

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Vox Evangelica* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_vox\\_evangelica.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_vox_evangelica.php)

# WORSHIP AND EVANGELISM IN PRE-CHRISTENDOM (THE LAING LECTURE 1994)

ALAN KREIDER

About one thing at least there is no dispute: the pre-Christendom church was growing. Contemporaries commented on it. The late second-century Epistle to Diognetus noted soberly that Christians 'day by day increase more and more'. In the middle of the following century Origen could write without fear of contradiction about 'the multitude of people coming to the faith'.<sup>1</sup> Across the Roman Empire, for those who looked behind the facades, there was evidence of growth. In Rome the first congregations were literally *house* churches. Meeting in the largest rooms of their members who were rarely wealthy, the people attending could rarely have totalled much higher than fifteen or twenty.<sup>2</sup> But by the mid-third century, congregations were growing in numbers and wealth. So Christians, who still met in *insulae* (islands), multi-storied blocks containing shops and housing, unobtrusively began to convert private spaces into domestic complexes tailored to congregational needs. They knocked down walls to unite apartments and to create the varied spaces, large and small, that were required by the lives of their growing communities. The *titulus Byzantis* in Rome as well as the famous *domus ecclesiae* in Dura Europos in eastern Syria were both, in the words of architectural historian Richard Krautheimer, 'inconspicuous community centres'. In many respects their life was still domestic, but their changing architecture reflected the expanding life and numbers of their communities.<sup>3</sup> It was in such a building in Caesarea that Origen discovered that the growth of the church had its negative aspects: some people, he complained, were playing truant during his homilies on the Exodus and have 'hidden in the remotest corners of the house of the Lord [*dominicae domus*] . . . [where they] occupy themselves with profane stories'.<sup>4</sup>

Noting the growth is one thing; measuring it is another. To give an impression of 'the dimensions of growth', ancient historian Ramsay MacMullen of Yale has estimated a growth 'on the order of a half a million in each generation from the end of the first century' up to the conversion of the Emperor Constantine in AD 312. By that time, MacMullen estimates, the church scattered unevenly across the Empire constituted between five and eight per cent of the imperial population.<sup>5</sup> Other estimates, such as that of the great Dominican scholar Yves

Congar, are up to fifteen per cent of the populace, but this is certainly too high.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Robin Lane Fox of Oxford is closest to the mark in estimating that the Christians constituted 'only four or five per cent of the population'.<sup>7</sup>

'Only', Lane Fox says. But this remains an astonishing figure. For the growth of the pre-Christendom church took place in the face of imposing disincentives. Persecution was not constant, and many Christians would never experience it directly. But every Christian knew that persecution, because of imperial edict or local crisis, could break out with community-engulfing virulence. So they passed down the acts of the martyrs and celebrated the anniversaries of their deaths which they believed were really *birth* days. They commented on the experiences of being barricaded in their house churches—'besieged, and attacked, and kept prisoners actually in our secret congregations' is how Tertullian put it—or, as Origen reported, of having their buildings burned down.<sup>8</sup> They knew that 'every Christian by definition was a candidate for death'.<sup>9</sup> To understate: if one wanted a soft life, or to get ahead in respectable circles, one did not become a Christian.

And yet people became Christians. Why? It has intrigued recent historians to test, and rule out, a whole series of reasons which one might expect ought to have been important. Public preaching, for example: there was, as Arthur Darby Nock has emphasised, 'little, if any, direct preaching to the masses'; it was simply too dangerous.<sup>10</sup> Or organising the congregations for mission: according to Georg Kretschmar, 'the recruitment to the faith was never institutionalized . . . [I]n these communities the social life was in general . . . clearly structured, whereas for the connections 'outwards' practically no firm rules are recognizable . . .'.<sup>11</sup> How about prayer for the conversion of pagans? According to Yves Congar, 'the Christians prayed for the prosperity and peace of people, but scarcely for their conversion'.<sup>12</sup> Most of the very few prayers for conversion which survive from the early centuries, eight out of eleven in all according to my count, are in fact prayers in obedience to Jesus' command to pray for enemies and persecutors.<sup>13</sup> As to theologising of an explicitly missionary nature, the only word which for Norbert Brox will adequately describe 'the scarcity of reflection about mission', is 'astonishing'.<sup>14</sup> To this list of surprising omissions I would like to add one more. In my reading of early Christian materials with a missionary's eyes, I have been amazed at the absence of pastoral admonitions to evangelise. A sample of this is *Ad Quirinum* by the North African bishop and martyr Cyprian. The third book of this work is a manual of 120 'heavenly precepts' to guide catechumens in the Christian life. These 'precepts' cover a whole range of areas of Christian concern—'that brethren ought to support one another', or 'that we are to be urgent in prayers'—but none, not one of the 120, urges the new believers to evangelise.<sup>15</sup>

This is already a formidable list of reasons to rule out for the church's growth, but in this paper I would like to *add* yet one more: the church did not grow because its worship was attractive. From the mid-first century onwards pagans were not admitted to Christian worship services. Until non-Christians were willing to submit to the interrogation necessary to become a catechumen, and as a catechumen to be trained for membership in the Christian community, they were not allowed through the door into a Christian worship service. And even then, until they were baptised they were allowed to stay only for the service of the word—the biblical readings and teaching; they were firmly dismissed before the unitive actions of Christian worship—the prayers and the kiss of peace culminating in the eucharist. The Christians were thus surrounded by what one historian has called an 'invisible mine field'.<sup>16</sup> Contemporary critics sensed this. Celsus: Christians are 'a secret society'; Caecilius: 'Why do [the Christians] never speak in public, never meet in the open, if it be not that the aspect of their worship is either criminal or shameful?'<sup>17</sup>

At first, of course, pagans had indeed been allowed to attend Christian worship services. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14, urged his enthusiastic friends to comport themselves in such a way that, when 'outsiders or unbelievers enter', they will 'not say that you are out of your mind' (1 Cor. 14:23). In Corinth it was clearly expected that pagans would come. In this, the early Christians were in the tradition of the Jewish synagogues, where outsiders were courted and whose services 'had the functions both of edification and of solicitation'.<sup>18</sup> After the Neronian persecution of the mid-60s, however, the Christian churches seem to have felt it necessary to close their doors to outsiders. They, unlike the Jews, were now styled a *superstitio*, a deviation from the norms of acceptable behaviour; now they, as Pliny put it in his correspondence with the Emperor Trajan, were subject to execution not only for their 'secret crimes' but also for 'the mere name'.<sup>19</sup> In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the Christians closed their doors to outsiders; to let just anybody in was simply too dangerous.<sup>20</sup>

The early Christian documents are explicit about this. The believers feared the presence of what Athenagoras of Athens called 'lying informers'.<sup>21</sup> So they, in various parts of the Empire, assigned someone to watch at the door to see that only appropriate people came in. Typical of this is the mid-fourth-century *Testament of our Lord*, which describes one of the deacon's functions as that of the ecclesiastical bouncer:

Let him observe and look at those who come into the house of the sanctuary. Let him investigate who they are, so that he may know if they are lambs or wolves. And when he asks, let him bring in him that is worthy, lest, if a spy enter, the liberty of the Church be searched out, and his sin be on his head.<sup>22</sup>

Similar duties are described of other church orders.<sup>23</sup> In light of this screening process it is unsurprising that, when Origen described those who were present in the congregation in Caesarea to which he was preaching, he spoke of 'all, catechumens and faithful, women, men and children'—but no pagans. They simply weren't there.<sup>24</sup>

So, in pre-Christendom, there was *no connection* between worship and evangelism. It simply didn't matter whether the church's worship was attractive to outsiders. It wasn't designed for outsiders, and outsiders weren't there. The topic that I have set for myself therefore appears to be a *non sequitur*.

And yet I think there was a connection. I believe that worship, to which pagans were denied admission, was all-important in the spread of the church. It was important not because it was attractive but because its rites and practices were designed to re-form those pagans who joined the church into Christians, into distinctive people who lived in a way that individually and corporately looked like Jesus Christ. As such these people, re-formed, would be attractive. And not only attractive but free. In an age of bondage, of increasing disorder, of a deepening gulf between privileged people and poor people, of life-disfiguring addictions and compulsions, the church was growing because it and its members had a freedom and a fulness of life in Christ that could not be hid. This, as I shall seek to demonstrate, was good news, news that was *new*; and this newness in the practices of its corporate life and the behaviour of its members towards non-members was intriguing, inviting, question-posing. Why, people asked, do the Christians live like *that*?

The pre-Christendom Christians sensed that they, by God's grace, had been ushered into a privileged place. The mid-third century bishop of Carthage, Cyprian, repeatedly referred to it as an 'enclosed garden'.<sup>25</sup> Quoting Song of Solomon 4:12, in which he heard the voice of Christ, he wrote: 'A garden enclosed [*hortus conclusus*] is my sister, my spouse; a spring sealed up, a well of living water. But if the spouse of Christ, which is the church, is a garden enclosed; a thing that is closed up cannot lie open to strangers and profane persons.'<sup>26</sup> Enclosed: outsiders cannot easily get in. A garden: here is life flowering and flourishing in the presence of Christ. Cyprian and other Christians sought repeatedly to express the delight and the newness of their common life in Christ. 'This is a new people, and there is something divine mingled with it.' This is 'a new race or way of life'. This is 'God's country'. This is 'Paradise'. This is 'the place where the Holy Spirit flourishes'.<sup>27</sup>

The heart of the newness was the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. He and his words were good news to people. Jesus' words were, according to the mid-third century *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 'incisive words'.<sup>28</sup> Origen testified that they had a 'charm' that drew people to

follow him.<sup>29</sup> In Justin's experience Jesus' words 'possess a terrible power in themselves, and are sufficient to inspire those who turn aside from the path of rectitude with awe; and the sweetest rest is afforded to those who make a diligent practice of them'.<sup>30</sup> Pagans, the Christians testified, were drawn to Jesus and his Sermon on the Mount teachings.<sup>31</sup> The idea that these were hyperbolic demands which were 'unfulfillable' simply never occurred to them.<sup>32</sup> And no teaching was more repeated by the Christians, or more pondered by the pagans, than Jesus' command to love the enemy.<sup>33</sup> Was this because it was part of 'an extremely early fixed catechetical tradition'?<sup>34</sup> Or was this because, in a situation in which Christians were surrounded by enemies, it gave them a creative way to respond? We do not know.

What we do know is that the pre-Christendom Christians sensed themselves out of joint with the dominant values of their time. As Eduardo Hoornaert has seen so well from his Brazilian perspective, joining the Christian community meant being 'converted to marginality'.<sup>35</sup> The word that the early Christians repeatedly used for themselves was one found in 1 Peter 2:11—*paroikoi*—'resident aliens'.<sup>36</sup> At home everywhere; fully at home nowhere: the Christians because of their life in Christ knew that they were living in a distinctive way that had global and salvation-historical import. There was something catholic, something universal about the life that they shared with others across the empire and beyond; and they all, when under pressure, would express their primary identity in a simple affirmation: 'I am a Christian'.<sup>37</sup> Tertullian exulted, 'One state we know, of which we are all citizens—the universe'.<sup>38</sup> This vision of global peace, rooted in the peacemaking of Christ Jesus and the enemy-loving of his disciples, underlay the Old Testament passage which was apparently quoted more frequently than any other by the early communities—the 'swords into ploughshares' passage of Isaiah 2 and Micah 4. This, the Christians believed, had been fulfilled in Christ's world-wide church, and it was the culmination of the Jewish hope.<sup>39</sup> The sheer largeness of this vision was bracing. God was saving individuals, to be sure, but as a part of his grand design for 'the reconciliation and restoration of the human race'.<sup>40</sup> Small wonder that these Christian communities, which appeared to be so marginal, had a self-confidence that was attractive. They believed that they were the instruments that God was using in constructing a new world.

How did people learn about that new world? An initial encounter often came through martyrdom, which brought these communities a notoriety that they would have preferred to avoid. Their endurance in the amphitheatre, while being attacked by starved bears or roasted on chairs of molten iron, was medically inexplicable; their love for each other—for example, giving the kiss of peace before being despatched by their executioners—was transparent.<sup>41</sup> Those who guarded them

reported in admiration that 'there is a power' among them.<sup>42</sup> And the whole process, for those who had never previously given a thought to Christianity, was question-posing. 'What profit has their religion brought them, which they have preferred to their own life?' asked the incredulous onlookers in the Lyons pogrom.<sup>43</sup> Repeatedly the Christians reported that the fidelity of the martyrs had been one of the first things that had attracted their attention to the faith. As Tertullian put it, faithfulness in public suffering 'is the bait that wins men for our school'.<sup>44</sup>

Others learned about the new world in less dramatic ways. It could happen at work, for example, through a new worker who was employed in one's workshop who remarked quietly that his community 'alone . . . know the right way to live'; to people who were aware that nothing was going right for them this could be not offensive but intriguing.<sup>45</sup> A number of sources speak of the unobtrusive ministry of these Christian itinerants, whether self-conscious missionaries or simply Christians whose jobs took them to new places. Or one could learn about Christianity in the apartment building or neighbourhood, where one lived. 'Most converts', E. Glenn Hinson has observed, 'became acquainted with it through casual contact'.<sup>46</sup> Christians lived scattered throughout the populace, as neighbours. Like countless others they would climb and descend the long flights of stairs in a Roman *insula*. Since Christians looked and dressed like everyone else, people would often be surprised to learn that such ordinary people belonged to this extraordinary group.<sup>47</sup> 'A good man', they say, 'this Caius Seius, only that he is a Christian'.<sup>48</sup> As these Christians built relationships with their neighbours they would talk about their faith. The pagan Caecilius reported, with distaste, that the Christians were 'silent in public, chattering in corners'.<sup>49</sup> In times of illness or crisis their neighbours, who had learned to trust them, would feel free to turn to Christians, who could offer to provide material help or to come and pray for healing and release. Many pagans sensed themselves to be bound, comprehensively un-free, in the midst of social and spiritual forces much larger than themselves. Christians, by offering the services of exorcists, could help free people not only from 'wild attacks' but from the 'delusions' and 'illusions' of demonic forces.<sup>50</sup> Early Christians such as Irenaeus pointed to the evangelistic function of exorcism: 'those who have been cleansed often both believe [in Christ] and join themselves to the Church'.<sup>51</sup> And if Christianity spread through these exorcisms it was because, in an age of competitive miracle-working, the Christian God seemed stronger than other gods.<sup>52</sup>

And not only stronger but more profound. Some people in the early centuries were aware that they were indeed oppressed by demons, but that this oppression made them comprehensively un-free. The form that this oppression took was what we might today call addiction or

compulsion. To be 'liberated from bondage' meant to be freed from the sway of the evil one who 'dominated the whole earth'.<sup>53</sup> It was the catechist Justin in Rome, writing around 150, who articulated this most clearly. No doubt reflecting the experience of his students, Justin was acutely aware of the work of the demons, 'who struggle to have you as their slaves and servants'. But, he reported, Christians 'after being persuaded by the Word' have renounced the demons. Through God in Jesus Christ they are now experiencing freedom, in four areas. Those people, he said, who had been addicted to sexual adventure now 'delight in continence alone'. Those who had been addicted to the magic arts now 'have dedicated themselves to the good and unbegotten God'. Justin then changed from speaking about 'those' to 'we', indicating that he was now speaking about compulsions general to the society against which he and *all* Christians had to struggle.

*We* who once took most pleasure in the means of increasing our wealth and property now bring what we have into a common fund and share with everyone in need; *we* who hated and killed one another and would not associate with people of different tribes because of [their different] customs, now after the manifestation of Christ live together and pray for our enemies . . . so that they, living according to the fair commands of Christ, may share with *us* the good hope of receiving the same thing.<sup>54</sup>

Common to all the inhabitants of Rome, Justin knew, were the addictions of escalating living standards and xenophobic violence. But Christ was liberator. 'His sayings were short and concise, for he was no sophist, but his word was the power of God'.<sup>55</sup> His work on the cross had led to 'the destruction of the demons';<sup>56</sup> his teaching had led to the freeing of people from addictions and compulsions.

A good example of such a freed individual is Cyprian. Cyprian was a patrician Carthaginian whose future as a rhetorician seemed clear. By his early adulthood his reputation was formidable, and his lifestyle was characteristic of his class. But Cyprian was dissatisfied. He sensed himself powerless in the face of powers that were larger than he was—the 'corruption of our own material nature', the habits and assumptions that are 'deeply and radically engrained in us'. What was the particular point of bondage, or addiction, for Cyprian? It was accumulation and consumption. 'When', he agonised, 'does a person learn thrift who has been used to liberal banquets and sumptuous feasts? And a person who has been glittering in gold and purple, and has been celebrated for his costly attire, when does he reduce himself to ordinary and simple clothing?' How does one break free of these compulsions? At some point Cyprian encountered Caecilius, a 'just man' and Christian elder who became 'the friend and comrade of his soul' and

who apparently functioned as his sponsor as he progressed towards membership in the Christian community. There, in a community of freedom, through a powerful experience (which we discuss below) Cyprian, bishop-to-be, martyr-to-be, experienced new birth; and, to his delight, he discovered the freedom which enabled him to 'put off what he has previously been'.<sup>57</sup>

Caecilius's friendship was a vital ingredient in Cyprian's coming to faith. And throughout the early centuries, there were no doubt countless people who played the role of friend. 'Affective bonds', which sociologists have shown to be central in attracting people to counter-cultural religious groups, were at play here.<sup>58</sup> Pagans, Justin noted, were turning 'away from the ways of violence and tyranny' because they were drawn to Christians as people whose lives were distinctive, free. The pagans' hesitations were overcome 'by observing the consistent lives of their neighbours, or noting the strange patience of their injured acquaintances, or experiencing the way they did business with them'.<sup>59</sup> Women apparently were disproportionately involved in forming evangelistically productive 'affective bonds'.<sup>60</sup> This is partly because they were from an early date preponderant numerically in the church.<sup>61</sup> It also reflected their ability to listen to people and to be attentive to their questions.<sup>62</sup> Inevitably, then as now, a major concern of women was the salvation of their husbands, who as a group seem to have been more locked in paganism than they were.<sup>63</sup> These pre-Christendom patterns were still evident in the time of Augustine, over a century after the conversion of Constantine: 'O you men', he wrote, 'who all fear the burden imposed by baptism. You are easily beaten by your women. Chaste and devoted to the faith, it is their presence in great numbers that causes the church to grow'.<sup>64</sup> Whether with women or with men, it was friendship which was the most common way for individuals to approach the seemingly unapproachable church.

There was still another way: the way of community. Just as individual Christians were quietly conspicuous for their freedom, so also entire Christian communities were evident as communities of freedom. Outsiders often misconstrued what was going on in the churches. As the pagan Caecilius commented:

[The Christians] are a gang of discredited and proscribed desperadoes . . . . They have gathered together from the lowest dregs of the populace ignorant men and credulous women—and women are naturally unstable—and have formed a rabble of impious conspirators . . . they fall in love almost before they are acquainted; everywhere they introduce a kind of religion of lust.<sup>65</sup>

Caecilius's was a somewhat uncharitable view, of course, but he was not unperceptive. He noted the preponderance of women, which we have already observed, and of 'ignorant' people evidently from the lower

social orders; but by addressing his complaints to Octavius, a highly literate non-plebeian believer, Caecilius was conceding that the Christian churches were socially inclusive to an extent unparalleled in ancient society. After much debate, scholars in recent years have been coming to much the same conclusion. According to Professor Peter Lampe of the University of Kiel in Germany, whose study of the churches in urban Rome in the first two centuries is the most detailed examination that I know of any group of early Christians, 'Christianity more or less mirrored the stratification of the entire society'—except for an absence of patrician males, who of course had the most power to lose. This would mean that there were many more poor people than rich people in the churches in Rome. However, he also noted that among the Christians there was 'an intensive exchange', in which richer Christians gave through the church's common fund to their poorer brothers and sisters, leading to 'a limited material equalization between the strata'.<sup>66</sup> And the equalization was not only material. As Lane Fox commented, 'Christianity made the least-expected social groups articulate'—women, slaves, people who had been discarded as unwanted babies on the local tip.<sup>67</sup> Not everyone was happy about this equalization, to be sure; some people who were becoming rich hesitated to come to the services, where they would as a part of their worship be expected to give generously to the common fund.<sup>68</sup> There was also, as a result of the generosity of the Roman Christians and their remarkable institutions for mutual aid and poor relief, a growth in the overall wealth of the Roman church institutions which eventually was to have deleterious effects on the life of the Roman Christians. However, what is notable about the Roman Christians at the time when Caecilius was observing them was their social inclusivity and generosity. Some outsiders were mistrustful of this; others wanted to join it.

Caecilius's second observation was also shrewd. For the Christians did indeed view themselves as brothers and sisters, members of the same family, bound together in the love and peace of Christ. From the outset, being a people of peace had required tending. Even Clement's first letter, customarily viewed as an appeal to the Corinthians to restore a hierarchical view of the church, was rather above all an expression of 'the conviction that the Christians form a common *adelphotes* which must be preserved' through reciprocal humility and service.<sup>69</sup> In time, the Christian communities developed means of tending this corporateness, both through the disciplines of inter-communal reconciliation and through a ritual observance which expressed the love that bound them to each other—the kiss of peace. This, even more than the social inclusiveness of the Christians, lent itself to misinterpretation by unsympathetic onlookers, who could generalise upon rumours of unbridled sexual behaviour on the part of certain gnostic groups.<sup>70</sup> For good reason the Christians in Athens had a communal rule which

forbade anyone to kiss twice 'because it was pleasurable'.<sup>71</sup> But the early Christians knew that central to their communities' life was a peace, a peace that was unworldly and deeply attractive.

