A Bishop in Chains: The Early Christian Response to Human Bondage

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by
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ABSTRACT

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A thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Ancient Greek and Roman Studies

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In this thesis, I question the degree to which ancient Christians internalized the traditional social stigmas attached to Roman slaves and freedmen. Recent scholarship has suggested that Christians identified with Roman slave-holding practices without challenge. This paper examines the biographical account of freedman Bishop Callistus I (217-223 CE) by Hippolytus of Rome and argues that early Christians challenged the social prejudice against slaves and freedmen despite the continued practice of slave-owning in the congregation. His character study proves helpful in discussing the social transformation of slaves and freedmen in the early Roman church. I discuss the Christian master-slave relationship, as described by Hippolytus, in comparison with slave practices in Roman civic society, specifically in the areas of slave inferiority and slave punishment. I argue that Callistus’ biography reflects a broader trend of enfranchisement of marginal groups through Christian affiliation, an argument which conflicts with scholarly assumptions that early Christianity had no unique response to Roman slavery.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

From the outset, Christianity offered its adherents a religious equality that afforded access to spiritual fulfillment and endurance in the present world and salvation in the future heavenly world, irrespective of social standing, gender, and ethnicity. The Christians’ ability to connect their spiritual faith with social action unquestionably brought change to the Roman Empire, and yet current scholarship almost unanimously rejects a positive Christian influence on Roman slavery. According to Keith Bradley, slave life and the master-slave relationship recorded in early Christian literature shows no evidence of having softened nor altered slave practice after centuries of Christian influence.¹ There was no unified Christian objection to slave-owning, despite the faith teachings and apostolic epistles on spiritual equality, and early Christians never advocated the abolition of slavery. The Christian slave-owner profited from the labor of his slave in the same way as a Roman slave holder, and he responded to criminal behavior similarly to his non-Christian counterpart. Bradley also remarks that the Pauline epistles, which frequently equated slavery to sin, dangerously strengthened Christian slave holders’ psychological domination over their property.²

Jennifer Glancy concludes that New Testament Scriptures and extracanonical writings reinforced Roman values of slave holding and provided a spiritual basis for slaves to submit to their servile status.³ J. Albert Harrill studied the literary characterization of slavery in early Christian texts, arguing that slaves described in New Testament writings are modeled after stock figures from Roman comedy. Harrill, for example, reads the appearance of the slave Rhoda in Acts 12 and the dishonest manager in Luke 16 as based on the servus currens and parasitus
literary stock characters found in many Plautine comedies. He observes that slaves in New Testament literature are products taken from classical stock comedy scenarios that reinforce Roman stereotyping and social prejudice against slaves, literary devices which only functioned to dehumanize them further. The scholarship described here demonstrates that scholars remain unsettled by the early Christians’ reaffirmation of slave-holding practices and refusal to condemn, or at least question, the morality of slavery in light of Christian messages advocating spiritual freedom and deliverance.

I do not refute the early Christians’ refusal to condemn slavery and also acknowledge the persistence of slave-owning ideology and practices in early Christian literature. This thesis examines the biographical account of freedman Bishop Callistus I (217-223 CE) described in Hippolytus’ *Refutation of All Heresies*, and argues that some early Christians challenged the social prejudice against slaves and freedmen despite the continuation of slaveholding practices in the congregation. Hippolytus of Rome, a schismatic bishop who set himself as anti-pope against Callistus, wrote a brief biography about his rival in *Philosophumena*, also named *Refutation of All Heresies*. The *Refutation*, a Christian polemic that challenged several Gnostic beliefs opposing Catholic orthodoxy, provides biographical details about the Bishop of Rome that have not been found in any other primary source. Hippolytus depicts Callistus as a hateful, rebellious leader, but, despite his personal animosity, the character study proves useful in discussing the social transformation of slaves and freedmen in the early church. Callistus, an imperial freedman, began his life enslaved to a Christian owner, was condemned twice as a criminal, but rose to the highest level of Christian authority. The policies Callistus implemented during his tenure as bishop prove equally useful for the purposes of this paper. Callistus recognized ecclesiastical
marriage between Christian free women and enslaved men, a policy that Hippolytus deemed heretical, but a strategy that symbolically broke down social barriers between enslaved and free. Callistus’ example demonstrates that some Christians transcended social distinctions between enslaved and free, even if it did not alter the power of the slave-owner over his property. As a former slave, Callistus could not advance in Roman politics in the same manner by which he ascended in church leadership. His biography, if we choose to accept the historical account as fact, demonstrates a notable change in the social perceptions of slaves and freed persons. The Christian influence on Roman slavery is not defined by a rejection in slave ownership, but rather a higher level of social acceptance for the enslaved and formerly enslaved. Social groups marginalized in Roman society became socially enfranchised through their participation in the Christian community. This essay, therefore, complicates the conclusions of previous scholarship about Christianity and Roman slavery, which suggest that Christians’ unwillingness to condemn the institution of slavery automatically signified their full acceptance of Roman attitudes and opinions about slaves and freedmen. Slaveholding values certainly affected the development of Christian thought and practice, but there were a brave few, such as Pope Callistus I, who broke from established traditions to create less structured levels of social distinction and difference in the Christian community.
Chapter 2
Servile ingenium: The Question of Slave Inferiority

An introduction to slave theory and ideology highlights the importance of Christian responses to Roman slavery. Moreover, in order to support the argument for a more nuanced Christian reaction to slavery, Roman sources should be examined to consider how Republican and imperial slave ideology influenced Christian thought and social practice. For Moses Finley, political and legal advances created conditions for Rome to develop into one of five known slave societies. The slave society, in contrast to a society with slaves, defined the social, political, and economic structures of the society. A society with slaves could lose the slaves and remain the same society; a slave society could not abolish slavery without fundamentally changing its structures and ideologies. The significance of understanding Rome as a slave society should not be easily dismissed, as it wholly affects the organization of the early Christian church and the relational dynamics within the Christian community.

Slavery contains both an ideological and social construction: a psychological sense of superiority over another human life has to be established before a social institution of human ownership can be constructed. Roman legal sources sharply drew distinctions between the free and enslaved person, conceiving all humanity to exist in two basic categories. In principle, freedom was considered the natural state of existence, and slavery stood contrary to the natural order. Henrik Mourtisen comments “the Romans treasured the ideal of the free, unfettered mind, which alone could make morally informed decisions and act according to the highest principles. Any form of dependency, psychological as well as material, reduced the person’s honor and moral standing. Slavery represented the ultimate state of dependency and lack of self-control.”
The jurists insisted on an essential difference between the slave and the free, a distinction that grew increasingly problematic with the introduction of Roman manumission practices and the slave’s subsequent change in status from enslaved to free. With the slave’s ability to cross these social boundaries, Roman jurists recognized the need to define these categories further, separating freed persons from those who had never experienced servitude.

Cultural sociologist Orlando Patterson conceptualizes slavery as a state of social death, described as “the permanent, violent domination of [socially] alienated and generally dishonored persons.” Roman law legally defined slaves as property similar to livestock and agricultural land, subject to the *ius mancipii*. Slave owners had the right to exercise absolute control over their property and to inflict corporeal punishment, torture, and summary execution. The slave enjoyed no legal protection or rights to property, had no formal ability to marry, and enjoyed no authority over children produced in his *contubernium* union with a fellow slave. All of these legal distinctions created the circumstances in which slaves suffered social alienation, and formerly enslaved persons carried traces of their former servile status, *macula servitutis*. This stain of social shame produced a number of legal and social disadvantages for freed persons in Roman society.

The literary evidence affirms that the notion of servitude as a source of social stigma was not confined to legal discussions. Several Roman authors supported slaves and freedmen’s inferiority to freeborn Romans. In his fourth epode, Horace delivered a vicious attack on an anonymous freedman who achieved some wealth after acquiring his freedom and chose to celebrate his success. Horace directly accused the freedman of overstepping his social boundaries:

You whose sides are scarred by the Spanish lash, whose legs
Are calloused by iron fetters.
Though you may strut around, so proud of your money,  
Fortune can’t alter your breeding.  
As you measure the length of the Via Sacra  
In a toga that’s three yards wide,  
Don’t you see the unrestrained indignation,  
On the faces of passers-by?11

Horace argued that material success did not transform his breeding, and he reminded the unnamed victim that manumission and good circumstances did not erase his servile past. In fact, Horace strongly implied that the visibility of the slave’s past abuse contributed to his social inferiority. The passage is notable not only for its high degree of hostility toward this freedman, particularly in light of the poet’s own first-generation freeborn status and loving tribute to his father,12 but it also suggests that slaves belonged to a distinct category of humanity with innate characteristics, traits which remained impervious to any type of social change.

Roman literature includes numerous casual references to slaves, who were associated with a number of servile traits in character and body. Mourtisen remarks, “the term ‘servilis’ was thus typically combined with words likes ‘humilis’, ‘inbecillus’, ‘caducus’ - ‘lowly’, ‘weak’, and ‘perishable’- just as ‘serviliter’ occurred alongside ‘abiecte’, ‘timide’, ‘ignave’, ‘muliebriter’, - ‘despondent[ly]’, ‘cowardly’, ‘slothful[ly]’, and ‘womanish’.13 The notion of a servilis animus frequently appeared in the primary sources. In Cicero’s speech Against Verres, he ascribed many servile qualities to the Roman magistrate, contrasting free and servile minds: “How, then, can a man beg for any mercy who has surpassed slaves in baseness, runaway slaves in rashness, barbarians in wickedness, and enemies in inhumanity?”14 Sallust used ‘servile ingenium’ to describe Spartacus’ army in the slave rebellion, and in his agricultural manual, Columella charged his slave bailiff, vilicus, to possess a certain level of authority over his fellow slaves, insofar as his servile disposition, ‘servile ingenium,’ permitted.15 These types of negative associations underlie the common assumption that slaves possessed a distinct nature, a
suggestion also made implicit in Horace’s epode. These servile stereotypes performed a necessary function in reinforcing the slave system by setting apart slaves from free people, thereby justifying the constructed hierarchies of authority in Rome.

