
Jan Willem van Henten

One of Jan Bremmer’s many scholarly interests concerns the topic of martyrdom. He has produced important case studies of singular early Christian martyrdom writings. Together with Jan den Boeft he has written a series of most useful notes that offer new perspectives on details in early Christian martyrdoms. He has also reflected on issues of continuity between martyrdom traditions through the ages in various religious contexts. And in at least one study he has focused upon the origin of noble death traditions concerning Jesus in the New Testament. As a token of gratitude for his rich contribution to the study of martyrdom I would like to contribute to this volume in Jan Bremmer’s honor with a study of the reception of Daniel 3 and 6 and the Maccabean martyrdoms in Hebrews 11.

I forego a discussion of the literary forms of the tales in Daniel 3 and 6 and the martyrdoms in 2 Maccabees 6:18–7:42 and simply take as point of departure for my analysis that all these texts have been interpreted as martyrdoms by early Christians. The references to Daniel 3 and 6 as well as 2 Maccabees all occur in the list of anonymous faithful prophetic figures in Hebrews 11:33–38. I will, therefore, offer a selective analysis of this passage only. There are many studies of Hebrews 11 in commentaries, articles and monographs and many scholars have pointed out connections between Hebrews 11 and Daniel 3 and 6, 2 Maccabees

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However, many of these references are imprecise and it often remains unclear whether they concern parallels, the use of common tradition or the incorporation of elements from these earlier passages. Before starting my analysis I will briefly discuss the distinctions between various types of literary interdependence and the use of common tradition. It is important to be as precise as possible about the use of Daniel and Maccabees in Hebrews. Ideally, every survey of early Christian use of Jewish martyrdom traditions should differentiate between various kinds of reception. The appropriation of Jewish martyrdom vocabulary and motifs should be analyzed in contrast with the use of quotations, allusions or paraphrases. Whether or not these are implicit or explicit forms of literary interdependence should also be established. Explicit quotations are indicated by a marker.

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3 See, for example, O. Michel, Der Brief an die Hebräer übersetzt und erklärt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), 278–283; F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grands Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 319–328; C. Rose, Die Wolke der Zeugen: Eine exegetisch-traditionsge

4 Rose, Wolke der Zeugen, 310, 312–322, is imprecise in his use of the phrase ‘Maccabees’ (‘Makkabäer’), which he applies to the Maccabean martyrs as well as to Mattathias and his five sons.


7 See, among others, Dimant, “Use and Interpretation”; D.-A. Koch, Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums. Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift