Flourishing in a hostile world

Lee Gatiss
Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (NIV2011)
• Persecution helps the church to grow.
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• Key individuals played a part
• Persecution helps the church to grow.

• The gospel broke boundaries

• The Lord’s hand was with them

• The word does the work

• Key individuals played a part

• They applied their faith in love and good deeds
Table 1.1
Christian Growth Projected at 40 Percent per Decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Christians</th>
<th>Percent of Population&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>0.0017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>0.0023</td>
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<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>7,530</td>
<td>0.0126</td>
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<tr>
<td>150</td>
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<td>200</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>250</td>
<td>1,171,356</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>6,299,832</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350</td>
<td>33,882,008</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Based on an estimated population of 60 million.
NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS FROM 20 CE TO 400 CE
- Evangelistic
- Exclusive
- Entire life
- Eternity-focused
- Endurance of the martyrs
- Embrace of community
- Excluding
Evangelistic
Evangelistic

40% growth per decade
Evangelistic

40% growth per decade

Every church of about 100 people making 3 or 4 converts per year
Evangelistic

40% growth per decade

every church of about 100 people making 3 or 4 converts per year

Pax Romana
Evangelistic

40% growth per decade

every church of about 100 people making 3 or 4 converts per year

Pax Romana

Common language
Evangelistic

40% growth per decade
every church of about 100 people
making 3 or 4 converts per year

Pax Romana

Common language

Jewish diaspora
- Evangelistic
- Exclusive
Evangelistic

Exclusive

“the inflexible, and… intolerant zeal of the Christians.”
Evangelistic
Exclusive
Entire life
• Evangelistic
• Exclusive
• Entire life
• Eternity-focused
‘Christianity is supposed to be not so much about life AFTER death as life BEFORE it; quality of life right here, right now, of which poverty and injustice rob so many.’

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Eternity-focused
- Evangelistic
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- Entire life
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- **Endurance of the martyrs**

![Graph showing the number of Christians from 20 CE to 400 CE](image_url)
Evangelistic
Exclusive
Entire life
Eternity-focused
Endurance of the martyrs
Evangelistic

Exclusive

Entire life

Eternity-focused

Endurance of the martyrs

Embrace of community
• Evangelistic
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• Embrace of community

Rodney Stark
“Paganism failed to develop the kind of voluntary system of good works that Christians had been constructing for more than three centuries.”

“Paganism lacked the religious ideas that would have made such organised efforts plausible.”

Embrace of community
- Evangelistic
- Exclusive
- Entire life
- Eternity-focused
- Endurance of the martyrs
- Embrace of community
- Excluding
Drive out the recalcitrantly immoral and avoid charlatans in the church (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Timothy 3)

Discern between the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist, and do not welcome those who bring false teaching (1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 9-10)

Jesus commends churches for not tolerating wicked people who claim to be apostles but are not (Rev 2:2)

He commands them to repent quickly if they harbour those who teach false doctrine or immoral lifestyles (Rev 2:14-16, 20)
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“For what if any harbour in the sea shall begin to be mischievous and dangerous to ships, by the breach of its defences; do not the navigators direct their ships to other neighbouring ports where there is a safe and practicable entrance, and a secure station?

Or if, on the road, any inn should begin to be beset and occupied by robbers, so that whoever should enter would be caught by the attack of those who lie in wait there; do not the travellers, as soon as this its character is discovered, seek other houses of entertainment on the road, which shall be safer, where the lodging is trustworthy, and the inns safe for the travellers?

And this ought now to be the case with us, dearest brother, that we should receive to us with ready and kindly humanity our brethren, who, tossed on the rocks of Marcian [Marcianus of Arles, a Novatian heretic], are seeking the secure harbours of the Church.”

— Cyprian of Carthage (Epistle 66.3)
“pertinaciously contending with one another about matters of small or scarcely the least importance.”

“Is it right on account of insignificant and vain contentions between you about words, that brethren should be set in opposition against brethren; and that the honourable communion should be distracted by unhallowed dissension, through our striving with one another respecting things so unimportant, and by no means essential?”

It was an “an insignificant subject of controversy.”

Emperor Constantine pushing for “Good disagreement”
I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ,
his only Son our Lord.
He was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of the Father.
From there he shall come again
to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.
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the holy catholic church,  
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the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and of all things, visible and invisible.  
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only begotten Son of God,  
begotten of the Father before all ages,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one being with the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven.  
He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit  
of the virgin Mary, and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.  
He suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.  
He spoke through the prophets.  
I believe one catholic, and apostolic church,  
and I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.  
I look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.
Athanasius said we must be clear on truth, even if it excludes.
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“Immediately on his arrival in Egypt, Athanasius displaced those whom he knew to be attached to Arianism, and placed the government of the Church and the confession of the Nicaean council in the hands of those whom he approved, and he exhorted them to hold to this with earnestness. It was said at that time, that, when he was travelling through other countries, he effected the same change, if he happened to visit churches which were under the Arians. He was certainly accused of having dared to perform the ceremony of ordination in cities where he had no right to do so.”
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Christianity is said to have “triumphed” in the Roman Empire when it reached about 10% around 312 AD or 56% of the population around 350 AD.

The last UK census showed that of our population (around the same size as the Roman Empire in total), more than 59% ticked “Christian” as their religion.

Why is that not considered successful?