

“We have left you nothing but the temples.” How Christianity Became Rome’s Dominant Faith

In the year 242 C.E., the young Roman Emperor Gordian III, preparing to march east to defend the imperial boundaries, paid public homage to the gods by ordering a new athletic festival in honor of Athena. It was a logical step, worship of Athena and the other pagan gods had been going on uninterruptedly for at least a thousand years. Yet, no more than a lifetime later, when another Roman Emperor set out on a similar expedition to the eastern frontier, he scorned Athena’s protection. Constantine and his troops marched under the Sign of the Cross. “With stunning suddenness, Christianity had emerged at the center of the Mediterranean world” (Fox, 3).

In the Edict of Milan (313 C.E.), Constantine exempted church lands from taxation; he ordered provincial officials to make materials and labor available for church construction; he set up a system of food gifts to churches; he granted grain allowances to those in church service and excused clerics from civic duties. “Overnight, it seemed, he created a Christianity whose bishops and clergy had their social horizons blown wide open by finding the openhanded Constantine in their midst” (MacMullen, 49).

How did a tiny and obscure messianic movement from the edge of the Roman Empire dislodge classical paganism and become the dominant faith of Western civilization?

Why study this topic?

- Motivational - The example of these early Christians will inspire us in evangelism.
- Provocative - The example of the early church will challenge our assumptions and practices about what we consider effective evangelism.
- Affirming - The early church is a wonderful apologetic for the power of the gospel.

I. The Spectacular Explosion

A. Growth from humble beginnings in Jerusalem.

In 250 C.E., Origen admitted that Christians made up “just a few” of the population. However, six decades later, Christians were so numerous that Constantine found it expedient to embrace the church. How can we document the church’s growth?

Year	Number of Christians	Percentage of population
40	1,000	0.0017
50	1,400	0.0023
100	7,530	0.0126
150	40,496	0.07
200	217,795	0.36
250	1,171,356	1.9
300	6,299,832	10.5
350	33,882,008	56.5

Sociologist Rodney Stark bases this on a total population in the fourth century Roman Empire at 60 million people. He projected a forty percent growth rate each decade (Stark, 1997, 6-7).

B. The movement was a tricontinental religion, with powerful representation in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

As late as the eleventh century, Asia was home to at least a third of the world's Christians. Perhaps a tenth of all Christians still lived in Africa - a figure the continent would not reach again until the 1960s.

Mesopotamia or Iraq retained a powerful Christian culture through the thirteenth century. The church operated in multiple languages: Syriac, Persian, Turkish, Soghdian and Chinese, not only the Latin of Western Europe.

Between the fourth and ninth centuries, Christian communities became widespread around the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. Major settlements and churches existed through Arabia and Yemen, Persia and southern India. Egypt was a Christian nation.

By the seventh century, Christian missionaries spread among the peoples of central Asia -- the Turks, Uygurs, and Soghdians, and later the Mongols and Tartars. "Apart from the efforts of monks and clergy, widely traveled Soghdian merchants spread the faith across central Asia. Indeed, Syriac Christian writers used the word "merchant" as a metaphor for those who spread the gospel" (Jenkins, 63).

Part II - How Did the Movement Start?

A. The example of Jesus.

1. The good news for all people is at the beginning and end of Jesus' ministry.

Lk 2:10	good news ... for all the people
Lk 2:31,32	of all people . . . a light for revelation to the Gentiles
Lk 24:47	to all nations
Mt 28:19-20	of all nations

2. Jesus' evangelistic ministry was in public teaching and private conversations.

Public teaching - Matt 4:17, 23-25

Private conversations. "The primary venue for evangelism in Jesus' life was the meal" (Peterson, 215). Jesus regularly used meals as opportunities to engage lost people. This was at odds with the customary practice of rabbis and the importance of ceremonial holiness.

“The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners.’” Luke 7:34

“Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Luke 15:1,2

Luke 5:27-32	banquet with Levi
Luke 7:36-50	dinner with Pharisees and anointing by sinful woman
Luke 10:38-42	Martha and Mary’s home
Luke 11:37-54	dinner with a Pharisee and the “woes” of Phariseeism
Luke 14:1-27	wealthy Pharisee
Luke 15:1-2	implied meal together
Luke 19:1-10	meal with Zacchaeus
Luke 24:13-35	meal with Cleopas

Jesus regularly associated with various “sinners” whom the most pious of his culture frowned upon. His association, though, was never an end in itself. Implicitly or explicitly, he called people to change their ways and follow him as their master. But unlike so many in his world, He did not assume that he would be defiled by associating with corrupt people. Rather, He believed that his purity could rub off on them and change them for the better. “Cleanliness is even more ‘catching’ than uncleanness; morality more influential than immorality” (Blomberg, 128).

For Jesus to be called a glutton and a drunkard was not a light criticism. It was based on a matter of Levitical law. In Deuteronomy 21:20, the description of a son rebelling against the people’s way resulted in a charge before the elders that led to death by stoning (Wills, 20).

There were always kingdom purposes involved in Jesus’ presence at banquets and other special meals. Yet it remains striking how willing he was to socialize, even in the intimacy of table fellowship, with anyone and everyone for the sake of accomplishing his mission (Blomberg, 129).

3. Jesus’ strategy was to produce “reproducers.”

It all started by Jesus calling a few men to follow Him. This revealed immediately the direction His evangelistic strategy would take. His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes would follow. Remarkable as it may seem, Jesus started to gather these men before He ever organized an evangelistic campaign or even preached a sermon in public. [“People] were to be His method of winning the world to God” (Coleman, 21).

4. Jesus envisioned a multiplication of “Jesus Gatherings.”

Jesus pictured from the beginning of his ministry that his followers would gather together. When Paul adopted the Greek word *ekklesia*, he was referring to those “gatherings in Jesus” (Wills, 13). These gatherings would be missional, announcing His good news to interested people.

B. The example of the Apostle Paul.

1. Paul began with a Jewish audience and moved outward.

Jews - 1 million in Palestine, 4-6 million in the diaspora (outside Palestine). Paul traditionally started his ministry in a local Jewish synagogue (Acts 13:4; 13:14; 14:1; 17:1,2).

Hellenized Jews - Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Many had left Palestine because of the poor economy, wars, and enslavement by the Romans.

- All major cities had large Jewish populations.
- Scattered Jews were accustomed to receive teachers from Jerusalem.
- Missionaries likely had friends and family there.
- Jewish population was less dubious about a Messiah from Palestine.
- Christianity offered cultural continuity with Jewish culture.
- Jewish world had become so Hellenized that the language of Hebrew had declined and the Old Testament was translated into Greek in 300 B.C.E. (Stark, 1997, 62-63).

God-fearers - Greeks or Romans who were monotheists and participated in synagogue attendance (Acts 10:1,2; 13:26; 13:50).

Two biggest obstacles for Gentile conversion was keeping the dietary laws and circumcision. "Food laws the Gentiles thought simply laughable. Circumcision was much worse: it was mutilation" (Green, 1970, 26).

Gentiles or "Pagans" - Greeks and Romans who were worshippers of the multiple gods of antiquity, the mystery religions and the Greek philosophers. Term was developed by early Christians (Fox, 31).

2. Paul's destination was the urban centers of the Empire.

"They Christianized the cities" (Stark, 2006, 26). Within a decade of the crucifixion of Jesus, the village culture of Palestine had been left far behind, and the Greco-Roman city became the dominant environment of the Christian movement (Stark, 1997, 129).

Paul was more at home with the clichés of Greek rhetoric, drawn from the gymnasium, stadium, or workshop. Paul was among those who depended on the city for their livelihood. This life as an artisan distinguished him both from the workers of the farms, who were at the bottom of the social pyramid (Meeks, 9).

Greek was the language of the cities. Aramaic was presumably still the dominant language of the villages (Meeks, 15).

3. Paul's strategy embraced relational networks.

The Book of Acts pictures not a grand vision or strategy but a reliance on the natural networks of relationships in cities and between cities (Meeks, 28).

When a stranger arrived in a city, it was taken for granted that he knew, or could easily

learn, where to find immigrants and temporary residents from his own country or practitioners of his own trade (Meeks, 29).

After the first Jewish War (75 C.E.), Christians were dispersed throughout the Empire. This dispersal of Christian survivors would have facilitated the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman world more broadly and more quickly than might have happened simply through missionary efforts (Novak, 33).

Progress of the new faith was accelerated or retarded by the whole network of relationships within which each individual lived his life (MacMullen, 65).

4. Paul's vision was the Gentile population.

Paul always started with the Jewish synagogues. How then did he evangelize the Gentiles? Other than the incidents at Lystra (Acts 14:8-20) and Athens (Acts 17), there are no recorded messages of his direct encounter of Gentiles outside of the God-fearers.

He was an outsider to the Gentile culture but the Synagogues provided God-fearing Greeks and Romans who were the insiders to wider social networks. "People heard the faith from those to whom they could relate" (Fox, 302).

Paul established beachheads of new believers. "He didn't do everything; he just established beachheads. Then he counted on the continued growth of his offspring to enlarge that sphere. The entire success of Paul's effort deepened on the continued growth and subsequent expansion of the gospel through his spiritual children" (Peterson, 75) (2 Corinthians 10:13-15).

