

rodney stark rise of christianity

Rodney Stark and the Rise of Christianity: Understanding a Sociological Perspective

rodney stark rise of christianity offers a fascinating lens through which we can explore how one of the world's major religions grew from a small Jewish sect into a dominant spiritual force. Stark, a prominent sociologist of religion, provides a compelling and data-driven narrative that challenges traditional explanations centered solely on faith and miracles. Instead, his analysis dives deep into social dynamics, cultural contexts, and human behavior, making his work essential for anyone interested in religious history, sociology, or the early Christian movement.

Who Is Rodney Stark?

Before diving into his influential work on Christianity, it's helpful to understand who Rodney Stark is. A professor of sociology at Baylor University, Stark has dedicated much of his career to studying religion through a sociological framework. His research spans diverse religious traditions, but he is perhaps best known for applying rigorous sociological and historical methods to understand the growth of Christianity. Unlike many traditional theological approaches, Stark's work emphasizes the social mechanisms and rational choices behind religious conversions and community formation.

Key Insights from Rodney Stark's Analysis of Christianity's Growth

Rodney Stark's exploration of the rise of Christianity is most famously encapsulated in his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, where he offers a fresh perspective on how Christianity expanded in the first few centuries CE. Here are some of the core themes that make his approach stand out:

The Role of Social Networks

One of Stark's most significant contributions is highlighting the importance of social networks in spreading Christianity. Early Christians didn't rely on mass media or political power; they grew because believers actively shared their faith within their families, neighborhoods, and workplaces. Stark points out that conversion was often a relational process, where trust and personal connection played crucial roles. This grassroots growth contrasts with the idea that Christianity spread primarily through coercion or imperial

endorsement.

Christianity's Appeal to Women and the Marginalized

Stark also notes how Christianity's inclusive nature attracted groups often marginalized in Roman society, especially women. Unlike many contemporary religious and social systems, Christianity offered dignity, community, and support to women, slaves, and the poor. This inclusivity created a strong sense of belonging and support, making Christianity appealing beyond mere doctrine.

Practical Benefits and Ethical Teachings

Early Christianity's emphasis on charity, ethical behavior, and mutual aid also helped it thrive. Stark argues that the Christian community's willingness to care for the sick, support widows and orphans, and provide social safety nets made the religion attractive. In times of plague, famine, or social instability, Christians' care for one another demonstrated a tangible benefit to membership beyond spiritual promises.

Challenging Traditional Narratives of Christianity's Rise

Traditional accounts often credit miraculous events or state sponsorship for Christianity's growth. Rodney Stark's rise of Christianity narrative offers a different explanation grounded in social science. He contends that the religion's expansion was not miraculous but rather the outcome of rational decisions made by individuals seeking social, spiritual, and practical benefits.

The Myth of Coercion

Contrary to popular belief, Christianity did not become dominant because of violent suppression of other religions or forced conversions under Roman emperors. Stark's research shows that coercion was minimal during Christianity's initial rise. Instead, voluntary conversion, motivated by personal and social factors, played the key role.

Population Growth and Conversion Rates

Stark uses demographic data to illustrate how Christianity grew steadily but

naturally over time. By estimating conversion rates and Christian family sizes, he explains the numerical growth in a way that aligns with social realities of the ancient world. This methodical approach helps demystify the religion's remarkable expansion.

Why Rodney Stark's Approach Matters Today

Understanding the rise of Christianity through Rodney Stark's sociological perspective offers valuable lessons beyond just historical curiosity. It shows how social dynamics, community building, and practical benefits influence religious movements. This approach can also inform contemporary discussions about how religions spread, adapt, or decline in modern societies.

Implications for Modern Religious Movements

Modern religious groups can learn from the early Christian emphasis on community support and ethical conduct. Stark's analysis suggests that sustainable growth often depends on meeting the social and emotional needs of adherents, not just preaching beliefs. This insight is relevant for faith groups, non-profits, and social movements seeking lasting impact.

The Power of Social Networks in Cultural Change

Rodney Stark's focus on social networks underscores the broader truth that cultural and religious change often happens through personal relationships. Whether it's a new religious movement or a social cause, grassroots connections remain fundamental in shaping collective behavior.

