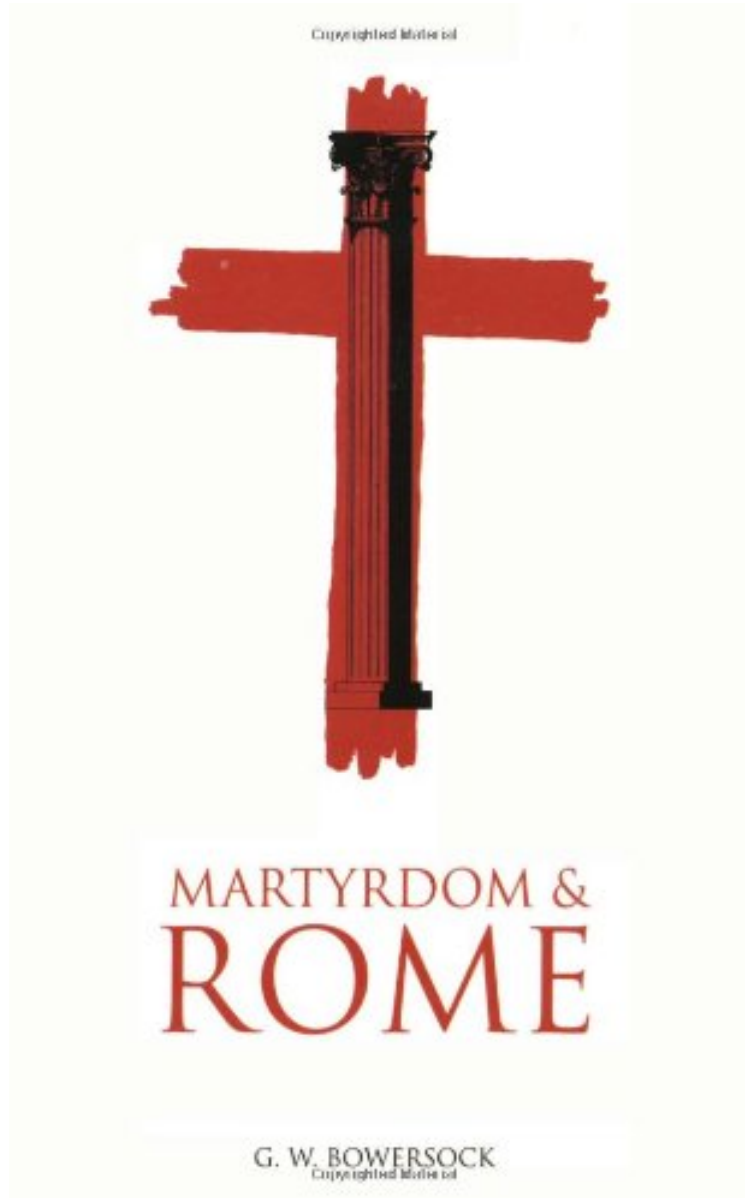


[Read and download] Martyrdom and Rome (Wiles Lectures Given at the Queen's University of Belfast)

Martyrdom and Rome (Wiles Lectures Given at the Queen's University of Belfast)

G. W. Bowersock

*DOC | *audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF | ePub*



DOWNLOAD



READ ONLINE

#414073 in Books Cambridge University Press 2002-10-03 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.50 x .28 x 5.431, .36 #File Name: 0521530490120 pages | File size: 61.Mb

