

# The Spread of Christianity--an Urban Story

## A. What life was like in the cities of the Graeco-Roman Empire:

### 1. Cities were relatively small by modern standards, but the population density was exceptionally high.

"The first important fact about Greco-Roman cities is that they were small, in terms of both area and population." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity--A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton):149]

Rome	650,000
Alexandria	400,000
Ephesus	200,000
Antioch	150,000
Apamea	125,000
Pergamum	120,000
Sardis	100,000
Corinth	100,000
Gadir (Cadiz)	100,000
Memphis	90,000
Carthage	90,000
Edessa	80,000
Syracuse	80,000
Smyrna	75,000
Caesarea Maritime	45,000
Damascus	45,000

"MacMullen estimates that the **average population density in cities of the Roman Empire may have approached two hundred per acre--an equivalent found in modern Western cities only in industrial slums**. Further, given that much of the space--one-fourth, by MacMullen's calculations--was devoted to public areas, 'the bulk of the population had typically to put up with most uncomfortable crowding at home, made tolerable by the attractive spaciousness of public facilities...It follows that privacy was rare. Much of life was lived on the streets and sidewalks, squares and porticoes--even more than in Mediterranean cities today.'" [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):29]

"If we assume a population of about a million, we must conclude that **Rome** in the early principate was one of the most densely populated cities the world has ever known--**as crowded, probably, as modern Bombay or Calcutta**." [Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (Johns Hopkins):90]

"The built-up area of imperial **Rome** corresponded more or less to that enclosed by the third-century walls of Aurelian, 1,373 hectares (1 hectare = 2.47 acre), which implies a population density of about **730 per hectare (300 per acre)**. This compares with an overall density of **452 per hectare in modern Bombay, 364 for Dublin, 295 for Calcutta, and 224 for Mexico City**. Most of these modern cities have upper-class residential areas and parks, which decrease the density. The **highest spot densities** recorded are for Hong Kong (1,656 per hectare), Bombay (1,169 per hectare), and Calcutta (1,018 per hectare). Modern figures are taken from the United Nations' 1977 Compendium of Social Statistics (New York, 1980)." [Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (Johns Hopkins):337]

*Comparisons:*

Population Density of Antioch around **117/acre**. [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):149]...[Compare Chicago 21; SF 23; NY 37; Manhattan 100]..But allowing for public space, Antioch goes to 137 [Bombay 183; Calcutta 122]

Geographical Area	Pop/SqMile
Nanshi area, Shanghai	147,187
Yuexiu area, Guangzhou	132,163
<b>Graeco-Roman cities</b>	<b>128,200</b>
Old Bombay(1958)	125,662
City area, Calcutta	108,005
Hong Kong	73,627
Seoul	61,970
Cairo	60,000
New York: NY County	52,419
Delhi	45,778
New York: King County	32,618
Mexico City	30,263
New York: Bronx County	28,640
Tokyo	18,401
New York: Queens County	17,839
California: San Francisco County	15,502
New Jersey: Hudson County	11,855
Pennsilvanial: Philadelphia County	11,733
Massachusets: Suffolk County	11,345
Washington DC	9,882
City of Baltimore	9,108
Illinois: Cook County	5,398
Michigan: Wayne County	3,488
Louisanna: Orleans County	2,750
California: LosAngeles County	2,183

## 2. Housing for the non-elite was multi-family and generally occupied by either ethic or occupational groups.

**"Roman tenement buildings were usually the only places open to them** [new immigrants to Rome]. **Persons of the same nationality tended to congregate in individual apartment** buildings as new arrivals sought the companionship of established compatriots." [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):131]

"From the second century B.C.E., Rome began erecting **multistory apartment buildings** (*insulae*). Packer believes the *insula* originated in Rome to address the housing needs of its rapidly growing population. They were typically built around an inner courtyard that provided light and air to the rooms above. Small shops (*tabernae*) were often built into the outer ring of the first floor of the *insula*. Families who operated such small shops often lived in them as well. There was sometimes a back room behind or a mezzanine above the main room, offering a bit of privacy for the family. **A few "deluxe" apartments might be found behind these shops, facing the inner courtyard.** These apartments contained a number of rooms, including accommodations for servants, and were suitable for hosting small social gatherings. They generally **lacked kitchens and latrines**...**Above the *tabernae* were usually three to five floors of apartments. The absence of elevators and the poorer construction of the higher stories meant that the cheapest apartments were on the upper floors.** These were mostly **one- and two-room apartments**. Interior rooms, probably used for sleeping, received

either cooked on charcoal braziers located near an outside opening or went out for hot meals. They used public latrines, the small spaces under stairs, or chamber pots. Privacy would have been rare. **Within the individual apartment, several unrelated families might have separate sleeping rooms but share a common sitting room.** These apartments were **too small to allow for socializing with friends**, let alone for Christian house congregations. Those who lived in such apartments would have to do most of their eating and socializing in public places." [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):132]

### 3. Ethnic divisions were fairly strong, with no statistically dominant group, creating a complex society.

"As a consequence of Rome's entry into the East and her active interest in the cities, **urban society became somewhat more complex than it had been even during the Hellenistic age.** For a very long time **groups of foreigners had gathered in each city**: merchants and artisans following the armies or in search of better markets or better access to transportation, persons enslaved and displaced by war or piracy and now set free, political exiles, soldiers of fortune. **These noncitizen residents, or metics, often retained some sense of ethnic identity** by establishing local cults of their native gods or by forming a voluntary association, which also had at least the trappings of religion." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale):13]

"**When a stranger arrived in a city, then, it is taken for granted that he knew, or could easily learn, where to find immigrants and temporary residents from his own country or ethnos and practitioners of his own trade.** Nothing could be more natural, for these were the two most important factors in the formation and identification of neighborhoods.." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale):29]... (he gives examples of Jewish quarters, linenweavers quarters, etc.)

"By the first century CE **non-Romans and their descendants made up a large part, if not the majority, of the common people of the city [Rome]**, a large population of free resident aliens, and the entire slave class." [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):129]

"Roman tenement buildings were usually the only places open to them [new immigrants to Rome]. **Persons of the same nationality tended to congregate in individual apartment buildings as new arrivals sought the companionship of established compatriots.**" [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):131]

"there were **eighteen identifiable ethnic quarters** within Antioch" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):158]

"What does seem clear is that the **social integration of Greco-Roman cities was severely disrupted by the durability of internal ethnic divisions, which typically took the form of distinctive ethnic precincts.** Ethnic diversity and a **constant influx of newcomers will tend to undercut social integration**, thus exposing residents to a variety of harmful consequences, including **high rates of deviance and disorder. Indeed, this is the major reason why Greco-Roman cities were so prone to riots.**" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):158]

### 4. Turnover and poverty in the city was extremely high, due to plague, migration, and high mortality rates--resulting in urban problems.