Diving Deeper: Related Concepts in Rodney Stark's Work

If you're intrigued by the idea of the rise of Christianity from a sociological angle, Stark's scholarship also touches on several related concepts worth exploring:

- **Religious Economies:** Stark views religions as competing "firms" in a marketplace, where individuals make choices about belief systems based on perceived benefits.
- **Conversion Theory:** He explores why people convert, emphasizing social

influence, personal networks, and sometimes crises or life changes.

- **Religious Commitment:** Stark looks at how commitment levels impact growth, with early Christians often showing high dedication that fostered community cohesion.

These ideas expand the understanding of how religions interact with societies and why some thrive while others fade.

Final Thoughts on Rodney Stark and the Rise of Christianity

The story of Christianity's rise is often told as a tale of divine intervention or historical inevitability, but Rodney Stark's work invites us to see it through the rational, social, and human dimensions. By focusing on networks, social benefits, and inclusive communities, Stark paints a picture of Christianity as a movement that grew because it served the needs of its people in profound ways.

Whether you're a student of history, sociology, or religion, exploring Rodney Stark's rise of Christianity offers a nuanced and enriching perspective that challenges assumptions and deepens our appreciation of one of history's most transformative movements. It's a reminder that behind every major cultural shift are the everyday choices and relationships of ordinary people.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main thesis of Rodney Stark's 'The Rise of Christianity'?

Rodney Stark argues that Christianity's rise was primarily due to its social dynamics, including strong community ties, effective organization, and appeal during times of crisis, rather than miracles or state support.

How does Rodney Stark explain the rapid growth of early Christianity?

Stark explains the rapid growth through sociological factors such as high birth rates among Christians, strong family values, mutual aid, and the religion's appeal to marginalized groups in Roman society.

What role does Rodney Stark attribute to social networks in the spread of Christianity?

Stark emphasizes that Christianity spread through existing social networks, including friendships and family connections, which facilitated conversion and retention of new members.

How does Rodney Stark's approach differ from traditional religious explanations for Christianity's rise?

Unlike traditional accounts that focus on divine intervention or miraculous events, Stark uses sociological and historical analysis to explain Christianity's growth through rational social factors and community dynamics.

What impact did Rodney Stark's 'The Rise of Christianity' have on the study of religious history?

Stark's work popularized a sociological approach to religious history, encouraging scholars to analyze Christianity's growth through social science methods rather than purely theological perspectives.

Does Rodney Stark discuss the persecution of Christians in his book?

Yes, Stark acknowledges persecution but argues it often strengthened Christian communities by fostering solidarity and commitment rather than hindering growth.

How does Rodney Stark's analysis explain Christianity's appeal to women?

Stark notes that Christianity offered women greater respect, protection, and community support compared to Roman society, making it especially attractive to women and aiding the religion's expansion.

Additional Resources

Rodney Stark and the Rise of Christianity: An Analytical Review

rodney stark rise of christianity marks a seminal contribution to the academic understanding of how Christianity evolved from a small, obscure sect in the Roman Empire to one of the world's dominant religions. As a sociologist of religion, Rodney Stark offers a distinctive perspective that

blends empirical data, sociological theory, and historical analysis. His work challenges conventional narratives by focusing on the social dynamics and rational choices behind the early Christian movement's exponential growth.

Understanding Rodney Stark's Approach to the Rise of Christianity

Rodney Stark's analysis diverges from purely theological or doctrinal explanations by emphasizing the sociological factors that influenced Christianity's rapid expansion. Unlike traditional historians who may stress miraculous or purely spiritual causes, Stark adopts a rational-choice framework, arguing that the spread of Christianity can be understood through social networks, conversion incentives, and community behaviors. This approach invites readers to consider Christianity's rise not merely as a spiritual phenomenon but as a social movement shaped by human agency and cultural context.

His methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence, drawing from ancient texts, demographic studies, and sociological principles. By doing so, Stark constructs a comprehensive model explaining how Christianity spread in a predominantly pagan world. The emphasis on social networks, for instance, highlights how early Christians supported one another, creating a resilient and attractive community in times of crisis.

The Core Thesis of "The Rise of Christianity"

At the heart of Rodney Stark's book, "The Rise of Christianity," is the argument that Christianity's growth was neither accidental nor solely divine intervention but a result of strategic social dynamics. Stark posits that early Christians were effective at forming close-knit communities that offered tangible benefits such as social support, healthcare, and mutual aid. These benefits made Christianity especially appealing during periods of plague, persecution, and social upheaval.

