

FREE Public Lecture

# Were there any upper-class members amongst the first Christians?

Presented by Dr. Alexander Weiss

The answer to the question posed in the title of this paper is: It depends. It depends first on how you define "upper-class members" in contemporary Roman society. My proposal will be to restrict this term to the 'political elite'. It depends secondly on the position one takes in the vexed question of whether those NT passages, which report the conversion of persons belonging to the 'political elite', are 'fact or fiction'. German theologians in particular tend to opt for the latter and, consequently, to hold the view that there were no Christians coming from the socio-political elite before the end of the second century. But one can also argue with good reason that the relevant passages were not fictitious - and that there were upper-class members amongst the first Christians.

## PROFILE

Dr Alexander Weiss is a Feodor Lynen Research Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at the Department of Ancient History. He has studied Ancient History, Classical Archaeology and Prehistoric Archaeology at the Universities of Bonn and Salzburg. After gaining his M.A. at the University of Bonn he held teaching and research positions at the University of Leipzig, where he has been inter alia a research fellow at the Collaborative Research Centre "Difference and Integration" from 2001-2003 and an Assistant Professor since 2003. Since 2004 he is also a co-researcher at the project "Studies in Ancient Slavery" at the Mainz Academy of Sciences and Literature.

His research interests range over ancient slavery, nomads in antiquity, Roman social history, epigraphy and early Christianity. The goal of the research project Alexander undertakes while at Macquarie is to show that there were probably members of the social elite, or more exactly members of the Roman ordines (senatorial ordo, equestrian ordo, decurional ordo), already among the first Christians. If this can be established, it will force a reconsideration of current social historical explanations of Christian conversion.



## Details

Tuesday 26 May 2008  
8:00 pm

**Admission Free**

## Location

Australian Institute of Archaeology  
Building EC 11, La Trobe University  
Terrace Way, Macleod  
Melways 475

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