He set up "light-bearing communities" of men and women who had found salvation. His preaching had been representative; each province had heard something of the gospel, and little Christian communities were planted there to continue the work (Green, 263).

5. Paul's message contained one subject and one only, Jesus.

- Through Him the ancient promises were fulfilled Acts 13:32
- He is the good news of peace Acts 10:36
- He is Lord Acts 11:20
- The cross of Christ 1 Corinthians 15:1,2
- Resurrection of Jesus Acts 17:18
- Jesus Himself Acts 8:35

6. Paul flexibly communicated the gospel.

He adapted the message to the audience. Compare Acts 13:16-52 (the prepared Jews) with 17:16-34 (the unprepared Gentiles). Paul consistently created "common ground" with his hearers -- a pattern repeated in the early church's approach to evangelism. Paul "christianized" Greek and Roman words and ideas. Without this, the message would be heard but not assimilated (Green, 115). There was never a formulaic approach to the gospel.

7. Paul was a team player.

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| • Paul & Barnabas | Acts 13:1-4 |
| • Paul & Silas | Acts 15:40 |
| • Paul, Silas & Timothy | Acts 15:3,4 |
| • Paul, Silas, Timothy & Luke | Acts 16:11 |
| • Paul, Priscilla & Aquila | Acts 18:2-4 |
| • Paul, Priscilla & Aquila | Acts 18:18 |
| • Paul, Sopater, Aristarchus,
Secundas, Gaius, Timothy,
Tychicus, Trophimus | Acts 20:4-6 |

A collaborative team worked in a town for months, even years, engaged in sustained teaching located in the households of those who joined the fledgling communities (Horsely, 121).

C. The unique call to conversion.

Conversion prior to Christianity was not known in the Greek or Hellenistic world. Conversion introduces three new realities into the first century.

- Christian conversion required belief. In pagan religions one was not asked to believe in a god but to perform duties and rituals for the god.
- Conversion to Christ implied ethical transformation. In Roman culture there was no connection between religion and behavior. You could follow any god and behave any way you wanted.
- Conversion in the Christian sense implies devotion to Jesus and a belonging to his community. This was strange to the Hellenistic mind. The mysteries were only open to those who belonged, but they did not demand an exclusive embrace. One could belong to other groups as well (Weber, 66)

“The impact of the Apostolic preaching is remarkable. The first preachers enjoyed neither the approval of the empire’s intelligentsia nor the protection of the politicians. They faced the hostility of religious authorities and the fickleness of mobs” (Dunn-Wilson, 3).

Lessons for today.

1. A meal builds the bridge of safety for faith conversations.
2. The gospel must assume diverse forms to cross cultural boundaries.
3. Advancing the gospel is a team sport.
4. Insiders in relational networks is God’s strategy for advancing the gospel.
5. Gospel communities should result from effective evangelism. Gospel communities

will multiply the impact of the gospel.

6. Urban centers are natural greenhouses for the gospel's growth.

7. We must insulate ourselves from sin but not isolate ourselves from sinners.

Part III - What Challenges Did Evangelism Face in the Post-Apostolic Era?

A. The challenge of privilege.

Christianity was an illegal religion in the Empire until 325 C.E. It did not enjoy the privilege of state recognition.

The letters of the Governor Pliny to the Emperor Trajan indicate that less than a century after the beginning of the Christian religion, the Roman authorities treated the mere profession of Christianity as a capital offense (Novak, 51).

As long as the Roman authorities did not recognize Christianity as a permitted religion, Christian gatherings for worship constituted a punishable offense (Novak, 77).

Nero set the precedent by accusing the Christians of the burning of Rome. His actions allowed magistrates to condemn Christians to death because they were Christians and for no other charge (Chadwick, 26). After Nero's death, Christianity was considered illegal. No official decree is found outlawing the faith, but Nero's persecution set the precedent. Suetonius, in his biography of Nero, lists persecuting Christians as one of the good things Nero did (McKechnie, 62-63). Christianity became a capital offense by 125 C.E. (Chadwick, 28).

It was not necessary for people to believe in the ancient gods. Belief was a private matter. Worship was public and the safety of the state depended upon it. (Green, 34)

Why was the Christian faith so offensive to the Romans?

1. Culture, citizenship, and religion were linked together for the Romans.

Romans made a distinction between a state religion and a private religion. A state religion linked a particular nation, city-state, to the gods (Green, 35). "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:27-28).

The Romans considered themselves more religious than other peoples. Originally the word "piety" was used to designate the honor and respect one showed to members of one's family, children to parents, to ancestors. The term came to be used in a wider sense, designating loyalty and obedience to the customs and traditions of Rome, to the inherited laws of those who lived in previous generations. Piety embraced both the sense of reverence for the traditions of the family and city and the more specific cultic sense (Wilken, 56-57).

The Roman world recognized no meaningful distinction between religion and politics. Roman literature is filled with assertions that their political and military success was directly dependent upon the favor of the gods. This favor was earned by a Roman's careful efforts to propitiate these gods.

The Romans viewed warfare as a contest between gods, with the victorious gods to be worshipped. The refusal to honor the Roman gods, particularly if the refusal was based on the worship of a rival god, was an explicit rejection of and challenge to Roman sovereignty. Religious opposition to the Roman gods raised the suspicion of political opposition to Roman rule that would lead to an open revolt (Novak, 52).

The Romans tolerated any cult provided it did not encourage sedition or weaken morality. Romans worshipped all deities without exclusiveness and believed they were rewarded by the gods for their piety. There was no reason why the Christians should not have been tolerated (Chadwick, 25) However, the exclusivity of the Christian claim for Jesus' Lordship was intolerable. The divine lordship of the emperors became an unquestioned axiom of state policy. Any challenge to the godlike supremacy of the divine emperor was treason and Christians could expect nothing but hostility and official persecution. The church put itself at risk when it refused to compromise the Lordship of Christ (Dunn-Wilson, 20).

The Christian worship of Jesus as God set up a rival God whose followers created an independent and factious group within the body politic (Wilken, 108).

For the Christian's everyday neighbors, their social entertainment was inextricably rooted in festival practices and felt offended at being snubbed by the Christians. Christianity presented a kind of polarization to pagan theology that pricked and alarmed their neighbors (MacMullen, 19).

The early church walked a tightrope between being "in the world" as a witness but not "of the world" in embracing its values and customs. Many second century Christians thought it inconceivable in practice that a good Christian could perform military service or hold public office without compromising his or her faith. These pagan religious ceremonies and festivals were a part of the social life for both civilians and soldiers, so the refusal of Christians to participate in these communal functions served to isolate Christians from their neighbors and their communities (Novak, 90).

Most Christians into the early third century refused military service and were accused of being unwilling to do their part in protecting the empire. Origen confirms this when he wrote: "Christians do more for the good of the empire by forming an "army of piety" that prays for the well-being of the emperor and the safety of the empire" (Wilken, 117).

Tertulian wrote: "If the Tiber has overflowed its banks, if the Nile has remained in its banks, if the sky has been still, or the earth has been in commotion, if death has made its devastations, or famine its afflictions, your cry immediately is, "This is the fault of the Christians"" (Dunn-Wilson, 35).

2. Truth is aged.

Christianity was a "new" faith making it automatically suspicious. Greeks and Romans

based legitimacy and roots in antiquity -- Jews had this privilege.

The Romans were very conservative, suspicious of innovations and mistrustful of new religious ideas and practices. The primary test of truth in religious matters was custom and tradition, the practices of the ancients. One looked to the past, to the accepted practices handed down by tradition, and to the guarantors of this tradition, the priests (Wilkins, 62).

Given this attitude that religion is a patrimony from the past which sustains the life of the state, it was inevitable that the piety of the persecutors would conflict with the new movement that had begun in Palestine. "The Christians were seen as religious fanatics, self-righteous outsiders, arrogant innovators, who thought that only their beliefs were true" (Wilkins, 63).

The Jews were not persecuted for their religion. They backed a winner in Julius Caesar, serving in his army and were given a protected position (Green, 24). They were not brought to trial for their faith (Fox, 428). Romans allowed Judaism to continue as long as they offered prayers for the Roman state (Green, 35). "They observe a worship which may be very peculiar, but it is at least traditional," wrote the Christian critic, Celsus (Wilkins, 116).

To abandon even the forms of worship used by one's ancestors, much less the worship of the ancestral gods themselves, was a serious offense to the gods and risked bringing down divine wrath upon Roman society at large. For this reason the Romans, who as a whole intensely disliked the Jews, nevertheless respected Jewish religion for its great antiquity. "However, Christians were quite clearly a recent splinter group from the Jewish faith and thus could derive no benefit from this Roman toleration for ancient faiths" (Novak, 82).

As a Roman proconsul put it at the trial of a Christian in North Africa, "If you make fun of things we hold sacred I will not allow you to speak." How presumptuous, thought the Romans, "that the Christians considered themselves alone religious" (Wilkins, 63).

