

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF EVANGELISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH (100-300 A.D.)

Philip Schaff

Merival “traces the conversion of the Roman empire chiefly to four causes: 1) the external evidence of the apparent fulfillment of recorded prophecy and miracles to the truth of Christianity; 2) the internal evidence of satisfying the acknowledged need of a Redeemer and Sanctifier; 3) the goodness and holiness manifested in the lives and deaths of the primitive believers; 4) the temporal success of Christianity under Constantine, which ‘turned the mass of mankind, as with a sweeping revolution, to the rising sun of revealed truth in Christ Jesus.’”

“It is a remarkable fact that after the days of the apostles no names of great missionaries are mentioned till the opening of the middle ages. . . .There were no missionary societies, no missionary institutions, no organized efforts in the ante-Nicene age; and yet in less than 300 years from the death of St. John the whole population of the Roman empire which then represented the civilized world was nominally christianized.”

“Christianity once established was its own best missionary. It grew naturally from within. It attracted people by its very presence. It was a light shining in darkness and illuminating the darkness. And while there were no professional missionaries devoting their whole life to this specific work, every congregation was a missionary society, and every Christian believer a missionary, inflamed by the love of Christ to convert his fellow-men. The example had been set by Jerusalem and Antioch, and by the brethren who, after the martyrdom of Stephen, ‘were scattered abroad and went about preaching the Word’ (Acts 8:4; 11:19). Justin Martyr [c. 140 A.D.] was converted by a venerable old man whom he met walking on the shore of the sea. ‘Every Christian labour,’ says Tertullian [c. 190 A.D.] ‘both finds out God and manifests Him, though Plato affirms that it is not easy to discover the Creator, and difficult when He is found to make Him known to all.’ Celsus [philosopher who attacked Christianity, c. 180 A.D.] scoffingly remarks that fullers and workers in wool and leather, rustic and ignorant persons, were the most zealous propagators of Christianity, and brought it first to women and children. Women and slaves introduced it into the home-circle. It is the glory of the gospel that it is preached to the poor and by the poor to make them rich. Origen [c. 225 A.D.] informs us that the city churches sent their missionaries to the villages. . . . Every Christian told his neighbor, the laborer to his fellow-laborer, the slave to his fellow-slave, the servant to his master and mistress, the story of his conversion, as a mariner tells the story of [his] rescue from shipwreck.”

The gospel was propagated chiefly by living, preaching and by personal intercourse; to a considerable extent also through the sacred Scriptures, which were early propagated and translated into various tongues. . . .”

Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library
(http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/2_ch01.htm).

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