



# The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries

By Rodney Stark

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This "fresh, blunt, and highly persuasive account of how the West was won—for Jesus" (*Newsweek*) is now available in paperback. Stark's provocative report challenges conventional wisdom and finds that Christianity's astounding dominance of the Western world arose from its offer of a better, more secure way of life.

"Compelling reading" (*Library Journal*) that is sure to "generate spirited argument" (*Publishers Weekly*), this account of Christianity's remarkable growth within the Roman Empire is the subject of much fanfare. "Anyone who has puzzled over Christianity's rise to dominance...must read it." says Yale University's Wayne A. Meeks, for *The Rise of Christianity* makes a compelling case for startling conclusions. Combining his expertise in social science with historical evidence, and his insight into contemporary religion's appeal, Stark finds that early Christianity attracted the privileged rather than the poor, that most early converts were women or marginalized Jews—and ultimately "that Christianity was a success because it proved those who joined it with a more appealing, more assuring, happier, and perhaps longer life" (Andrew M. Greeley, University of Chicago).

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

"Stark finds that Christians prospered the old-fashioned way: by providing a better, happier and more secure way of life . . . In the end, Stark concludes, Christians 'revitalized' the Roman Empire." -- Kenneth Woodward, "Newsweek""Stark uses contemporary social-scientific data about why people join new religious movements and how religions recruit members to investigate the formative history of Christianity . . . ["The Rise of Christianity" will] generate spirited argument." -- "Publishers Weekly""Compelling reading . . . highly recommended." -- "Library Journal""This book raises, simply and brilliantly, just the kinds of questions anyone concerned with early Christianity should ask." -- "The Christian Century""Anyone who has puzzled over Christianity's rise to dominance in the Roman Empire . . . must read [this book]. Here is theoretical brashness combined with disarming common sense, a capacious curiosity, and a most uncommon ability to tell a complicated story in simple prose." -- Wayne Meeks, Yale University"A provocative, insightful, challenging account of the rise of Christianity." -- Andrew M. Greeley, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago

### **From the Publisher**

"Compelling reading" (*Library Journal*) that is sure to "generate spirited argument" (*Publishers Weekly*) , this account of Christianity's remarkable growth within the Roman Empire is already the subject of much fanfare. "Anyone who has puzzled over Christianity's rise to dominance... must read it," says Yale University's Wayne A. Meeks, for *The Rise of Christianity* makes a compelling case for startling conclusions. Combining his expertise in social science with historical evidence and his insight into contemporary religion's appeal, Stark finds that early Christianity attracted the privileged rather than the poor, that most early converts were women or marginalized Jews -- and ultimately "that Christianity was a success because it proved those who joined it with a more appealing, more assuring, happier, and perhaps longer life" (Andrew M. Greely, University of Chicago).

### **From the Inside Flap**

The idea that Christianity started as a clandestine movement among the poor is a widely accepted notion. Yet it is one of many myths that must be discarded if we are to understand just how a tiny messianic movement on the edge of the Roman Empire became the dominant faith of Western civilization. In a fast-paced, highly readable book that addresses beliefs as well as historical facts, Rodney Stark brings a sociologist's perspective to bear on the puzzle behind the success of early Christianity. He comes equipped not only with the logic and methods of social science but also with insights gathered firsthand into why people convert and how new religious groups recruit members. He digs deep into the historical evidence on many issues--such as the social background of converts, the mission to the Jews, the status of women in the church, the role of martyrdom--to provide a vivid and unconventional account of early Christianity.

The author plots the most plausible curve of Christian growth from the year 40 to 300. By the time of Constantine, Christianity had become a considerable force, with growth patterns very similar to those of modern-day successful religious movements. An unusual number of Christian converts, for example, came from the educated, cosmopolitan classes. Because it offered a new perspective on familiar concepts and was not linked to ethnicity, Christianity had a large following among persons seeking to assimilate into the dominant culture, mainly Hellenized Jews. The oversupply of women in Christian communities--due partly

to the respect and protection they received--led to intermarriages with pagans, hence more conversions, and to a high fertility rate.

Stark points out, too, the role played by selflessness and faith. Amidst the epidemics, fires, and other disasters that beleaguered Greco-Roman cities, Christian communities were a stronghold of mutual aid, which resulted in a survival rate far greater than that of the pagans. In the meantime, voluntary martyrdom, especially a generation after the death of Christ, reinforced the commitment of the Christian rank and file. What Stark ultimately offers is a multifaceted portrait of early Christianity, one that appeals to practical reasoning, historical curiosity, and personal reflection.

## **Users Review**

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