The Roman writers who mention Christianity in the second century called the new movement a *superstitio*, a superstition. The term "superstition" referred to beliefs and practices that were foreign and strange to the Romans.

According to the Roman historian, Plutarch, superstition sets people off from the rest of society because the superstitious person does not use his intelligence in thinking about the gods. Because superstition leads to irrational ideas about the gods, the inevitable consequence is atheism. Superstition is a worse evil than atheism, because instead of producing genuine religion it eventually leads men and women to have doubts about the very existence of the gods, and then to the authority of the Emperor (Wilkins, 62).

Christians were considered in revolt against the institutions of the Greco-Roman world, against the customs and traditions of the cities, against the wisdom which had been handed down for generations by wise men of old. Christians had contempt for these ancient and hallowed ways. Like the Jews, Christians held profane what the Romans held sacred, and permitted what others thought reprehensible (Wilkins, 118-119). Disregard for tradition could only lead to error and social anarchy (Wilkins, 121).

Roman philosophers argued that Christians had severed the traditional bond between religion and a “nation” of people. The ancients took for granted that religion was indissolubly linked to a particular city or people. There was not a term for religion in the sense we now use it to refer to the beliefs and practices of a specific group of people or of a voluntary association divorced from ethnic or national identity (Wilkins, 124). The idea of an association of people bound together by a religious allegiance with its own traditions and beliefs, its own history and its own way of life independent of a particular city or nation, was foreign to the ancients. Religion belonged to the people (Wilkins, 124-25).

Christians were considered misfits and referred to as the “plague.” Christians seemed so odd and socially unprofitable in pagan eyes that Tertullian, at the end of second century (190 C.E.), had to stress that they were like other men: “We live among you, eat the same food, wear the same clothes, have the same habits and the same necessities for existence . . . We sail with you, we fight with you, we till the ground with you, we join with you in business ventures” (Green, 41).

3. The early atheists.

No one objected to the Christians publicly discussing religion or exalting their deity. What caused trouble was the express denial that the gods existed and their their images and services should be respected. Such talk was “no-godly,” atheistic (MacMullen, 105).

Instead of joining in with the public rites of the cities, like other associations, they refused to have anything to do with others and carried on their affairs in the fashion of an “obscure and secret association” (Wilken, 45).

Christianity presented ideas that demanded a choice, not tolerance; and while some lay easily within the bounds of the acceptable, others were a lot harder to swallow (MacMullen, 17). They differed from the pagan cults in their antagonism -- “antagonism of God toward all other supernatural powers, of God toward every man or woman who refused allegiance, and of those who granted their allegiance toward all the remaining stubborn unbelievers” (MacMullen, 19).

Christianity embraced people from all ethnic groups qualifying it as a private belief. They were branded as *atheists* because they did not give honor to the customary gods. Evidently they talked freely and from an early date about their “atheism,” in the sense of denying the true divinity of all but their own god, and they talked with irrepressible conviction about the absoluteness of their deity (MacMullen, 15).

4. They were isolated from the Jews.

A Jewish benediction, ordered by Gamaliel II, dated about 85 C.E. reads: “. . . and let the Nazarenes and the heretics perish as in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and let them not be written with the righteous. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant” (Novak, 34). Gamaliel II ordered this benediction be recited three times a day as part of Jewish worship.

Lessons for today.

1. Christians must not separate themselves from people (in the world) but from

“worldly” practices.

2. The church must always choose how to distance itself from the state. The church must be the conscience of the state not to conform to the state to be accepted by the state.
3. To proclaim and follow Jesus as Lord will set ourselves against the power structures of a state and culture.
4. We will be held in suspicion and antagonism because of the absolute demands of our faith.
5. The church should always be the “new” in culture, not a mainstay in the mainstream.

B. The challenge of paganism.

1. The prevalence of paganism.

For most people, to have a good time with their friends involved some contact with a god who served as a guest of honor, as master of ceremonies. For the rich and the poor, there existed no social life in the world of the Apologists (second and third centuries) that was entirely secular. Small wonder, then, that Jews and Christians, holding themselves aloof from anything the gods touched, suffered under the reputation of misanthropy (Wilkins, 65).

All good might be received from the gods. You only made offerings, or promises of offerings, in order to gain favor from powerful beings (MacMullen, 13).

When Tacitus wrote that Christianity was the “enemy of mankind,” he did not simply mean he did not like Christians and found them a nuisance, but that they were an affront to his social and religious world. When later critics faulted Christians for not participating in civic affairs or in the military, the point of such criticism was as religious as it was social. “You do not go to our shows, you take no part in our processions, you are not present at our public banquets, you shrink in horror from our sacred games” was the charge against the church. Roman games were religious events as well as shows for gladiators or gymnastic contests. As one early Christian put it, reflecting on the world in which he lived, “What is a stage show without a god, a game without a sacrifice?” (Wilkins, 66).

2. The practice of paganism.

- Temple worship performed rites but professed no creed or doctrine. There was no concept of heresy.
- Belief in the ancient gods was not in a set of revealed beliefs like the Christians.
- Pagan believers were not exhorted to faith: to anyone brought up on classical Greek philosophy faith was the lowest grade of cognition, the state of mind of the uneducated.
- No group of pagans ever called themselves the “faithful.”
- Performance of religious rites were done without accompanying beliefs (Fox, 31).

- The power of the gods had great potential for helping and harming; unlike electricity, it was unpredictable. They were not only superior patrons to a city, but powers of immense superiority; they were particularly touchy, then, about honor (Fox, 38).
- Cults of the emperor grew up in cities and townships.
- Festivals, pilgrimages, statues, sacrifices, temples, superstition, and wealthy patronage dominated the first three centuries. Wherever a Christian looked, he or she would have been bombarded by the temples, festivals, etc. of the pagan gods.

Lessons for today.

1. Relevancy may mean being an affront to our culture.
2. Mass media has replaced the pervasive power of the pagan temples and worship.
3. The church can mimic the power of the pagan religion, a visible presence lacking the power to solicit life-changing commitment.

C. The challenge of power.

The Christian movement attacked the power of the pagan gods. "Driving all competition from the field head-on was crucial" (MacMullen, 27). The Roman world held dozens and hundreds of gods. Choice was open to everybody. An exceptional force was needed to displace alternatives and compel allegiance.

Demonstrations of the power of God encouraged conversions. Miracles, wonders, exorcisms, temple-torching and shrine-smashing were in themselves acts of evangelism (Fletcher, 45).

- Exorcisms

Exorcism was probably the most highly rated activity of the early Christian church (MacMullen, 27). Justin boasted "how many persons possessed by demons, everywhere in the world and in our own city, have been exorcized by many of our Christian men. Irenaeus asserted that "some people incontestably and truly drive out demons, so that those very persons often become believers" (MacMullen, 27).

Jesus' authority over the fiercest satanic power was passed on to His disciples (Matt 10:8). Exorcists by title became established early in the churches. Eusebius says theirs is "an office of special labor." This manhandling of demons made the superiority of the Christian's patron power over all others in dramatic and physical ways. One and only one was God. Where people were persuaded, they produced a special loyalty (MacMullen, 28).

Lessons for today.

1. Changed lives marked by a change in power allegiances is a powerful testimony.

Part IV - What Was the Evangelism Strategy of the Early Church?

We are but of yesterday and we have filled all you have -- cities, islands, forts, towns, assembly halls, even military camps, tribes, town councils, the palace, senate and forum. We have left you nothing but the temples. Tertian

A. The movement was advanced by personal evangelism.

After the Apostolic age, there were no public harangues, no mass meetings to evangelize pagan crowds. Compared with the preachers of popular philosophy, Christians kept a low profile (Fox, 315).

1. The church grew with an absence of public evangelists.

After New Testament times and before Constantine, very little open advertising of Christianity is attested. Private houses were the chief locus of conversion. Even there we should probably not expect to find any active or official mission. "Missionaries are just not mentioned" (MacMullen, 111).

It was dangerous to give evangelizing speeches in public. Persecutions were often few and far between but the news of activities and possible arrests would be known and influence the conduct within a region. "From the turn of the second century . . . the mentions of missionary effort taper off . . . Confirmation can be had from the best census possible of preachers known and recorded anywhere in our sources. They hardly exist" (MacMullen, 34).

The early church possessed few really competent preachers. Indeed, speaking to large numbers does not seem to have figured among their possibilities at all, after the initial splash in Jerusalem. After all, Roman emperors were suspicious about gatherings that might be construed as political. They were a "law and order" culture. An emperor as enlightened as Trajan warned Pliny, his governor in Bithynia early in the second century, that he must not allow more than fifteen men to assemble for the innocent purpose of becoming the local fire brigade. "It is hardly surprising that citywide crusades are out, as far as the earliest evangelists were concerned" (Green, 1979, 17,18).

The church had no mission, it made no organized or official approach to unbelievers; rather it left everything to the individual (MacMullen, 34).

Christians avoided attention. Even where they were numerous and presumably not taken for granted, there were many among their neighbors ready and willing to cite them before a hanging court (MacMullen, 35).