G. W. Bowersock : Martyrdom and Rome (Wiles Lectures Given at the Queen's University of Belfast) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Martyrdom and Rome (Wiles Lectures Given at the Queen's University of Belfast):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy shirley whitakerexcellent product0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. great source materialBy steve mcgahaShort text for the price but awesome source material0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Precise Argument, Staunchly DefendedBy Frank BellizziThis book began as the series of Wiles Lectures delivered at Queen's University in Belfast in 1993. The author, G. W. Bowersock, taught Classics and History at Harvard University from 1962 to 1980. Then, from 1980 until his retirement in 2006, he was Professor of Ancient History at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. The central thesis of this book is that the terms martyr and martyrdom should not be associated with pagans who were willing to die for a philosophy, or with Jews who were willing to die for their faith. Why? Because, strictly speaking, those terms originated with and belong especially to Christians who lived in the Roman Empire during the second through fourth centuries. Bowersock offers a set of arguments rooted in philology and history in order to show that in the Roman Empire martyrdom meant something very specific. In Chapter I, "The making of martyrdom," Bowersock attempts to reveal the precise definitions of martyr and martyrdom. Of course, there were accounts of people in the ancient world, other than Christians, who "provided glorious examples of resistance to tyrannical authority and painful suffering before unjust judges." So, then, what was different about true martyrdom per se? Bowersock answers that there were two things. First, starting with the Christians of the second century in their imperial Roman context, such courage was "absorbed into a conceptual system of posthumous recognition and anticipated reward." Second, and related to the first point, "the very word martyrdom existed as the name for this system" (5). Chapter II, "The written record," sets out to corroborate the argument of the first chapter along the lines of literary analysis. Bowersock notes that the distinctive literary form called martyrology bears little resemblance to Jewish stories from the Old Testament book of Daniel, or from the second and fourth books of Maccabees. Instead, judging from their narrative technique and literary style, the Martyr Acts most closely resemble "pagan historical fiction" (26). The author concludes that "like the very word 'martyr' itself, martyrdom had nothing to do with Judaism or with Palestine" (28). Furthermore, Jewish martyrology sounds nothing like pre-Constantine Christian martyrology. In those accounts, for example, the victims are asked, according to formula, if they are ready to change their minds. Such inquisitions have a "distinctively Roman character" (37). Chapter III, "The civic role of martyrs," begins with the simple observation that the Martyr Acts "take place in the greatest cities of the Roman world" (41). Why was this the case, and why is it significant? Bowersock explains that, from the Roman side, major cities included the deadly legal authority of provincial governors as well as the crowds who would gather for "spectacles of blood sport in the amphitheater." From the Christian side, "martyrdom in a city provided the greatest possible visibility for the cause of the nascent Church, and it simultaneously exposed the Roman administrative machinery to the greatest possible embarrassment" (42). Under these circumstances, pagans and Jews would unite publicly against Christian martyrs, a fact that underscores the author's thesis that martyrdom was a uniquely-Christian phenomenon vis-a-vis imperial Rome. In Chapter IV, "Martyrdom and suicide," the author describes the eagerness, good cheer, and even laughter of some early martyrs. In many cases, their dispositions reveal a desire for martyrdom that amounted to suicide by state official (59-61). Because of this development, some Christian theologians took up the question of martyrdom as opposed to suicide. On the one hand, Tertullian argued that if some pagans voluntarily died for false and foolish notions, how much more should Christians be willing to die for the truth of the gospel? On the other hand, Origen and Clement of Alexandria spoke against all forms of voluntary self harm. The debate reached all the way to the time of Augustine, who argued at length that to kill oneself, or to provoke someone else to kill you, even for what is true, is wrong. Augustine's verdict combined with the effects of the Constantinian revolution to bring to an end to this major chapter of Christian history (73-74). Four Appendixes, a "Select Bibliography" and an index round out this book. Each appendix is a commentary or extended footnote on one of the points in the text. The book could have used a map of the Roman world and a few illustrations. At any rate, Bowersock's lectures assert and advance a provocative thesis. One might quibble with a point here or there. Nonetheless, this book is a tour de force that no student interested in the topic should ignore.

This book examines the historical context of the earliest Christian martyrs, and anchors their grisly and often willful self-sacrifice to the everyday life and outlook of the cities (mostly Greek) of the Roman empire. By exploring the remains of contemporary documents of martyrdoms in the centuries before Constantine, it provides a historical explanation of why martyrdom occurred when and as it did, and thereby tries to expose the fundamental assumptions of a radical new form of religious and political dissidence that has been a powerful influence down to our own times.

"...an interesting book with numerous insightful details....vital for any discussion of early Christian martyrdom." *The Journal of Religion* "...a significant contribution to the reawakened interest in the political and social dimensions of Christian martyrdom, as well as in the martyrological narratives themselves....argued with the clarity and magisterial command of the original sources that is characteristic of the author....a pivotal work in the impending debates over the meaning of Christian martyrdom." Brent D. Shaw, *Catholic Historical* "This is a succinct yet engrossing study, appropriate for both general and specialist audiences." Craig L. Hanson, *Church History*