Roman authors routinely associated slaves with traits of treachery, greed, cowardice and criminality, as seen in these examples. The stereotypical slave could exhibit a certain degree of cunning and cleverness, but did not act according to moral principle. The legal sources specified a relationship between moral dishonor and violence. As a result of the Roman tendency to classify free men and slaves as distinct and exclusive social groups, punishments approved by law for slaves were at a higher degree of severity than the discipline routinely prescribed for free men. The Digest discussed how to tightly regulate the use of torture against slaves: “Torture against slaves should be employed as the last resort, at a point when someone is suspected of having committed the crime and proof is not quite forthcoming from other arguments, so that it seems that the only step that is still missing is an admission by slaves.”\(^\text{16}\) Another requirement of Roman law dictated that slaves should be automatically interrogated, tortured and murdered if they were within earshot of their owner’s murder and did not defend him against the violence.\(^\text{17}\) Although slave violence in late Roman law is more fully discussed in a later chapter, it is appropriate to comment here that Constantine’s legal policies did not soften slave discipline in Late Antiquity, despite the Christianization of the Empire.\(^\text{18}\)

In Roman thought, the slave’s perceived moral incapacity legitimized the use of violence against his person. A discussion of Roman drama helps to better understand this social reality. Plautus’ comedies, composed around the time of the second Punic War in the third-century BCE, are the earliest documented representations of chattel slavery at Rome. The Roman dramatist details a large number of torture methods which symbolize the types of violence to which slaves
were routinely subjected. Erich Segal summarizes the varieties of abuse threatened against slaves: “Besides the countless references to the standard whipping instruments like virgae (rods) and stimuli (goads), his comedies display a vocabulary of torture.”

He continues, “Plautus mentions an astounding number of torture devices, including iron chains, hot tar, burning clothes, restraining collars, the track, the pillory, and the mill…an additional reminder of what retribution usually awaits a misbehaving slave.” Slave torture described and derided in Plautine drama help modern readers visualize the actual practices of torture hinted in the Roman legal sources.

The additional value of Plautus derives from his staging of private master-slave relationships and their interactions with the wider community. The dramas were written and performed to a public audience comprising of elite and non-elite citizens as well as slaves. The various situations performed onstage cleverly dramatized the societal expectations of master and slave relationships. His comedies prove useful for his representation of some slaves as clever and faithful, and others as tricksters, liars, and criminals. In the play Captivi, Hegio, a wealthy Aetolian, has two sons, one of which is kidnapped and later sold by a fugitive slave trying to secure his own freedom. Hegio hopes to recover his son, now imprisoned in Elis, by purchasing Elean prisoners and exchanging them for his lost child. Complications, of course, ensue during the play, involving cases of mistaken and switched identities. Stalagus, the fugitive who originally stole the child Tyndarus, does not defend himself when Hegio questions him for information about his long lost son:

Heg: Speak forthrightly the honest truth, even if you have never acted rightfully or truthfully.
Stal: When I would admit something, do you think it shames me when you say it? (V.ii.960-961)
Plautus portrays the fugitive as a criminal and trickster, and the interactions between Stalagmus and Hegio offer the audience some of the best scenes for the dynamics of master and slave in the play. Hegio strongly criticizes Stalagmus’ lack of honor, an accusation left unchallenged by the slave. And when Hegio threatens punishment in response to his moral failings, Stalagamus counters with resigned acknowledgement of his exposure to violence:

Heg: But I will make you ashamed, for I will make you one big blush.
Stal: Ha! I believe you threaten me with a whipping, as if I were inexperienced.
(V.ii.962-963)

The moral narrative of the play defines the defiant slave as a criminal who needs to be subordinated by the master. Trickster slaves deceive everyone in the play, regardless of status and morality, thereby reaffirming the master’s (and audience’s) judgment of him as morally inferior. The plot, understood in the historical context, reflects one of many examples about slave criminality in Roman society.

Underlying Plautus’ comedy is a topic related to slave criminality that Roman owners greatly feared: slave escape. Flight provided one of the only forms of resistance for slaves to express their grievances against their masters and to appeal their ill treatment. Roman slave-owners continually suspected that their domestics would attempt to run away, and Roman law repeatedly addressed this concern. In the Digest, anyone found harboring a fugitive slave was guilty of theft. As property of the owner, when the slave escaped, he technically committed theft by stealing himself. The legal codes had clear regulations on returning a slave, and described severe punishments for those who tried to escape, including face branding. Hippolytus’ own portrayal of Callistus as a runaway slave highlights the dangers of slave escape. Early Christians accepted their obligation to return slaves: Paul tried the reconcile the relationship between slave Onesimos and his Christian owner in the Letter to Philemon, and centuries later,
Constantine modified the state punishment of branding to the hands and legs, and provided an alternative option for fugitive slaves to wear collars.\textsuperscript{27} The play’s discussion of slave resistance, while humorously designed to make listeners laugh, also highlighted an ever-present social reality that affected many in the audience. Slave flight both legitimized the owner’s use of violence against the slave and further confirmed his moral inferiority by his willingness to commit crimes to resist enslavement.

Roman literary authors also had positive responses to slave ideology. In the Stoic tradition, a person’s moral status depended on his soul, not his social status. These types of Stoic writings on moral bondage and spiritual freedom heavily influenced Christian understandings of a benevolent God and the rhetoric of spiritual enslavement. Stoic philosophy supported a type of benevolent paternalism; although the master was encouraged to treat his slaves respectfully, the master deemed his slaves unable to control their own lives and determined that the slave’s best interests rested in willing submission to the owner. Seneca famously advocated for humane slave treatment in his 47\textsuperscript{th} epistle: “The sum of what I wish to preach is this: treat those whose status is inferior to your own in the same manner as you wish your own superior to treat you. Each time you remember how much you are entitled to do to your slave, you must remember also how much your own master is entitled to do to you.”\textsuperscript{28} This charge for humane treatment, however, still supported and reaffirmed the power and status of the slave owner.

Moreover, while Romans classified all slaves as morally deficient, they still distinguished between good and bad slaves. When discussing men who bravely performed beyond their call of duty, Seneca celebrated a slave who acted in moral integrity, citing its rarity in Roman society: “So also with a slave…when he overcomes the limitations of his status by showing goodwill toward his master, and surpasses what his master has a right to expect even to those born into
some higher rank, we are confronted with a benefit performed within the household communities.”29 Enslavement delivered an immediate social blow which irreversibly destroyed a person’s honor. The slave’s experience of social death would never be fully forgotten and slaves suffered enduring social stigma, even after emancipation. And yet, although a slave was always defined by his subordination to another, his disposition and conduct to his owner still mattered.

The Roman slave owners’ self-interest influenced governmental action against slaves and perpetuated their opinions of slave inferiority according to literary sources. Romans developed these social and ideological constructions of slavery to protect absolute power over their subordinates, justify elitist attitudes, and punish slaves who resisted enslavement. This historical background directly impacted the Christian response to slavery, which was admittedly wide-ranging, in addressing issues of slave moral inferiority, criminality, and punishment. These types of servile associations attached to slaves conflicted with some Christian messages written in the first century CE.

In the early decades of the Christian church, in order to guarantee its survival, the faith had to grow beyond its roots as a charismatic faith message into an organized institution supported by leadership and membership. From its inception as a religious movement, Christians had to interact with the Roman slave economy. The Christian populace assembled together various sects of marginalized groups: women, freed persons, and slaves. The practice of slave-owning in the Christian community was almost impossible to escape. Christianity did not have the power to deregulate Roman slavery; in fact, only a handful of Christian authors advocated the dismissal of its practice, and never for its complete abolition.
The household codes of Ephesians and Colossians, and the writings about slave obedience in the letters of 1st Peter and 1st Timothy encouraged the submission of the slave in accordance with the patriarchal standards of the Roman household.\textsuperscript{30} The Pauline letters and other first-century epistles’ continual discussions on slave obedience signified the presence of slaves in the early Church.\textsuperscript{31} The perception of slaves as socially inferior, however, experienced a notable shift in these first-century writings. The first letter of Peter describes all Christians as belonging to a “royal priesthood”\textsuperscript{32} and Paul instructs in his letter to slave owner Philemon to treat his slave as a fellow brother.\textsuperscript{33} The Pauline epistle to Galatians promises equality in Christ, as “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”\textsuperscript{34} The ideal of Christian brotherhood and equality, regardless of social status, still had to be measured against the hierarchy of dependency in Roman society.

It should be noted that secondary scholarship can not sufficiently measure which writings influenced these pockets of Christian communities, as the Christian canon had yet to be formed. Nonetheless, the Christian charge of spiritual equality to all peoples complicated the basic categories of slave and free, a challenge presented earlier with the introduction of Roman manumission practices. The Roman response to crossing these social boundaries involved more restrictions on freedom, changes which further dehumanized the slave. The Christian response to this challenge called for a redefinition of these categories. All believers, regardless of social status, experienced spiritual equality since all Christians accepted spiritual servitude to God. By adopting this language of spiritual adoption into God’s kingdom, belonging to a royal community, and being co-heirs with Jesus Christ, marginalized groups experienced a type of moral rebirth, theoretically, and were granted the same spiritual honor awarded to all free men.
The universal concept of spiritual enslavement helped break down ideological groupings of enslavement and freedom, at least in the Christian communities, as well as some conceptions of moral inferiority in slave populations.

As previously noted, Christian responses to slavery remained varied, particularly in the first-century Gospels. In an article on slave ideology in the Matthean parables, one historian argues that Jesus’ parabolic slave narratives personify stereotypes of master-slave relationships. The stories of the unmerciful slave, the wicked tenants, and the overseer in Matthew 18, 21, and 24,\textsuperscript{35} testify to the normalcy of slave discipline and the vulnerability of the slave body to excessive violence.\textsuperscript{36} Plautine references to slave punishment and slave torture are repeatedly cited in the article, and the parables’ inventory of disciplinary devices could be easily found in mainstream Roman drama.\textsuperscript{37} The parables reaffirmed the practice of slavery in the Greco-Roman world, especially in the early empire. Ideological notions of spiritual equality did not always translate to changes in social practices or slave perceptions.