"As noted, Greco-Roman cities required a constant and substantial stream of new-comers simply to maintain their populations. As a result, at any given moment a very considerable proportion of the population consisted of recent newcomers--**Greco-Roman cities were peopled by strangers. It is well known that the crime rates of modern cities are highly correlated with rates of population turnover**... This is because where there are large numbers of newcomers, people will be **deficient in interpersonal attachments, and it is attachments that bind us to the moral order.**" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):156f]

"**Night fell over the city like the shadow of a great danger**, diffused, sinister, and menacing. Everyone fled to his home, shut himself in, and barricaded the entrance. The shops fell silent, safety chains were drawn behind the leaves of the doors.... If the rich had to sally forth, they were accompanied by slaves who carried torches to light and protect them on their way .... Juvenal sighs that to go out to supper without having made your will was to expose yourself to reproach of carelessness ... [W]e need only turn to the leaves of the Digest [to discover the extent to which criminals] abounded in the city. " [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):157]

"Any accurate portrait of Antioch in New Testament times must depict **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 in stable networks of attachments** that petty incidents could prompt mob violence. A city where crime flourished and the streets were dangerous at night. And, perhaps above all, a city repeatedly smashed by cataclysmic catastrophes: 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 circumstances must often have despaired. Surely it would not be strange for them to have concluded that the end of days drew near. And surely too they must often have longed for relief, for hope, indeed for salvation." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):160f]

"For they [the lowest classes, without social attachments to patrons] provided the manpower for **dangerous urban riots**. They were not easy to control. They were men without honor. Without honor, they were difficult to coerce. They had no status to lose and no wealth that might be threatened by fines. They could only be beaten, not blackmailed, into submission. Their daily behavior showed this only too clearly." [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):53]

## 5. Plagues and natural disasters were frequent, extensive, and life-shattering.

"In 165, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a devastating epidemic swept through the Roman Empire....During the **fifteen-year duration of the epidemic, from a quarter to a third of the empire's population died from it**, including Marcus Aurelius himself...Then in 251 a new and equally devastating epidemic again swept the empire, hitting the rural areas as hard as the cities. " [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):73]

"The **following summary of natural and social disasters that struck Antioch is instructive and rather typical**. I have not attempted a careful survey of the sources to assemble my list but have depended primarily on Downey (1963). The totals are probably incomplete. Moreover, **I skipped the many serious floods because they did not cause substantial loss of life**. Still, the summary shows how extremely vulnerable Greco-Roman cities were to attacks, **fires, earthquakes, famines, epidemics, and devastating riots**. Indeed, this litany of disasters is so staggering that it is difficult to grasp its human meaning...During the course of about six hundred years of intermittent Roman rule, Antioch was taken by unfriendly forces eleven times and was plundered and sacked on five of these occasions. The city was also put to siege, but did not fall, two other times. In addition, Antioch burned entirely or in large part four times, three times by accident and once when the Persians carefully burned the city to the ground after picking it clean of valuables and taking the surviving population into captivity. Because the temples and many public building were built of stone, it is easy to forget that Greco-Roman cities consisted primarily of woodframe buildings, plastered over, that were highly flammable and tightly packed together. Severe fires were frequent, and there was no pumping equipment with which to fight them. Besides the four huge conflagrations noted above, there were many large fires set during several of the six major periods of rioting that racked the city. By a major riot I mean one resulting in substantial damage and death, as distinct from the city's frequent riots in which only a few were killed...Antioch probably suffered from literally hundreds of significant earthquakes during these six centuries, but eight were so severe that nearly everything was destroyed and huge numbers died. Two other quakes may have been nearly as serious. At least three killer epidemics struck the city--with mortality rates probably running above 25 percent in each. Finally, there were at least five really serious famines. **That comes to**

forty-one natural and social catastrophes, or an average of one every fifteen years." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):160-161]

#### 6. There were no meaningful social/medical support services, with physical abandonment common during plague.

"...they died **with no one to look after them**, indeed there were many houses in which all the inhabitants perished through lack of any attention.... The bodies of the dying were heaped one on top of the other, and half-dead creatures could be seen staggering about in the streets or flocking around the fountains in their desire for water. The temples in which they took up their quarters were full of the dead bodies of people who had died inside them. **For the catastrophe was so overwhelming that men, not knowing what would happen next to them, became indifferent to every rule of religion or of law...** No fear of god or law of man had a restraining influence. As for the gods, it seemed to be the same thing whether one worshipped them or not, when one saw the good and the bad dying indiscriminately. " (Thucydides, on the plague of Athens)

"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; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape. [Dionysius, in Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):83]

"It is worth noting that the **famous classical physician Galen** lived through the first epidemic during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. **What did he do? He got out of Rome quickly**, retiring to a country estate in Asia Minor until the danger receded." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):85]

"What needs to be stressed is that the **Christian poorhouse-cum-hospital** was a **novel institution** in the ancient world. Temples, of course, had always contained large sleeping quarters for those in search of healing, as at the incubatory shrine of Asclepius at Epidaurus. But the new *xenodocheia* were not necessarily connected with healing shrines. **Only soldiers and slaves**--that is, persons who had no family to look after them--**had valetudinaria, hospital quarters in their camps and slave barracks.** To extend this facility to the poor in general and to associate it with any human settlement was a new departure. " [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):34]

#### 7. The truly destitute were 5-10% of the population, but those in 'shallow poverty' would have been most of the middling "class".

"In the Roman sense of values, predicated on a morality of reciprocal favors granted and expected, **helping the poor and homeless was simply not the traditional way.** That kind of charity was an Oriental concept codified by Jews and Christians who became conspicuous and a little suspect in their zeal for taking care of the sick and poor." [Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (Johns Hopkins):135]

"Preaching at Antioch in the 380's, John Chrysostom told his congregation that they should think of their city as being made up of one-tenth of rich residents, **one-tenth of 'the poor who have nothing at all,'** while the remaining 80 percent were of 'the middling sort'... **The tolerance level of such societies appears to have wavered between accepting 5 percent to 10 percent of the population as permanently 'poor' and in need of relief, while being prepared to help between 20 percent and 25 percent of the population for short periods in times of crisis.**" [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):14]

"To use a term favored by historians of early modern Europe, John's [Chrysostom] hearers lived in a **society characterized by widespread 'shallow' poverty.** And for most of them, the 'deep' poverty of actual destitution remained an ever-present possibility. 'Deep' poverty was a state into which they might fall, and from which they might emerge again, scrambling back painfully into 'shallow' poverty, on many occasions in the course of their lives." [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):15]

## 8. There was a high frequency of single-parent families, with women retaining custody of children.

"Inscriptions in Rome also mention a **number of single-parent families** (only one parent is named on the inscription). The **frequency of divorce and of the early death of one parent** must have led to frequent remarriage, and thus to stepchildren and blended families." [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):135]

"On the other hand, women in nonlegal marriages could leave a relationship without interference by the state. Such **women were far more likely to get custody of their children, since Roman law recognized the mother as the only legitimate parent in an illegitimate relationship**. By contrast, the divorcing father in a legal Roman marriage almost always was awarded custody of the children, since they were his heirs. **Many lower-class families were fatherless, requiring the mother to take full responsibility to provide for and raise her children, thus acquiring the rights and duties of a head of household.**" [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):.141]

"When the marriage dissolved, **she probably kept the children.**" [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):150]

"For what we know of the demography of the Roman world and of similar societies suggests that the **destruction of the family unit by the death or desertion of male protectors and wage earners was the single greatest cause of poverty.**" [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):58]

## 9. The society was very hierarchical, with layers of patron/client relationships, and with a very high dependence on patrons.