Additionally, Stark highlights the role of women and marginalized groups in the expansion process, challenging the notion that Christianity was a top-down movement controlled by elite males. By empowering those often sidelined in Roman society, Christianity fostered loyalty and rapid dissemination of its beliefs. This grassroots vitality proved essential in sustaining the movement through adversity.

Key Factors Contributing to Christianity's

Growth According to Rodney Stark

Stark's research identifies several pivotal factors that contributed to Christianity's rise, which include:

1. Social Networks and Community Solidarity

One of Stark's most influential insights is how early Christians created robust social networks that facilitated conversion and retention. These networks provided emotional and material support, particularly during crises like the Antonine Plague, which decimated populations across the Roman Empire. Christian communities cared for the sick and buried the dead, actions that visibly demonstrated their compassion and attracted new adherents.

2. The Role of Women

Women played a crucial role in the spread of Christianity, according to Stark. Unlike many pagan religions that limited women's public roles, Christianity offered women an active part in worship and community life. This inclusion made the faith more accessible and appealing to a significant portion of the population, thereby accelerating its growth.

3. High-Quality Converts and Conversion Patterns

Stark challenges the assumption that early Christian converts were primarily the poor or uneducated. Instead, he argues that many were from the middle classes and even elites, who then influenced their social circles. This "contagion" effect, where converts actively proselytized, was critical for the exponential growth of Christianity.

4. Institutional Structure and Leadership

The establishment of organized leadership and clear doctrinal boundaries also helped Christianity maintain internal cohesion while expanding outward. Stark points out that the development of ecclesiastical structures allowed Christianity to operate effectively in diverse cultural environments within the empire.

Comparisons with Other Religious Movements

Rodney Stark's work often situates Christianity's rise within the broader context of religious movements in antiquity. By comparing Christianity with contemporaneous religions and cults, he underscores unique features that contributed to its success:

- **Christianity vs. Mystery Religions:** While mystery religions promised secret knowledge and individual salvation, Christianity offered communal support and an inclusive message, appealing to a wider demographic.
- **Christianity vs. Paganism:** Paganism's polytheistic practices lacked the community cohesion and ethical imperatives that Christianity emphasized, which proved decisive during times of social crisis.
- **Christianity vs. Judaism:** Christianity's universalism and missionary zeal contrasted with Judaism's ethnic particularism, enabling Christianity to expand beyond ethnic boundaries.

These distinctions explain why Christianity could adapt and thrive in a complex, multicultural empire, eventually becoming the dominant faith.

Critiques and Controversies Surrounding Stark's Thesis

While Rodney Stark's sociological approach to the rise of Christianity has been widely influential, it has also faced criticism from various quarters:

- **Overemphasis on Rational Choice:** Some scholars argue that Stark's rational-choice model downplays the importance of faith, spirituality, and theological innovation in driving conversions.
- **Data Limitations:** The lack of comprehensive demographic data from the ancient world means that some of Stark's quantitative conclusions are necessarily speculative.
- **Generalization Risks:** Critics caution against overgeneralizing from specific case studies to the entire Roman Empire, as regional variations in conversion rates and Christian practices existed.

Despite these critiques, Stark's work remains a cornerstone in the sociology of religion, prompting further research and debate about the social mechanisms behind religious growth.

The Impact of “The Rise of Christianity” on Religious Studies

Rodney Stark’s book has had a lasting impact on how scholars and students approach early Christian history. By framing the rise of Christianity within sociological terms, Stark opened new avenues for interdisciplinary research, bridging history, sociology, anthropology, and religious studies. His emphasis on empirical evidence and social theory encourages a more nuanced understanding that goes beyond traditional theological interpretations.

This interdisciplinary approach has inspired a generation of scholars to investigate the role of social networks, cultural contexts, and organizational strategies in religious movements, influencing the broader field of religious sociology.

Why Rodney Stark’s Analysis Remains Relevant Today

In an era where religion continues to shape societies and global cultures, understanding the dynamics behind Christianity’s rise is more than an academic exercise. Rodney Stark’s model provides valuable insights into how belief systems spread, adapt, and sustain themselves over time. These insights have implications not only for historians but also for sociologists, theologians, and policymakers interested in religious demography and cultural change.

Moreover, the focus on social networks and community dynamics resonates with contemporary discussions about how modern religious movements grow in digital and physical spaces. Stark’s analytical framework thus remains a vital tool for interpreting both ancient and modern religious phenomena.

