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CCXLI

MARTYRDOM AND PERSECUTION  
IN LATE ANTIQUE CHRISTIANITY  
FESTSCHRIFT BOUDEWIJN DEHANDSCHUTTER

EDITED BY

J. LEEMANS

UITGEVERIJ PEETERS  
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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This volume marks the retirement of Boudewijn Dehandschutter as professor of Greek and Oriental Patrology at the Faculty of Theology of the K.U. Leuven. To understand ‘Patrology’ here, in the narrow sense of ‘life, writings and thoughts of the Church Fathers’, would certainly do injustice to the breadth and depth of scholarly expertise that Dehandschutter has exhibited in research and teaching for more than four decades. His area of expertise may be best circumscribed as ‘the history of Christianity and its doctrine from the beginnings to the Byzantine period’. Indeed, Dehandschutter is knowledgeable in areas as diverse as the New Testament, the Apostolic Fathers, Gnosticism, Late Antiquity and Byzantine authors (Latin and Greek, but also Syriac, Coptic and Armenian sources). His main concern is to understand the phenomenon of Christianity in all its complexity. Gradual development, diversity and a careful reconstruction of the past based on a detailed literary and historical-critical analysis of the individual sources are the main features of his scholarship.

This philology-driven approach to the history of Christianity was the fruit of a thorough training at the Universities of Antwerp and Leuven, where he obtained degrees in Classical Philology, Biblical Philology, Oriental Studies and Theology in the years 1966–1971. In 1971, at the tender age of 25, he published his first article on the Gospel of Thomas<sup>1</sup>. Between 1971 and 1975, Dehandschutter worked under the direction of F. Neiryck as a research fellow on the Martyrium-project of the Fonds voor Kollektief Fundamenteel Onderzoek (today known as the Fund of Scientific Research – Flanders). On 18 March 1977, he obtained the degree of Doctor in Theology ‘summa cum laude’<sup>2</sup> with a dissertation entitled *Martyrium Polycarpi. Bijdrage tot de studie van de martelaar in het vroege christendom*<sup>3</sup>. With these, his first publications, two major research lines were defined from the very start of his career: Gnosticism (the Nag Hammadi writings and the Gospel of Thomas) on the one hand, and

1. *Les paraboles de l’Évangile selon Thomas: La parabole du Trésor caché* (log 109), in *ETL* 47 (1971) 199–219.

2. The jury consisted of F. Neiryck (promotor) and, as correctors, M. de Jonge (Leiden), A. Van Roey, M. Sabbe.

3. Published as *Martyrium Polycarpi. Een literair-kritische studie* (BETL, 52), Leuven, University Press – Peeters, 1979.