Preaching as defined as the public proclamation of Christianity to the non-Christian world is too narrow of a definition. The generation of believers after the Apostles became "informal preachers testifying to their neighbors" (Dunn-Wilson, 9). Christians believed themselves to be commissioned to make the faith clear to non-Christians and "conversational appeal to one or two is a legitimate constituent of evangelistic preaching" (Dunn-Wilson, 9). The church grew more by infiltration than by organized

evangelism.

2. The growth of the church was largely informal and done through relationships.

Paul, Barnabus, Timothy, Silas, and the others who took Christianity to the Roman Empire traveled along social networks that give them entry to, and credibility within, the Hellenized Jewish communities (Stark, 2006, 14).

Above all, we should give weight to the presence and influence of friends. It is a force which so often escapes the record, but it gives shape to everyone's personal life. One friend might bring another to the faith. When a person turned to God, he found others, "new brethren" (Fox, 316).

We have no historical text which refers to formal, open-air sermons outside a church after the Apostolic age. For "preaching," then, we should think essentially of teaching to individuals and small groups (Fox, 284).

The early Christians maintained open networks--able to reach out and into adjacent networks.

3. This growth was a movement of informal missionaries - insiders who were next to somebody (enough insiders and you are next to everybody!).

"We cannot hesitate to believe that the great mission of Christianity was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries . . . this was not formal preaching, but the informal chattering to friends and chance acquaintances, in homes and wine shops, on walks, and around market stalls. They went everywhere gossiping the gospel; they did it naturally, enthusiastically, and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing" (Green, 1970, 172-173).

We cannot name a single active-Christian missionary between St. Paul and the age of Constantine (Fox, 282).

The conversion process soon became self-sustaining as new converts accepted the obligation to spread their faith and did so by missionizing their immediate circle of relationships.

The derisive charge by the Christian critic, Celsus, reflects the informality of this movement: "We see in private houses workers in wool and leather, laundry workers and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels, who would not dare to say anything at all in front of their elders and more intelligent masters. But they get hold of the children privately, and any women who are as ignorant as themselves. Then they pour out wonderful statements . . ." (Green, 1970, 173). While the charge may be inflated, it does reveal the informal and personal nature of evangelism.

4. The church worked outwards from the center.

We do not get the idea from the early church the idea of visiting all around the suburbs in the hope that something will happen with someone. That has its place, of course, but it is far less important and effective than working to get the center of the church really

hot (Acts 1:8; Romans 1:8; 1 Thess 1:6-8). It is not difficult to discern from the conclusion of Acts 2 and 4 that this was a priority to the early Christians (Green, 1979, 119).

Lessons for today.

1. Personal evangelism, whether done one-to-one or in small groups, is still God's proven method for advancing the gospel.
2. We must be intentional about starting faith conversations as we live in the quiet of everyday relationships, routines, and conversations.
3. We must cultivate an ever expanding network of relationships to advance the gospel.
4. Evangelism is an every-member obligation not the specialized calling of a few.

B. The movement embraced the urban centers.

An accurate picture of Antioch depicts a city filled with misery, danger, fear, despair, and hatred. A city where the average family lived a squalid life in filthy and cramped quarters, where at least half of the children died at birth or during infancy, and where most of the children who lived lost at least one parent before reaching maturity. A city filled with hatred and fear rooted in intense ethnic antagonisms and exacerbated by a constant stream of strangers. A city so lacking stable networks of attachments that petty incidents could prompt mob violence. A city where crime flourished and where a resident could expect literally to be homeless from time to time, providing that he or she was among the survivors. People living in such conditions must often have despaired of life itself (Stark, 1997, 161).

1. The density crush of the Roman cities.

Antioch - approx 150,000 population with density of 75,000 inhabitants per square mile or 117 per acre. Today: Chicago - 21 per acre; San Francisco - 23 per acre; New York - 37 (Stark, 1997, 149, 150).

Housing areas were densely populated because large areas (nearly one-fourth of most cities) were taken up by public buildings, monuments, and temples. Most people lived in tiny cubicles in multistoried tenements. Archeology in Rome has uncovered the pattern of one private house for every twenty-six blocks of apartments (Stark, 151).

2. The condition of the cities.

The stench of cities was overpowering, especially in warm weather. Cities must have been smothered in flies, mosquitoes, and other insects that flourish where there is much stagnant water and exposed filth. (Stark, 1997, 154). Life expectancy was less than 30 years.

Privacy was hard to find. Not only were people crowded in buildings but streets were so narrow that if people leaned out their window they could chat with some living across the street without raising their voice. Many parts of Rome contained only

footpaths.

Most living quarters lacked furnaces and a fireplace. Cooking was done over wood or charcoal braziers, only source of heat, lacked chimneys, the rooms were always smokey in the winter. Windows were "closed" by hanging cloths or skins. Drafts increased the danger of fires - fire was an obsession of rich and poor (Stark, 1997, 151).

Urban households and groups that were poor, or at least not rich, were obliged to live right on top of each other. Their crowding exposed them to ideas from their neighbors, even if their wish was for some degree of privacy; and the larger the city, the closer the crowding. Much of life was lived on the streets and sidewalks. Not much could happen in a neighborhood without escaping the eyes of the neighbors (Meeks, 29).

While they excluded themselves from the pagan social settings, as neighbors, they were everywhere. Their points of contact with non-Christians lay at the street corners or places of employment or in the working quarters of dwellings. "In their secular lives Christians thus appear not to have been in the least ghettoized" (MacMullen 40).

One Christian apologist wrote: "We live together with you in this world, including the forum, including the meat market, baths, shops, workrooms, inns, fairs and the rest of commercial intercourse, and we sail along with you and serve in the army and are active in agriculture and trade" (MacMullen, 40).

3. The power of a personal witness.

In an eighth of a Roman rented room or a twentieth of a house in an Egyptian township, it was simply not possible or necessary to conceal ones' prayers or worship of God from everyone's eyes.

Christianity provided new kinds of social relationships, provided charity to homeless and impoverished. In cities filled with newcomers and strangers, the local church offered immediate basis for attachments. It provided a sense of family for widows and orphans.

The new believers remained in the cities, and their members continued to go about their ordinary lives in the streets and neighborhoods, the shops and agora. Paul and the other leaders did not merely permit this continued interaction as something inevitable; in several instances they positively encouraged it (Meeks, 105).

4. A limited mission.

The educated and articulate elite of the classic Mediterranean believed that civilization and culture were to be found exclusively in the cities. Consequently, the movement of the gospel was primarily placed within the cities and it did not penetrate the rural countryside. For the early church leaders, the countryside did not exist as a zone for missionary enterprise. Small ventures were begun in the third century to evangelize the countryside but an emphasis on rural conversion did not appear until into the fifth century (Fletcher, 40-44).

The movement of the gospel was also confined to the boundaries of the Roman Empire. The faith was for all the dwellers within the confines of the empire but not for those outside. Unfortunately, all dwellers meant excluding the “internal outsiders,” the huge rural majority. Those outside the empire were the “barbarians” (Fletcher, 25). Some historians would assert that Patrick of Ireland was the first “real” missionary since he ministered outside the boundary of the former Empire to the Celtic barbarians.

Lessons for today.

1. Urban centers can be the launching pad for a comprehensive gospel movement.
2. Cities are not evil places to avoid but opportunities to embrace to advance the gospel.
3. Remaining in a city will be a costly investment, sacrificing privacy and convenience for believers.
4. The movement of the gospel must transcend the safe boundaries of political and social-economic spheres.

C. The movement translated the message for the hearers.

“Once Christianity took root in Hellenistic soil, it became necessary to do a tremendous work of translation. Not only words, but ideas had to be put into other dress. Without such a task of translation the message would have been heard, perhaps, but not assimilated” (Green, 1970, 115).

1. Evangelism was most often a dialogue rather than a monologue.

Some form of dialogue was an integral part of Paul’s method. One translation of *proclaim* can mean to “converse” or “discuss.” For example, in Acts 17:1-4: “Paul . . . argued with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer . . .” Paul’s local evangelism often followed a pattern of arguing-explaining-proving-proclaiming-persuading (Stott, 63).

Paul expected all disciples to be involved in continuous dialogue with the world (Col 4:6). “Here are Christians in such close contact with ‘outsiders’ that they are able but to speak the them (with gracious words) and to answer their questions” (Stott, 64).

The early apologists recognized the need to discredit pagan errors, the apologist-preachers appreciated that they must establish common ground with pagans in order to show how Christianity is the logical answer to many pagan aspirations (Dunn-Wilson, 45).

The work of such Christian apologists as Origen is adorned with references to Homer and Vigil. These apologists drew from a common educational heritage that they shared with the Empire’s cultivated people, and their training in philosophy and rhetoric enabled them to meet pagan intellectuals on their own ground (Dunn-Wilson, 37).

As part of their strategy, they created a common cultural climate by interlacing their treatises and sermons with hundreds of references to classical writers and then set about “contextualizing the gospel in audacious ways” (Dunn-Wilson, 46).

