A dominant feature of Greek literature in late Antiquity is the encounter of classical culture and Christianity. This encounter, which so deeply influenced the development of our Western world, often took the form of a conflict. We could compare this with the conflicts between older and younger generations which occur throughout history. Classical culture was past its prime, senescent. Christianity had the dynamism of youth. And, as always, the future belonged to the younger generation. But it could and in fact did learn a great deal from its elders.

It is on account of this influence of classical culture on early Christianity that the writings of Christian authors from this period are not only 'food for theologians', but also have relevance for those who are mainly interested in classical culture. There are two reasons for this. First, they will find a great deal of material in these texts which can provide them with a deeper insight into the classical culture itself. Second, they will be able to make great contributions to a correct understanding of the important and vast field of research of early Christian literature. I do not think it an exaggeration to say that one often has to be more of a (classical) philologist than a theologian to be able to understand the writings of the early Christian authors.

It is regrettable, therefore, that early Christian literature long remained unexplored territory for philologists. It was as if an invisible wall divided the study of pagan and early Christian literature. At the beginning of this century, however, the great Wilamowitz already observed that 'this altogether improper separation should, at least in principle, be ended'.¹ His dedication to this idea can be gauged from the fact that he earmarked the money which he received on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday for a critical edition

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¹ Die griechische und lateinische Literatur und Sprache (in: Die Kultur der Gegenwart, herausgeg. von P. Hinneberg), Berlin 1905, p. 144.
of the works of Gregory of Nyssa, which was supervised by his immediate successor in Berlin, Werner Jaeger, until his death.²

Besides this work, which has now almost been completed and is called the 'Leiden Corpus' after the place where it was published, there are many other publications which show that much has changed since the days of Wilamowitz. I need only refer to the activity of Franz-Joseph Dölger in Bonn and its continuation in the Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum; to the many-sided oeuvre of Père Festugière, to the studies of Daniélou and De Lubac and the series Sources Chrétienes initiated by these two Jesuits, a series which has given us greater access to many writings from the first centuries of Christianity; to the works from the school of Schrijn en and Mohrmann, whose main aim has been to bring out the distinctive character of these writings. One could also mention eminent scholars writing in English like Dodds and Nock, whose studies have contributed in a special way to a better understanding of the climate of thought in the first centuries of the Christian era.³ This list is far from complete, as is shown by the fact that names like Marrou and Courcelle are lacking.

In my view, the interest of the above-mentioned authors is weighted towards Latin literature. Students of Christian literature in Latin have one clear advantage over Greek literature. None of the important works of the great Greek apologists and Church Fathers have been commented on. One could perhaps refer to Marrou's commentary on the Letter to Diognetus, but this is the exception which proves the rule. The fate of this work can be compared to that of the darling of Latin apologetics, Minucius Felix's Octavius. There are as yet no commentaries on the central works of the great Greek authors.⁴ The situation in the Latin camp is more favourable. Some important works there have been provided with commentaries. Here I must mention the name of my honoured teacher Waszink, who opened up a considerable part of Christian Latin literature in his commentary on Tertullian's De anima. In my view, it is precisely the lack of this kind of study which has made

⁴ An exception can be made for the annotated edition of Gregory of Nyssa, De Virginitate, by Michel Aubineau in the series Sources Chrétienes, n° 119.