntary associations. Also, Harland’s attempt to relate this chapter to group identity seems strained, since Ignatius’s use of these concepts is merely metaphorical.

In chapters 3–4 Harland places the Christian use of *brother/sister* and the Judean use of *mother/father* within the context of voluntary associations that used the same designations. Of the Christian terminology, the parallels are less clear and frequent. Harland attributes this to the fact that our evidence for Christian use of *brother/sister* comes from letters and that such language was generally not suitable to the inscriptions that provide our best evidence for associations. Nevertheless, Harland does produce a few inscriptional examples. He supplements these with others from letters found among Egyptian papyri. Since the examples of associations using *mother* and *father* for prominent individuals are more numerous, Harland’s main focus in chapter 4 is not to prove their use but to counter the view that such terminology, both with Judeans and with other groups, was distinctly Roman and that Eastern examples were conscious imitations of the West. He capably shows that this was not the case but that those terms were popular throughout the empire and may have been first used in the East.

Chapter 5 presents examples of ethnic associations of Syrians in Asia Minor that exemplify the three main forms of acculturation that are dealt with in modern studies on migration: (1) *cultural assimilation*, which is two culturally different groups selectively adopting cultural elements from one another; (2) *structural assimilation*, which is integration of a group into the social networks of a host society; and (3) *dissimilation*, which Harland does not define but which apparently means adherence to a cultural trait of one’s ethnic group rather than one expected by a host society. Harland shows how these dynamics were at play with various Syrian associations, such as one that continued to use the Phoenician language and worship Sidon’s native deity using rituals adapted to Greek forms. Harland supplements this inscriptional data with passages from Lucian of Samosata in which he defends Syrians against common ethnic stereotypes applied to them.

Chapter 6 investigates similar dynamics of acculturation on the parts of Judeans in Asia Minor as evidenced in epitaphs there that often include mention of voluntary associations. Harland points to several epitaphs that mention Judean associations and devotes special attention to one for a family named Glykon that does not mention Judeans but that mentions endowments left to two occupational guilds to be used for celebration of the Judean feasts of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost and the Roman feast of Kalends. Based on this inscription and others that mention the same guilds, Harland concludes that they were primarily Gentile associations that included some Judeans or God-fearers. This might give us a window into processes by which Gentiles would have been introduced to Judean rituals.

Chapter 7 describes ways that associations competed with one another in a “rhetoric of rivalry.” This included attempts to win the support of benefaction from important

members of society and to win honor by group benefaction of social institutions. Harland points to groups that used boastful adjectives such as *worldwide* and *holy* in their self-designations and monuments that boast of achievements demonstrating connections to powerful people, gods, the empire, or the city. He also points to the phenomenon of membership in multiple associations and the response of some groups to that by banning the practice. The result is a picture of some Judean and Christian groups, often thought to be distinctly exclusivist, exhibiting considerable integration in society alongside some non-Judean and non-Christian associations exhibiting considerable exclusivity.

In chapter 8 Harland focuses on accusations made against groups by outsiders, commonly featuring motifs about their behavior at feasts, including human sacrifice, cannibalism, drinking blood, drunkenness, and sexual licentiousness. The existence of these stereotypes provides background for their application to Judeans and Christians. Harland also points to Judeans and Christians making these same charges against groups they opposed, as well as one example of a gnostic making such charges against apostolic Christianity in the Gospel of Judas. Harland claims that rejection of outsider stereotypes by a group was a method of defining the group's identity. The contribution this chapter makes to the book would have been enhanced by more discussion of that point, as it is not obvious why, for example, Tertullian's truthful claim that Christians did not drink blood served to give members of the Jesus movement any sense of identity beyond what they already had. Nevertheless, this chapter is successful in placing Christian and Judean groups within the context of a broader spectrum of groups that all participated in giving and receiving the types of accusations Harland surveys.

The few criticisms I have made about this book relate mainly to ways its cohesiveness could be improved and do not negate the cumulative weight of Harland's arguments, which demonstrate that Christian and Judean groups can, indeed, be better understood when viewed within the context of voluntary associations and that doing so illuminates the social identities of Judeans and Christians. Moreover, whatever any reader concludes about the appropriateness of the association category or of a particular social-scientific concept at any given point, the numerous clear parallels Harland provides between Christian and Judean groups and other segments of their society constitute an invaluable and unique resource for which scholars of early Christianity owe Harland a debt of gratitude.