The Christians were aware that the life of their communities of freedom was remarkable; and they wanted to live in such a way that this was visible enough to draw people to faith and freedom in Christ. 'Beauty of life', one of them contended, '. . . causes strangers to join the ranks. . . . We do not talk about great things; we live them'.<sup>72</sup> A strenuous communal lifestyle required constant pastoral attention; and it is likely that the pastoral leaders gave their primary attention not to evangelism but to the church's inner life precisely because of their 'confidence that the clearly and distinctively lived ideal will most effectively make people attentive to the truth of Christianity'.<sup>73</sup> The church orders, which attempted to regulate the life of the early communities, exemplify this concern. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* emphasised that by nurturing right relationships within the church Christian leaders would be 'helpers with God that the number of those who are saved may be increased'.<sup>74</sup> For this reason, wrangling, enmity, and the like, were especially to be avoided, 'lest thou scatter some one from the Church'. The same concern was evident for the individual believers who had been shaped by the church's common life and witness. Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition* enjoined, 'Let us compete among the pagans in being like-minded and sober'.<sup>75</sup> And the later *Canons of Hippolytus* expressed the desire that the lives of Christians 'may shine with virtue, not before each other [only], but also before the Gentiles so they may imitate them and become Christians'.<sup>76</sup>

But these communities were by no means ingrown. Among their activities often were means of serving the material needs of their neighbours which dumbfounded the imagination of their contemporaries. For example, the Christians in Alexandria intervened, on both sides, in a civil war to attempt to mediate a dispute and to bring relief to both parties; the Christians in Carthage nursed the pagan victims of the terrible plague of 252.<sup>77</sup> In many places the Christians provided hospitality and poor relief to pagans as well as believers. The sincerest flattery of this came from the ex-Christian emperor Julian, who in the 360s was finding it difficult to reinstitute paganism as the religion of the Roman Empire. The problem, he discovered, was that the Christians had been so generous. He bewailed: '[I]t is their benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase their atheism . . . the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well.' However, his attempts to get the pagan priests to stir their adherents to comparable practices were, like his brief reign, barren. For all his contention that 'this was our practice of old', nobody believed him. The pagans had neither the living traditions, nor the theological understand-

ings, nor the communal disciplines, nor the appropriate rites to make this practice live among them.<sup>78</sup>

But live it did among the Christians. A telling example comes from upper Egypt, in the period just prior to the conversion of Emperor Constantine. In 312 the local imperial forces, sensing the need to replenish their legions, conscripted some young men and shipped them, guarded by soldiers, down the Nile to Thebes where, to prevent them escaping, they were held in a prison. 'In the evening some merciful Christians, hearing about them, brought them something to eat and drink and other necessities, because they were in distress.' One of the conscripts, twenty-year old Pachomius, asked who these merciful people were. He was told that they were Christians, and that 'Christians were merciful to everyone, including strangers'. But, he repeated, what is a Christian? 'They are men who bear the name of Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and they do good to everyone, putting their hope in Him who made heaven and earth and us men.' 'Hearing of this great grace', the account continues, '[Pachomius's] heart was set on fire with the fear of God and with joy. Withdrawing alone in the prison, he raised his hands to heaven' and offered himself in love for God and the service of others. Shortly thereafter, after being discharged, Pachomius went to a nearby village where he was instructed and was baptised. Through the active mercy of a local community of Christians, Pachomius, the founder of the Christian conventual monastic tradition, was won for the faith.<sup>79</sup> Pachomius's was not an exceptional conversion. This was not simply the result of 'the practical application of charity'; it was the natural product of a community whose common life was animated by deviant values—and was actively attractive.<sup>80</sup>

But how was it that Christians were able to behave like this? Here I come to the heart of the matter. I am convinced that the secret was in their worship, which above all shaped individuals and communities that were distinctive. But before one could worship one had to get through the doors of the church. And that, as we have already noted, was not easy.

After a brief period in the first century in which baptism seemed to follow almost immediately upon confession of Jesus as Lord (Acts 2:38; 8:26–40; 16:33), by the second century churches all over the empire had slowed down greatly the process of baptismal preparation. (There was also, in many churches, at least from the second century, the practice of infant baptism, but the language and shape of the baptismal rite shows that adult baptism had been the main route of entry to the church up to the sixth century.)<sup>81</sup> The early converts to the messianic faith who were baptised quickly had been largely either Jews or God-fearers, who would be steeped in the Jewish Scriptures and way of life. By the second century, however, converts, coming to Christianity directly from a variety of paganisms, were ignorant of these.<sup>82</sup> Their lives and outlooks

represented a late Roman cultural consensus which Christian thinkers viewed as a form of bondage. 'Captives we have been', Origen declared, 'who for many years, Satan held in bonds'.<sup>83</sup> This captivity had been to idols, but also to 'this worship, more subtle than that of idols, which is greed'.<sup>84</sup> Such bondage needed to be broken, and a period of catechism culminating in baptism was the means by which the church attempted to ensure that its members were free people.<sup>85</sup>

As always, friendship was the way to approach the church. In the early period the befriending believers themselves may have been the ones to catechise potential Christians.<sup>86</sup> Or a person exploring the faith might wish to attend a school such as Justin's in Rome.<sup>87</sup> But by the later second century in many parts of the empire a pattern of formal catechism had developed.<sup>88</sup> Believers who had befriended pagans, when convinced of their seriousness, would bring them, early in the morning before one of the church's daily meetings, to speak with a catechist. This teacher would question both the sponsors and the potential candidates. What is the marital state of the candidates? If the candidates are slaves, what do their masters think? Are the candidates involved in some profession, such as chariotteering or teaching gladiators, that the church utterly rejects? 'Let him cease or be rejected.' If the candidate is in a difficult profession, such as military service, they may be catechised only if they promise not to kill. If they kill, or if they as catechumens join the legions, 'let him be rejected'.<sup>89</sup> This inquiry stage has been called, by liturgical theologian Robert Webber of Wheaton College, a 'weeding-out process'.<sup>90</sup> It may seem perverse to reject people before one has taught them, but that was not how the early Christians saw things. Their concern rather was to maintain and nurture the character of the community, in the face of a hostile surrounding society. Conversion, they believed, began less at the level of belief than at the level of lifestyle. Only a person who was willing to change 'his conduct and his habits' was someone who was 'capable of hearing the word'.<sup>91</sup>

Thereafter began a process which could take up to three years of catechism (although 'if a man is keen . . . the time shall not be judged, but only his conduct').<sup>92</sup> During this period, in some areas every single morning before going to work, the catechumens would come to the church house for an hour of study. At times their sponsors would accompany them, and other believers would generally also be there. They would hear a reading from the Bible; they would listen to an address by a catechist, who often expounded the biblical passage which had been read, and which they might, in dialogical fashion, interrupt; there would be a prayer, and the catechumens would depart after having received a blessing.<sup>93</sup>

What did they learn in these sessions? Scholars have, in rather tedious fashion, spoken of doctrinal, moral, and liturgical materials; but they have generally done this without considering the pastoral purpose of the

catechism. This, I believe, was to re-form pagan people, to resocialise them, to deconstruct their old world, and reconstruct a new one, so that they would emerge as Christian people, at home in communities of freedom. And to help the catechumens progress on this journey, the catechists needed especially to instruct them in two areas essential to the life of any community: history and folkways.

The first of these, as Professor Everett Ferguson has recently pointed out, is the primary means by which any community develops its sense of identity.<sup>94</sup> The stories that people tell, and the history that they remember, the heroes and heroines whom they venerate, all shape a community's consciousness. The typical pagan entering Christian catechism had a mental melange of historical data—myths about gods, national exploits, local heroes. To enable the catechumen to become ready to join the Christian community, the catechist needed to replace this melange by an alternative narrative, by the history of salvation as recounted in the books of the Hebrew Scriptures which culminated in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and which continued in the life of the transnational church and the sufferings of the martyrs. For Ferguson, 'the Old Testament was more than an explication and proof of the New Testament message; as the story of God's saving deeds it was the very framework of catechesis and provided the setting for presenting Christ, the very center of that catechesis'.<sup>95</sup> Convincingly Ferguson argues that Irenaeus's *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* is a catechetical document designed to impart a living narrative to catechumens. Other examples of this are not hard to find.<sup>96</sup> And, if conceived in this light, it even makes sense that Origen's daily Old Testament expositions can be seen as catechetical. He is providing for his hearers a living history which, by superceding their old history, will equip them to respond to the life situations they will encounter with precedents that are life-giving.

