

Lecture 2-There Went Forth A Stream: The Growth of the Christian Church

Those early Christians were a small minority, often situated on the periphery of public life, but they did not regard their mission as a private affair—it had to do with the transformation of the world.

John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy: A Theology for a Just World Order*

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Matthew 5: 5

Assigned Reading

The Story of Christianity, chapters 2-4

Key Terms

Social movement, geographical movement

Objectives

- Locate where Christianity spread during the second century
- Explain why Christianity spread during the second century

Class Prayer

“Grant unto us, Lord, that we may set our hope on Thy name...and open the eyes of our hearts, that we may know Thee.”

“We beseech Thee, Lord and Master, to be our help and succour. Save those among us who are in tribulation; have mercy on the lowly; lift up the fallen; show Thyself to those in need; heal the sick; turn again the wanderers of Thy people; feed the hungry; ransom our prisoners; raise up the weak; comfort the faint-hearted. Let all nations know that Thou art God alone, and that Jesus Christ is Thy Son, and that we are Thy people and the sheep of Thy pasture.”

“We praise Thee who art able to do these and better things than these, through Jesus Christ the High Priest and Guardian of our souls, through whom be glory and majesty to Thee, both now and throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.”

Clement of Rome

There Went Forth A Stream: The Growth of the Christian Church

I. The Spread of Christianity

A. The cultural movement

1. Judaism (Age 1)
2. The gentile world (Age 2)

B. The social movement

1. Common people
2. The “higher classes”
3. Clement of Alexandria: “What Kind of Rich Person Can Be Saved?”

C. The geographical movement

1. To the West
 - a. By the end of the 1st century: eastern Mediterranean
 - b. By 185: also Gaul, Germania, Spain, and North Africa
2. To the East
 - a. India: Apostle Thomas and Alexandrian scholar Pantaeenus
 - b. Syria: Edessa and the kingdom of Osrhoene

“[The Lord] was zealous that those things should be known which through His

grace have been given to us.
 For there went forth a stream, and it became a river great and broad...
 And it filled everything.
 Then all the thirsty upon the earth drank.

Blessed therefore are the ministers of that drink,
 Who have been entrusted with His water.
 They have refreshed parched lips..."

Odes of Solomon 6: 6-15

- c. Arbela and the kingdom of Adiabene (near ancient Nineveh) (Tatian the Assyrian)
- d. Bactria (Afghanistan)

II. Why Did Christianity Spread?

A. The power of the Gospel

1. The religious mix

- a. The _____ pagan religions
- b. The _____ religions
- c. The _____
- d. The _____ cult

2. The exclusiveness of Judaism and Christianity

"Into this tumultuous world of gods and cults, uncertainties and fears, came Christianity with its savior god and his resurrection, its emphasis on redemption through faith, its utter certainty about life in the hereafter for those cleansed of sin, its assertion that it alone knew the way to salvation, and the readiness of many of its adherents to accept martyrdom." Chaim Potok, *Wanderings*, p. 286

B. The witness of Christians

1. The role of the Apostles

2. Other Christians

- a. By word ("one loving heart setting another on fire")
- b. By deed ("See, they say, how they love one another. How they are ready even to die for one another." Tertullia
 "It helped the pagan mired in a morass of gods to find a path to meaningful faith by offering him one irrevocable choice to salvation, and it showed how the community of a Christian congregation could be an effective embrace against the bitter chill of urban loneliness felt by the peasant who had come to the city seeking work, by the lonely soldier released from the army, the freed slave, the ruined landowner, the pensioner whose fixed income was being devoured by inflation, Christian philanthropy toward strangers, its impulse toward mutual concern, its care of the dead, its acceptance of every person no matter from what tribe, city, or countryside—these were the attractions of the early church to the masses of mankind." Chaim Potok, *Wanderings*, p. 289
- c. By death ("Blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"—Tertullian)

Questions for Consideration (questions may or may not be on the lectures)

1. What was the status of children in the early church?
2. What happened to Paul?

For Further Study

Walls, Andrew F. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*.

1996.

One of the most important books of Christian history of the 1990s. By a Scottish mission historian and missionary.

Read Clement's *What Kind of Rich Person Can Be Saved?* What do think of Clement's introduction? Is he right in his interpretation of Jesus' command to the rich young ruler? Of the disciples' response? What important lessons about generosity in giving does this early church sermon contain? Notice the expression "soberly insane." Do you think that a rich person would know how to be saved after hearing Clement's sermon?

Support Chaim Potok's statement regarding the spread of Christianity with social and historical facts presented in this lecture.