Rodney Stark’s “The Rise of Christianity” stands as a pioneering work that combines rigorous sociological analysis with historical inquiry. By examining the social fabric that underpinned early Christianity’s expansion, Stark invites a rethinking of religious growth as a complex, multifaceted process. The ongoing relevance of his thesis underscores the importance of interdisciplinary study in unraveling the historical trajectories of faith traditions.

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rodney stark rise of christianity: The Triumph of Christianity Rodney Stark, 2011-10-25 The religious historian and author of God's Battalions delivers an accessible and illuminating account of Christianity's rise in the West. In The Triumph of Christianity, celebrated sociologist and religious historian Rodney Stark traces the extraordinary rise of Christianity through its most pivotal and controversial moments to offer fresh perspective on the history of the world's largest religion. Stark gathers and distills decades of authoritative research into a concise and highly readable volume that explores Christianity's most crucial episodes. Stark begins with an overview of the pre-Christian religious landscape before examining how Christianity spread among the Roman Empire's elite—especially women—and then expanded throughout Europe. Eschewing dense chronologies, Stark delivers a fascinating and often surprising narrative, bringing readers right to the heart of Christian history's most vital controversies and enduring lessons.

rodney stark rise of christianity: The Rise of Christianity Rodney Stark, 2023-05-02 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--

rodney stark rise of christianity: Cities of God Rodney Stark, 2009-03-17 An “intriguing” study of how early Christianity caught on and converted much of the world, rooted in archaeological and statistical evidence (Kirkus Reviews, starred review). How did the preaching of a peasant carpenter from Galilee spark a movement that would grow to over two billion followers? Who listened to this “good news,” and who ignored it? Where did Christianity spread, and how? Based on

quantitative data and the latest scholarship, this book presents startling new information about the rise of the early church, overturning many prevailing views of how Christianity grew through time to become the largest religion in the world. Drawing on both archaeological and historical evidence, Rodney Stark provides hard statistical evidence on the religious life of the Roman Empire to discover surprising facts: Contrary to fictions such as *The Da Vinci Code* and the claims of some prominent scholars, Gnosticism was not a more sophisticated, more authentic form of Christianity but an unsuccessful effort to paganize Christianity. Paul was called the apostle to the Gentiles, but mostly he converted Jews. Paganism was not rapidly stamped out by state repression following the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 312 AD—it gradually disappeared as people abandoned the temples in response to the superior appeal of Christianity. The “oriental” faiths—such as those devoted to Isis, the Egyptian goddess of love and magic, and to Cybele, the fertility goddess of Asia Minor—actually prepared the way for the rapid spread of Christianity across the Roman Empire. Contrary to generations of historians, the Roman mystery cult of Mithraism posed no challenge to Christianity to become the new faith of the empire—it allowed no female members and attracted only soldiers. By analyzing concrete data, Stark challenges the conventional wisdom about early Christianity, offering the clearest picture ever of how this religion grew into what it is today.

rodney stark rise of christianity: The Rise of Christianity Through the Eyes of Gibbon, Harnack and Rodney Stark Jan N. Bremmer, 2010 The rise of Christianity up to the victory of Constantine has often been studied and remains a puzzling phenomenon. In this valedictory lecture Jan N. Bremmer concentrates on the explanations adduced, focusing in particular on the works of three iconic figures from the last two hundred and fifty years: *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* of Edward Gibbon, the most famous ancient historian of all time, at the end of the eighteenth century; *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums* of Adolf von Harnack, the greatest historian of early Christianity of all time, around 1900, and *The Rise of Christianity* of Rodney Stark, the most adventurous sociologist of religion of our times, at the end of the twentieth century. Bremmer locates their concerns and explanations within their own times, but also takes them seriously as scholars, discussing their analyses and approaches. In this way he shows both the continuities and the innovations in the evolving view which scholarship presents of early Christianity. Bremmer's exceptional knowledge of the huge range of scholarship and his humane and balanced judgment make this lecture the ideal introduction to the many problems raised by Christianity's displacement of paganism.

