This is a study of how women figured in public reaction to the church from New Testament times to Christianity's encounter with the pagan critics of the second century CE. The reference to a hysterical woman was made by the most prolific critic of Christianity, Celsus, and he meant a follower of Jesus, probably Mary Magdalene, who was at the centre of efforts to create and promote belief in the resurrection. MacDonald draws attention to the conviction, emerging from the works of several pagan authors, that female initiative was central to Christianity's development; she sets out to explore the relationship between this and the common Greco-Roman belief that women were inclined towards excesses in matters of religion. The findings of cultural anthropologists of Mediterranean societies are examined in an effort to probe the societal values that shaped public opinion and early church teaching. Concerns expressed in New Testament and early Christian texts about the respectability of women, and even generally about their behaviour, are seen in a new light when one appreciates that outsiders focused on early church women and understood their activities as a reflection of the nature of the group as a whole.
Early Christian women
and pagan opinion
Early Christian women and pagan opinion

The power of the hysterical woman

MARGARET Y. MACDONALD

Department of Religious Studies
University of Ottawa
For Duncan, Delia, and Jake
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Preface

Although I have been working intensively on this book for about five years, many of its themes have occupied my thoughts for much longer. In preparing *The Pauline Churches* (Cambridge University Press, 1988) I became fascinated with the question of how the reaction of non-believers to early Christian groups may have affected life in the early church. *Early Christian women and pagan opinion* considers this question with a specific focus on early Christian women.

In conducting this study I was frequently required to venture outside my own field of Early Christian Studies to consider the work of anthropologists of Mediterranean societies and the work of scholars in the area of women and religion. Given the interdisciplinary nature of my study, I set out deliberately to write a book which I hope will interest specialists, but will also engage more general readers. I have made extensive use of footnotes throughout which will offer scholars of early Christianity further information about textual backgrounds and related studies.

My investigation has been enriched by many conversations with graduate students. In addition, I have received assistance from students working in conjunction with the Canadian Centre for Research on Women and Religion at the University of Ottawa. Steven Muir, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa, deserves special mention for editing, bibliographical work, and proof-reading.

For his judicious advice on the general shape of the book and for organizing the initial reaction to my work in the form of very valuable readers’ reports, I would like to thank my editor at
Preface

Cambridge University Press, Alex Wright. I would also like to express my appreciation to two colleagues, Professor Naomi Goldenberg of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa and Professor Eileen Schuller of the Department of Religious Studies at McMaster University, who have offered support in various forms.

During the course of conducting the research for this book I received funding from the University of Ottawa and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. In particular, the support I received from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ottawa as a complement to my SSHRC grant, which took the form of release from some teaching responsibilities, was instrumental in allowing me to complete my study in a timely manner.

The past five years of my life have involved not only the creation of this book, but also the birth of my two children, Delia and Jake. This book is dedicated to my husband Duncan and my two children who have all shared in the difficulties and the joys of the enterprise.
Abbreviations

BAGD  W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, Greek-English Lexicon of the NT
Barn  Barnabas
BTB  Biblical Theology Bulletin
CBQ  Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CH  Church History
1 Clem  1 Clement
Clem. Alex. Strom.  Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis
Did  Didache
GRBS  Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies
HDR  Harvard Dissertations in Religion
Herm. Man.  Hermas, Mandate
Herm. Sim.  Hermas, Similitude
Herm. Vis.  Hermas, Vision
HR  History of Religions
HTR  Harvard Theological Review
Ign. Magn.  Ignatius, Letter to the Magnesians
Ign. Pol.  Ignatius, Letter to Polycarp
Ign. Smyrn.  Ignatius, Letter to the Smyrnaeans
Ign. Trall.  Ignatius, Letter to the Trallians
JAAR  Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JAC  Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
JBL  Journal of Biblical Literature
JFSR  Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion
Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>Journal of Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRH</td>
<td>Journal of Religious History</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSNT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mart. Pol.</td>
<td>Martyrdom of Polycarp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>J. Robinson (ed.), Nag Hammadi Library in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NovT</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td>New Testament Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orig. C. Cels.</td>
<td>Origen, Contra Celsum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol. Phil.</td>
<td>Polycarp, Letter to the Philippians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLDS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLMS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBLSP</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNTSMS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Vigiliae Christianae</td>
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