Another historian also possesses a negative opinion of early Christian influence over slavery, commenting that “Christians made, therefore, a new addition to the traditional set of asymmetrical relationships between superiors and inferiors that society had always known in the past.”\textsuperscript{38} The rhetoric of spiritual subservience to God paradoxically strengthened the acceptability of slavery in Roman society, and increased ammunition for those who considered it an acceptable institution: “The possibility of significant amelioration that Christianity’s egalitarian principles theoretically created was closed off by its failure to develop any new intellectual perspective from which slavery may be viewed in a critical light…to them change was unnecessary because it was slavery that opened that way to salvation, no matter what misery it entailed along the way.”\textsuperscript{39} This paper disagrees with this assessment. A uniform Christian
challenge to slave ideology and slave practice almost certainly did not exist, but several Christian voices condemned or at least displayed discomfort toward traditional slave-owning practices and philosophies.

Second century Christian apologists (and slave owners) Justin Martyr and Athenagoras both discuss the pagan authorities’ efforts to glean information about the Christian faith. One interrogation method involved the torture of slaves in an effort to learn more about their Christian owners. The accounts differ in opinion on whether the slaves betrayed their masters. Justin Martyr assumed that slaves always lied under pressure given the opportunity, and he vilified them in accordance with Roman stereotypes of servile character and dishonesty: “For these [authorities], having put some to death on the false accusation made against us, dragged away our household servants to be tortured, whether children or helpless women. Through fearful mistreatment, they compelled them to make these fanciful charges concerning things which they themselves do openly.”40 In one of his early apologies in the late second century, Tertullian vehemently condemned slaves and their lies against Christian owners: “The curiosity of the household slaves has obtained knowledge through peepholes and crevices. So what of domestics betraying their secrets to you? Why shouldn’t they when they are betrayers? Indeed they are, and isn’t it more likely that such betrayal should occur when atrocities like these are in question, when a righteous indignation destroys the trust within the household?”41 Athenagoras, however, found slaves unwilling to inform on their owners, and commended the virtues of both Christian owners and slaves in the household: “Moreover, we have slaves: some of us more, some fewer. We cannot hide anything from them; yet not one of them has made up such tall stories against us. Since they know that we cannot endure to see a man being put to death even justly, who of them would charge us with murder or cannibalism?”42 Regardless of the
historicity behind these stories, the accounts highlight a key difference in slave morality. Two apologies gladly subscribed to traditional Roman slave ideology, while the last defense openly questioned and defended the slaves’ moral integrity. Bishop Clement of Alexandria argued that both masters and slaves were human beings and, that at times, the slaves were superior to their masters: “Take away, then, directly the ornaments from women, and domestics from masters, and you will find masters in no respect different from bought slaves in step, or look, or voice, so like are they to their slaves. But they differ in that they are feeblener than their slaves, and have a sickly upbringing.” This ideology contains traces of Roman Stoicism and the notions of “moral enslavement” with one essential difference. Stoics directed their philosophical writings to an elite male audience, while Christian leaders wrote their letters to diverse and marginalized populations. These examples confirm that longstanding traditions of slaves’ social inferiority faced some opposition.

In the early second century, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, addressed a letter to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, concerning the liberation of baptized slaves. The letter discouraged the practice of corporate slave manumission in the church. The letter could reflect Ignatius’ social conservatism on slavery, but recent scholarship offers a new interpretation. Ignatius gave clear instructions to the bishop: “Do not behave arrogantly towards slaves either male or female. Rather let them be enslaved all the more to the glory of God…let them not desire to be manumitted out of their money in the common chests, so that they may not be found slaves of [their] greed.” Unlike previous scholarship, which assumed that Ignatius’ opposition signified his overall resistance to slave freedom, one historian observes that the bishop was likely more concerned with abuses of corporate manumission practices and did not necessarily disapprove private manumissions of Christian slaves. Corporate manumission
possibly encouraged self-seeking slaves to desire baptism as a method to increase their chances for freedom. These selfish motivations undoubtedly brought undesirable converts to the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{46} The situation addressed in Smyrna was not an isolated example, as several Christian sources describe congregational displays of generosity towards slaves.

In the \textit{Apostolic Constitutions}, a collection of treatises composed in the third century but compiled in the late fourth century, discussed church congregations offering both corporate aid and individual Christians visiting chattel slave markets to purchase slaves, likely for the reason of conversion: “And such sums of money as are collected from them…appoint to be laid out in the redemption of the saints, the deliverance of slaves, and of captives, and of prisoners, and those that have been condemned by tyrants to single combat and death in the name of Christ.”\textsuperscript{47} The \textit{Constitutions} encouraged believers “not to go to any of those public meetings, unless to purchase a slave, and save a soul, and at the same time buy such other things as suit their necessities.”\textsuperscript{48} In his first \textit{Apology}, Justin Martyr described how churches used common chests to perform acts of charity to marginalized peoples: “And they who are wealthy, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and the collection is deposited with the president, who supports the orphans and widows, and those who are in want, through sickness, or any other cause, and those who are in chains, and the stranger sojourning among us, and in a word, takes care of all who are in need.”\textsuperscript{49} Ancient Christians did not hold abolitionist tendencies, but the corporate acts of charity and emancipation were nevertheless exceptional.

Many Roman manumission practices reaffirmed the power of the former slave owner, or patron, and the continual disenfranchisement of the freedman. These conditions for Roman manumission did not necessarily apply to the Christian communities. The terms for slave freedom in Christian circles did not require patron relationships, associations which, many times,
regulated the freedman’s continual subordination to his former master. Christians ransomed slaves in an effort for them to participate more fully in the faith community, a significant and unique response to slavery. Overall, the Christian reactions to slavery widely varied between complete identification to subtle discomfort toward existing Roman slave practices. This chapter dealt primarily with slave morality; later chapters consider Christian influences on preexisting laws of slave criminality and punishment. This chapter’s discussion of slave ideology in first and second-century Christian sources contextualizes Callistus’ notable tenure as Bishop of Rome in the third-century.

Hippolytus of Rome wrote biographical details about a Christian master-slave relationship in his *Refutation*, facts which are helpful in understanding Christianity’s problematic intersections with the institution of slavery. Callistus, a Roman freedman, may have been the one of the first monarchical bishops in Rome.50 Before the third century, semi-independent communities had multiple bishops, *episkopoi*, who handled the administrative duties. Kristina Sessa, whose book argues that early Christian leadership modeled itself after Roman styles of domestic household management, finds it very significant that Hippolytus used household management terminology to describe a freedman bishop.51 In some ways, his biography reflected traditional Roman conventions of slave-owning ideology: a disenfranchised slave who personified slave attitudes of dishonesty, unfaithfulness, and betrayal and endured severe discipline and torture. His penal sentencing confirmed his uselessness as a good and faithful slave in Roman society. Callistus’ servile background and criminality should have disqualified him from any type of influential leadership, particularly in a setting which gathered together freeborn, freed and enslaved persons. Curiously, Hippolytus never questioned his moral integrity as a freedman, and his ability to lead the congregation without challenge strongly
suggests that the worshippers had no qualms accepting a former slave as the moral and spiritual shepherd of the church. Thus, analysis into Callistus’ biographical narrative argues for a more nuanced understanding of ancient Christian approaches to Roman slave ideology and practice.
Chapter 3
Callistus: The Freedman Bishop

The complete absence of slave literature significantly weakens historian’s understandings of the Christian response to slavery. Apart from the total silence of the enslaved populations, much of the extant literature represents the need for the socially empowered elite to legitimize the structure of slavery and the meanings it generated. Plautus and his literary characterization of slaves, although written in the Roman Republic, provide modern historians some of the closest examples for the realities of the Roman slave experience, even in later historical periods, a main reason why frequent mentions of his comedies appear in this paper. Nonetheless, no surviving sources can complete the picture of the practice of slavery in the Christian community. Many of the New Testament scriptures, apostolic writings, and Christian apologies were merely literary constructs that transmitted the writers’ fantasies, fears, ideal, values and social agendas.

Callistus’ biography, narrated in Hippolytus’ Refutation, face these same challenges, however, the work is noteworthy in its mix of conformity and divergence from traditional Roman realities of slavery. Hippolytus’ biography was consistent with long-established Roman ideologies about slave immorality and slave criminality, but his depictions of Callistus’ status as a freedman were highly uncharacteristic.

A number of scholars discuss at length Callistus’ personal history in their scholarship. They argue how Callistus’ example proves that Christianity did not bring any softening influence to Roman slave practices nor questioned well-attested models of Roman hierarchies. This paper disagrees and seeks a more nuanced explanation of this biographical account. Callistus’
biography offered no challenge to the masters’ authority over his slave; however, his remarkable ascension to power suggests a Christian softening to the traditional social shame attached to freedmen, a stigma that would have precluded his involvement in much of Roman political life.

Hippolytus main objective in the *Refutation* was to criticize gnosticism and other heresies, and he incorporated Callistus’ story only to discredit his rival. Hippolytus repeatedly depicted Callistus as a conniving leader, ruthless in his quest for power:

> Callistus attempted to confirm this heresy,—a man cunning wickedness, and subtle where deceit was concerned, (and) who was impelled by restless ambition to mount the episcopal throne…and inasmuch as Zephyrinus was accessible to bribes, and covetous, Callistus, by luring him through presents, and by illicit demands, was enabled to seduce him into whatever course of action he pleased.\(^54\)

The character study, despite the writer’s personal feelings of hostility, proves useful in discussing the social perceptions of slaves in the early Roman church. A close reading of Callistus’ biography is beneficial in exploring the question of Christian responses to Roman slavery.