The second essential area covered by the catechists had to do with folkways. I use this term rather than 'ethics' or 'morality' because it has to do with the ways of a people which are often assumed rather than consciously thought out; they are habitual, even reflexive. The pagans undergoing catechism needed to be *rehabilitated* so that they would react to situations of tension and difficulty in a distinctive way, not like pagans, but like members of a Christian community, and ideally like Jesus. At the heart of the imparting of folkways, as Origen pointed out, was imitation: hence the importance of the life example on the part of catechists and sponsors alike.<sup>97</sup>

But the catechists also taught folkways by precept. From the end of the first century Christian writers divided approaches to life according to 'two ways, one of life and one of death'.<sup>98</sup> Subsequent Christian writers referred to the 'teaching' which their communities imparted. They had to prepare their catechumens, for example, to face martyrdom; or to



know how to behave in public bath-houses; or how to avoid swearing; or how to respond to enemies and warfare.<sup>99</sup> One document, Cyprian's *Ad Quirinum* book 3, provides a full agenda for 'the religious teaching of our school', providing copious biblical citations for 120 'precepts of the Lord'. First on his list and much the longest, as we might expect in light of Cyprian's pre-baptismal struggle with materialism, was 'of the benefit of good works and mercy', for which he provided no fewer than 36 biblical texts. Other precepts had to do with peaceful living together in the Christian community, with relations to the 'Gentile' world, and, rather unpopularity today, with 'the benefit of virginity and continence'.<sup>100</sup> As a quick perusal of Cyprian's biblical texts will indicate, at the heart of his entire teaching, and I believe of the inculcation of early Christian folkways by many catechists, was the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. Athenagoras: 'What then are the teachings on which we are brought up? I say to you, love them who curse you, pray for them who persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven.'<sup>101</sup> Aristeides: 'Now the Christians . . . have the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ himself engraven on their hearts, and these they observe.'<sup>102</sup> And Justin, catechising in Rome, was intensely aware that he was a mediator of the Jesus tradition: as recipient of 'teachings which have come from Christ himself', he sought to 'teach these things truly' to others.<sup>103</sup>

During this period, possibly several years in length, while the catechumens are internalising the history of God's people and experiencing a re-reflexing of their responses, they also participate in the first part of the Sunday worship of the church. Week after week they enter the door, but only just. For, although on Sundays as other days they will hear the reading of the Scriptures and the expositions of the presbyters, they will then be reminded that they are only catechumens. They must leave before the mysterious rites that follow.<sup>104</sup>

But at some point, often in the weeks prior to Easter, the catechumens, accompanied by their sponsors, were called before the church leaders to be scrutinised for their suitability for membership in the Christian community. The questions which they and their sponsors were asked did not have to do with their doctrinal comprehension; they rather had to do with folkways. 'Let their life be examined', the *Apostolic Tradition* enjoins: 'have they lived good lives when they were catechumens? Have they honoured the widows? Have they visited the sick? Have they done every kind of good work?'<sup>105</sup> The *Canons of Hippolytus* sharpen the question to the candidate. 'Are you in two minds, or under pressure from anything, or driven by convention?'<sup>106</sup> Have the candidates, in short, been living like Christians? Are they ready to live like Christians? If so, they were then ready to enter into the most strenuous period of their entire pre-baptismal preparation.

Every day during the weeks before their baptism at Easter they were

to 'hear the gospel', that is be taught the 'rule of faith' which provided a doctrinal framework for their life and understandings.<sup>107</sup> Daily they also had hands laid on them by the church leaders, who exorcised all lurkings of 'the Alien' from them. This, according to William Willimon, served as a final 'detoxification of the dominant order'.<sup>108</sup> In the days immediately before Easter they fasted, received further exorcisms, and on Easter Eve, they held an all-night vigil. The climax of this process came at cockcrow on Easter morning. The water to be used in baptism was blessed. And then, as the *Apostolic Tradition* calmly puts it, 'They shall take off their clothes'. Divested of the old, vulnerable, naked, the catechumens went down into the water and, after being baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, they, having died to their old selves, emerged as Christians who were alive. They were anointed with the oil of thanksgiving, and, having put on their garments, they went through the door into the church. There for the first time, together with all the people, their new family, they raised their hands in prayer. It was at this point, in Tertullian's community, that the newly-baptised person asked God for the charisms of the Holy Spirit.<sup>109</sup> '[W]hen they have prayed, they shall give the kiss of peace.' And then, for the first time they receive the eucharist.<sup>110</sup>

Imagine the emotional impact of these experiences. Margaret Miles of Harvard has written about the way that they 'realize—make real—in a person's body the strong experiences that, together with the religious community's interpretation of that experience, produced a counter-cultural religious self'.<sup>111</sup> The experience of baptism and the eucharist would be all the more potent because, at least from the beginning of the third century, these were secret rites whose meaning the catechumens were not taught until after they had experienced them. Origen, for example, in full flight in one of his homilies, suddenly became uncharacteristically vague and began talking obscurely about 'these august and sublime mysteries which only those know who have the right to know them'.<sup>112</sup> But now, in a final post-Easter week of catechisms, the new believers learned the symbolism and life significance of what they had already experienced in baptism and eucharist. Not only did they now understand what Christians do behind closed doors; they were now full members of the Christian community.

Early Christian writers, unlike many later ones, are reticent in discussing the affective dimensions of their experience.<sup>113</sup> But occasionally one gets a sense of the release, the liberation which they experienced. Origen assured catechumens that 'you descend into the waters . . . you come up again a "new man", ready to "sing a new song"'.<sup>114</sup> Even more telling is Cyprian, who had struggled so much with his inability to live simply. Cyprian reported that the experience of baptism made all the difference. 'By the help of the water of new birth, the stain of former years had been washed away, and a light from above . . . had

been infused into my reconciled heart.' At the heart of this was the Holy Spirit. 'By the agency of the spirit breathed from heaven' Cyprian knew that he had become 'a new man'. And this experience transformed his lifestyle. He could live simply! 'What before had seemed difficult began to suggest a means of accomplishment, what had been thought impossible, to be capable of being achieved.'<sup>115</sup> Now that he was baptised, Cyprian not only had a new label—'Christian'; Cyprian was a free man.

What was it that would keep Cyprian, and his baptised sisters and brothers, free? What was it that would make them into communities of freedom that would communicate good news to the world? It was worship, expressed in a series of practices, performed every Lord's Day in their quasi-domestic meetings. For these practices were important, not only to enable the worshipper to encounter God, but also to shape a distinctive common life that would be visible to the world and attractive to it.