rodney stark rise of christianity: Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity Leif E. Vaage, 2010-10-30 Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity discusses the diverse cultural destinies of early Christianity, early Judaism, and other ancient religious groups as a question of social rivalry. The book is divided into three main sections. The first section debates the degree to which the category of rivalry adequately names the issue(s) that must be addressed when comparing and contrasting the social “success” of different religious groups in antiquity. The second is a critical assessment of the common modern category of “mission” to describe the inner dynamic of such a process; it discusses the early Christian apostle Paul, the early Jewish historian Josephus, and ancient Mithraism. The third section of the book is devoted to “the rise of Christianity,” primarily in response to the similarly titled work of the American sociologist of religion Rodney Stark. While it is not clear that any of these groups imagined its own success necessarily entailing the elimination of others, it does seem that early Christianity had certain habits, both of speech and practice, which made it particularly apt to succeed (in) the Roman Empire.

rodney stark rise of christianity: Die Wiederkehr der Götter Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, 2007

rodney stark rise of christianity: The Deliverance of God Douglas A. Campbell, 2009-08-07 This book breaks a significant impasse in much Pauline interpretation, pushing beyond both Lutheran and New perspectives on Paul to a non-contractual, apocalyptic reading of many of the apostle's most famous, and most troublesome, texts. His strongly antithetical vision identifies participation in Christ as the sole core of Pauline theology and produces the most radical rereading

of Romans 1-4 for more than a generation. Even those who disagree will be forced to clarify their views as never before.

rodney stark rise of christianity: Alte Texte in neuen Kontexten Wolfgang Stegemann, Richard E. DeMaris, 2015-01-28 Das leitende Thema dieses Bandes ist die in den 1970er Jahren in der Bibelwissenschaft einsetzende soziale und kulturelle Wende (social and cultural turn). Sie stellt eine der wichtigsten Innovationen der wissenschaftlichen Erforschung des Alten und Neuen Testaments im 20. und beginnenden 21. Jahrhundert dar. Der einseitig auf theologische Ideen und herausragende Individuen verengte Fokus der traditionellen Exegese wird bewusst geweitet. Die biblischen Texte werden in ihren sozialen, ökonomischen, politischen und kulturellen Kontexten gedeutet, durch die sie geprägt wurden. Die sozialwissenschaftliche Bibelauslegung ermöglicht so ein vertieftes Verständnis zahlreicher biblischer Aussagen. In den einzelnen Beiträgen zu Themen und Texten v. a. des Neuen Testaments zeigen international führende VertreterInnen dieser Forschungsrichtung die Leistungsfähigkeit dieser Methodik, wobei sowohl soziologische und sozialgeschichtliche als auch ethnologische und kulturanthropologische Zugänge vorgestellt werden.

rodney stark rise of christianity: Kissing Christians Michael Philip Penn, 2013-10-09 In the first five centuries of the common era, the kiss was a distinctive and near-ubiquitous marker of Christianity. Although Christians did not invent the kiss—Jewish and pagan literature is filled with references to kisses between lovers, family members, and individuals in relationships of power and subordination—Christians kissed one another in highly specific settings and in ways that set them off from the non-Christian population. Christians kissed each other during prayer, Eucharist, baptism, and ordination and in connection with greeting, funerals, monastic vows, and martyrdom. As Michael Philip Penn shows in *Kissing Christians*, this ritual kiss played a key role in defining group membership and strengthening the social bond between the communal body and its individual members. *Kissing Christians* presents the first comprehensive study of the ritual kiss and how controversies surrounding it became part of larger debates regarding the internal structure of Christian communities and their relations with outsiders. Penn traces how Christian writers exalted those who kissed only fellow Christians, proclaimed that Jews did not have a kiss, prohibited exchanging the kiss with potential heretics, privileged the confessor's kiss, prohibited Christian men and women from kissing each other, and forbade laity from kissing clergy. *Kissing Christians* also investigates connections between kissing and group cohesion, kissing practices and purity concerns, and how Christian leaders used the motif of the kiss of Judas to examine theological notions of loyalty, unity, forgiveness, hierarchy, and subversion. Exploring connections between bodies, power, and performance, *Kissing Christians* bridges the gap between cultural and liturgical approaches to antiquity. It breaks significant new ground in its application of literary and sociological theory to liturgical history and will have a profound impact on these fields.