2. The movement translated their own texts.

To promote their message, they translated their own texts. Books of Latin and Coptic Scripture are found in 180 C.E. and were probably older. Origen, writing in the late 240s, remarked that if Plato had wished to spread his truths to barbarians, he would have preached them in Syrian or Egyptian languages, He implied, then, that Christians were already doing both (Fox, 282-283).

Lessons for today.

1. Communicating the good news is most often a conversation rather than a formal message.
2. Evangelism is a process of translating biblical words and concepts into the language and idiom of the hearers.
3. We can draw on cultural examples, words, and stories to explain the good news.
4. A passion for communication breeds innovative approaches.

D. The movement employed the power of apologetics.

Until the end of the second century, there was little dialogue between Christians and the public. Around 170 C.E., a Greek philosopher named Celsus wrote a major work devoted solely to discrediting the Christian faith. The book, entitled *True Doctrine*, is preserved only in fragments but the main outlines can be confidently reconstructed. This book was so powerful that eighty years later, Origen, the famous Christian philosopher and theologian from Alexandria, wrote an eight book reply to Celsus (Wilkins, 94).

The apologists rose to prominence in the third century. Clement (c. 200) was steeped in Stoic philosophy and adapted and used this in his writing. His works reflect the range and stamina of a cultured Christian author and his audience. “The pagan schools had produced nothing more dazzling” (Fox, 306) Clement assumed that “all truth is God’s truth” (Chadwick, 97).

Tertullian combined philosophy, rhetoric, and the massive erudition of the higher schools (Fox, 307). Justin kept the philosopher’s robe after his conversion (Green, 121). Aristides wrote an “apology” to the Emperor Hadrian for the faith (c. 130). He described himself as “the philosopher from Athens” (Fox, 305).

In the second half of the third century, Christianity had become a significant force within the Empire. One of the greatest critics of Christianity, Porphyry, wrote several works criticizing Christianity. Several generations of Christian intellectuals responded to his charges, among them were Eusebius, the church historian; Jerome the Biblical

scholar; and Augustine, the preacher and scholar from Northern Africa. Even the emperor Constantine sought to still Porphyry's voice, not by composing another treatise against him, but by burning his writings. "The vigor, scope and sheer size of Porphyry's attack must have stunned the Christian communities" (Wilkins, 126).

An ongoing dialogue developed between Christian apologists and their attackers. Such dialogues were possible because Christians were willing to meet their critics on common grounds. Christians readily entered the public arena and adopted the accepted standards of truth as the basis for discussion. Christian apologists believed that the Christian way had significance for all people. If it were to be intelligible it had to be set in the universal language of reason. The "teachings of our faith," wrote Origen, "are in complete accord with the universal notions." That pagans continued to write books against the Christians for three hundred years is evidence that they took the ideas of Christian thinkers seriously. This made a genuine dialogue possible (Wilkins, 199).

The Christian critics helped Christian thinkers see the difficulties of the positions they adopted and to understand the very traditions they were defending. That Christianity became the object of criticism by the best philosophical minds of the day at the same time when Christians were forging an intellectual tradition of their own, was a powerful factor in setting Christian thought on a sound course. Christian theology took shape in dialogue and discussion with alternative points of view (Wilkins, 200).

Christianity became the kind of religion it did because it had critics like Celsus, Porphyry, and the Roman Emperor Julian. They helped Christians to find their authentic voice, and without them Christianity would have been the poorer. Christians encountered the traditions of the ancient world not simply as an intellectual legacy from the past, not only in the education they received, but as part of a vital interaction through the vigorous criticism of pagan intellectuals (Wilkins, 205).

Lessons for today.

1. The public nature and power of the Christian faith will draw powerful critics.
2. God will raise up men and women of intellect and stature who can confront critics on their own terms.
3. Christian apologists are free to draw upon all branches of science, logic, philosophy, etc., to advance and defend the faith.
4. The church must not be afraid to counter its critics. The message will not be harmed but strengthened through meaningful dialogue and debate.
5. Cultural forms and reasoning can be employed as weapons in the vigorous advancement and defense of the gospel.

E. The movement emphasized discipleship.

The local assemblies created a new social group to ensure that people would practice their faith. An intimate discipline of a tightly knit group helped them to be different

from the moral attitudes of their pagan and Jewish neighbors (Aries and Duby, 260)

“Any community that cannot artfully and effectively pass on its cherished way of life as a program for divine wisdom and graced existence cannot long endure” (Milavec, 39).

1. Time was taken to shape the new convert’s life. “Christians were not made in a hurry” (Fox, 316).

- Interested persons were ranked nominally as “Christians.”
- It was often 2-3 years before they were baptized.
- Christian apprentice was watched for signs of misconduct
- New converts were taught the Christian faith by a spiritual mentor.
- They were allowed to attend Church services as a special group with fellow apprentices.
- They could not participate in communion.
- Preparation completed, he or she was brought forward for final weeks of teaching, accompanied by fasting, frequent exorcisms, and confession of sins (Fox, 317).

The time of instruction and preparation became one of the faith’s particular appeals. “They were advancing with a group of fellow explorers along a route which required a high moral effort” (Fox, 317).

2. The shaping of lives was intentional and personalized through a mentor.

The discovery of the *Didache* (a mid-first century Christian writing) reveals a detailed step-by-step tradition where house churches prepared gentile converts for full and active participation in their assemblies.

The Greek word *didache* makes reference to the training that a master-trainer imparts to apprentices or disciples. The force of *didache* is better rendered as “training” or “apprenticing.” Unlike the traditional classroom, this word communicates how novices gradually and progressively assimilated the performance skills of a master-trainer (Milavec, 47).

Each mentor was expected to illustrate, inquire, question, listen to, and challenge his/her candidate in such a way that not only the words but the deep meanings of Jesus’ Way of Life would be assimilated and applied at each step. The mentors were to teach the Way so that it took into account the particular circumstances, strengths, weaknesses, and fears exhibited by the candidates (Milavec, 87).

Lessons for today.

1. Conversion is more than a momentary experience but a growth pattern, over time, of embracing the way of Jesus.
2. Discipleship is not done in a hurry.
3. Mentors, or alongsiders, are essential in helping people reach maturity.
4. The ongoing discipleship and development of new converts must not be left to chance.

Part V - What Were Some of the Church's Tactics (practical methods) for Evangelism?

A. Teaching evangelism.

There was often not a clear-cut distinction between the work of the evangelist and the teacher. Biblical examples: Acts 19:8 "Arguing persuasively" pictures a public debate. Paul held his own in these debates and made converts. Acts 19:9 records how "[He led] discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus."

The early church leader Justin (150 C.E.) gave instruction in the faith while earning a living as a philosopher. He gives a guarded account of his activities in his defense before Rome's city prefect, which issued in his execution.

"I have endeavored to learn all doctrines; but I have come to rest at last in the true doctrines, that is the the Christian, even though they do not please those who hold false opinions." "Where do you assemble and where do you bring your followers to?" "I live above one Martin, at the Timoinian Bath . . . And if anyone wished to come to me, I passed on to him the doctrines of the truth" (Green,1970,5).

Here was a Christian intellectual, settling for a while in Rome, staying at the home of another Christian, next door to a Bath where everyone gathered daily for social introductions. With his own room above Martin's apartments, he could easily invite interested inquirers for conversation. Justin's explanation of Christian philosophy and appeal to commitment go hand in hand.

Lessons for today.

1. Evangelism becomes a dynamic and ongoing process if viewed through the lens of education, people learning a message and way of life rather than an event of transmitting a message.
2. People can be engaged in the learning process at a variety of entry points.
3. If evangelism is a learning/teaching exchange, then the message must be learner-friendly (in terms and forms that a learner can understand).
4. When evangelism takes place as an educational process, all people can enter at some point in this process.

B. Personal testimonies.

Justin begins his First Apology by saying, "Myself being one of them." Euelpistus, as he faces execution, says: "And what are you?" asks the Perfect. "I too am a Christian," he replies, "having been set at liberty by Christ." (Green, 1970, 207).

C. Household evangelism.

A Roman household consisted of a number of domestic slaves, a *paterfamilias*, his legitimate wife, sons and daughters, along with free men known as “clients,” who waited each morning in the antechamber of their protector or “patron” to pay him brief homage. A household was more than a “natural” family (Aries and Duby, 71).

1. New Testament examples of growth through households.

Acts 17:5	Jason
Acts 18:7	Tituius Justus
Acts 16:15, 32-34	Philip
Acts 16:15	Lydia
1 Cor 1:16; 16:15	Stephanas

Family is not defined only by kinship but by the relationships of dependence and subordination. The head of a substantial household was thus responsible for--and expected a degree of obedience from--not only his immediate family but also his slaves, former slaves, hired laborers, clients, and sometimes business associates. It was ordinarily assumed that the subordinate members of a household, particularly the servile ones, would share the religion of his master (Meeks, 30).

Christian missionaries made a deliberate point of gaining households they could use as lighthouses, from which the gospel could illuminate the surrounding darkness (Green, 1970, 210). The phrase “household of Stephanas” can be translated “the assembly at Stephanas’ household” (1 Cor 1:16, 16:15). The basic cell of the Christian movement, and its nucleus was often an existing household. (Meeks, 65)

This new group was inserted into or superimposed upon existing networks of relationships. The centrality of the household shows our modern, individualistic conceptions of evangelism and conversion to be rooted in North American individualism (Meeks, 77).