Callistus began as a highly ranked domestic slave in the imperial administration.\(^55\) His Christian master, Carpophorus, entrusted Callistus with the management of his banking business. The money disappeared, either through bad investment or financial mismanagement, which compelled Callistus to flee from Rome to the nearby harbor Portus. Carpophorus recaptured his slave, returned him to Rome and condemned him to the flour mill, *pistrinum*.\(^56\)

Although a work of fiction, Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* offers a colorful description of the flour mill and the types of degradations to which masters subjected their slaves:

> I inspected the [organization] of this highly undesirable mill with a certain degree of pleasure. The men there were indescribable — their entire skin was [colored] black and blue with the [stripes] left by whippings, and their scarred backs were shaded rather than covered by tunics which we patched and torn. Some of them wore not more than a tiny
covering around their loins, but all were dressed in such a way that you could see through their rages. They had letters branded on their foreheads, their hair had been partially shaved off, and they had fetters on their feet. They were sallow and [discolored] and the smoky and steamy atmosphere had affected their eyelids and enflamed their eyes. Their bodies were a dirty white because of the white flour—like athletes who get covered with fine sand when they fight.57

As an imperial slave with some degree of privilege, Callistus likely considered what type of punishment he would receive for his crimes and feared for his life, opting to commit suicide rather than endure a life-long sentence of harsh labor, according to Hippolytus. Fortunately, some of the Jewish creditors, certain that Callistus still had some of their money, convinced Carpophorus that the fugitive deserved a second chance to recoup some of the financial loss. Callistus, fully aware that the money had disappeared, devised a scheme to ensure his death.58

One afternoon, he went to the synagogue in the pretext of meeting with Jewish investors and created a disturbance. The Jews, upset by his behavior, started to insult and abuse him, eventually bringing him before a Roman prefect. The Jews sent for Carpophorus, who immediately rushed over and discredited Callistus as a Christian. The slave was whipped into submission and condemned to the mines at Sardinia.

Diodorus Siculus’ discussion of the Iberian mines in the first century BCE describe the brutal exploitation that miners and slaves had to endure: “As a result of their underground evacuations day and night they became physical wrecks, and because of their extremely bad conditions, the mortality rate is high; they are not allowed to give up working or have a rest, but are forced by the beatings of their supervisors to stay at their places and throw away their wretched lives as a result of these horrible hardships.”59 Although this passage occurs much earlier in Roman history, it provides a general context for the type of suffering and misery that awaited Callistus after his sentencing. Callistus suffered some of the worst punishments and atrocities that any slave could endure, a fact that made his ascension to the episcopate all the
more notable. Hippolytus never considered Callistus a “good” slave in his dealings with his master, but despite his status as an unfaithful domestic, he still achieved the highest seat of Christian office, possibly over and against Hippolytus, a dedicated and freeborn presbyter in the church.\textsuperscript{60}

After suffering penal servitude for an unspecified amount of time, Marcia, a mistress of Commodus, appealed to the Emperor to secure the release of all Christians confined to the mines. Her eunuch, Hyacinthus, working on behalf of his mistress, freed all the Christian prisoners. Callistus, although not originally placed on the list, pleaded for his freedom, and Hyacinthus appealed to the governor to obtain his release.\textsuperscript{61} Once liberated, Callistus earned the favor of Pope Victor I, who housed the freedman at his home in Antium and provided him with a monthly allowance. Following Victor’s death, Callistus returned to Rome where he worked as an archdeacon under Pope Zephyrinus and was later appointed overseer to a cemetery belonging to the Church. Zephyrinus’ death led to the nomination and appointment of Callistus as Bishop of Rome in 217, where he served for 5 years.\textsuperscript{62} After his rise as bishop, Callistus implemented new polices, which Hippolytus deemed heretical and harmful to the integrity of the Church.\textsuperscript{63} Callistus allowed clergy twice married to retain their church positions, performed second baptisms, a hotly contested and unresolved issue in the Christian community, and officially recognized marriages between Christian freewomen and enslaved men in the church.

Hippolytus’ narrative highlights important themes of slave management, escape, and punishment. Hippolytus spent much time describing the relationship between a Christian master and slave. Carpophorus entrusted Callistus with his business, and he served as an intermediary between the slave-owner and his business partners. In the narration, Hippolytus repeatedly stressed this deep level of trust in their relationship: “And in process of time were entrusted to
him not a few deposits by widows and brethren, under the ostensive cause of lodging the money with Carpophorus.”\textsuperscript{64} This exact same language appeared later in the text as investors sought to convince Carpophorus to free his fugitive slave: “But Carpophorus, as a devout man, said he was indifferent regarding his own property, but that he felt a concern for his deposits; for many shed tears as they remarked to him, that they had committed what they had to Callistus, under the ostensive cause of lodging the money with himself.”\textsuperscript{65} The repetition in language positioned Carpophorus as the victimized slave-owner and the slave as the villainous thief. In light of Hippolytus’ mission to discredit Callistus, the historical accuracy of Carpophorus’ response is open to interpretation, but his account highlights a chief concern that was already an accepted reality in Roman society: slaves could not be trusted. The Roman slave-owning elite had a longstanding history of comparing good slaves and bad slaves, and good domestics were considered obedient, hardworking and trustworthy. Hippolytus accused Callistus of lacking the essential qualities of a good slave. His decision to portray Callistus as an irresponsible, insubordinate slave, regardless of its veracity, strengthened the accusation that slaves were independent-willed, disloyal and lacked devotion to their master. Hippolytus praised Carpophorus for the treatment of his slave in keeping with Roman traditions of slave-ownership, and demonized Callistus for his lack of obedience. In this regard, their Christian master-slave relationship almost completely resembled its counterpart in Roman society.

Hippolytus’ also addressed the reality of human ownership in his biographical account. Carpophorus had complete control over the body and personhood of his subordinates. After the Jews accused him of creating a disturbance in the synagogue, Carpophorus condemned his slave before a Roman prefect:
‘I implore of you, my lord Fuscianius, believe not this fellow; for he is not a Christian, but seeks occasion of death, having made away with a quantity of my money, as I shall prove.’ The Jews, however, supposing that this was a stragagem, as if Carpophorus was seeking under this pretext to liberate Callistus, with the greater enmity clamoured against him in the present of the prefect. Fuscianius, however, was swayed by these Jews and having scourged Callistus, he gave him to be sent to a mine in Sardinia.  

Both socially and legally disenfranchised, Callistus was answerable with his body to any type of punishment or chastisement. Slaves were always physical and sexually vulnerable to their owners, and the lack of control over their body contributed to the perception of slaves as socially dead. Callistus had no right to his sense of self, no right to an opinion about his behavior, and no right to decide the way he received punishment.

Hippolytus portrayed Carpophorus as maintaining a Roman model of hierarchal authority over his dependent; however, his actions during Callistus’ sentencing deserve more close attention. The denouncement of Callistus’ faith before the prefect, while appearing insincere, may have served as a lifeline to spare his servant from death. As previously noted, the Jews who stood before the prefect were suspicious of Carpophorus denying Callistus’ Christian faith, believing him to seek freedom for his slave. The passage hints at a practice of denouncing faith to avoid punishment. In the second-century, persecutions of Christian had been locally commissioned by provincial governments. Romans leaders typically did not regulate Jewish-Christians relations unless it directly involved a matter of Roman law. There has been recent some scholarship on the history of Christian hearings in the third-century:

Christians had been considered troublesome enough to have been brought to the attention, from time to time, not just of Roman provincial governors or of the Roman urban prefect …early in the third century Ulpian was able to draw up a register of imperial rescripts (i.e. imperial responses to referrals by provincial governors, possibly responses to complaints or queries by provincial councils etc.) demonstrating the punishments that by then were deemed appropriate for Christian adherents…arrest as a Christian did not inevitably lead to a martyr’s death: adventitious circumstances such as the hostility of a crowd or the strength of the religious sentiments of a governor could be determinant.
Public declarations of faith did not always lead to Christians’ death, but the hostility of the Jewish crowd toward the slave motivated the prefect to sentence Callistus to capital punishment. Thus, Carpophorus’ declaration, while it did not fully exonerate Callistus, potentially spared the slave from immediate execution. This demonstration of mercy, if that indeed was Carpophorus’ intention, implied some level of support for the slave, and it was interpreted as such by the Jewish audience.

Hippolytus curiously portrayed Carpophorus as the betrayed slave owner having compassion toward a rebellious slave who blatantly and repeatedly mishandled his master’s affairs. On the first occasion, Carpophorus listened to the Jewish investors and awarded Callistus a second chance, although he kept the slave under close supervision following his escape. On the second occasion, Carpophorus spared his servant from immediate death after he openly created a disturbance in the Jewish synagogue. No extant Roman literature encouraged slave owners to show kindness to defiant and insubordinate domestics. Examples of benevolent paternalism existed, such as Seneca’s epistle, where he recommended that owners show respect to their subordinates as fellow members of the household in order to promote an atmosphere of reverence for the master.  Seneca’s charge to fellow slave-holders, however, only addressed the harsh treatment of the master, and did not serve as a defense for disobedience. Seneca’s diatribe on anger is the closest example of compassionate treatment toward insolent slaves: “Why do I have to punish my slave with a whipping or instrument if he gives me a cheeky answer or a disrespectful look or mutters something which I can’t quite hear? Is my status so special that offending my ears should be a crime? There are many people who have forgiven defeated enemies—am I not to forgive someone for being lazy or careless or talkative? Seneca’s rhetorical questions hint at some level of compassion toward slaves who behave rudely
towards their master. His intent, however, was to improve one’s own character by self-control, which indirectly made slaves less vulnerable to the master’s volatile moods.

The analysis of the passage only further highlights how Carpophorus’ decision to show any degree of mercy toward his defiant slave was atypical behavior for the Roman slaveholder. He still condemned Callistus to the mines for his wicked behavior, which some could view as a punishment worse than death, yet he dealt less harshly with his servant by preventing his execution. Carpophorus’ seemingly Christian expression of grace and mercy toward a fellow Christians contradicted all Roman teaching on managing disloyal slaves. Carpophorus certainly subscribed to the legal practices of Roman slave-holding, but his response to his disobedient servant also demonstrates that he recognized Callistus as a Christian brother. In this regard, Christian faith did have some impact on how the Christian master treated his slave.