"What may be more significant is that **fairly often in imperial times women were asked to serve as founders or patrons of men's clubs**. This might involve provision of a place of meeting, either in the patron's house or in a special building erected or obtained for the purpose, or an endowment for the other expenses of the association, including its banquets, sacrifices, and funeral expenses for members.[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):24]

"Such subsidies apart, **the poor did what they could. Traditionally they became the clients of patrons who provided food or money in exchange for political support or other help**. If that did not work--and the sources show that the process could involved an intensely competitive scramble--there was begging, stealing, or starving." [Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (Johns Hopkins):134]

"'Middling' persons **had always needed protectors.**" [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):50]

## 10. Status was everything--the society was built to keep you 'in your place'.

"In the society of the principate it was apparently not uncommon for **these [communal meals] to become occasions for conspicuous display of social distance and even for humiliation of the clients of the rich, by means of the quality and quantity of food provided to different tables.**"[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):68]

"Roman authors **scorn Jews for their poverty.**" [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):130]

"What needs to be stressed, in assessing the social texture of the later empire, was that such persons were in an uncomfortable position. We have found that late Roman society was not as drastically "polarized" between the rich and the poor as we had been led to suppose. **The class of "middling" persons was more extensive and more differentiated than we had thought. But such persons did not, enjoy the**



**autonomy and the protection that we associate with a modern "middle class."** The powerful and the truly rich remained overbearing presences in a society where so many self-respecting persons lived uncomfortably close to the widespread 'shallow' poverty that had always characterized an ancient society. It was a tense situation. As Keith Hopkins has put it succinctly, by reason of the **"steepness of the social pyramid ... Roman society demanded an uncomfortable mixture of pervasive deference to superiors and openly aggressive brutishness to inferiors."** [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):49]

**"If you're poor, you're a joke, on each and every occasion.** What a laugh, if your cloak is dirty or torn, if your toga appears a little bit soiled, if your shoe has a crack in the leather. Of if several patches betray frequent mending! Poverty's greatest curse, much worse than actually being poor, is that it makes man objects of mirth, ridiculed, grumble, embarrassed...Sons of freeborn men give way to a rich man's slave." [Juvenal, early 2nd century AD, cited at Worth, *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Roman Culture* (Paulist):41]

#### 11. Upward mobility was very doable, but 'status inconsistency' was frequent too.

"We have already seen that there were a number of women prominently involved in the Pauline circle who exhibited the sorts of **status inconsistency** what would inspire a Juvenal to eloquent indignation. There were **women who headed households, who ran businesses and had independent wealth, who traveled with their own slaves and helpers.**"[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):71]

"In recent years, however, **most sociologists have come to see social stratification as a multidimensional phenomenon;** to describe the social level of an individual or a group, one must attempt to measure their rank along **each** of the relevant dimensions. For example, one might discover that, in a given society, the following variables affect how an individual is ranked: power (defined as 'the capacity for achieving goals in social systems'), occupational prestige, income or wealth, education and knowledge, religious and ritual purity, family and ethnic-group position, and local-community status (evaluation within some subgroup, independent of the larger society but perhaps interaction with it). **It would be a rare individual who occupied exactly the same rank, in either his own view or that of others, in terms of all these factors ...All these kinds of behavior, some sociologists believe, show that a high degree of status inconsistency produces unpleasant experiences that lead people to try to remove the inconsistency by changing the society, themselves, or perceptions of themselves.**"[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):54,55]

### B. Situating Christianity in its social setting:

#### 12. Christianity was basically an urban movement (like all 'cults' were)

"The third reason Pauline Christianity is an apt subject for our investigation is that it was **entirely urban.**[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):8]

"of the twenty-two largest **cities** in the empire, four probably still lacked a Christian church by the year 200" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):10]

#### 13. Christianity was mostly made up of 'middling-plus' class folks: merchants, tradesmen, craftsmen.

"The picture of **Barnabas as a reasonable well-to-do man** who deliberately chose the life of an itinerant **artisan** to support his mission is reinforced by the report in Acts that he was the owner of a farm that he sold, the proceeds going to the Jerusalem Christians." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):61]

"What we do see clearly is that the collection is to be assembled little by little, week by week. This bespeaks **the economy of small people, not destitute, but not commanding capital either.** This, too, would fit the picture of fairly well-off artisans and **tradespeople** as the typical Christians." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):65]

"But there is also **no specific evidence of people who are destitute**--such as the hired menials and dependent handworkers; the poorest of the poor, peasants, agricultural slaves, and hired agricultural day laborers, are absent because of the **urban setting of the Pauline groups**." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):73]

"The 'typical' Christian, however, the one who most often signals his presence in the letters by one or another small clue, is **a free artisan or small trader**." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):73]

"Abraham J. Malherbe analyzed the language and style of early church writers and concluded that they were addressing **a literate, educated audience**." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):31]

"If this is so, and if **cult movements are based on a relatively privileged constituency**, can we not infer that Paul's missionary efforts had their greatest success among **the middle and upper middle classes**, just as the New Testament historians now believe?" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):45]

"Consequently, the early church was **a mass movement in the fullest sense and not simply the creation of an elite**. Ramsay MacMullen recognized that the failure of Roman authorities to understand this fact accounts for **the strange aspect of the persecutions: that only leaders were seized**, while **crowds of obvious Christians went unpunished**. That is, when the Romans decided to destroy Christianity, "they did so from the top down, evidently taking it for granted that only the Church's leaders counted." This mistaken judgment was, according to MacMullen, based on the fact that **paganism was utterly dependent on the elite and could easily have been destroyed from the top**." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):208]

"...the Christian Church stood **squarely in the middle of Roman society**. It occupied the extensive middle ground between the very rich and the very poor. **'Middling' persons formed its principal constituency**. The church tended to recruit its clergy from among the more prosperous artisans and from the fringes of the class of town councilors." [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):48]

#### **14. Christianity contained members from most levels of the elite, from its inception.**

"It is indeed plausible that those who, after conversion to Christianity, **may still have had reason to accept invitations to dinner where meat would be served**, perhaps in the shrine of a pagan deity, are likely to have been the **more affluent members of the group, who would still have had some social or business obligations that were more important to their roles in the larger society** than were comparable connections among people of lower status. The difference is not absolute, however, for Christian clients of non-Christian patrons would surely also sometimes have found themselves in this position." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):69]

"The NT provides information about Prisca and Aquila, two of the Roman Christians greeted in Romans 16. They were tentmakers who worked in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus, indicating a high degree of mobility. **The fact that Aquila and Prisca could afford to rent residences capable of seating a dozen or two worshipers shows that they were able to live well above a subsistence level. Their wealth, though modest, exceeded that of most residents of Rome** and, therefore, probably that of most other Roman Christians. Perhaps they were able to rent a "deluxe" apartment. It also is possible that a house church could have met in the work area of their *taberna*." [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):137]

"Although Acts might not give a clear indication of status for all the people mentioned, **the internal evidence from the Pauline Corinthian correspondence would seem to indicate that by the third quarter of the first century A.D. the Christian community contained a good number of members of the social elite**. First some members of the Christian community could be described as wise, powerful and well-born. Some members of the community were involved in vexatious litigation which is suitable for members of the elite. 'Boasting' may reflect the keenness to display social position. Enmity within the church reflects the case in the wider Roman world. The form of worship with its concern over dress seem to be more suitable to people familiar with formal Roman worship. The Lord's supper may reflect the



wider tensions within Corinthian elite society." [Gill/Gempf, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting--Graeco-Roman Setting*:111]