2. Why were homes so effective?

- small numbers made real discussion possible
- no artificial isolation by a preacher
- relaxed atmosphere
- hospitality

Christians met in enlarged private houses or rooms (Fox, 269). House churches were clearly identifiable by their size and number of people. Neighbors were aware that these were Christian gathering places. “Although Christians stood in formal, official disrepute for much of the first three centuries, informally they were free to do pretty much as they wished, in most places, most of the time” (Stark, 1997, 192).

The Christian churches in the cities depended on the respectable and well-to-do households, members of which might welcome certain rituals of undifferentiated solidarity (Arlies and Duby, 259).

Example: (second century) Having heard through chatter in an inn that a certain Peter was in the town and was going to hold a discussion the next day with one Simon, a Samaritan, Clement asks to be shown to his lodging. He found it, knocked, was welcomed in, and before long was listening to extended instruction from the Apostle.

“The master of the house welcomed us, and led us to a certain apartment, arranged like a theater, and beautifully built. There we found considerable crowds waiting for us, who had come during the night. . .” and before long the discussion was in full swing (Green, 1970, 208).

Lessons for today.

1. Homes, or small gatherings, are ideal places to teach and demonstrate the gospel life.
2. Evangelism is designed to be done in relationship-rich environments.
3. Homes are marvelous ways to exercise true hospitality--the loving of strangers.
4. God’s strategy is to advance the gospel through natural networks of relationships, networks which are shared through a common home or living situation.

D. Literary evangelism.

Reading became increasingly important as a means of sustaining the spiritual life of scattered congregations and sacred writings were precious. Evangelists served as colporteurs, distributing copies of the Gospel and martyrs embraced the Christian books as they died (Dunn-Wilson, 26).

Mass media in antiquity was limited because of cost and illiteracy. What did exist belonged almost entirely to the church and its advocates. In the fourth century, church bells would call people to worship, there was prominent use of Christian symbolism (particularly the cross) in art or graffiti. Literature was designed to persuade people to the faith.

“All these media we have seen at work openly, officially, and stridently, became possible when Christians could at last emerge into the full sunlight of acceptance. We must make some effort to imagine how much more attractive Christians must have seemed when compared to non-Christians” (MacMullen, 64).

1. The church invented a new literary form, the gospel, to carry their evangelistic message.
 - not history
 - not a biography
 - a testimony from the lips of many witnesses collected together by the author and arranged in order to show who and what sort of person Jesus was.
2. The church created a new literary tool - the book.

One of the fundamental contrasts between the pagan cults and Christianity was this passage from an oral culture of myth and conjecture to one based firmly on written texts. The Christian codex was made of papyrus, not parchment. It was more compact and better suited to people on the move, and it was an easier form in which to refer to and fro between texts. This Christian revolution lies at the beginnings of the history of the modern book (Fox, 305).

The early Christians seem to have been among the first, if not the very first, to have used a codex made of papyrus for their publications. It was easy to read, easy to find a place in, easy to hide--and wonderfully cheap to produce. It is probably a Christian invention, and may well have gone back to Mark (Green, 1979, 125)

Lessons for today.

1. The written word is a rich tool to advance the gospel.
2. A passion to advance the gospel will lead to innovative approaches of mass media.
3. Media can be a useful tool in advancing the gospel but care must be taken that the media does not become the message. The message can be inadvertently shaped by the media employed.

Part VI - What Made the Movement and Message of the Early Church So Appealing?

A. The movement showed love and character in a pagan and barbaric age.

“Their community life, though far from perfect . . . was nevertheless sufficiently different and impressive to attract notice, to invite curiosity, and to inspire discipleship in an age that was pleasure-conscious, as materialistic and as devoid of serious purpose as our own. Paganism saw in early Christianity a quality of living, and supremely of dying, which could not be found elsewhere “ (Green, 1970, 275).

1. What were the differences between temple worship and the church?

- Churches were not endowed by wealthy benefactors like pagans.
- Leadership was by appointment and not by prestige. “Christian community stood opposed to the open pursuit of power” (Fox, 321).

The leaders mentioned in the Epistles are not addressed in the honorifics and titles reserved for the synagogues and pagan gatherings. The letters are sent to the entire community, where functions are specified by the gifts of the Spirit and not the title of an office (Wills, 50).

Because the Romans thought that the official cults were an integral part of the public life of the city, they took it for granted that the priesthoods should be offered to the most prominent social and political figures (Wilkin, 6).

The idea of doing “unto others” was not foreign to pagan philosophy but “loving your enemies” had no precedent in pagan thought. Rational pagan philosophy was capable of great heartlessness (Fox, 323).

Humility was never a term of commendation. The humble belonged with the abject, the mean, the unworthy. Humility as poverty in the broader sense of a total dependence on God was unheard of. Pagans had never seen any spiritual merit in being poor (Fox, 324).

What was possible in Christianity was love exchanged between humans and a deity -- the teaching that God loves those who love him was alien to pagan beliefs. What mattered in the pagan faiths was the service a deity could provide. The god felt no love to the offering of a human (Stark, 1997, 86).

“[The early church] preached, and at its best it practiced, love in a world of widespread brutality” (Fox, 335).

The church lived in a culture of open violence and overt sexuality. Artistic representations in everything from official civic art to the paintings in private homes graphically portrayed violent scenes. “These artistic representations must have created a level of desensitization that enabled the inhabitants to view the real thing. Public executions were carried out in the most brutal way possible and public games featured varying forms of violent entertainment . . . It is very difficult to imagine what life was like when surrounded constantly by such a level of violence” (Horsley, 206).

Lessons for today.

1. Love, practiced in a world of brutality and sexuality, is a powerful magnet for the gospel.
2. Jesus taught a great flattening of the hierarchy of church leadership. The servants, not the benefactors, became leaders.
3. A brutal and sexual culture can desensitize people to the worth and sacredness of life.
4. Loving one’s enemies runs counter to any culture’s standard of success and means of relating.
5. The church is called to a different standard of relationships and reconciliation than the state or culture at large.
6. People are always “peeking in”, seeking to get a glimpse of something different in the church. Our difference is found in our commitment to love and value each person.

B. They had open networks rather than secret societies.

An important factor in the church’s growth was its openness. Christianity was simply accessible. The cults, in contrast, were secretive and exclusive. The cult of Mithraism excluded women and the philosophical schools of religion made salvation an intellectual

accomplishment (Weber, 56).

Christians were not a secret sect. How could they grow if they were secret? To attract outside members, people needed to be able to find it. For Christianity to grow as rapidly as it did, it must maintain close ties to nonmembers--it must remain an open network. An underground Christianity would have been insignificant.

1. How was this openness demonstrated?

- Pagan trade societies and religious groups segregated men and women - Christians did not.
- In the Greek world, slaves were generally excluded from pagan groups. Slaves were welcomed in the "brotherhood."
- The New Testament used inclusive metaphors - a community, family, brothers, sisters, not secret members. Adoption was open for everyone into the family of God.
- In pagan cults, the patrons and donors were also the leaders. In church, leaders were nominated by character and the wealthy gave gifts that were administered by others (Fox, 324-325).

The Roman Empire had a luxuriant growth of clubs, guilds, and associations. Unlike the existing social groups, "the Christian groups were much more inclusive in terms of social stratification and other social categories" (Meeks, 79).

To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services. "For what they brought was not simply an urban movement, but a new culture capable of making life in Greco-Roman cities more tolerable" (Stark, 1997, 161).

The Christian community was a close-knit, organized and disciplined community with its members bound together by a common rite, a community of life, and by their common danger. This gave its members a true sense of belonging (Weber, 57).

Their organization was so great that Christians were referred to as the "third race" distinct from pagans and Jews. The classical city had no room for this "state within a state" (Fox, 325).

2. Their mission drove their openness.

The mission and self-defense of the church are reasons to encourage openness toward the world, and the culture at large. The ordering of the internal life of the church takes place not in complete isolation but with an eye toward how outsiders will perceive the Christians (1 Thes 4:11f; 1 Cor 4:23).

"Yet one of the most obvious facts about the movement associated with Paul and his fellows was the vigor of its missionary drive, which saw in the outsider a potential insider and did not want to cut off communication with him or her" (Meeks, 107).

While Paul exhorted churches not to be conformed to the world (Romans 12:1,2), he did

not fear contamination by the world (1 Cor 6:1-11). They could continue intimate relationships with non-Christians, including existing marriages (1 Cor 7:12-16) and ordinary social relations (1 Cor 10:27) and their meetings were open to outsiders (1 Cor 14:23).

Lessons for today.

1. The church must be an open culture, inviting unbelievers to “peek in” to see the reality of Christ in a mix of people belonging to a variety of cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.
2. The gospel is advanced in an open culture when people form relational attachments to friends and neighbors within the church culture.
3. People are attracted to people who exercise a commitment to care and belong.
4. Jesus purposefully built a movement that eliminated social stratification as a basis for belonging and as a rule of ongoing conduct within the church. People are accepted for who they are not what they do or earn. Leadership is based on character rather than competencies or accomplishments.
5. Church life is always missional, seeing outsiders as potential insiders.
6. The church must not fear contamination by the world but be open to people in the world for the sake of the mission of the gospel.