The role of the freedman underwent a social transformation in the *Refutation*. Callistus began his life as a slave but advanced to the highest levels of Christian office, first as an archdeacon and last as a bishop. His story is one of restoration: he suffered the greatest amount of social marginalization possible as a slave, but achieved the high dignity of a Roman bishop. Hippolytus criticized Callistus for bribing and cheating his way into the office, as he claimed the former slave cheated fellow Christians and Jews out of their money, and also remarked that Callistus dishonorably advanced his way into the episcopate. His status as a freedman, however, did not seem to block his rise to power. Some historians register surprise at Hippolytus’ complete silence of Callistus’ servile background in his references to the freedman’s church participation. Hippolytus took every opportunity possible to damage Callistus’ reputation, and his status as a freedman should have been considered an easy target of attack. Hippolytus, however, never used the opportunity to dishonor Callistus for his standing as a freed slave.
Hippolytus’ only criticism of Callistus as a slave was his disobedience to his master; he said nothing of the servile stigma attributed to freedmen after emancipation. Hippolytus brutally discredited Callistus in his *Refutation*, but he chose not to comment on his servile status, even when his rival ascended the ranks of the clergy. Once Callistus was granted his freedom, Hippolytus never addressed him as a former slave; he was regarded solely as a fellow Christian. In a comparison of Roman law and canon law, early church legislation did not discriminate against Christian brethren considered lowly and servile in Roman society. The ability for freedmen to enter into church leadership and receive holy orders was unquestioned, provided they were properly emancipated.\(^7^3\) Written in the fourth century, canon 80 in the Synod of Elvira in Spain prevented freedmen from entering the clergy until the death of their patron.\(^7^4\) The council created this church legislation a century after Hippolytus wrote his account, however, it is helpful to note here that the specific conditions preventing the freedmen from entering the clergy dealt entirely with his relationship to his former master. The canon law mentioned nothing about the freedman’s servile origins, nor suggested it as a stumbling block to his qualifications for leadership.

Freedmen who had been granted citizenship did not qualify for the highest levels of Roman government and were not eligible for military service, with notable exceptions.\(^7^5\) The stain of their servile past disqualified them from much of Roman civic life. In the middle Republic, public office began to hold considerable political influence. The original rule to exclude freed people from civic office was based in the decision to limit the freedman’s political participation while not depriving him of his citizenship rights.\(^7^6\) The ability of the formerly enslaved to enter into high-level Christian offices suggests that the Christian community created its own qualifications for authority that did not fit perfectly with the Roman civic model. Freed
persons likely made up a significant percentage of the church population, and the socio-political reasons for excluding freed persons in Roman political life may not have existed in the Church. Much of the Christian populace consisted of social groups already considered marginalized by Roman societal standards.

Callistus’ decision to recognize marriage between free women and enslaved men provides another indication for social changes in the early church. Roman mixed marriages were not uncommon in the early third-century, but Callistus created a separation between the qualifications for ecclesiastical marriage and those of Roman civic marriage. In Roman civil law, unions between free men and slave women, though considered disreputable, were not penalized. The unions between free woman and enslaved men proved much more problematic. Imperial sanctions against mixed-status unions began under Augustus with *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus*, marriage legislation that banned relationships between Republican senators and free women.\(^{77}\) Augustus originally hoped to encourage population expansion and limit marriage (and elite children produced from the marriages) across social boundaries. Roman law never considered sexual relationships among slaves as legitimate marriage. Such unions, *conturbenium*, had no benefits of legally recognized matrimony. The *senatusconsultum Claudianum* regulated quasi-marital unions between the free woman and the slave man. The legislation, originally proposed by imperial freedman Pallas in 52 CE, served as a protection for the slave owner. The law was originally directed at creating more stable families for imperial slaves, who had high prestige and an atypical degree of social advancement within the imperial family.\(^{78}\) One scholar observes that the enactment of this law dealt less with issues of gender and status hierarchy, and more with the slave-owner’s property rights over his subordinate. Children of a union with a slave woman would rightly belong to her master, and these legal measures
controlled the slave supply and protected the owner’s financial interests. In the legislation’s modified form, commissioned under Hadrian, free women cohabiting with another’s slave caused a reduction in her social status and the enslavement of her children. If the master permitted the union, the master could claim the woman as his *liberta*. Tacitus snidely comments on this legislation, scolding women who engaged in these types of unions and thinly concealing his disdain for freedmen affecting public policy:

> During these proceedings he proposed to the Senate a penalty on women who united themselves in marriage to slaves, and it was decided that those who had thus demeaned themselves, without the knowledge of the slave's master, should be reduced to slavery; if with his consent, should be ranked as freedwomen. To Pallas, who, as the emperor declared, was the author of this proposal, were offered on the motion of Barea Soranus, consul-elect, the decorations of the prætorship and fifteen million sesterces. Cornelius Scipio added that he deserved public thanks for thinking less of his ancient nobility as a descendant from the kings of Arcadia, than of the welfare of the State, and allowing himself to be numbered among the emperor's ministers. Claudius assured them that Pallas was content with the honour, and that he limited himself to his former poverty.

For Tacitus, and many other elite Romans, a free woman’s sexual relationship with a slave negatively affected her honor. The woman crossed the ideological boundaries between free and enslaved, a transition made with severe consequences, and her decision effectively ruined her own reputation and directly affected her children’s social standing.

Unlike the Roman legal codes, which solely protected the slave owner’s interests, the Christian community did not need to reaffirm traditional standards of honor. Callistus’ decision, although not recognized in Roman law, symbolically broke down social barriers between enslaved and free in the church. Callistus likely responded to a need for legitimacy in slave unions, particularly in light of first and second-century Christian teachings that upheld marital fidelity and strictly forbade adultery and fornication. By recognizing a practice that had been socially tolerated for centuries, Callistus made his congregants feel more comfortable and more socially empowered, and Hippolytus himself affirmed this sentiment.
Hippolytus’ criticism of Callistus’ policy focused primarily on the increased probability of abortion and infanticide. He believed free women would not want to subject their children to the social indignity of slavery and would choose instead to terminate the pregnancy. Callistus’ personal experience with slave abuse and penal servitude almost certainly sponsored such bold regulations. Callistus suffered greatly as both a slave and a criminal, and he experienced social empowerment with his participation in the Christian community. Some of the rules that he implemented helped his congregants experience the same type of social freedom. Social death hindered any type of legally recognized familial or marriage ties between slaves, and these new regulations helped facilitate the same type of social rebirth in church marriage that Callistus experienced with his advance in church leadership.

The implementation of these new policies illustrates how a regional church inserted itself into the domestic affairs of its membership. Callistus’ contemporary, Tertullian of Carthage, firmly opposed marriage between free women and enslaved men: “Even among the nations, do not all the strictest lords and most tenacious of discipline interdict their own slaves from marrying out of their own house...yet, further, have not (the nations) decided that such women as have, after their lords’ formal warning, persisted in intercourse with other men’s slaves, may be claimed as slaves?” In spite of the varied opinions on marriage in the regional churches, the Roman church felt sufficiently empowered to create rules that best suited its domestic needs. This type of empowerment supports the hypothesis that slaves could experience some degree of social transformation in the Christian church or, at least, in individual communities. The decision to regulate leadership and marriage separate from the Roman civic model demonstrates the church’s desire to enfranchise the slaves and freedmen socially in the Christian population.
The emergent Christian Church in the third century had to cope with a slave institution that shaped the social lives of its leadership and membership. Hippolytus’ biography of Callistus, from Carpophorus’ management of his slave, to the increase of Callistus’ social capital in the church, raises important questions about how the early church helped to empower slaves and the formerly enslaved in leadership and marriage, even if the practices of slave-owning remained the same. Rome was not the only Christian seat of power in the early third-century, and some of the arguments posited here may only apply to the regional church in Rome. His marriage policies directly challenged Roman attitudes about the slaves’ experience of social and familial alienation. Hippolytus’ biography of Callistus certainly supported the enduring model of Roman slave practice in the Christian community, but his narrative also suggests social change and improved social perceptions of slaves and freedmen in the church.
Chapter 4
Change and Continuity in the Christian Empire

The final analysis into Callistus’ biography involves his surviving legacy in the primary sources. Eusebius provides historical confirmation for Callistus’ tenure as bishop, but the rest of extant literature is silent on the bishop’s social impact in the third century. After his discussion of Callistus’ life, Hippolytus switched subjects to the sect of Elchasaites, a Jewish-Christian group charged with heresy for its unorthodox approaches to baptism and its condemnation of virginity. The writings about the religious practices have never been recovered, although referenced by Hippolytus, Eusebius, and Epiphanius of Salamis in the fifth century. Eusebius recorded Bishop Urban as Callistus’ chosen successor, who took over the episcopate for 8 years, but no credible biography of his tenure survives. The historian cited a letter from Bishop Cornelius of Rome (251-253 CE) that described how the Roman church experienced massive growth in the middle of the third century, less than thirty years after Callistus’ term: “There are forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty two acolytes [assistants to the clergy], fifty-two exorcists, readers, and doorkeepers, and more than fifteen hundred widows and distressed persons…both rich and growing, together with laymen too numerous to count.” Eusebius did not credit Callistus with the increase in membership, nevertheless, one can assume that Callistus’ policies, which Hippolytus acknowledged had received widespread approval, positively contributed to congregational growth.

The third-century also witnessed a turbulent period in Roman history. The fall of the Severan dynasty created political unrest in the Empire, and this instability evolved into the third-century crisis, a time of near collapse in the face of weak centralized leadership, barbarian
invasions, famine, disease, and economic depression. The political situation at Rome without a doubt affected the Roman church, and Eusebius cited presbyter Dionysius of Rome’s letter about Christian persecutions under Valerian. Despite the chaotic political situation, some Christian literature has survived in this time period which provides helpful clues about the Christian reaction to Roman slavery in the late Empire.

Among our sources for Christian attitudes are works known as the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*. These stories, dated to the second and third centuries, include fantastical episodic acts of miracles and conversions performed by the apostles. The writings also contain some gnostic elements, which explain their exclusion from the Christian canon, but they are nevertheless useful for their insight into the institution of slavery. Along with the apostles, the leading characters are elite families in various cities of the Roman Empire. In one episode of the *Acts of Thomas*, Mygdonia, wife of the wealthy Charisius, rides on a litter carried by her slaves, while her other servants walks ahead of the group to chase away the crowds. The apostle Thomas addressed the slaves who were supporting the weight of their mistress: “You are those who carry burdens, grievous to be borne, and are driven onward by [Mygdonia’s] behest. And although you are men, they lay burdens upon you, as upon the irrational beasts, because your lords think you are not men like themselves, whether in bond or free.” Thomas spoke directly to the slaves and empathized with the literal burden they carried as well as the figurative burden of slavery they endured daily. The implicit criticism of the slave-owners’ behavior suggests that the author had discomfort toward traditional attitudes of slave treatment.