"Indeed, based on an inscription found in Corinth in 1929 and upon references in Rom. 16:23 and 2 Tim. 4:20, many scholars now agree that among the members of the church at Corinth was Erastus, 'the city treasurer' And historians now accept that Poponia Graecina, **a woman of the senatorial class**, whom Tacitus reported as having been accused of practicing 'foreign superstition' in 57 (*Annals* 13.32), was a Christian. Nor, according to Marta Sordi, was Pomponia an isolated case: 'We know from reliable sources that there were **Christians among the aristocracy [in Rome] in the second half of the first century** (Acilius Glabrio and the Christian Flavians) and that it seems probable that the same can be said for the first half of the same century, before Paul's arrival in Rome.'" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):30f]

"The fundamental thesis is simply put: **If the early church was like all the other cult movements for which good data exist, it was not a proletarian movement but was based on the more privileged classes.**" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):33]

"If this is so, and if **cult movements are based on a relatively privileged constituency**, can we not infer that Paul's missionary efforts had their greatest success among the middle and **upper middle classes**, just as the New Testament historians now believe?" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):45]

"Finally, what difference does it make whether early Christianity was a movement of the relatively privileged or of the downtrodden? In my judgment it matters a great deal. Had Christianity actually been a proletarian movement, it strikes me that the state necessarily would have responded to it as a political threat, rather than simply as an illicit religion. With Marta Sordi (1986), I reject claims that the state did perceive early Christianity in political terms. It is far from clear to me that Christianity could have survived a truly comprehensive effort by the state to root it out during its early days. When the Roman state did perceive political threats, its repressive measures were not only brutal but unrelenting and extremely thorough--Masada comes immediately to mind. Yet even the most brutal persecutions of Christians were haphazard and limited, and the state ignored thousands of persons who openly professed the new religion, as we will see in chapter 8. **If we postulate a Christianity of the privileged, on the other hand, this behavior by the state seems consistent.** If, as is now believed, the Christians were not a mass of degraded outsiders **but from early days had members, friends, and relatives in high places--often within the imperial family--this would have greatly mitigated repression and persecution. Hence the many instances when Christians were pardoned.**" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton): 46]

"It is very difficult to estimate how far, despite these adverse factors, Christianity had by the beginning of the fourth century penetrated into the upper classes. The edict of Valerian, laying down special penalties for senators and *equites Romani* who refused to conform, suggests that **as early as 257 there were some Christians in these classes**. The canons of the council of Iliberris, probably held shortly before the Great Persecution, lay down penances for Christians who as **provincial sacerdotes or municipal duoviri or flamines** take part in pagan rites or celebrate games. This would imply that there were **not a few Christians among the curial class in Spain**, and, indeed, **among its richest and most prominent members**, who held not only the highest municipal offices and priesthoods, but even **the supreme honour of the provincial high priesthood.**" ["The Social Background of the Struggle between Paganism and Christianity", by A. H. M. Jones, in *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Arnaldo Momigliano (ed). Oxford: 1963, p. 21]

## 15. Christianity was dependent on patrons/semi-elites for resources and protection.

"Both the private associations and **the Christian groups also depended to some extent on the beneficence of wealthier persons who acted as patrons**...The client *collegium* would reward its patron with encomiastic inscriptions, honorary titles, wreaths, perhaps even a status--and with effective control of the club's life, for there were no strong countervailing powers in the association. In this respect, as we have seen, **the Christian congregation was quite different, and the patrons may have had reason to**

**feel somewhat slighted.** Paul even admonishes the Corinthians to show a little more respect for such people, such as Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15-18)."[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):78]

"There are now good reasons to think that the **Christian communities became established in part through the elite families of the main urban centres** in the eastern provinces." [Gill/Gempf, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting--Graeco-Roman Setting*:117]

"Harnack pointed to the obvious conclusion that **Ignatius took it for granted that Christians in Rome had 'the power' to gain him a pardon,** 'a fear which would have been unreasonable had not the church contained members whose riches and repute enabled them to intervene in this way either by bribery or by the exercise of personal influence.'" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):32]

#### **16. Christian leaders (unlike other groups) also came from a non-privileged group.**

"According to Hebrews 13:7, the function of the 'leaders' consisted in preaching the word of God. From this fact they may be characterized as **charismatically endowed leaders whose authority derived exclusively from the word they proclaimed** and whose precedence was promoted by preaching alone." [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):.220]

"The **public religious establishment** in most cities, the Temple-city of Jerusalem included, **was usually in the hands of 'an aristocratic oligarchy' whose members had sufficient wealth** and leisure to maintain the cults alongside their other functions as leaders of society. Priests and public benefactors were often one and the same person...**This is not the world that we meet in Early Christianity**, or, indeed, it appears, in Judaism after the destruction of the Temple." [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):20f]

#### **17. Christianity was involved in social relief efforts--to its own first--from its earliest days.**

Acts 6 and 1 Timothy--the widows; James at the 'widows and orphans'; and the collection for Jerusalem

"The fact that **some Christians in the first century sold themselves into slavery** to help out fellow believers suggests the poverty of the Christian community as a whole." [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):131]

"Christian **values of love and charity** had, from the **beginning, been translated into norms of social service and community solidarity.** When disaster struck, the Christians were better able to cope, and this resulted in substantially higher rates of survival." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):74]

"Writing in 251, to the bishop of Antioch, Cornelius, the bishop of Rome, emphasized the extent of this double responsibility: 'there can only be one bishop in **a church** in which are 46 priests...**and more than 1500 widows and distressed persons**...' [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):25]

"A large number were formally enrolled on **various 'poor lists': 3,000** were on the list of widows and orphans in fourth-century Antioch, **7,500** were on the poor rolls of the church of Alexandria in the early seventh century. A provincial church, such as Gaza, may have supported about **200** persons a year, each receiving the **equivalent of half a year's wages of a skilled artisan.**" [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):65]

#### **18. Christianity grew fastest among Hellenistic Jewry of the cities of Asia Minor.**

"Consequently there was **a substantial Jewish population in virtually every town of any size in the lands bordering the Mediterranean.** Estimates run from **10 to 15 percent of the total population** of a city--in the case of Alexandria, perhaps even higher." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):34]

"archeological evidence shows that the **early Christian churches outside Palestine were concentrated in the Jewish sections of cities**" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):63]

"There is recent physical evidence suggesting that the **Christian and Jewish communities remained closely linked--intertwined, even--**until far later than is consistent with claims about the early and absolute break between church and synagogue." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):68]

## C. How Christians came in contact with others:

### 19. Living arrangements, by ethnicity and by trade groupings

"While we have no remains of private homes of Jews or Christians in Rome, **it seems clear that the majority of Jews and Christians of necessity would have lived either in tiny apartments several stories above ground floor, in the homes of their masters or former masters, or in *tabernae* where their shops were located.** Did Jewish and Christian families practice religious rituals in such homes? If so, what kinds of rituals did they practice and what did their neighbors think of them? **Christian house congregations which met in the homes of believers probably met in the first-floor "deluxe" apartments.** If Jews were able to congregate in buildings with other Jews, they would have found it easier to practice the dietary and exclusivity demands of their religion. **Jews who converted to Christianity would have found their apartment building a natural place to proselytize.**" [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):133]