One of these practices was the 'kiss of peace', which in every Sunday service came after the prayers and before the eucharist. Passages in the writings of Paul and Peter indicate that this was already important in the earliest Christian communities.<sup>116</sup> Why this emphasis upon such a curious practice? Professor William Klassen has seen this in a 'living context of people who are building a new sociological reality'. They, from many backgrounds, had experienced reconciliation with and through Jesus Christ. From many families, they had become brothers and sisters. 'Such an emerging social reality called for new practices . . . and new forms of greeting.'<sup>117</sup> The holy kiss was thus not, initially, a liturgical gesture; it was an expression of revolutionary social bonding.<sup>118</sup> This form of greeting, which Christians apparently used on a variety of occasions, became a regular part of the developing rites of Christian worship.<sup>119</sup> By Justin's time it was, in Rome, the regular means of ending the service of the word before the eucharist began.<sup>120</sup> And it was practiced not just in Rome but in North Africa and Asia as well. There were, of course, occasionally problems connected with this.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless it was an essential part of early worship. For the Christians, as we see already in the *Didache*, were convinced that their worship would not be valid if their relationships were broken.<sup>122</sup> By the third century in the Syrian community of the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, regular week-by-week processes were therefore established in the liturgical and pastoral life of the churches to enable reconciliation prior to the eucharist. A deacon would declaim: 'Is there any one that keepeth aught against his fellow?' Most members, at this point, would exchange an embrace celebrating the peace which God had given them through the Spirit. But if there were any that were quarreling with each other, the bishop, as the church's peacemaker, was to call both parties—'for we do not call them brothers until peace has been made between them'—into his presence. A process of mediation ensued, with

the aim of restoring right relationships by the following Lord's Day.<sup>123</sup> Why all this procedure? As we have noted, it was because a community of peace can only worship with integrity when it is at peace: 'If then thou keep any malice against thy brother, or he against thee, thy prayer is not heard and thy eucharist is not accepted.' This procedure was also important because the Christian community only had something novel to offer the world when it was at peace: 'If then thou preach peace to others, still more does it behove thee to have peace with thy brethren. As a son of light and peace therefore, be thou light and peace to all men . . . . Be . . . peaceable one with another, and strive like wise doves to fill the Church, and to convert and tame those that are wild and bring them into her midst.'<sup>124</sup> Because its witness as well as its worship depended upon right relationships, it was vital that the Christians observe the 'kiss of peace'.

The same qualities of peace and unity were fostered by both the congregational prayers and the eucharist. The subject matter dealt with by the prayers of the people was rarely specified, but it probably often included the thanksgivings and intercessions mentioned in Justin 1 *Apology* 13. In Tertullian's Carthage the prayers were militant—'for emperors, for their ministers and those in authority, for the security of the world, for peace on earth, for postponement of the end'.<sup>125</sup> The people praying customarily stood, with hands upraised. Tertullian, some of us may be glad to note, urged his friends to 'pray with modesty and humility, with not even our hands too loftily elevated, but elevated temperately and becomingly'.<sup>126</sup> But posture in prayer was not the main point. It was, as we have already noted in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the peace and unity of the people praying. 'The place where the faithful congregate', Origen observed, 'is especially conducive to prayer and makes it more effectual'.<sup>127</sup> But prayer could be ineffectual, even 'lost', if it was marred by anger and broken relationships.<sup>128</sup>

The eucharist, too, which the pre-Christendom communities celebrated every Sunday, could be marred or lost if there was an absence of unity. This was a time when the community's thanksgivings, generally expressed impromptu by the presiding elder, could well up.<sup>129</sup> A typical eucharistic prayer might remember the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ 'on behalf of those who are purified in soul from all iniquity'. It would also praise God for 'having created the world . . . for the sake of man, and for delivering us from the evil in which we were, and for utterly overthrowing principalities and powers by him who suffered according to [God's] will'.<sup>130</sup> The eucharist was a unitive rite, the focus of the community's common adoration. It was a time of energetic congregational participation—'. . . all the people present sing out their assent by saying "Amen" '<sup>131</sup>—and very possibly the time of its greatest spiritual concentration. But this concentration, once again, could be subverted if relationships were not right. The most important of God's

precepts, according to Tertullian, was 'that we not go up unto God's altar before we have contracted [made peace] with our brethren. For what sort of deed is it to approach the peace of God without peace?'<sup>132</sup> Cyprian expressed this concern with equal intensity. God commands us, he says, 'to be peacemakers, and in agreement, and in one mind in his house'. He united us through baptism, and he wants us 'when new-born to continue' in unity so that the community may be a community of peace. God cares about this so passionately, Cyprian argued, that he 'does not receive the sacrifice of a person who is in disagreement, but commands him to go back from the altar and first be reconciled to his brother . . . . Our peace and brotherly agreement is the greater sacrifice to God . . .', greater even than the eucharist.<sup>133</sup> A rite by itself, Cyprian was convinced, was wrong. As he added in another treatise: '. . . it is of small account to be baptized and to receive the eucharist, unless one profit by it both in deeds and works.'<sup>134</sup> The pastoral purpose of worship was to empower a distinctive people.

The same aim of developing a community of freedom and peace animated the slowly-developing rite of the offering. From the earliest times Christian writers expressed their concern about the power of wealth to destroy souls and relationships; they also, throughout the early centuries, expressed their desire to live as free people. Irenaeus rejoiced in the work of 'our Liberator' Christ, who had freed him and his fellow Christians to go beyond the demands of Old Testament law: 'instead of the law enjoining the giving of tithes, [he told us] to share all our possessions with the poor.'<sup>135</sup> A similar reservation about the tithe is found in other early Christian writing. It was not free: the early Christians put a strong emphasis upon *voluntary* giving. It also was too little: Jesus had told his followers, 'Sell all that you have, and give to the poor'.<sup>136</sup> Why then give? Because, according to Cyprian, people's possessions possess them and deprive them of freedom.<sup>137</sup> In his *De Lapsis* he even noted a clear correlation between wealth and apostasy.<sup>138</sup> The early Christians, from Barnabas and the *Didache* through Tertullian, found it to be good news that the Christians 'share everything with [their] brother and call nothing [their] own'.<sup>139</sup> This did not mean that in their communities private property was abolished; it did mean that because the fear that leads to accumulation was being addressed, people were free—free to share, free to give radically to church funds which were used to support poorer members, widows and orphans, prisoners, other congregations, even non-Christians.<sup>140</sup> And this, the Christians were aware, was good news. Outsiders, from philosophers like Galen to their immediate neighbours, were watching them in amazement. 'Look', they say, 'how they love one another'.<sup>141</sup>

During our period a rite gradually developed—the offering—to nurture this generosity in worship. At first Christians seem generally to have given their gifts directly to the needy sister or brother, or to the

congregational common funds via the bishops or deacons as intermediaries. From the earliest days of the Pauline congregations such giving seems also to have taken place in the context of their Sunday services (1 Cor. 16:1–2).<sup>142</sup> Tertullian reported that this happened once a month in his community in Carthage; in Rome, according to Justin, it seems to have happened weekly. People would come to worship bringing money, but also food (in the *Apostolic Tradition* there are prayers of blessing for oil, cheese and olives as well as bread and wine); and from this food the clergy would take the bread and wine which they would use in the eucharist. By the third century it was clear that people were bringing clothing and shoes as well.<sup>143</sup> Everyone, even the poorest, was admonished to 'come to the Lord's Supper [with] a sacrifice'.<sup>144</sup> Precise details are lacking for this period, but it seems that as the people entered the church building they deposited their varied offerings on a table by the entrance.<sup>145</sup> The deacons, who superintended the process, would then take some food forward for use in the eucharist; the other gifts they deposited with the community's leader, who, as 'the protector of all in need', was responsible for the community's varied ministries.<sup>146</sup> Not to give in such a setting was to deny communion, and thereby to undermine the community's common ethos. The offering was a worship rite for a distinctive community, a people liberated from the addiction of accumulation, freed for 'sharing' and 'magnanimity'.<sup>147</sup>

We conclude our examination of the components of early Christian worship by going back to the part of the service that the catechumens could experience along with the believers; we have still to consider the sermon. It is dangerous to use the word 'sermon' during the pre-Christendom period, for both 'sermon' and 'preaching' have come for us to connote one speaker addressing a passive congregation at length.<sup>148</sup> This was a phenomenon which few early Christians would have recognised. Let us recall the setting of early Christian Sunday worship: a smallish gathering of people, who know each other well, and who meet in a quasi-domestic space early in the morning for an hour or so before going to work. (The Sunday holiday is a Christendom institution, dating from 321.) In this service there would, in addition to the readings and address, be prayers and the eucharist. The time for the address would thus be limited, typically to less than a half an hour. And the person giving the address would speak on intimate terms with people for whose common life in a situation of pressure he was responsible. In this setting, Melito of Sardis's so-called sermon *On the Pascha* doesn't really fit. At 36 minutes it is somewhat on the long side; and its 'extravagant rhetorical forms' are much too polished and literarily dense to have communicated to a typical congregation in Sardis.<sup>149</sup> Origen's *Homilies on Luke* are much shorter, and more straightforward and accessible, than Melito, although nothing that Origen did can be construed as typical!