rodney stark rise of christianity: Christianity and the Roots of Morality, 2017-06-06 What is the role of religion, especially Christianity, in morality, pro-social behavior and altruism? Are there innate human moral capacities in the human mind? When and how did they appear in the history of evolution? What is the real significance of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount — does it set up unique moral standards or only crystallize humans' innate moral intuitions? What is the role of religious teachings and religious communities in pro-social behavior? *Christianity and the Roots of Morality: Philosophical, Early Christian, and Empirical Perspectives* casts light on these questions through interdisciplinary articles by scholars from social sciences, cognitive science, social psychology, sociology of religion, philosophy, systematic theology, comparative religion and biblical studies. Contributors include: Nancy T. Ammerman, István Czachesz, Grace Davie, Jutta Jokiranta, Simo Knuuttila, Kristen Monroe, Mika Ojakangas, Sami Pihlström, Antti Raunio, Heikki Räisänen (□), Risto Saarinen, Kari Syreeni, Lauri Thurén, Petri Ylikoski.

rodney stark rise of christianity: How the West Won Rodney Stark, 2014-03-17 Finally the Truth about the Rise of the West Modernity developed only in the West—in Europe and North America. Nowhere else did science and democracy arise; nowhere else was slavery outlawed. Only Westerners invented chimneys, musical scores, telescopes, eyeglasses, pianos, electric lights,

aspirin, and soap. The question is, Why? Unfortunately, that question has become so politically incorrect that most scholars avoid it. But acclaimed author Rodney Stark provides the answers in this sweeping new look at Western civilization. How the West Won demonstrates the primacy of uniquely Western ideas—among them the belief in free will, the commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, the notion that the universe functions according to rational rules that can be discovered, and the emphasis on human freedom and secure property rights. Taking readers on a thrilling journey from ancient Greece to the present, Stark challenges much of the received wisdom about Western history. How the West Won shows, for example: · Why the fall of Rome was the single most beneficial event in the rise of Western civilization · Why the “Dark Ages” never happened · Why the Crusades had nothing to do with grabbing loot or attacking the Muslim world unprovoked · Why there was no “Scientific Revolution” · Why scholars’ recent efforts to dismiss the importance of battles are ridiculous: had the Greeks lost at the Battle of Marathon, we probably would never have heard of Plato or Aristotle Stark also debunks absurd fabrications that have flourished in the past few decades: that the Greeks stole their culture from Africa; that the West’s “discoveries” were copied from the Chinese and Muslims; that Europe became rich by plundering the non-Western world. At the same time, he reveals the woeful inadequacy of recent attempts to attribute the rise of the West to purely material causes—favorable climates, abundant natural resources, guns and steel. How the West Won displays Rodney Stark’s gifts for lively narrative history and making the latest scholarship accessible to all readers. This bold, insightful book will force you to rethink your understanding of the West and the birth of modernity—and to recognize that Western civilization really has set itself apart from other cultures.

rodney stark rise of christianity: *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* Éric Rebillard, 2012-04-06 In this provocative book Éric Rebillard challenges many long-held assumptions about early Christian burial customs. For decades scholars of early Christianity have argued that the Church owned and operated burial grounds for Christians as early as the third century. Through a careful reading of primary sources including legal codes, theological works, epigraphical inscriptions, and sermons, Rebillard shows that there is little evidence to suggest that Christians occupied exclusive or isolated burial grounds in this early period. In fact, as late as the fourth and fifth centuries the Church did not impose on the faithful specific rituals for laying the dead to rest. In the preparation of Christians for burial, it was usually next of kin and not representatives of the Church who were responsible for what form of rite would be celebrated, and evidence from inscriptions and tombstones shows that for the most part Christians didn't separate themselves from non-Christians when burying their dead. According to Rebillard it would not be until the early Middle Ages that the Church gained control over burial practices and that Christian cemeteries became common. In this translation of *Religion et Sépulture: L'église, les vivants et les morts dans l'Antiquité tardive*, Rebillard fundamentally changes our understanding of early Christianity. The *Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* will force scholars of the period to rethink their assumptions about early Christians as separate from their pagan contemporaries in daily life and ritual practice.