C. The structure and make-up of local churches was inclusive.

The patrons and disciples of Paul and his successors were not simple souls, nor were they the humble and oppressed of modern romantic imagination. They were moderately wealthy and frequently well traveled. As a result, they were exposed to a range of social contacts (Aries and Dubby, 257).

1. The early church took a different approach to local leadership.

The multitude of clubs and temple settings awarded public offices and prestige to wealthy patrons to secure followers. “We find nothing comparable” when leading roles are examined in the local congregations (Meece, 134). The New Testament writers do not use the word *arche* in the sense of “office,” nor its synonyms. However, leadership roles were differentiated and important (1 These 5:12).

2. The early church generally reflected a cross-section of urban society.

We find Christians in the *familia caesaris*, whose members were often among the few upwardly mobile people in the Roman Empire (Phil 4:22). We find freedmen (Romans 16:7) or descendants of freedmen who had advanced to wealth and position, especially in the Roman colonies of Corinth and Philippi (1 Cor 16:17; Phil 4:3). The churches included city officials (Romans 16:23). There were also wealthy artisans and traders:

high in income, low in occupational prestige (Phil 4:2; Rom 16:22; Philemon 24: Col 4:14). There were wealthy, independent women (Rom 16:1-2; 16:13; Acts 12:12) . We find wealthy Jews (Acts 4:3).

Lessons for today.

1. Authenticity is the new holiness. Authenticity in the church is demonstrated when leadership is based on character and not competency or accomplishments. This reflects the great leveling as taught by Jesus.
2. An open church embraces an open gospel, attractive and inviting to all ethnic and socioeconomic classes.

D. They lived sacrificially in traumatic times.

The community of Christians did not constitute an “in group” who cared only for its members. They gave freely to the poor and the hungry, visiting the sick and clothing the poor. “Christianity’s sense of community and its universal charity were a major reason, if not the most important single reason, for its growth and subsequent victory over the empire” (Weber, 57).

1. Life in the plagues.

- Epidemics swamped the explanatory and comforting ability of paganism and Greek philosophy: “Why do bad things happened to good people?”
- Death tolls were horrific. In c. 250, 5,000 people died daily in Rome.
- Christian values were translated into norms of social service and community solidarity.
- Pagans fled the cities in times of plagues, Christians stayed behind to care for sick.
- Christians took care of their own sick and their neighbors.
- Christian care would have provided a higher survival rate (Stark, 1997, 75). Christians not only risked death but were less likely to die.
- Who offered best explanation for trials? The pagan priests professed ignorance, most fled the cities - Christianity offered an alternative explanation for trials.

“Another advantage Christians enjoyed over pagans was that the teaching of their faith made life meaningful even amidst sudden and surprising death . . . Christianity was, therefore, a system of thought and feeling thoroughly adapted to a time of troubles in which hardship, disease, and violent death commonly prevailed” (Stark, 1997, 81).

Dionysius (writing around 260 C.E.): “Most of our Christian brothers showed unbounded love and loyalty never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick attending to their every need . . . drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many in nursing and caring for others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead . . . The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner . . . The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease . . .” (Stark, 1997, 83).

“They idealized faith and gave a powerful counter to anxiety. Among second-century authors, it is the Christians who are the most confident and assured. There is a magnificent optimism in [their theology]” (Fox, 331).

2. Life among the poor.

“It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents, ‘Only look,’ they say, ‘look how they love one another’” Tertullian (Stark, 1997, 87).

New Testament examples: Acts 2:42-47; 4:32; 24:17; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 9:1,2

Tertullian writes (160-240 C.E.): “Though we have our treasure-chest . . . they are not taken and spent on feasts, and drinking bouts and eating houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to other houses . . . and if there happens to be any in the mines . . . shut up in prisons” (Batson, 64).

By the year 251 C.E., the resources of the church in Rome had grown so much that it was supporting from its common purse more than 1500 widows and needy persons. “The assistance provided by the church was impressive in a world where . . . the government did not expect to undertake generous program of social welfare” (Chadwick, 58).

The early churches also freed believers who were enslaved. They would be bought out by money taken from the common fund (Horsley, 135).

The Christian movement’s example reached to the emperor. In 350 C.E., Emperor Julian launched a campaign to institute pagan charities in an effort to match the Christians. Julian complained in a letter to the high priest of Galation that the pagans need to equal the virtues of Christians, for recent Christian growth was caused by their “moral character” and by their “benevolence towards strangers and care for the graves of the dead.” In a letter to another priest, Julian wrote, “I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by the priests, the impious Galleons observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence.” He wrote, “The impious Galleons support not only their poor, but ours as well, even they can see that our people lack aid from us” (Stark, 1997, 84).

Paganism was utterly incapable of generating the commitment needed to motivate such behavior. Not only were many of its gods and goddesses of dubious character, they offered nothing that could motivate humans to go beyond self-interest acts of propitiation (Stark, 2006, 31).

“Their gospel was big enough to embrace earth and heaven, this life and the next. They were concerned with labor relations, slavery, marriage and the family, the exposure of children, cruelty in the amphitheater and obscenity on stage . . . There was no dichotomy between a social and a spiritual gospel to these men who held a united concept of truth” (Green, 1970, 277).

The practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success (Chadwick, 56). Christians created a mini welfare state in an empire

which lacked social services (Stark,2006, 31).

The exposure of newborn infants was common and perfectly legal practices. The Greeks and the Romans thought it peculiar that Egyptians, Germans, and the Jews exposed none of their children but raised them all. In 1 B.C.E. a Greek wrote his wife: "If (touch wood!) you have a child, let it live if it is a boy. If it is a girl, expose it" (Aries and Duby, 9). Early believers would rescue children from the city dumps. Since many were women, these women leveraged cultural influence as future wives in a paucity of female candidates.

Lessons for today.

1. Sacrifice in times of shared difficulty is a powerful witness for the gospel.
2. Sacrificial care is not reserved only for members of the body of Christ but must be extended to those outside of the body.
3. In the midst of cultural crises and change, the Christian message must be communicated in ways that provide real hope and meaning to others.
4. Caring for the poor in practical ways is a part of the mission of the church.
5. Without a concern for buildings, staff, or funding programs, the early church could devote significant funds to care for the disadvantaged. This should challenge our priorities of funding and giving today.
6. Caring for the poor reflects the compassionate nature and kindness of our Father.
7. When we care for the poor, building safety nets of compassion, secular leaders will notice and treat us as competitors or embrace us for our love.
8. Agape love is measured by loving those who lack any ability to return the favor. The church is called to create a mini-welfare state for the disadvantage.
9. The way we treat the marginalized of our culture marks us as a true church.

D. The church gave women new status and respect.

A woman was like a grown child; her husband was obliged to humor her because of her dowry and her noble father (Aries and Duby, 39).

The pious Jew may honor his mother, but he fervently thanks God every morning that he is not a woman (Dunn-Wilson, 8),

1. Condition of women in the Roman Empire.

- A study at Delphi made it possible to reconstruct 600 families. Of these, only 6 had raised more than one daughter.
- Girls received little or no education.
- Females were married at puberty and often before. Roman law set 12 as the

minimum age.

- Example - under Athenian law, a woman was regarded as a child all her life and was the legal property of some man at all stages of life.

A writer from Hilarion to his pregnant wife Alis: "Know that I am still in Alexandria . . . I ask and beg you to take good care of our baby son, and as soon as I receive payment I shall send it up to you. If you are delivered of a child [before I come home], if it is a boy keep it, if a girl discard it" (Stark, 1997, 98).

The letter dates from the year 1 B.C.E. but these patterns persisted among pagans far into the Christian era. Both Plato and Aristotle recommended infanticide as legitimate state policy (Stark, 1997, 118).

2. The role of women in the church.

Christianity cut across ordinary social patterns more deeply than any other religion (Chadwick, 59).

Some classical writers recognized that Christianity was so appealing because within the Christian subculture women enjoyed far higher status than did the women in the Greco-Roman world at large. "Women enjoyed far greater marital security and equality than did her pagan neighbors" (Stark, 1997, 95).

- Eliminated the sexual double standard.
- Provided for widowers.
- Gave women roles of contribution - Romans 16:1,2 - Phoebe is a deaconess.

Pliny the Younger reported that he had tortured two young Christian women "who were called deaconesses" (Stark, 1997, 108). Christians differed not only from pagans in this respect but from Jews: "The Christian clergy . . . took a step that separated them from the rabbis of Palestine . . . They welcomed women as patrons and even offered women roles in which they could act as collaborators" (Stark, 1997, 109).

The equality of men and women was a thing so shocking in the patriarchal society of Jesus' time that his own male followers could not understand it: "Just then his disciples came back. They marveled [were thunderstruck] that he was talking with a woman" (Wills: 2006, 48).

