

What Really Matters: Insights from Church History

October 13 Early Church 50-313
The Remarkable “Success” of the Early

Christian Church **1000** 40CE
 7,000,000 300CE

Why did so many people in the Roman Empire become Christians? Why did we become Christians? What does it mean to be a Christian?



The Seven Revolutions

1. A Revolution of Religion: God is Love
 2. A Revolution of Death: The Conquest of the Last Enemy
 3. A Revolution of the Person: The Invention of Human Dignity
 4. A Revolution in the Home: The New Idea of Family
 5. A Revolution of Community: Love Your Neighbor
 6. A Revolution of Work: How Labor Became Holy
 7. A Revolution of the State: Religious Freedom
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It is interesting...When we ask the question: Why did people in the Roman Empire embrace Christianity?

We discover it wasn't because they simply heard the message of Jesus and believed.

That did happen... but often what first attracted them was not the "religion" per se but the lives those who followed Jesus.

In other words it was the 3rd 4th 5th and 6th revolutions that caught their attention. Then the 1st and second made sense.

A Revolution of the Person: The Invention of Human Dignity

for every person, including the elderly, the very young, women, the infirm and “slaves”

A Revolution in the Home: The New Idea of Family

Not simply the man and his property

A Revolution of Community: Love Your Neighbor

No matter who they are

A Revolution of Work: How Labor Became Holy

All work is not only valuable but respected: including physical labor

We are equally forbidden to wish ill, to do ill, to speak ill, to think ill of everyone. The thing we must not do to the Emperor, we must not do to anyone else.

TERTULLIAN

2nd/3rd C
Apologist

These Christians walk in humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them. They love one another. They despise not the widow. They grieve not the orphan. He that has distributes liberally to him that has not. If they see a stranger they bring him under their roof and they rejoice over him as if they were their own brother and if there is a man that is poor and needy and they have not an abundance of necessities they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.

ARISTIDES (2nd Century Roman historian.)

The earnestness with which the people of this religion help one another in their needs is incredible. They spare themselves nothing for this end. Their first lawgiver put it into their heads that they were all brethren.

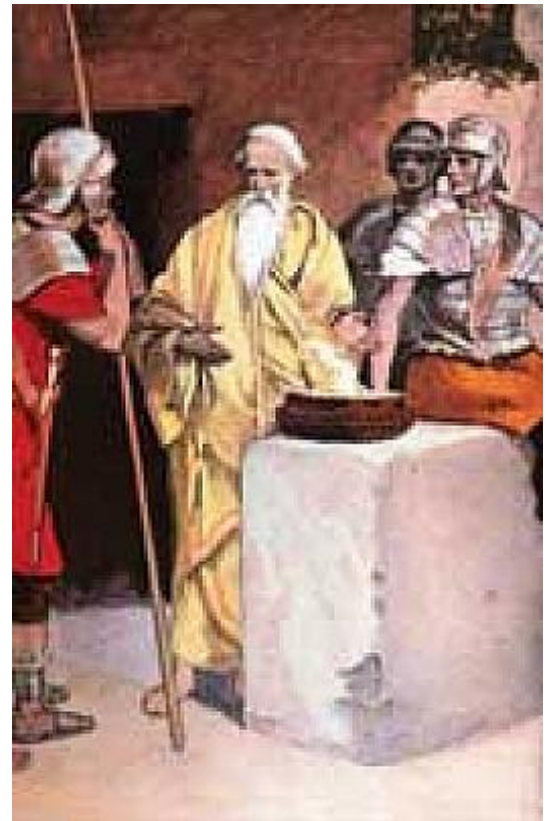
LUCIAN (2nd Century Roman Satirist)

Perhaps the most courageous evidence of Christian faith
witness of the Martyrs

By 325, an estimated 7 million **were Christians** with
as **many** as 2 million **killed** for the faith.

Accused of “atheism” and “treason” for not worshipping
the Roman Gods; and sometimes of cannibalism for
eating flesh and drinking blood in their Communion
services.

Bishop Polycarp (69-156)
Feeding his captors
before he was killed



Perpetua (187-203)
and her slave Felicity

Revolution of Religion: God is Love

Roman Religion

A positive word about the Romans... common grace

Many Gods...Goddesses.....

Venus



Jupiter



Many religions... “inclusive”... perhaps a good thing but... the activities of these gods did not bring order and peace. They reflected the tensions in society. Each God competing with the others for ultimate control.

There were some who resisted these destructive patterns Roman religion but they were clearly in the minority.

Christianity

One God... “three forms” Creator, Savior, Advocate
working together

The story of the Hebrew People and Jesus

From **chaos**, to **order**, to **justice** to **love**

chaos to order— the Jews move into the “promised
land”

order to justice— the 10 Commandments

justice to LOVE —Jesus, the Messiah, comes to
save God’s people...and the world

...but not with the “power” they were
expecting (like that the Roman Gods)...but with
the power of **forgiveness**

*Father **forgive** them they know not what they
do*

The power of forgiveness fulfills the promise in
Jeremiah 31:33, 34

*I will put my law in their minds and write it on
their hearts... I will **forgive** their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more...*

Once forgiven... a whole new life is possible...

a peace that passes understanding Phil 4:7
a love that transcends knowledge Eph 3:19

a fourth form of love...

eros, philia, storge, AGAPE

...loving even your enemies

Worship: The Sacrament of Holy Communion
...with God

“Do this in remembrance of me...” (Jesus’ sacrificial
act of forgiveness)

Weekly in “house”
churches informal...
“real” meal in which
people in the
community were
invited.

Evangelistic.