"The ground floors appear to have been occupied by shops, and the upper levels by prosperous families. **The connection of these buildings with the social world of craftsmen and artisans** is suggestive in the light of reference to the church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:5), whose property must have served as workshop, residence, and meeting place. As yet there has been no excavation of common housing from the days of the early empire in Rome, but the work of J. E. Packer and A. G. McKay on the *insulae*, or apartment buildings, points to the existence of **amorphous blocks of tenements, one budding abutting another, that served the vast majority of people in the capital and other large cities of the Roman Empire...** A typical *insula* contained a row of shops on the ground floor, facing the street, and provided living quarters for the owners and their families over the shops or in the rear. There would be space on the premises for the manufacture of goods sold in the shops, and **accommodations for visiting clients, workers, servants, or slaves.** **The arrangement brought together a considerable cross section of a major group in society,** consisting of manual workers and tradespeople. Such households were part of an intricate social network made up of other households to which they were tied by kinship, friendship, professional advantage, and other considerations. **The strategy of situating the church in the home was sound,** for it provided Christians with relative privacy; a setting where identity and intimacy could be experienced, **a ready-made audience as well as a social network along which the influence of the Christian movement could spread.** **The conversion of households with their dependents helps to account for the growth of Roman Christianity.**" [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):209]

"Attention has recently been focused on the significance of the household and the workshop for Paul's missionary activities. Households were not the private residences of today but were most likely to be large houses which provided shops at the front and living accommodations at the rear. There would also have been room for workshops and living quarters for dependents and visitors. **Such an arrangement would have ideally suited Paul's purposes** by both enabling him to finance his mission through his work as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3; 20:34, 35; 1 Thess 2:9) and **by providing him with a ready-made platform from which preaching and teaching could be conducted daily among the many who would have been around the workshop.** The significance of the workshop has been brought into focus by research into the methods of other itinerant philosophers like the Cynics of Paul's day. Rather than viewing manual labor as demeaning, the Cynics adopted it as an ideal way of life and as the means by which a teacher could model his philosophy to his disciples." [Tidball, "Social Settings of Mission Churches", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP)]

## 20. Organized settings, by ethnicity (synagogue) and by trade groupings (market)

"...**Jews** in most places were distributed through the whole range of statuses and occupations...The **number of artisans** who appear in inscriptions, papyri, and literary and legal texts is especially notable..."[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):39]

"In all the major centers of the empire were substantial settlements of **diasporan Jews who were accustomed to receiving teachers from Jerusalem**. Moreover, **the missionaries were likely to have family and friendship connection within at least some of the diasporan communities**." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):62]

unbelievers had free access to Christian meetings [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):106]

"...there is good reason to believe that **Paul was initially accepted as a synagogue member** in most locations. The thirty-nine lashes were discipline for a synagogue member, not quite the expulsion and ostracism which an officially designated apostate might receive." [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):123]

## 21. Social networks

"On entering a city **Paul's mission strategy was to make contact with people by using the existing social networks to which he related**. So, originally, he made his way to the **synagogue** (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:2; 18:4; 19:8) or, in its absence, the place of **prayer** (Acts 16:13) to meet other Jews. Similar **links with other expatriates and people who worked at the same trade** (including Priscilla and Aquila) were also exploited, especially when the synagogues turned against his message. In each location Paul sought to establish a household as the base of his missionary endeavors and as an ongoing means of support for himself and his newly formed Christian community (Acts 16:15; 17:7; 18:1–3, 7–8; 1 Cor 16:15)." [Tidball, "Social Settings of Mission Churches", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP)]

"In effect, **conversion** is not about seeking or embracing an ideology; it is about bringing one's religious behavior into **alignment with that of one's friends and family members**." (when attachments to members exceeded those to non-members). [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):16]

"**Conversion** to new, deviant religious groups occurs when, other things being equal, **people have or develop stronger attachments to members of the group than they have to nonmembers**." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):18]

"Data based on records kept by a **Mormon** mission president give powerful support to this proposition. When **missionaries make cold calls**, knock on the doors of strangers, this eventually leads to a conversion **once out of a thousand calls**. However, when **missionaries make their first contact with a person in the home of a Mormon friend or relative of that person**, this results in conversion **50 percent** of the time." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):18]

"Nevertheless, the dynamics of the conversion process are not changed even as the absolute numbers reach a rapid growth stage along an exponential curve. **The reason is that as movements grow, their social surface expands proportionately. That is, each new member expands the size of the network of attachments between the group and potential converts**." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):20f]

"For the fact is that typically **people do not seek a faith; they encounter one through their ties to other people who already accept this faith**." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):56]

"In all the major centers of the empire were substantial settlements of **diasporan Jews who were accustomed to receiving teachers from Jerusalem**. Moreover, **the missionaries were likely to have family and friendship connection within at least some of the diasporan communities**." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):62]

"There is recent physical evidence suggesting that the **Christian and Jewish communities remained closely linked**--intertwined, even--until far later than is consistent with claims about the early and absolute break between church and synagogue." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):68]

## 22. Outreach to the "uncomfortable"

- *Marginalized*

"People are **marginalized when their membership in two groups poses a contradiction** or cross pressure such that their status in each group is lowered by their membership in another." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):52]

"...Christianity was **unusually appealing because within the Christian subculture women enjoyed a far higher status than did women in the Greco-Roman world at large.**" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):95]

"The ancient sources and modern historians agree that **primary conversion to Christianity was far more prevalent among females than among males.**" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):100]

- *Abandoned/Sick/Needy*

"As mortality mounted during each of these epidemics, **large numbers of people, especially pagans, would have lost the bonds that once might have restrained them from becoming Christians.**" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):75]

"At the height of the second great epidemic, around 260, in the Easter letter already quoted above, Dionysius wrote a lengthy tribute to the **heroic nursing efforts of local Christians, many of whom lost their lives while caring for others.**

'Most of our brother Christians 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 and ministering to them in Christ, and **with them** departed this life serenely happy; for **they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead....** The **best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen** winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom.

"Dionysius emphasized the heavy mortality of the epidemic by asserting how much happier survivors [sic] would be had they merely, like the Egyptians in the time of Moses, lost the firstborn from each house. For "there is not a house in which there is not one dead--how I wish it had been only one." But while the epidemic had not passed over the Christians, he suggests that pagans fared much worse: "Its full impact fell on the heathen. "

"Dionysius also offered an explanation of this **mortality differential.** Having noted at length how the Christian community nursed the sick and dying and even spared nothing in preparing the dead for proper burial, he wrote:

"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; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape. [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):83]



"But how much could it have mattered? Not even the best of Greco-Roman science knew anything to do to *treat* these epidemics other than to avoid all contact with those who had the disease. **So even if the Christians did obey the injunction to minister to the sick, what could they do to help?** At the risk of their own lives they could, in fact, save an immense number of lives. McNeill pointed out: **"When all normal services break down, quite elementary nursing will greatly reduce mortality. Simple provision of food and water, for instance, will allow persons who are temporarily too weak to cope for themselves to recover instead of perishing miserably"** (1976:108)...Modern medical experts believe that **conscientious nursing without any medications could cut the mortality rate by two-thirds or even more."** [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):88,89]

"...during and after the epidemic **the formation of new relationships would be increasingly biased in favor of Christians. One reason is that the nursing function is itself a major opportunity to form new bonds.** Another is that it is easier to attached to a **social network that is more rather than less intact."** [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):92f]

"Tertullian noted that members willingly gave to the church, which, unlike the pagan temples, did not spend the donations on gluttony: **'For they [the funds] are not taken thence 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 to the house; such too as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become nurslings of their confession. (*Apology* 39, 1989 ed.)"

[Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):189]

**"When you are weary of praying and do not receive an answer to your prayers to God, consider how often you have heard a poor man calling and have not listened to him...**It is not for reaching our hands to God (in the gesture of prayer) that you will be heard. Stretch forth your hands, not to God, but to the poor." [John Chrysostom, a sermon in Antioch, between 386-404, cited at [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):86]]

- *"Status inconsistency" (including the urban elite)*

"We have already seen that there were **a number of women prominently involved in the Pauline circle who exhibited the sorts of status inconsistency** what would inspire a Juvenal to eloquent indignation. There were women who headed households, who ran businesses and had independent wealth, who traveled with their own slaves and helpers." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale):71]

"Not only was there a mixture of social levels in each congregation; but also, **in each individual or category that we are able to identify there is evidence of divergent rankings in the different dimensions of status.** Thus we find Christians in the *familia caesaris*, whose members were so often among the few upwardly mobile people in the Roman Empire. We find, too, other probable freedmen or descendents of freedmen who have advanced in wealth and position, especially in the Roman colonies of Corinth and Philippi. We find wealthy artisans and traders: high in income, low in occupational prestige. We find wealthy, independent women. We find wealthy Jews. And, if we are to believe Acts, we find gentiles whose adherence to the synagogue testifies to some kind of dissonance in their relation to their society. " [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale):73]

"Although the evidence is not abundant, **we may venture the generalization that the most active and prominent members of Paul's circle are people of high status inconsistency. They are upwardly mobile; their achieved status is higher than their attributed status.**" [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale):73]



"We found that their dominant characteristic was **status inconsistency or social mobility**." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):191]

- *The discontent...*

"New religious movements mainly **draw their converts from the ranks of the religiously inactive and discontented**, and those affiliated with the most accommodated (worldly) religious communities." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):19]

"...conversion, which intends a radical shift of allegiance, a radical change of ethos and of fundamental symbols, **presupposes some kind of strong prior dissatisfaction** with the way things are." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):184]

- *The despairing...*

"In this book's closing chapters I will examine how Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the urban GrecoRoman world. In anticipation of those discussions, let me merely suggest here that **Christianity revitalized life in GrecoRoman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. 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.**" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):161]

## D. The Life of the Christian Community

### 23. Its distinctive ethos of loving community, and its self-image

"One **peculiar thing about early Christianity** was the way in which **the intimate, close-knit life of the local groups was seen to be simultaneously part of a much larger, indeed ultimately worldwide**, movement or entity. Hence we must also investigate the ways in which that trans-local sensibility was generated and reinforced." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):75]

"The Pauline letters are **unusually rich in emotional language**--joy and rejoicing, anxiety, longing...**but both the number of intensity of the affective phrases in the Pauline letters are extremely unusual.**" [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):86]

"Among the **distinctive** (though not necessarily unique) **characteristics of James** that emerge from this comparison [with non-Christian moral instruction] is the **letter's focus on a community ethos rather than simply individual behavior, on moral behavior rather than on manners, on an ethics of solidarity rather than of competition.** " [White/Yarbrough, *The Social World of the First Christians* (Fortress):195]

"In any case **Christians welcomed converts into their communities with a warmth far distinguished from the ambivalence of contemporary Jews**. Converts were **given immediately a status equal in theory to that of existing members** of the community: people were either entirely outside the Church or entirely inside it." [Goodman, *Mission and Conversion--Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford):105]

"Such a **proselytizing mission was a shocking novelty in the ancient world** The amazed reactions of Jews to the policy of making gentiles 'members of the same body' (Eph. 2:11-3:21) show that Paul was

not seen by them as simply continuing Jewish proselytizing in a special form...**Only familiarity makes us fail to appreciate the extraordinary ambition of the single apostle who invented the whole idea of a systematic conversion of the world, area by geographical area**" [Goodman, *Mission and Conversion--Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford):106]

"Here issues of doctrine must be addressed. **For something distinctive did come into the world with the development of Judeo-Christian thought: the linking of a highly social ethical code with religion.** There was nothing new in the idea that the supernatural makes behavioral demands upon humans-the gods have always wanted sacrifices and worship. Nor was there anything new in the notion that the supernatural will respond to offerings-that the gods can be induced to exchange services for sacrifices. **What was new was the notion that more than self-interested exchange relations were possible between humans and the supernatural. The Christian teaching that God loves those who love him was alien to pagan beliefs.** MacMullen has noted that from the pagan perspective "what mattered was ... the service that the deity could provide, **since a god (as Aristotle had long taught) could feel no love in response to that offered**". **Equally alien to paganism was the notion that because God loves humanity, Christians cannot please God unless they love one another.** Indeed, as God demonstrates his love through sacrifice, humans must demonstrate their love through sacrifice on behalf of *one another*. Moreover, such responsibilities were to be extended beyond the bonds of family and tribe, indeed to "all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 1:2). **These were revolutionary ideas.**" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):86]

"When the New Testament was *new*, these (Matt 25:35-40) were the norms of the Christian communities. **Tertullian claimed: '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!'**" (*Apology* 39; c.160-220AD)" [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):87]

"In my judgment, a major way in which Christianity served as a revitalization movement within the empire was in **offering a coherent culture that was entirely stripped of ethnicity. All were welcome without need to dispense with ethnic ties.** Yet, for this very reason, among Christians **ethnicity tended to be submerged as new, more universalistic, and indeed cosmopolitan, norms and customs emerged.** In this way Christianity first evaded and then overwhelmed the ethnic barrier that had prevented Judaism from serving as the basis for revitalization." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):213]

"**Wherein then lay the appeal of Christianity? It was first in the personality of the founder.** This has been doubted, because it is not stressed by the apologists. It is not stressed because it was taken for granted: no need to repeat in the second century what was in the gospels. **That the person of Christ was central is seen in the critiques of Celsus and Porphyry, in the exaltation of Apollonius by Philostratus and Hierocles as a counterblast, in the heroic witness of a Polycarp: 'I have been his servant for eighty-six years and he has done me no wrong; how can I blaspheme my King who saved me? It was secondly in the way of love revealed, in the witness of community (koinonia), in a fellowship which took in Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women, and whose solid practicality in their care for the needy won the admiration even of Lucian. 'How these Christians love one another!'** was a respectful affirmation. There was a curious gaiety about the Christians; years later it was **this warmth which attracted Augustine. The women were a particular power:** Mithras, for example, did not admit them. It was thirdly in the very strength of conviction, **in the simple directness which cut through the multitudinous choices offered by the ancient world** above all in the courage which faced martyrdom without flinching and wrung a grudging recognition from Celsus and Marcus Aurelius, and secured the conversion of Justin and Tertullian. It was finally in a message of hope **for all, for from the first resurrection of Christ had meant for his followers a certainty of victory over death.** As Nock put it pungently, 'it was left to Christianity to democratize mystery'" [Ferguson, *Religions of the Roman Empire* (Cornell):125ff]