In the *Acts of Peter*, set in Rome, a senator’s mother begs the apostle to restore her son back to life. Before Peter performed the miracle, he bluntly requests that the freedmen, whom the mother had set free following her son’s unfortunate death, should not return to enslavement
following his resurrection: “Those young men whom you set free in honor of your son, are they to do service to their master as freemen, when he is [alive] again? For I know that some will feel injured on seeing your son restored to life because these men will become slaves once again. But let them all keep their freedom.” The mother later agrees to Peter’s request and the son is brought back from death. The message in these episodes represents the writers’ dissatisfaction with slave treatment and the disciples displayed deep compassion for the enslaved persons. None of these stories challenged the right of the slave owners over their domestic property, but some of their responses suggest higher levels of sympathy not found in Roman slave ideology, and even some attempts to bring slaves out of their dehumanizing situations. Callistus demonstrated this same type of compassion toward marginalized populations in his church marriage policy.

The *Apocryphal Acts*, however, re not a straightforward condemnation of the system of slavery. In a disturbing episode of slave sexual exploitation in the *Acts of Andrew*, Christian slave owner Maximilla, who considered sexual abstinence to be a form of holiness, commands her slave, Euclia, to impersonate her mistress in the marriage bed. Euclia, either willingly or unwillingly, submits to her mistress’ request, but soon begins to brag about her affair with the master, leading her fellow slaves to betray her and tell the husband about the impersonation. He angrily killed Euclia and the slaves who originally confronted him with the truth. Although the overall episode contains a moral lesson on sexual purity, the story highlights an accepted social reality: slaves were always physically and sexually susceptible to their masters. Christians did not always disapprove of these practices and, in some cases, used these vulnerabilities to their personal advantage.
Literary and legal sources in the fourth and fifth centuries demonstrate how Christian writers continued to have mixed reactions to slave ideology. The fourth century marked a pivotal moment in Christian history once Constantine decreed the Christian faith as the officially recognized religion in the Empire. Christian responses to slave inferiority, slave treatment and violence continued to be wide-ranging. Lactantius, a North African theologian in the late third and early fourth centuries, charged all Christians to acknowledge their equality in brotherhood, regardless of their social status on earth: “In [God’s] sight no one is a slave, no one a master; for if all have the same Father, by an equal right we are all children...no one is rich, but he who is full of virtues.” His messages were similar to the New Testament writings which elevated slaves to the level of spiritual equals, even if they were still considered social inferiors. Lactantius’ views were complicated, and in one of his writings, he criticized a slave owner who failed to discipline his disobedient servant. One historian comments that “in the writings of one Christian theologian [Lactantius], we then find succinct expression of a central paradox pervading ancient Christian writings on slavery. By and large the common affiliation that Christian relationships transcend distinctions between slave owner and slave did not alter the actions of the slave holders.” Although this paper is not in complete agreement with the conclusions about the slave holders, Christian ideals about slaves’ moral equality and their ever-present social realities did conflict.

Basil of Caesarea also addressed the issue of slave inferiority and sexual exploitation: “Why one man is a slave, why another is free, one is rich, another is poor, and the difference in sins and virtuous actions is great, she who was sold to a brothelkeeper is in sin by force and she who immediately obtained a good master grows up in virginity?” Basil publicly argued that enslaved women forced into sexual activity with their masters should still be considered
guiltless, a minority opinion in surviving Christian sources. Basil’s explanation of sexual abuse expresses that some Christians who advocated spiritual equality for slaves also desired a practical application of the theology.

Corporate manumission practices also continued into the fourth century. The Acts of Pionius (ca. 300 CE) record Christians in Smyrna sneaking supplies to runaway slave Sabina, who was banished to the mountains for refusing to denounce her beliefs. The church then offered money to buy the slave’s freedom from her pagan mistress. In the late Empire, Christians continued to display uniquely generous acts of manumission. Saint Ambrose of Milan, famous for his citing the example of Esau and Joseph in the Book of Genesis as a justification for slavery, used church funds to manumit Christians forced into slavery. In legal sources, Constantine allowed church priests to manumit their slaves with a simple deathbed declaration. The Emperor also approved the practice of manumission at a church in the presence of a bishop, who fulfilled the role of the Roman magistrate. The master brought his slave to the church and destroyed the document that testified to his ownership over the servant. Conversely, the Emperor employed ecclesiastical networks to help locate and return fugitive slaves who had escaped unlawfully. Constantine and many other Christians still acknowledged the slaveholders’ property rights over their slaves, but believers continued to offer subtle alternatives to slave oppression.

In regard to slave violence and punishment, some Christians advocated more humane treatment and the complete elimination of physical and sexual exploitation, and other Christians accepted the practices. As previously mentioned, Lactantius criticized a slave owner for failure to beat his slave properly for insubordination, arguing that his punishment would serve as an example for slaves: “If any master has in his household a good and a bad servant...he addresses
the one who is good with friendly words, and honours him and sets him over his house and household, and all his affairs; but punishes the bad one with reproaches, with stripes, with nakedness, with hunger, with thirst, with fetters: so that the latter may be an example to others to keep them from sinning.” Some Christians viewed physical violence against slaves as inevitable, not only to maintain order in the household, but also for the moral benefit of an insubordinate servant.

John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople in the fourth century, describes a brutally violent example of a female slave-owner punishing her domestics. Chrysostom condemned this excessive violence, though his words may indicate deliberate exaggeration intended to teach audiences about moderation in slave discipline: “If you chastise her for a fault of this kind, all will applaud…but if you do it for any reasons of your own, all will condemn your cruelty and harshness. And what is more base than all, there are some so fierce and so savage as to lash them to such a degree, that the bruises will not disappear with the day…At that moment, tell me, does no recollection of hell come over you?” Chrysostom continued with a stern warning: “Ought these things to take place in the houses of Christians? ‘Aye’ say ye, ‘but slaves are a troublesome, audacious, impudent, incorrigible race.’ True, I know it myself, but there are other ways to keep them in order; by terrors, by threats, by words; which may both touch her more powerfully, and save you from disgrace… do you not disgrace yourself more than her? Chrysostom upheld the traditional rights of the master to discipline his slave, but he warned against extreme and unnecessary punishment, implying that Christians should have some level of restraint in household affairs, including their dealings with domestic servants.

Early church canon law also regulated excessive violence to slaves. In the Synod of Elvira, the church council decreed that a slave woman who had beaten her slave to death would
be excommunicated for seven years, but if the murder was later ruled as an accident, only five
years. The canon law demonstrates that in some regional Christian communities, masters’
conduct toward their slaves had an impact on their social standing in the church and proper social
treatment toward slaves represented a legitimate concern for Christians.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the Theodosian Code reaffirmed the master’s right to
punish and torture his slave without facing legal action: “The August Emperor Constantine, to
Bassus. If an owner has chastised a slave by beating him with sticks or whipping him, or has put
him into chains in order to keep him under guard, he should not stand in fear of any criminal
accusation if the slave dies.” The legal text also regulated situations where a slave’s death did
constitute homicide. In 315 or 316 CE, Constantine decreed that branding of slaves should
only concentrate on the legs and hands, instead of the face, in order to protect religious
sensibilities about the face of God. Alternatively, slaves wore collars to publicize their
fugitive status, and many archaeologically recovered collars contain explicit Christian symbols.
Constantine did not abolish slavery, but he did prohibit Jewish masters from owning Christian
slaves. The legal codes confirm that Constantine did not eliminate slave disciplinary practices
or restrict previous practices of slave torture. Slave violence continued in the Christian Empire,
although in a modified form, where the Emperor reaffirmed preexisting standards of slave law,
however, he did soften some of these decrees and offered alternative options for some of the
disciplinary methods.

Fourth and fifth-century Christian sources also addressed issues of slave sexual
exploitation. As noted earlier, Basil of Caesarea showed empathy toward slaves forced to
engage in sexual relationships with their masters. Despite notable exceptions like Basil,
Christian complicity to the sexual exploitation of slaves remained the normative pattern: “The
failure of Christian sources to consider the choices slave confronted by forcible sexual demands underscores the degree to which a Roman *habitus* conditioned Christians to accept the sexual vulnerability of servile bodies.” Basil, however, was not the only voice to oppose slave owners’ sexual relations with their slaves. Saint Jerome urged Christian men to abstain from sex with slaves: “The laws of Caesar are different, it is true, from the laws of Christ…Earthly laws give a free rein to the unchastity of men, merely condemning seduction and adultery; lust is allowed to range unrestrained among brothels and slave girls… [b]ut with us Christians what is unlawful for women is equally unlawful for men.” Jerome believed that all Christians who shared a common spiritual ancestry in Christ should uphold the same moral standard, regardless of social status.

John Chrysostom also remarked on master’s sexual abuse of slave, and he warned against sexual violence in his sermon about the dangers of adultery: “So that even if you should defile the Empress, he says, or even your own handmaid, that has a husband, the crime is the same. Why? Because [God] avenges not the persons that are injured, but Himself. For you are equally defiled, you have equally insulted God; for both the one and the other is adultery, as both the one and the other is marriage.” Chrysostom warned of predatory sexual behavior against slaves, but mostly against prostitution. In the same sermon, he railed against both slaveowners and slaves who frequented brothels, and openly cited the socially accepted practice as evil. In the *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.32.12, a Christian man in possession of a concubine, either enslaved or free, had to cease extramarital contact and legally marry or risk excommunication from the church. By the fourth century, ideals of sexual abstinence and marital fidelity had been firmly established in the Christian church and most of these aforementioned arguments were designed to lead congregants to sexual and moral purity. Much of the Christian literature concerned
with the sexual behavior of the slaveowners dealt almost entirely with the moral health of the master. Although some Christian authors warned against sexual exploitation of slaves, the writers directed their defense to slave master, not the subordinate. Nonetheless, their writings signify how Christian sources addressed the slave owners’ predatory behavior even if the topic was included only as a secondary argument.