For more helpful insight on the role of instruction in a typical congregation we can turn to Justin's first *Apology*. From this we learn that in a service in mid-second century Rome, after readings from the 'memoirs of the apostles' and the 'writings of the prophets . . . as long as time permits', the community's leader would then 'in a discourse [*dialogou*] urge and invite [his hearers] to the imitation of these noble things'.<sup>150</sup> Here we have a pattern—a single speaker who is the communal 'president', expounding a biblical passage, and applying it to the life of his community. Liturgical scholars caution us not to generalise too confidently on Justin, but in this case I think his pattern was probably widespread.<sup>151</sup> It's not that there was generally only one speaker. The background of the Jewish synagogue, as well as that of 1 Corinthians 14, would point to the participation of a number of speakers.<sup>152</sup> Tertullian, reporting on worship in Carthage, speaks of 'exhortation in our gatherings, rebuke, divine censure': clearly in his church the exhortations addressed the life of the congregation, but he does not say how many people spoke.<sup>153</sup>

Perhaps the document that helps us most to come to terms with early preaching is the so-called 'Second Letter of Clement'. This anonymous second century document, whose place of writing is debated, is clearly a sermon.<sup>154</sup> 'Clement' comments that in a typical service in his community the elders (he does not say how many) would be exhorting the people. But on this occasion he, 'after God's truth' (the biblical reading), is 'reading you an exhortation to heed what was there written'. Reading an exhortation, by *one* person: obviously this is a departure from the norm, which would be the impromptu exhortations of several elders.<sup>155</sup> But, although the form may have been unusual, 'Clement's' subject-matter would seem to have been typical. His concern was to keep the Christian community that he was addressing on course. He dealt with problems facing the community—the deferring of the parousia, a cooling of faith among people whose parents had been Christian, a creeping love of money.<sup>156</sup> He expressed concern about the community's witness. Neighbours, he reported, who 'hear God's oracles on our lips . . . marvel at their beauty and greatness'. But when they note that we don't live what we say, they scoff at Christian teaching as 'a myth and a delusion'.

When, for instance, they hear from us that God says, 'It is no credit to you if you love those who love you, but it is to your credit if you love your enemies and those who hate you', when they hear these things, they are amazed at such surpassing goodness. But when they see that we fail to love not only those who hate us, but even those who love us, then they mock at us and scoff at the Name.<sup>157</sup>

Jesus' teaching, 'Clement' was reminding the congregation, was a part

of their evangelism. Pagans found this new, intriguing, and beautiful. But when people saw that the Christian community wasn't living what it taught this lack of integrity was a block to its witness. In light of this, 'Clement's' call to the church was to return to fundamentals—to be true to their baptismal commitments: to 'do holy and upright deeds'; to have faith; and above all, 'Let us . . . love one another, so that we may all come to God's Kingdom'.<sup>158</sup>

We don't know whether 'Clement' would have been interrupted in mid-flow, asking him what he meant by *this*, or how the church could do *that*: certainly such interruptions would have been typical of early sermons.<sup>159</sup> But 'Clement's' concern—to shape the character of a community of faith so that it applies the message and teachings of Jesus to its practical circumstances—would have been a typical one.

Further evidence of a sermon—applying the Bible to a community's life—comes from Cyprian's life as reported by his biographer Pontius. In 250–51 the Decian persecution had led to the deaths of some Carthaginian Christians and the apostasy of many more. Later in 251 came the great plague, possibly of measles, which ecumenically killed pagans and Christians alike. Wealthy pagans were 'shuddering, fleeing, shunning the contagion'.<sup>160</sup> Carcasses were piling up in the city. What should the Christians do? Cyprian, according to Pontius, urged the Christian community to be true to their calling. Having described God's goodness and mercy, he then turned to the community members in their setting. He observed

that there was nothing wonderful in our cherishing our own people only with the needed attentions of love, but that he might become perfect who would do something more than the publican or the heathen, who, overcoming evil with good, and practising a clemency which was like the divine clemency, loved even his enemies, who would pray for the salvation of those that persecute him, as the Lord admonishes and exhorts. God continually makes his sun to rise, and from time to time gives showers to nourish the seed, exhibiting all these kindnesses not only to his people, but to aliens also. And if a man professes to be a son of God, why does he not imitate the example of his Father. 'It becomes us', said he, 'to answer to our birth'.<sup>161</sup>

In a situation of danger and plague, Cyprian's sermon was a call to his community to act in light of its catechism. It had been loved into existence by God whose plan has ensured that its dead 'are alive with God'.<sup>162</sup> It had been given a distinctive way to live by Jesus. And here Cyprian, applying Matthew 5:43–48 to this desperately dangerous situation, was urging his friends not to save their own lives, not even to ensure that the Christian community would survive, but rather to act differently from the pagans. This was an opportunity for the Christians

to love their enemies who recently had been persecuting them. They could do so by staying in Carthage and nursing pagan and Christian alike. Christians could do this because they, unlike the pagans, can anticipate 'the pleasure . . . [of] the heavenly kingdom, without fear of death'.<sup>163</sup> A recent study has indicated the missionary effectiveness of this policy. The minority Christian community, which did not flee but stayed to provide nursing, had a higher survival rate than their pagan neighbours; and the pagans who had been nursed through the crisis by Christians were likely to be open to a faith that, unlike their own, had worked.<sup>164</sup>

So Christianity grew in pre-Christendom. Despite its problems and weaknesses, the church's worship was shaping a people whose life, and whose response to the world, were distinctive. In the fourth century major changes occurred. In 312 the Emperor Constantine I was converted, who gave the toleration to the Christians for which they had longed; then he made Christianity the way to get ahead in respectable circles. As disincentives disappeared and incentives appeared, the church grew even more rapidly; by 392 approximately half of the imperial populace was Christian.<sup>165</sup> In that year Emperor Theodosius I outlawed any public worship but that of orthodox Christianity. Proscribing non-Christian worship, coupled with destroying the pagan shrines, led to further church growth. Christianity, by this process which Ramsay MacMullen has called 'flattery and battery', was now the unrivalled religion of the Roman Empire.<sup>166</sup> In this situation, in which there was no alternative, by the eighth century the baptism of infants had become the norm.<sup>167</sup> Their parents and godparents may or may not have been able to catechise them. It was now a different kind of missionary religion, spreading, often through mass conversions, to the barbarian tribes of central and eastern Europe and even becoming the religion of the British Isles. As Nora Chadwick noted, these conversions were often rapid: ' . . . eastern Britain during the Anglo-Saxon invasions became heathen for a time, and then under Pope Gregory, suddenly became Christian of the most orthodox kind.'<sup>168</sup> Suddenly becoming most orthodox implies a different kind of Christianity to that which the pre-Christendom baptismal procedure had led. The substance of these conversions, as indicated by the Venerable Bede's advice to Egbert, Bishop of York, was assent to the rudiments of correct doctrine. Writing about the priorities for preachers, Bede urged:

[I]t is very necessary for you to take on many helpers . . . who shall be active in preaching God's Word in each village and consecrating the Heavenly Mysteries, and especially in baptizing . . . In this preaching to the people I consider that what you should most of all insist on is that you should engrave in the memory of all people under your charge the Catholic Faith, which is contained in

the Symbol [Creed] of the Apostles and the Lord's Prayer, which the Holy Gospel teaches us.<sup>169</sup>

Bede assumed, however, that because of the pressure of time and numbers the narratives and folkways of these people would continue largely unchanged. From a pre-Christendom perspective, their conversion would be, at best, partial.