## 24. The powerful sense of belonging

"It is evident, too, that **Paul and the other leaders of the mission worked actively to inculcate the notion of a universal brotherhood of the believers in Messiah Jesus.** The letters themselves, the

messengers who brought them, and the repeated visits to the local assemblies by Paul and his associates **all emphasized this interrelatedness.**"[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):109]

"The **unity of the 'new human,' Christ**, the Image of the Creator, was **set in contrast to just those oppositions that locate a person in society.** In short, **the unity of the initiates is contrasted with social structure in all its complexity.**"[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):166f]

"We have also seen a social movement, comprising small groups scattered in cities of diverse local character, experiencing conflict within and without, but also **strong emotional bonding**, and linked with one another and with a highly mobile group of leaders in several complicated ways. "[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):190]

"May we further guess that **the sorts of status inconsistency we observed--**independent women with moderate wealth, Jews with wealth in a pagan society, freedmen with skill and money but stigmatized by origin, and so on--**brought with them not only anxiety but also loneliness, in a society in which social position was important and usually rigid?** Would, then, **the intimacy of the Christian groups become a welcome refuge, the emotion-charged language of family and affection and the image of a caring, personal God powerful antidotes**, while the master symbol of the crucified savior crystallized a believable picture of the way the world seemed really to work?"[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):191]

"...just as the **weakness of paganism lay in its inability to generate belonging, the fundamental strength of an exclusive faith is its strength as a group.**

E. R. Dodds has put this as well as anyone:

'A Christian congregation was from the first **a community in a much fuller sense than any corresponding group** of Isiac or Mithraist devotees. **Its members were bound together not only by common rites but by a common way of life....** Love of one's neighbour is not an exclusively Christian virtue, but in [this] period Christians appear to have practiced it much more effectively than any other group. The Church provided the essentials of social security... But **even more important, I suspect, than these material benefits was the sense of belonging** which the Christian community could give. [cited in Stark]

## 25. Its intimacy, unity, and egalitarian nature

"The Pauline communities were not rigidly structured hierarchical organizations but were **characterized by *communitas*. *Communitas* refers to patterns of relationship which are marked by a high degree of participation on the part of its members and a strong sense of belonging** (see Sampley). They are antihierarchical brotherhoods which value spontaneity and are loose on structures. The pattern of worship (1 Cor 14:26–33; Col 3:15–16); the emphasis on every believer receiving gifts of the Spirit (Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:1–30; Eph 4:7–13); and **the command to accept one another and practice hospitality** (Rom 12:13; 15:17; cf. 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10; Tit 1:8) combine with the radical teaching that faith in Christ completely **undermines social distinctions** (1 Cor 7:21–22; Gal 3:28; Eph 6:5–9) to paint a portrait of Paul's churches as having the typical traits of *communitas*...**No group can exist for long on a level of pure *communitas* and some structural elements are evident in the Pauline community from the beginning.** Elders and deacons were appointed. Worship was to be conducted "in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor 14:40). E. Käsemann has pointed out how the gifts of the Spirit contain an implicit ordering according to the use made of them by the body. It is likely that the wealthier householders who hosted the church would have played some inevitable leadership role. Nonetheless, in spite of any qualifications, Paul's communities were predominantly characterized by *communitas*, especially when compared with the more structured worship of the Jewish synagogues." [Tidball, "Social Settings of Mission Churches", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP)]

"Among the distinctive (though not necessarily unique) characteristics of James that emerge from this comparison [with non-Christian moral instruction] is the letter's focus on **a community ethos rather than simply individual behavior**, on moral behavior rather than on manners, on **an ethics of solidarity**

**rather than of competition.** " [White/Yarbrough, *The Social World of the First Christians* (Fortress):195]

**"Central to this sense of community and belonging**, one common to all exclusive religious groups, **were the strong bonds between the clergy and the rank and file** (Banks 1980). **You did not approach Christian clergy to purchase religious goods, but to be guided in fulfilling the Christian life.** Nor were the clergy distanced from their flocks--**they were not an initiated elite holding back arcane secrets, but teachers and friends**, selected, as Tertullian explained, "not by purchase, but by established character" (Apology 39, 1989 ed.). " [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):207]

**"In my judgment, a major way in which Christianity served as a revitalization movement within the empire was in offering a coherent culture that was entirely stripped of ethnicity. All were welcome without need to dispense with ethnic ties.** Yet, for this very reason, among Christians ethnicity tended to be submerged as new, more universalistic, and indeed cosmopolitan, norms and customs emerged. In this way Christianity first evaded and then overwhelmed the ethnic barrier that had prevented Judaism from serving as the basis for revitalization." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):213]

**"...the theme of the poverty of Christ (and of this disciples, the Apostles) was put forward so as to rebut the claims of the rich, of the powerful, and of the educated to enjoy a special relationship with God.** They insisted that **Christ's lowly social status had been deliberately chosen by Him**, so that no human being should have any doubt as to the direct source of His power. It was an utterly supernatural authority. **It owed nothing whatsoever to human structures of power, prestige, or culture.** To be born among those who had no such advantages, and to choose his first disciples from among such persons, ensured that the success of His message would be recognized to be utterly miraculous, as patently coming from God alone. **Rather than be born in Great Rome, as the son of an emperor or of some great legislator, Christ had been born...in an inconspicuous country, in an unimportant village, to a poor virgin, so that He should draw all humanity to him noiselessly and without display...**" [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):93]

**"[W]e have to remind ourselves that our Lord Jesus Christ came not only for the salvation of the poor but also of the rich, not only of commoners but also of kings. He refused all the same to choose kings as disciples, refused rich people, refused the nobly born, refused the learned; but instead he chose poor, uneducated fishermen,** in whom his grace would shine through all the more clearly ... And if he had first called a king, the king would have said it was his rank that was chosen; if he had first called a learned man, he would have said it was his learning that was chosen. **Those who were being called to lowliness and humility would have to be called by lowly and humble persons.**" (Augustine, cited at [Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Brandeis):93])

## 26. Frequency of communication (between groups/leaders)

**"It is evident, too, that Paul and the other leaders of the mission worked actively to inculcate the notion of a universal brotherhood** of the believers in Messiah Jesus. **The letters themselves, the messengers who brought them, and the repeated visits to the local assemblies by Paul and his associates** all emphasized this interrelatedness." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale):109]

**"We have also seen a social movement, comprising small groups scattered in cities of diverse local character, experiencing conflict within and without, but also strong emotional bonding, and linked with one another and with a highly mobile group of leaders in several complicated ways.**" [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale):190]

**"The connections among the local cells are, relative to size, much stronger** than those among Jewish communities of the Diaspora." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale):190]

**"From the end of the first century onwards the leadership of traveling missionaries, teachers, and prophets** probably gave way gradually to the leadership of local bishops. But it should be noticed that **these bishops themselves, despite their attachment to local churches, maintained the habit of traveling and visiting other communities...**It seems that **leaders who moved from church to church,**

**to a greater or lesser extent, are a constant feature of the early Christian movement** in the first century and a half of its existence." [Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians--Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Eerdmans):36,37]