Ancient sources never called for the abolition of slavery, but some theologians did question its integrity as an institution. A number of Christian authors stated that God’s original design for humanity did not include slavery. John Chrysostom justified slavery while also cautioning slaveowners to live in moderation and depend on fewer slaves:

> Since not at all for need's sake was the class of slaves introduced, else even along with Adam had a slave been formed; but it is the penalty of sin and the punishment of disobedience. But when Christ came, He put an end also to this. ‘For in Christ Jesus there is neither bond nor free.’ So that it is not necessary to have a slave: or if it be at all necessary, let it be about one only, or at the most two.  

Chrysostom blamed human sinfulness for chattel slavery, an opinion shared by North African theologian Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine did not believe God included slavery in the natural order of creation, and cited Genesis 1:26 to demonstrate that God commanded men to have dominion over beasts, not each other. His theology grew more complicated, as the author believed that the system of slavery, owing its origin to the fallen nature of mankind, existed under God’s providence and had to be regulated. As one historian notes, “Augustine believed that although slavery was a consequence of common human sinfulness, it was nonetheless ordained by God. The slave would accept his or her place in the social order, as should the slaveholder. The slaveholder was morally obliged to foster the good of those under his or her care.” Augustine had no qualms...
about discussing slave punishment, and he concluded that discipline helped uphold the social order within the institution of slavery.\textsuperscript{122}

In the late fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa in Asia Minor composed one of the most biting critiques on slave-owning in early Christian history, deeming it incompatible with Christianity. A brother to Basil of Caesarea, the theologian provided an extended treatment on slave freedom and openly questioned and denounced the merits of Roman slavery:

>If man is in the likeness of God, and rules the whole earth, and has been granted authority over everything on earth from God, who is his buyer, tell me? Who is his seller? To God alone belongs this power; or rather, not even to God himself. For his gracious gifts, it says, are irrevocable [Romans 11:29]. God would not therefore reduce the human race to slavery, since he himself, when we had been enslaved to sin, spontaneously recalled us to freedom[?] But if God does not enslave what is free, who is he that sets his own power above God’s?\textsuperscript{123}

Gregory opinions represented a notable shift in the Christian response to slavery. Many Christian authors displayed compassion toward slaves and empathized with their situation, and even tried to provide justifications for why the institution existed. Gregory of Nyssas’s bold attack on slavery, however, was unparalleled in early Christian theology. Some Christian writers concluded that ideals of Christian equality did not always translate to social practice, and Gregory came to a different conclusion, citing that true spiritual equality between the free and enslaved should effectively eliminate man’s dominion over man. Augustine also addressed this concern, but he concluded his argument with resignation to the institution’s permanency in Roman society. Gregory was the only Christian theologian to declare Roman slavery as inconsistent with the will of God and supported the elimination of its practice, at least in the Christian communities.\textsuperscript{124}

In order to answer the question of Callistus’ enduring legacy, posed at the beginning of this chapter, one should consider that the literary and legal Christian evidence described here
represents subtle opposition to traditional Roman slave owning. Christians had several intellectual voices that offered opinions on slavery, but their voices did not form a unified response to its practice, a fact that has sparked criticism among modern Christian scholars. Writers urged slave holders to treat their slaves with dignity and strongly cautioned them to avoid excessive physical violence and sexual exploitation of their subordinates, despite the reaffirmation of the master’s absolute authority in Constantinian legal sources. Some Christians tried to enfranchise freedmen socially through leadership, as in the case of Callistus, who, in turn, empowered marginalized populations with church recognition of marriage practices routinely marginalized in Roman law. Even though church networks did occasionally work in tandem with Roman authorities to recover fugitive slaves, many churches gathered together to legally raise funds to support manumission. The Christian response to Roman slavery in the third to fifth centuries include a diversity of traditional and original attitudes to slave inferiority, slave freedom and punishment. Some of these practices were affirmed by Christian authors, others openly condemned.
Chapter 5
Conclusion

Historians have suggested that Christians subscribed to traditional Roman slave-owning values without challenge. Christian communities exploited their slaves in the same way as (or more than, if one considers spiritual justifications to servitude) Roman civic populations. This thesis demonstrates that Christians did have some positive influences in their interactions with slaves. The Christian faith awarded spiritual equality to socially alienated populations, offered chances for leadership in Christian communities, and advocated ways (although not uniformly) to improve the social lives of slaves in the early church.

Current scholarship remains pessimistic in its discussions of slavery and early Christianity. Scholars conclude that Christian authors morally and socially identified with the slaveholders’ perspective and as a result, the faith only produced superficial changes to the master-slave relationships, not substantially improving the social conditions of slaves. I disagree. This paper’s discussion of Callistus and inventory of Christian scholarship agrees that many Christian apologists and theologians reaffirmed traditional attitudes of slave inferiority, subscribed to traditional Roman methods of punishment and torture, and considered the use of disciplinary violence a slaveholder’s moral obligation. The thesis also argues that Hippolytus’ biography of Callistus signifies how some regional churches had their own attitudes about slavery that conflicted with the opinions and activities of other church communities.

At times, Christian writers held differing attitudes to slaves in their own personal consciousness. In the second century, Justin Martyr openly condemned slaves as untrustworthy domestics fully capable of betraying their master, but he charged Christian communities to
support church manumission practices. In the fourth century, Ambrose defended the existence of
slavery, even citing biblical precedent (an example used in justifications for slavery in the
antebellum South) and yet Ambrose and his church also faced criticism for corporate
manumission. Augustine argued against the “naturalness” of Roman slavery and deemed it a
sinful institution, but he still supported slaveholders’ right to discipline their servants. These few
erexamples demonstrate that many Christian writers had a conflict of consciousness in regard to
slavery. On the one hand, they championed the rights of the slave holders, but, on the other
hand, they understood, and tried to reconcile the moral compromise found in Christian ideals of
equality and the horrors of human bondage.

Current scholarship on this topic has mostly examined the social-moral relationship
between slavery and Christianity, but has never offered a comprehensive study on the economic
realities of slavery and the early church. As a continually persecuted faith in the first three
centuries of its existence, early Christians could not afford to renounce the slave institution, or
the slave economy to be more exact, that supported them financially. The generosity of wealthy
and slave-owning benefactors likely contributed to the fast-paced growth of Christian
communities, and helped provided the fundraising necessary for corporate manumission
practices. The slave economy both directly and indirectly supported the early Christians, thus, a
unified condemnation of the institution made no practical sense. Given this economic
justification, it seems reasonable that Christians would only differentiate themselves in small
degrees in how they treated slaves and would not support abolition theories. In consideration of
the financial realities that the regional churches faced, the ability of Christians to offer any type
of nuanced response to enslavement, which they certainly did, signifies tremendous social
progress.
Scholars have based many of their opinions on what is represented in the extant literary record, but they have been less apt to consider what is missing. As discussed in the second chapter, slave Christian literature no longer survives, if it ever existed. Hippolytus’ biography, although written by an elite freeborn male, described an account of a freedman, and his compassion toward the slave populations greatly differed from the attitudes of many Christian slaveholders. If the Christian communities did in fact have significant populations of freed and enslaved persons, the Christian faith likely influenced them in ways that do not textually or archaeologically survive. Should our incomplete collection of Christian literature represent all the collective opinions in early Christianity, especially considering the limited opportunities for literacy afforded marginal groups in pre-industrial societies? The second century onward witnessed an influx of wealthy members entering the church and participating in church leadership. Most of the surviving Christian apologies and epistles characterize a group of privileged Christian leaders who had both the literacy and financial stability to document their activities and record their attitudes about slaves. Before current scholarship too harshly criticizes Christians for their acceptance of Roman slave practices, one should consider that extant literature is considerably biased to the opinions of an elite minority, a general problem found in all historical analysis of Roman literature.

In addition, scholars should not automatically assume that the authors’ opinions about slaves reflect actual social practices in the Christian communities. The continual pleadings by the New Testament epistles and other Christian writings for slaves to submit to their social status suggest that slaves, in fact, resisted this type of teaching. Constantine’s need to reaffirm the masters’ absolute authority to punish their slaves implies that Roman masters’ experienced some opposition in these matters. Some of the literary sources’ urging of Christians to conform to
traditional standards of Roman slave-owning may help prove that these types of messages did, to a degree, conflict with social realities experienced in the church. Unfortunately, scholarship cannot prove that hypothesis, but nonetheless, the extant Christian literature may reflect the fears, opinions, and worries of the specific author more than the historical realities of the Christian communities.

Some scholars read Hippolytus’ biography and automatically consider it a reaffirmation of slave-owning values without any consideration for the remarkable way in which the story challenged social attitudes to marginal groups. Callistus’ story may have been a unique example, or it could reflect how the Christian religion, from its beginnings, had its own sensibilities about how non-elite members should be treated and valued, even if it sometimes conflicted with opinions accepted in Roman society. In that sense, Callistus’ ascension into Christian leadership may not have been as remarkable as previously believed. Callistus’ life story may present less of a challenge to early Christianity and more of a challenge to modern readers.

Do historians require too much from ancient Christians? Scholars refuse to celebrate early Christians’ small steps toward social progress, and instead, demand large-scale changes to attitudes about Roman slavery. Jean Andreau and Raymond Descat had some insightful remarks in their chapter about slavery in the Late Empire:

Let us not try to fall either in clericalism or into lay or antireligious sectarianism. It is true that the Church and Christians did not fight for the abolition of slavery. But is that surprising? Is it an inconsistency or a weakness? We think not…slave was considered the opposite of freedom and a particularly demeaning fate; but at the same time it constituted one of the social conditions that were deemed inevitable….it is not easy to evaluate the role of the Church and of the measures that it defended.125

Many Christians may have inwardly detested slave practices, but historians continue to search for confirmation in written sources, and failure to find complete divergence from Roman slave
ideology draws heavy criticism at the early Christian communities. Why are subtle changes not enough?

