



## Protestant Theological University

### **Review of: Katharine A. Shaner, Enslaved leadership in early christianity, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.**

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dit een belangrijk boek dat prachtig laat zien hoe deze intellectueel in een breed spectrum van media – reikend van Martin Rade's *Die Christliche Welt* tot Ferdinand Avernarius' *Der Kunstwart* – zijn visie op de noodzaak van een vernieuwing van een kerkelijk vastgeroest christendom poneerde. De kritiek op een onpersoonlijke en verzakelijkte maatschappij en de roep om een nieuwe mens en een nieuwe maatschappij wordt door Bonus bijna utopisch verwoord in nationalistische termen, maar staat voor een breder onbehagen. Vandaar ook dat Bonus als een belangrijke religieuze vernieuwer werd gezien en in de eerste editie van *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1909) maar liefst drie kolommen kreeg toebedeeld. In de laatste editie van dit theologische handwoordenboek komt hij slechts twee keer aan bod: een keer prominent in het lemma 'Germanisierung des Christentums' en verder als inspirator van Friedrich Gogarten. Dat is weer wat aan de krappe kant, zoals Königs studie mooi laat zien.

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Katherine A. Shaner, *Enslaved Leadership in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), ISBN 9780190275068; xxx + 207 pp., £ 71,00.

In a way the book under review by Katherine A. Shaner forms a response to the work of Sandra Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen. In their very stimulating work *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* (2014) Joshel and Petersen address the historical paradox that we know that slaves were ubiquitous in the ancient Greco-Roman World, but that we have only very little archaeological evidence of their existence. Joshel and Petersen's ambition is 'to make slaves visible where other [i.e. textual] evidence tells us they were in fact present' (3), by changing where and how we look and by locating the silences of sources. Katherine A. Shaner is at her best when she follows the example of Joshel and Petersen in her study of Early Christianity, determining the position and activities of enslaved Christians in Ephesus, and navigating through architectural, visual and epigraphic data. Shaner wants to show the 'great deal of variety in the everyday lives of slaves' (xviii) and the 'complexities of enslaved persons lives and the differing power dynamics at work in these complexities' (4). For example, in antiquity we come across agricultural (plantation) slaves, gladiator-slaves and slave prostitutes, but also slaves who owned slaves, imperial slaves with significant power, and slaves who fulfilled a cultic ('leading') function. Shaner's focus is on the last group of slaves: slaves in cultic positions, both in Graeco-Roman temples

and in Early Christian communities. With the help of the Persicus decree (44-45 CE) she shows in her second chapter how the consul Persicus felt unease with enslaved persons holding leadership positions in the cult and with slaves doing the same cultic jobs as free persons. The inscription tries to regulate their position, thereby re-establishing Roman hierarchy. In chapter three Shaner studies Gal 3:28, 1 Cor 7:20-24 and the Letter to Philemon. On the basis of these Pauline texts she concludes that enslaved persons held leadership positions in Early Christianity as well, which sometimes gave rise to tensions. In her reading of the Letter to Philemon Onesimus' service to Paul during his imprisonment (Greek verb *διακονέω*; Phlm 13) refers to cultic practice instead of menial labor (59) – a thesis that I do not find convincing given the use of the verb elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. Luke 12:37 and 17:8). In chapter four Shaner returns to archaeological and epigraphical remains, discussing the responsibilities of the *prytaneis*, a special category of temporary priestly officials, in Ephesus. The training of these, often wealthy, individuals is done by the 'actual' ritual specialists, who, according to a list of sacred personnel found at the Prytaneion in Ephesus, often bear names associated with slaves. In Shaner's opinion, the fact that these (alleged) slaves probably knew more of the cult and had to teach the elected priests, poses a 'possible challenge' to their authority (71). While I doubt whether this was as problematic as Shaner thinks it is (is the pedel a challenge to the authority of the professor because s/he has more knowledge of academic rituals than the professor?), I agree with her claim that 'in actual practice, enslaved persons significantly shaped religious practices' (85). While Shaner makes in her book numerous valuable observations and her inclusion of archaeological materials is highly commendable, the new insights she promises to offer with respect to New Testament texts are not very impressive. Often her insights are self-evident, while at other moments she seems to jump to her conclusions, without properly addressing all relevant literature (for example in the case of the Letter to Philemon). Nevertheless, I hope this well-written book inspires many others to go beyond textual data and use the full scope of available evidence in order to understand the complex and ambiguous ancient world.

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