## 27. Its problems:

### *Normal group transition/definition issues*

Stages of small group development: forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):103ff]

**Storming**: "Resentment and hostilities erupt among group members with differing needs. Each member attempts to persuade the others to adopt group goals that will fulfill his or her needs. The behavior of group members towards one another is assertive, and their commitment to the group is higher than it was before." [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):104]

**Norming**: "The norming stage is marked by interpersonal conflict resolution in favour of mutually agreed upon patterns of behavior." [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):104]

"The **problems** addressed in the Pauline corpus look to **storming and norming**." [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):105]

"**Paul thinks the Corinthians are far too comfortable in their social integration**, and he spends much of the letter **erecting barriers** where the Corinthians presently see none." [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):124]

### *Conflicts in leadership models*

"The **head of the household, by normal expectations of the society, would exercise some authority over the group and would have some legal responsibility** for it." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale):76]

"...but **some members quickly claim to have more Spirit than others**. Paul does not want to allow that claim" [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (Yale):90]

"According to Hebrews 13:7, the function of the 'leaders' consisted in preaching the word of God. From this fact they may be characterized as **charismatically endowed leaders whose authority derived exclusively from the word they proclaimed and whose precedence was promoted by preaching alone**." [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):.220]

### *The distributed nature of the early church, physically and culturally*

"The impression conveyed by Paul's greetings in Romans 16:3-15 is of a number of small household fellowships **not in close relationship with one another**. It would have been natural for Jewish and Gentile Christians to have met in separate households for their common meal or Eucharist. **One of the purposes of Paul's greetings may have been to reinforce a sense of unity at a time when the several house churches enjoyed little interrelationship with one another**." [Donfried/Richardson, *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Eerdmans):213]

### *Social 'baggage' -- a normal part of 'progressive sanctification'*



"...the church, like the larger society, is stratified. The conflicts in the congregation are in large part conflicts between people of different strata and, within individuals, between the expectations of a hierarchical society and those of an egalitarian community." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):53]

"Both the private associations and the Christian groups also depended to some extent on the beneficence of wealthier persons who acted as patrons...The client *collegium* would reward its patron with encomiastic inscriptions, honorary titles, wreaths, perhaps even a status--and with effective control of the club's life, for there were no strong countervailing powers in the association. **In this respect, as we have seen, the Christian congregation was quite different, and the patrons may have had reason to feel somewhat slighted. Paul even admonishes the Corinthians to show a little more respect for such people, such as Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15-18).**" [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):78]

"The wealthier members of the church are hosts of the gatherings and probably provide the food for all. Quite in accord with the expectations in many ancient clubs and with the practice often followed at banquet when dependents of a patron were invited, **the hosts provide both greater quantity and better quality of food and drink to their social equals than to participants of lower status ....Paul's response, Theissen suggests, is a compromise, which asks that the wealthy have their private meal at home, so that in the Lord's Supper the norm of equality can prevail.**" [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):159]

## E. The conversion experience of the individual

### 28. Conversion dynamics

Initiation involves three movements: **separation, transition, reaggregation** [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):157]

"Hence at the bottom of every group is the sequence: **aware--share--compare--declare.**" [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):99]

"In turn, those who created Christian groups **believed** not only that something was amiss with Israel and the cosmos, but also **that something could readily be done to improve matters. Their assessment was rooted in the resurrection of Jesus.**" [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):101]

"Judaism spread primarily through migration and procreation. **Proselytizing mission was, on the other hand, crucial to the spread of Christianity. The early Christians, moreover, did not have a central cultic, economic and political institution comparable to the Temple in Jerusalem, which attracted outsiders.** Political stability, if not piety, required respect for the Temple of the Jews. **Economic reasons** for affiliating to Jewish communities, and thereby gaining access to the economic network which connect them, **would not have applied to Christian groups, at least during the earliest period of Christianity.**" [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):129]

### 29. Resocialization

"For the poor, moreover, the **Christian community provided a more than adequate substitute for the sort of friendly association, including common meals, that one might otherwise have sought in clubs, guilds, or cultic associations.** For an Erastus, if indeed he was the rising public servant who in a few years would be *aedile* in charge of all the Corinthian meat-markets, a restriction of his social intercourse to fellow Christians would mean a drastic reduction of his horizons and a disruption of his career." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):69]

"Whatever else is involved, **the image of the initiate being adopted as God's child (at baptism) and thus receiving a new family of human brothers and sisters is a vivid way of portraying what a**



**modern sociologist might call the resocialization of conversion.** The **natural kinship structure** into which the person has been born and which previously defined his place and connections with the society is here **supplanted by a new set of relationships.**"[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):88]

"...naturally find communication with one another easier and more satisfying than communication with those who do not share their way of seeing. Furthermore, unless some countervailing factors work to divide the group, **the more frequently and intensively the members interact, the more strongly these common, distinctive patters of belief will be reinforced.**"[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):91]

"One means of **promoting the isolation of the group was the creation of institutions to perform services for which its members would otherwise have relied upon municipal or other outside organizations**...For many members, especially those of the humbler social strata, **the Christian assemblies and meals provided a more than adequate substitute for benefits, both physical and social, that they might otherwise have obtained from membership in *collegia* of various sorts or from the various municipal festivals.**"[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):103f]

"The unity of the 'new human,' Christ, the Image of the Creator, was set in contrast to just those oppositions that locate a person in society. In short, the unity of the initiates is **contrasted with social structure in all its complexity.**"[Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):166f]

"**Three independent but overlapping aspects of 'conversion'** are discernible: (a) **conviction/acknowledgement of divinity**, essentially cerebral but potentially involving worship; (b) **conformity/observance**, involving practice, either negative or positive, of the Law; and (c) **socialization, involving affiliation and integration into the community.**" [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):129]

### 30. Group identity/boundary establishment (sometimes through external conflict)

"Paul thinks the Corinthians are far too comfortable in their social integration, and he spends much of the letter **erecting barriers** where the Corinthians presently see none." [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):124]

"**Conflict** may have an adverse effect on the survival and development of groups **but**, providing the members of the group are given satisfactory explanations that legitimate their position, **it may be highly constructive for the group's life.** So it was for the Pauline churches. Opposition was their recurring experience and consequently Paul frequently taught or wrote to explain why it should have been so (Acts 14:22; Phil 1:12–14, 29–30; 1 Thess 2:14–20; 3:4; 2 Thess 1:4–10; 2 Tim 3:10–14). **The existence of conflict can strengthen a group by defining its boundaries**, disciplining its members, bonding them together in more intense relationships against a common enemy, demanding total adherence and heightening the sense members have of belonging. As well as energizing a group, it calls forth creative leadership and even makes a group attractive to nonmembers. **All this is evident in the churches of Paul.**" [Tidball, "Social Settings of Mission Churches", in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP)]

"**Sacrifice and stigma** mitigate the free-rider problems faced by religious groups." [Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton):177]

### 31. Reinterpretation of the past

"We can group the various clusters of metaphors under four headings: **bondage** and liberation, **guilt** and justification, **estrangement** and reconciliation, **deformity** and transformation." [Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*(Yale):184]

"Biographical reconstruction...refers to the process whereby **the convert reinterprets his or her past in terms of his or her present understanding**..." [Esler, *Modelling Early Christianity* (Routledge):134]