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978-1-107-43674-9 - Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament

Paul Trebilco

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SELF-DESIGNATIONS AND GROUP IDENTITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

What terms would early Christians have used to address one another? In the first book-length study on this topic, Paul Trebilco investigates the origin, use, and function of seven key self-designations: 'brothers and sisters', 'believers', 'saints', 'the assembly', 'disciples', 'the Way', and 'Christian'. In doing so, he discovers what they reveal about the identity, self-understanding, and character of the early Christian movement. This study sheds light on the theology of particular New Testament authors and on the relationship of early Christian authors and communities to the Old Testament and to the wider context of the Greco-Roman world. Trebilco's writing is informed by other work in the area of sociolinguistics on the development of self-designations and labels, and provides a fascinating insight into this often neglected topic.

PAUL TREBILCO teaches New Testament studies at the University of Otago, New Zealand. He is the author of *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, 1991), *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (2004) with S. Rae, *1 Timothy* (2006), and *2 Timothy and Titus* (2009) with S. Rae and C. Caradus.

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107436749

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First published 2012

First paperback edition 2014

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Trebilco, Paul R.

Self-designations and group identity in the New Testament / Paul Trebilco.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-01299-8 (hardback)

1. Identification (Religion) – Biblical teaching. 2. Bible. N.T. – Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Title.

BS2545.I33T74 2011

225.6 – dc23 2011036039

ISBN 978-1-107-01299-8 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-43674-9 Paperback

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Preface

This book began in an attempt to think concretely about early Christians travelling around the Mediterranean. If a Christian arrived in a new city, how would they go about finding a house-church gathering? Perhaps they would have known how to locate the group in advance, but if they did not, then we can see how important a 'label' for the group would be. A newcomer would need to know such a label or self-designation. But what would that be? This is the topic of this book.

Much of the work for this book has been done during two periods of research leave. In the second half of 2005 I spent some time at the University of Durham, and was very grateful to Professor John Barclay for his help at that time. I also had research leave from July 2009 to February 2010, and spent most of that time in Dunedin. I am very grateful to the Very Rev. Dr Graham Redding for providing me with an office at the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership for that time. John Barclay was in Dunedin for much of that time on research leave here, and I am hugely grateful to him for his interest in this book, and for the many conversations we had as I worked on it.

I am very grateful to the University of Otago for these periods of research leave and for a range of research grants and other forms of assistance that have greatly helped me as I have worked on this. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Department of Theology and Religion for their ongoing support and encouragement.

Laura Morris at Cambridge University Press has been very helpful in seeing this book through to completion. I have greatly appreciated her professionalism and her enthusiasm for this work. I would also like to thank Anna Lowe, Christina Sarigiannidou and Anna Zaranko from the Press for all their work in seeing this book through to production. I am also very grateful to Matt Easter for doing the indexes.

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Preface

I am enormously grateful to my wife Gill, who has been a loving and constant companion. This book is dedicated to her.

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