rodney stark rise of christianity: *Das antike Christentum* Christoph Marksches, 2017-02-17 In seinem vielgerühmten Standardwerk verortet der international renommierte Kirchenhistoriker Christoph Marksches das Christentum in der antiken Religionsgeschichte und kommt so zu neuen und überraschenden Antworten auf die Frage, warum sich das Christentum im römischen Reich so erfolgreich durchsetzen und schließlich die Antike überleben konnte. Der Autor bietet einen kompakten Überblick über die Verbreitung des Christentums und deren wichtigste Zentren und Epochen. Er schildert den Alltag und die Frömmigkeit antiker Christen von ihrer Geburt über Bekehrung und Taufe bis zum Tod, beschreibt Lebensformen wie Ehe und Familie, Askese und Mönchtum und erklärt die Besonderheiten der christlichen Gemeinschaften.

rodney stark rise of christianity: *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity* Jehu J. Hanciles, 2021-03-16 A magisterial sweep through 1500 years of Christian history with a groundbreaking focus on the missionary role of migrants in its spread. Human migration has long been identified as a driving force of historical change. Building on this understanding, Jehu Hanciles

surveys the history of Christianity's global expansion from its origins through 1500 CE to show how migration—more than official missionary activity or imperial designs—played a vital role in making Christianity the world's largest religion. Church history has tended to place a premium on political power and institutional forms, thus portraying Christianity as a religion disseminated through official representatives of church and state. But, as Hanciles illustrates, this "top-down perspective overlooks the multifarious array of social movements, cultural processes, ordinary experiences, and non-elite activities and decisions that contribute immensely to religious encounter and exchange." Hanciles's socio-historical approach to understanding the growth of Christianity as a world religion disrupts the narrative of Western preeminence, while honoring and making sense of the diversity of religious expression that has characterized the world Christian movement for two millennia. In turning the focus of the story away from powerful empires and heroic missionaries, *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity* instead tells the more truthful story of how every Christian migrant is a vessel for the spread of the Christian faith in our deeply interconnected world.

rodney stark rise of christianity: Gentile Christian Identity from Cornelius to Constantine Terence L. Donaldson, 2020-11-05 Originally an ascribed identity that cast non-Jewish Christ-believers as an ethnic other, "gentile" soon evolved into a much more complex aspect of early Christian identity. *Gentile Christian Identity from Cornelius to Constantine* is a full historical account of this trajectory, showing how, in the context of "the parting of the ways," the early church increasingly identified itself as a distinctly gentile and anti-Judaic entity, even as it also crafted itself as an alternative to the cosmopolitan project of the Roman Empire. This process of identity construction shaped Christianity's legacy, paradoxically establishing it as both a counter-empire and a mimicker of Rome's imperial ideology. Drawing on social identity theory and ethnography, Terence Donaldson offers an analysis of gentile Christianity that is thorough and highly relevant to today's discourses surrounding identity, ethnicity, and Christian-Jewish relations. As Donaldson shows, a full understanding of the term "gentile" is key to understanding the modern Western world and the church as we know it.

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unmenschlich und grausam, kam in den antiken Gesellschaften rund ums Mittelmeer vor. Daraus kann allerdings nicht der Schluss gezogen werden, Kindesaussetzung sei in der Zeit der Antike ein ganz alltägliches Phänomen gewesen. Zum einen lässt sich über deren Häufigkeit aus der Distanz von mehr als zweitausend Jahren nichts Sicheres sagen. Zum anderen gab es eine namhafte Zahl an Texten antiker Schriftsteller, in denen Kritik an der Kindesaussetzung geübt wird. Die entsprechenden Quellen sind in der vorliegenden Studie erstmals gesammelt und vergleichend analysiert. Sie zeigen ein klares Bild: Antike Menschen empfanden eine Kindesaussetzung als der Natur widersprechend und als gottlos. Eltern, die derartiges erwogen, wurden als gefühllose, rohe Menschen bezeichnet. Im Bereich des Religiösen gab es Maßnahmen wie der Ausschluss vom Heiligtum für eine bestimmte Zeit oder das Bezahlen einer Geldstrafe. Und wenn es auch bis ins 4. Jahrhundert der christlichen Zeitrechnung kein explizit gesetzliches Verbot der Kindesaussetzung gab, so waren etwa die frühen Christen sicher, dass ein solches Tun dereinst am Ende der Tage bestraft würde. Die antike Kritik an der Kindesaussetzung ist Zeugnis für eine breite Ablehnung derselben in den antiken Gemeinschaften verschiedener Zeiten und Orte. Sie zeigt aber auch, dass Kindesaussetzung keine Praxis sog. primitiver Völker war, sondern dass dahinter meist konkrete Nöte wie Armut oder uneheliche Geburt standen.

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