Are historians’ frustrations with ancient Christian responses to slavery, in reality, a scapegoat to disguise modern culture’s own disappointment at its inability to overcome these same slave realities? It is the height of unfairness to expect early Christian support of Roman slave abolition when our technologically advanced society remains incapable of fully eliminating systems of slavery. As I conclude this discussion, I raise one last possibility. The scholarly and moral judgments targeted against early Christians may, in reality, reflect modern society’s hidden anger at its own failure to eradicate completely these slave legacies. The collective guilt, and even historic guilt, may contribute to scholars’ refusal to acknowledge that ancient Christians had a unique reaction to Roman slavery which needs to be properly understood in its historical context. The question of early Christianity and Roman slavery needs more investigation, but one fact is evident; literary and legal sources confirm that ancient Christians started to break from established patterns of social distinction in the regional churches and actively engaged socially marginal groups in the growth of the faith community.
Notes


2 Ibid, 151.


5 Moses Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: Viking Press, 1980) 79. Finley discusses Rome as a developing slave society; Roman slave trade was at its largest extent in the Republican period, and witnessed a decline in the early and late Empire, although it always remained an integral part of the Roman economy.

6 This thesis does not suggest that the Romans supported the notion of “natural slavery.” The categories mentioned in the legal sources describe social, not biological, distinctions between free and enslaved persons. The jurists explicitly rejected the notion of natural slavery and some Roman writers influenced by Stoic thought also supported this philosophy. Gaius, *Institutes* 1.5.4; Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 5.33-4; Seneca Maior, *Controversiae* 7.6.18.


8 Gaius, *Inst.* 1.9: ‘Et quidem summa divisio de iure personarum haec est, quod omnes homines aut liberi sunt aut servi.’


13 Mourtisen, *Freedman in the Roman World*, 18; Seneca, *De Vita Beata* 7.3.

14 Cicero, *In Verre* 2.4.126.

15 Sallust, *Historiae* 3.98; Columella *De Rustica* 1.8.10.


17 *Digest* 29.5. Ibid, 169.


22 Keith Bradley describes the character Tyndarus as the noblest example for the clever slave (*servus callidus*) who is faithful to his master (*servus fidus*). For the full discussion, Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire*, 38-9.

23 For translation, Stewart, *Plautus and Roman Slavery*, 77.

24 For translation, Ibid, 78.


27 ILS 8731; *CT* 9.40.2.

Seneca, *De Beneficiis* 3.22.1. Ibid, 239.


I use the term *early church* to describe the church community before the official recognition of Christianity as the state religion in the fourth century.

1 Peter 2:9-10.

Philémon 1:15-16.


Ibid, 81.


Ibid, 153.


Albert Harrill cautions readers about accepting these stories as readings of actual historical events, and argues that both examples resemble literary stocks figures of the “faithful companion” and the “domestic enemy” found in Roman drama. The literary categorization, he states, reinforced traditional Roman prejudice against slaves. For more information, Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 153-55.


*Apostolic Constitutions* 4.9.2. Ibid, 129.

*Apostolic Constitutions* 2.62.4. Ibid. Harrill remarks that the language “in chains” likely refers to those in slavery and in penal servitude.


In the second century, there was no single bishop in charge of the Roman church, and the change in hierarchy in the third-century corresponded with population growth in the church communities, the influx of wealthier members, and the interactions of smaller, local churches with large, metropolitan church communities. For more information, Josef Lössel, *The Early Church: History and Memory* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010) 198-99.


Hippolytus was an important third century theologian and presbyter, and Rome is traditionally described as his church base. He opposed a number of Roman bishops whom he considered to have softened Christian theology to encourage more pagan believers to enter the church. His work on heresy, *Refutatio*, specifically charged Callistus with Sabellianism, a theology that denounces the Trinitarian view of the Godhead, and believes that God has three forms of Himself, not three distinct and eternally existing persons as God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit.


55 The “household of Caesar” language that Hippolytus uses to describe Carpophorus suggests that the slave-owner was a freedman himself, as many freedmen and slaves worked in the imperial administration (likely the reign of Marcus Aurelius or Commodus), but no other historical evidence has been recovered to support this hypothesis.

56 It is difficult to date these events, but Hippolytus mentions Commodus’ reign in the text, which suggest that these events occurred in the late second-century.


58 This area in the text is very difficult to analyze, as Hippolytus does not specify why Callistus tried to commit suicide by creating a disturbance in the synagogue, considering there were less public ways to end his life. Either this is an example of literary embellishment, or there was confusion on the part of Hippolytus about how Callistus actually arrived at the mines in Sardinia. In either case, my analysis of this passage is complicated by this mystery in Hippolytus’ narration.

59 Diodorus Siculus, Histories 5.38. For translation, Wiedeman, Greek and Roman Slavery, 177.

60 Recent patristic scholarship has debated whether Hippolytus actually presided in Rome. Both Eusebius and St. Jerome confirm Hippolytus’ role as bishop, but neither author discusses the location of his church. Nevertheless, in Refutatio 9.7.13, Hippolytus explicitly cites Callistus as his rival: “Thus, after the death of Zephyrinus, supposing that he had obtained (the position) after which he so eagerly pursued, he excommunicated Sabellius, as not entertaining orthodox opinions. He acted thus from apprehension of me, and imagining that he could in this manner obliterate the charge against him among the churches, as if he did not entertain strange opinions.” For more information, David Dunbar, “The Problem of Hippolytus of Rome: A Study in the Historical-Critical Reconstruction” in Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 25, no.1 (1982) 63-74. See also, Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica 6.20 and Jerome, De Viris Illustribus 66.

61 The right to sentence a slave into the mines belonged exclusively to the Roman prefect (Digest 48.19.5). Once Callistus became a penal slave, his master no longer had any rights to him and the Emperor had sole authority to manumit. In such cases, ownership for the criminal was transferred from the master to the Roman state, and once freed, Callistus became an imperial freedman. Freed without a patron, he had no legal obligation to his former master, and could advance into church leadership without permission (Digest 48.19.12). For more information, Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death, 126.


63 Hippolytus, Refutatio 9.7.8

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.


68 This passage is difficult to unpack in the narration. It seems contradictory that Callistus tried to commit suicide to avoid his master’s wrath, but Carpophorus then tried to manumit his slave before the Roman prefect, which would suggest support of his subordinate. Hippolytus is either confused in his own rendering of this story, or he is deliberately attempting to position Callistus as the criminal slave and Carpophorus as the merciful owner, despite the illogical narrative flow in the story.


70 Seneca, Epistula 47.

71 Seneca, De Ira 3.24. For translation, Weideman, Greek and Roman Slavery, 179.

72 Sessa, The Formation of Papal Authority, 88.
R.H. Helmholz, *The Spirit of Canon Law* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010) 26. This volume discusses primarily medieval canon law, but his comparisons of early canon law with Roman law are useful for the purpose of this paper.


According to Mourtisien, there was a perceived incompatibility between a servile background and the moral authority that came from defending the Empire. Freedmen were included in military service, but they were mostly used in situations that did not require direct combat. Livy records some instances of freedmen used for naval service in the second-century BCE (Livy, *Hist.* 36.2.15; 40.18.7; 42.27.3). During the Pannonian revolt and Varius disaster, Augustus drafted freedmen for the legions (Suetonius, *Aug.* 25.2). See also, Mourtisien, *Freedman in the Roman World*, 71-3.

Mourtisien, 71-72. Romans created opportunities for wealthy freedmen to participate in civic government. The *Augustales*, priestly positions held mostly by freedmen, helped to locally sponsor public events. As Mourtisien notes, rich freedmen were an anomaly; they did not qualify for traditional roles of public office, but Romans wanted to take advantage of their significant financial resources. In this sense, Romans did have opportunities for wealthy freedmen to be held in public esteem, but they were limited to small-scale municipal office that had no significant political influence. For more information, Mourtisien, *Freedmen in the Roman World*, 249-60.

*Digest*, 23.2.44; 23.2.31; 23.2.16. For more information, Judith Evans Grubb, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire: A sourcebook on marriage, divorce, and widowhood* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 143-45.


Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 9.7.10: “And the hearers of Callistus being delighted with his tenets, continue with him, thus mocking both themselves as well as many others, and crowds of these dupes stream together into his school.”


Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 19.2.10; 53.1.1.


Ibid 6.43.

Ibid 7.10-11.

A question still at large in the scholarly community is how Christian writings circulated in antiquity. The *Acts*, written in Greek, possibly circulated in areas alongside Christian writings that are now included in the canon.


Glancy, *Slave as Moral Problem*, 79.


*Martyrdom of Pionius* 9.3-4. See also, Harrill, “*Ad Polycarp* 4.3 and Manumission,” 132. Harrill cites a passage from Lucian that sarcastically remarks on Christians’ generosity toward those who are enslaved or imprisoned, and how a thief could easily swindle them out of money (Lucian, *De Morte Peregrini* 12-23).

Ambrose, *Epistles* 77.6.

Ibid 37.

*CT* 4.2.1.


Bernadette Brooten comments that the penalty for murder, in comparison with penalties for adultery, was much less severe, which implies that the health of marital relationships had a higher degree of importance than master-slave relationships. Bernadette Brooten, “Introduction” in *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies*, eds. Bernadette Brooten and Jacqueline L. Hazelton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 12.


J Albert Harrill offers a new interpretation for this law, arguing against previous scholarship that suggests Constantine became the first Emperor to declare a master’s killing of his slave as murder, albeit under certain legal conditions. For more information, Harrill, “Roman Slave Law and Romanist Ideology,” 63.

*CT* 9.40.2.

Ibid 16.9.2; 16.9.5.


Some early Christian writers warned men against sex with their enslaved subordinates, but no specific church ordinance in Christian canon law forbade the practice, although one instance in *the Apostolic Constitutions* has been found which confirms that sexual exploitation had some effect on the owner’s participation in the Christian community, see Bernadette Brooten, “Introduction” in Ibid, 10.


Ibid.
53

118 Glancy, Slavery as Moral Problem, 86.
120 Augustine, Confessions 19.15.
121 Glancy, Slavery as Moral Problem, 91.
122 In Confessions 9.9.20, Augustine discusses his mother, Monica, who severely punished her slaves for spreading malicious gossip around the household, disciplinary action that Augustine approved.
124 In Life of Macrina 4.9, Gregory reports that his sister, Macrina, owned several slaves, but treated them as sisters. Gregory does not openly say whether Macrina officially manumitted her servants.
125 Andreau and Descat, The Slave in Greece and Rome, 165.