It was a source of scandal for women to travel openly with a rabbi; but "many women followed Jesus throughout Galilee" (Luke 8:2-3). The wisdom of the *Didache* (a mid-first century document) deliberately offers training to women. Such training ensured that women were empowered to be active participants within church affairs (Milavec, 57).

In Romans 16:1, Paul commends Phoebe, a woman who was a protector or patroness of many Christians, including himself. We may then infer that Phoebe is an independent woman (she is traveling to Rome on business of her own, not just to deliver Paul's letter) who has some wealth and is also one of the leaders of the Christian group in the harbor town of Cenchreae (Meeks, 60).

Lydia persuaded Paul, Silas, and other companions to move into her house. She must have had some wealth since purple was a luxury item; she also has a household in

which several guests can be accommodated (Acts 16:14). Her name, occupation and place of origin show that she belongs to the Greek-speaking merchants who have settled in Philippi. Lydia is a pagan adherent of the Jewish synagogue and the female head of a household (Meeks, 62).

The recorded martyrdoms of Perputua and Felicitas (203 C.E.) reveals the unique role of women in the church. In the patriarchal and hierarchical cultures of the Mediterranean world, women were almost always defined in terms of their roles as the daughters, wives, and mothers of men yet Perputua assumed a leadership role among the prisoners. Also, her leadership and the imprisonment of other Christians revealed the extensive support Christians could expect to receive. This was a powerful attraction to the urban masses who lived in what one historian has called the “dim, hopeless obscurity of plebeian life.” “The revolutionary and egalitarian qualities of Christian communities like Perpetua’s were in sharp contrast to the customs of the larger pagan societies” (Novak, 115).

Lessons for today.

1. Jesus advocated not only a flattening of hierarchical roles but flattened the gender roles, promoting and esteeming the value of women.
2. Women are welcomed to provide leadership and serve with their gifts rather than only through their roles.
3. Gender is not a measurement for worth or necessarily for functional contribution.
4. The way we treat the marginalized of our culture marks us as a true church.

E. Martyrdom was often the church’s only advertisement.

“The blood of the martyrs watered the churches and reared up many times as many champions of piety” (MacMullen, 29).

A Carthaginian prison guard’s changed his heart when he observed the conduct of his Christian prisoners, “He began to make much of us, realizing there was a great virtue, a miraculous power, in us” until in the end “the guard of the prison now believed” (MacMullen, 30). Galen, the distinguished Greek physician to Roman emperors, wrote of Christians that “their contempt of death is patent to us every day” (Stark, 1997, 165).

1. Ten major persecutions are recorded.

The persecutions began with Nero in the first century and culminating in the one inaugurated by Diocletian early in the fourth century (Latourette, 2005, 85).

2. Martyrdom from persecution was always a possibility but it occurred in waves and was often provincial, rather than empire-wide.

The truth is that the Roman government cared little for the Christian menace. When a wave of persecution did occur, usually only bishops and other prominent figures were

singled out (Stark, 1997, 180).

In 250 C.E. the new emperor Decius ordered a systematic persecution, requiring that everyone should possess a certificate that he had sacrificed to the gods before special commissioners. Not until 257 C.E. were Christian services and places of meeting attacked (Fox, 422).

3. Martyrdoms were public events.

In the early church, martyrdoms were public events, coinciding with the phase of public entertainment that took place in the arenas. These displays were financed and chosen by the great men of the cities. Violence made excellent viewing and the crowds could be utterly callous. The intransigence of the braver Christians made a great impression on the pagans. When the Emperor Marcus wrote his thoughts on suicide in his private *Meditations*, he contrasted an orderly, reasoned choice of death with the Christians 'sheer opposition' to the rational order (Fox, 421).

4. Martyrdom could be easily avoided.

A gesture of honor to the gods and conformity to tradition was all that was required of them. If a god was dishonored, he might send his anger against the community, in the form of famine, plague or drought. "No rain, because of the Christians," had become proverbial for the mid-fourth century.

Roman authorities often tried for a compromise:

"If you don't want to offer or eat a sacrificial meat, how about a pinch of incense?"

"Out of respect, you could make a simple sacrifice to the emperor?" (lesser deity)

Christianity's most public advertisement was martyrdom (Fox, 315).

As expected, the response of the Christians to torture and martyrdom varied. Some recanted under pressure of torture and imprisonment. Some sent pagans or friends to sacrifice for them. Others wavered, but eventually gave themselves to the authorities. Still others sought martyrdom, in spite of the general policy of church officials which discouraged what was regarded as fanaticism. The courage of the victims made so great an impression on pagans that we hear of educated men becoming Christians (Fox, 91).

Jerome (390 C.E.) wrote: "When Christ's church came into the hands of Christian princes, its power and wealth increased but its virtues were diminished."

Lessons for today.

1. The safety and security of the church is not always God's goal.
2. The church will be tested in different ways in different eras. Compromise and conformity will always be a challenge to the committed.
3. Our unswerving commitment can be a light to some and an offense to others.

Part VIII - How Can the Evangelism Agenda of the Early Church Become Our Agenda?

The Church [in North America] today is back in apostolic times. Most of our neighbors do not share our faith, or a memory of our faith, or our assumptions, or our vocabulary. The West is, once again, a vast mission field. George Hunter

Evangelical churches have failed to gain an additional 2% of the American population in the past 50 years. In other words, we are not even reaching our children . . . Half of all churches in America last year did not add one new member through conversion. George Barna

1. Insiders

- streamline church schedule to free people up to build friendships
- create missional networks
- identify a baseline of preparedness
- motivate, teach, and model the importance of involvement in and extension of personal networks
- measure outreach of church through evangelism quotient: church membership / attendance X unbelieving friends and acquaintances

2. Conversations

- must learn how to turn from private devotion to a public conversation about our faith
- create conversation centers and events where discussions begin rather than only where decisions are made.

3. Homes

- mixed Bible reading groups
- hospitality
- dinner and discussion
- mini-gospel communities, lighthouses to reach neighborhoods, communities, etc.

4. Imagination

- create a team of people to re-imagine and experiment with evangelism
- create new approaches for adults
- innovate new forms and use of media

5. Resources

- create an evangelism resource center
- recruit artists and designers to create new evangelism resources

6. Disadvantaged

- turn mission budget to giving budget
- adopt an urban church or target an urban center
- set aside percentage of budget to serve the disadvantaged in a community

7. Strategic events

- turn church building into a community center
- strategic use of key events: VBS, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas cantata, Christmas eve service. Picture them as conversation starters with others rather than opportunities of edification for self.

8. Hot center

1 These 1:5 “conviction” suggests a cup so full to the brim that it flows over. It suggest Christians so full of the Holy Spirit that when they were bumped into, it was not their own reactions of frustration or irritation that spilled out, but the gracious, life-giving Spirit of God. (Green, 1979, 29).

Bibliography

- Aries, Philippe and Duby, Georges (1987). *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Batson, David (2001). *The Treasure Chest of Early Christians*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdman's Publishing Company.
- Bloomberg, Craig L. (2005). *Contagious Holiness*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Coleman, Robert E. (1971). *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company
- Cahill., Thomas (1995). *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. New York: Doubleday.
- Chadwick, Henry (1993). *The Penguin History of the Early Church*. London, England: Penguin Books.
- Dunn-Wilson, David. (2005) *A Mirror of the Church: Preaching in the First Five Centuries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans Publishing.
- Eusebius (1999). *The Church History* (P. Maier, Trans.). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.
- Fletcher, Richard (1997). *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Fox, Robin Lane (1989). *Pagans and Christians*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
- Green, Michael (1970). *Evangelism in the Early Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdman's Publishing Company.
- Green, Michael (1979). *Evangelism Then and Now*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Horsley, Richard A. (Editor) (2005). *A People's History of Christianity Vol 1. Christian Origins*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press.
- Hunger III, George G (2000). *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Jenkins, Philip (2008). *The Lost History of Christianity*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Latourette, Kenneth Scott (2005). *A History of Christianity: Volume 1 (Revised Edition)*. Peabody, MA: Prince Press.
- McKechnie, Paul (2001). *The First Christian Centuries*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

- Meeks, Wayne A. (1983). *The First Urban Christians - The social world of the Apostle Paul*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- MacMullen, Ramsay (1984). *Christianizing the Roman Empire A.D. 100-400*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Milavec, Aaron (2003). *The Didache: Text, Translation , Analysis, and Commentary*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Novak, Ralph Martin (2001). *Christianity and the Roman Empire. Background Texts*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.
- Peterson, Eugene (2005). *Christ Plays on Ten Thousand Places*. Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans Publishing.
- Peterson, Jim (1989). *Living Proof*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Stark, Rodney (1997). *The Rise of Christianity*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Stark, Rodney (2006). *Cities of God*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Stott, John R.W. (1975). *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Webber, Robert E. (2003) *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making your church a faith-forming community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Wilken, Robert Lewis (2003). *The Christians As the Romans Saw Them*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Wills, Garry (2006). *What Paul Meant*. Strand, London: Penguin Books.
- Wills, Garry (2006). *What Jesus Meant*. Strand, London: Penguin Books.

