

Preface

A N A T H E M A

Accipite et bibite ex eo omnes:
hic est enim calix sanguinis mei
novi et aeterni testamenti,
qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur
in remissionem peccatorum.
Hoc facite in meam commemorationem.

And with those words, Father Griffin leaned over the row of blue-suited thirteen-year-olds who kneeled before him at St. Theresa's in 1964, and one by one placed Jesus's body on their tongues. Then, as he began to pour out small cups of the savior's blood for the boys to drink, the chorus at the back of the church started to sing:

“Mysterium fidei . . .”

Thirty-six years later in the same church, moments before another line of kneeling youths prepared to taste Christ's body and blood, Father Kwiatkowski spoke these words:

Take and drink this all of you:
for this is the chalice of my blood
of the new and eternal covenant,
which shall be poured out for you
and for the many in remission of sins.
Do this in commemoration of me.

Just as the Father recited the last line, the chorus at the back of the church broke into song:

“The mystery of faith . . .”

When and how do a wafer and a cup of wine become the body and blood of Christ? Are Jesus's body and blood the same in Latin and English? Does it

matter whether the savior's body and blood are given to those receiving communion by a priest of Irish or Polish descent? Is a *mysterium fidei* the same thing as a mystery of faith?

This is a book about cultic change in context. It tells the story of one ancient mystery cult, based upon all of the surviving evidence. The story ends with the disappearance of the cult during the third century A.D. In the last chapter of this book I set out what I think are some of the wider implications of this study for our understanding of mystery cults, the Graeco-Roman polis, ancient polytheism, anthropological theories of initiation rituals, and the fields of evolutionary psychology and neuroscience. Both initiates and hierophants of these subjects should be interested in these implications.

A study that ends with a cult's demise might be interpreted as a story of failure; however, the opposite is the case. The story of the celebration of the mysteries of Artemis at Ephesos is a tale of almost unimaginable success. The Ephesians celebrated the goddess's mysteries from at least the mid-fourth century B.C. into the mid-third century A.D. — nearly six hundred years. If that is religious failure, seldom can a cult have failed so successfully.

Of greater interest is the question of why this cult survived as long as it did. In this book I argue that it was the Ephesians' willingness to adapt the theology and ritual practices of the cult to changed political, social, and economic circumstances that was the key factor in the cult's success and longevity. Indeed, I make the case that the flexibility of those who managed and took part in this cult helps to explain why polytheism was the dominant system of belief for the majority of the inhabitants of the Mediterranean world from the period of our first evidence of Greek writing in the middle of the second millennium B.C. until well into the fifth century A.D. Although the majority of the circa seven billion people on the face of the earth today are adherents of one of the Abrahamic religious traditions, it is worth reflecting upon the fact that for most of literate human history the majority of people for whom we have any material or literary evidence at all have been polytheists.

A flexible system of belief and practice — founded upon the idea that a multiplicity of divinities or divine forces govern the world and that human beings and those divinities need each other, indeed may require each other for salvation — best explained life both as lived and as imagined for the vast majority of people who lived in the ancient Mediterranean world. Whether such a system reflects and explains the reality of human experience more or less persuasively than other options, such as henotheism, Abrahamic monotheism, or atheism, will be up to readers to decide. A strategic comparison of some of these options and a hypothesis about why the "religions of the book" finally were more per-

suasive to the inhabitants of the ancient world is suggested in the conclusion of this work.

It has been a long time since I envisioned writing a book about the celebration of the mysteries of Artemis at Ephesos. Health problems, other book projects, house renovations, and professional peregrinations all have delayed its completion. At times, it has seemed as if the great goddess herself has not wanted me to reveal all, or perhaps even any, of her secrets. That I have now put this work aside, if not quite finished it, is largely due to the divine or at least heroic intervention of two old friends, Dieter Knibbe and Fergus Millar. After listening to my claim for years that I have been searching for Artemis and her secrets in the ruins of Ephesos, Dieter and Fergus have demanded that I stop hunting the huntress and at least share the story of my pursuit with others outside the circle of my family and friends. I can never repay them for their inspiration, wisdom, and friendship.

It is with sadness that I additionally record my gratitude to Oxford friends Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood and Simon Price, whose scholarship inspired my interest in mystery cults. I deeply regret that I was not able to share this work with them before they passed away. I am equally indebted to the work of Lionel Bier, who died tragically before the appearance of his wonderful study of the bouleuterion at Ephesos.

I also express my thanks to some of the true Viennese Ephesians, including Maria Aurenhammer, Anton Bammer, Stefan Karwiese, Ulrike Muss, Ulrike Outschar, Peter Scherrer, Hilke Thür, Gilbert Wiplinger, and Heinrich and Susanne Zabehlicky. If I occasionally have differed from their interpretations of the epigraphical and archaeological evidence from Ephesos, it is nevertheless with a profound sense of my debt to all of them that I have reached my own conclusions.

At Yale University Press I thank senior editor Jennifer Banks and her assistant Piyali Bhattacharya for their encouragement and guidance. At a time when fewer and fewer university presses are willing to publish large-scale works of historical scholarship, I have been very fortunate to find at Yale editors, editorial assistants, copy editors, and trustees who remain committed to publishing serious, challenging, original scholarship. Among them I would like to single out Jessie Dolch for her heroic copy editing and Susan Laity for the superb job she did managing the editing of a large manuscript. The anonymous reviewers of my manuscript for Yale University Press generously and expeditiously reviewed the work and made many helpful suggestions to improve it. It was a pleasure and an honor to be invited by Professor Lawrence Welborn to have my book

appear within his Synkrisis series at Yale University Press. I am also grateful to Bill Nelson, who drew the maps for my book, based upon my rough sketches.

If I have survived Artemis's trials and tribulations to finish this work, however, it is almost completely due to the love and support of Dr. Nancy Thompson. Fortunately for me, Dr. Thompson, like Theano, is a priestess of prayers, not curses. The completion of this book answers one I have heard quite often. Fecit. Fecit.