In this new world, a self-confessedly Christian world, the church became a dominant institution. Beginning with the Council of Mâcon in 585, the tithe was imposed on all citizens to support the work of the church. The tithe was, if you will, a kind of Christendom tax.<sup>170</sup> As the Christendom centuries progressed, some Christians confined the radical teachings of Jesus to a clerical (or sectarian) elite. Others handled them so as not to require Christians to behave unconventionally in their public lives.<sup>171</sup> In this Christendom world, early Christian vocabulary took on new meanings. In Christendom Christians were still called *paroikoi/parochiani*, but the term no longer meant resident aliens. It now meant residents, parishioners, people whose distinctiveness was not that they were unlike their neighbours, but that they were unlike people in other countries whose rulers espoused some other faith. Where everyone was a Christian, their primary allegiance was no longer to the transnational family of God; it rather was to people with whom they shared a common race and place. So the internationalism of early Christianity withered, and God came to be associated primarily with one's own country.

Whatever the benefits of Christendom—and there were many—we today are no longer living in Christendom. The grand edifice built on inducement and compulsion has crumbled, and most people in the West have stopped going to church. Some people in fact now view themselves explicitly as pagan. These people view Christianity as a kind of parenthesis in Western history, which will inevitably be replaced by a religion that is more authentically European—paganism.<sup>172</sup> Those of us who believe otherwise are aware that Christianity is on trial in the West. If the church survives, it will not be because of flattery or battery, 'not by might, nor by power' (Zech. 4:6), but because of God's Spirit who is enabling Christians to emerge, not as mere residents but, as in the early centuries, as resident aliens, purveyors of good news to our time.

This is a daunting challenge. With an unprecedented thoroughness our culture catechises us in beliefs hostile to Christianity. An average American, by the age of 18, has watched 36,000 hours of television and seen 15,000 TV murders.<sup>173</sup> A typical middle-class British child, when not watching television, is peering into a computer screen, while zapping hordes of invaders. Advertisers prey without ceasing upon our susceptibilities. We are enmeshed in a culture of violence, of endless dissatisfaction, of the promise of instant gratification, of limitless sexual

expression. In the supermarket as well as Soho we are assailed by addictions and compulsions. And in this setting we Christians are called to advocate the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to invite people to true life in him.

In view of the paganism of our times, we would seem to have much in common with the pre-Christendom Christians. I believe that we do. But our circumstances are also very different. We are separated from them not only by seventeen hundred years but also by Christendom. In my experience most people today view Christians not as advocates of something new and exciting but rather as blinkered defenders of views that are old, which have been tried, and which have failed. They may differ as to whether our Christian churches and institutions are benign or malign; they largely agree that they are backward-looking and irrelevant. For us, I believe, Christendom is a missiological problem.

In this setting, the early Christians cannot tell us what to do. They didn't have everything worked out, and on many points we, for good reason, would not want to copy them. The early Christians can, however, ask us some questions. 'At work or at home', they might well ask us, 'are you known to your neighbours? Are you known as members of a *superstitio*, a deviation from the norms of accepted behaviour? Are you distinctive because of Jesus, whose teachings and way offer you perspectives and ways of living that are new? And how about your congregations? In the way that they function and worship, are they becoming communities of peace and freedom which are evidences of the truth of the gospel? And your catechism: as you prepare people for baptism, are you equipping them to live freely in the face of the addictions and compulsions of your time? Are you teaching them new narratives and new folkways, so that they are being re-formed into people who are distinctively Christian? Finally, in your worship, what do your rites (for you all have them) say about your churches' beliefs and priorities? Are your rites strong and living, enabling you to address the issues that really trouble your communities? Do you evaluate your worship primarily by how it makes you feel, or by the extent to which it shapes your character—as communities of faith and as individual Christians—so you look like Jesus Christ?'

In German the early church is called *die alte Kirche*—the old Church. I believe that, as we engage in dialogue with it, the old Church can help us, even in post-Christendom, to be followers of Jesus Christ in a church that is perennially young.<sup>174</sup>

#### Endnotes

1 *Epistle to Diognetus* 6.9; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.9.

2 P. Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten: Unter-*

*suchung zur Sozialgeschichte*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe, 18. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987), 161.

- 3 G.F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 77–80; L.M. White, *Building God's House in the Roman World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 111–14; R. Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City, 312–1308* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 33.
- 4 Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 12.2.
- 5 R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 86, 109–10.
- 6 Y. Congar, 'Souci du salut des païens et conscience missionnaire dans le christianisme postapostolique et préconstantinien', in P. Granfield and J.A. Jungmann (eds.), *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970), I, 3.
- 7 R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 592.
- 8 Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.7.19; Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 24.9–10, 39.
- 9 G. Bardy, *Menschen werden Christen: Das Drama der Bekehrung in den ersten Jahrhunderten*, trans. J. Blank (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1988), 179.
- 10 A.D. Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 212. Apparent exceptions, such as those in Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 13.13 and the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 1.6.4–5 (E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher [eds.], *New Testament Apocrypha* [London: SCM, 1973–1974], 538–39) are not strong enough to validate Michael Green's assumption that 'there can be no doubt that . . . open air evangelism continued throughout the first two centuries' (*Evangelism in the Early Church* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970], 197).
- 11 G. Kretschmar, 'Das christliche Leben und die Mission in der frühen Kirche', in H. Frohnes and U.W. Knorr (eds.), *Kirchengeschichte als Missionsgeschichte I, Die Alte Kirche* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1974), 94.
- 12 Congar, 'Souci du salut', 5.
- 13 1 Clement 59.4; Ignatius, *Eph.* 10.1; Aristeides, *Apol.* 17.3; Justin, *Trypho* 108.3; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.56; Cyprian, *De Oratione dominica* 17; to which Norbert Brox (see next note) adds Justin, *Trypho* 35.8; *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.10.16–17. To these I would add Polycarp, *Ep.* 12.3; Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 20; Pontius, *Vita Cypriani* 9. Of these, four refer explicitly to Jesus' enemy-loving teaching; five refer implicitly to enemy-loving; and only two (1 Clement 59.4 and Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 20) express prayer for conversion of 'all nations' or of an individual on more general grounds.
- 14 N. Brox, 'Zur christlichen Mission in der Spätantike', in K. Kertelge (ed.), *Mission im Neuen Testament*, *Questiones Disputatae*, 93 (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: Herder, 1982), 211.
- 15 Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3, preface, 9, 120. The significance of this work has been missed in part because the editors of the Ante-Nicene Fathers edition have entitled it 'Three Books of Testimony Against the Jews' (ANF, 5, 507).
- 16 MacMullen, *Christianizing*, 102.
- 17 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.17; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 10.2.
- 18 D. Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 90; cf. J.N. Lightstone, *The Commerce of the Sacred: Mediation of the Divine among Jews in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora*, *Brown Judaic Studies*, 59 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 12.
- 19 Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.2.
- 20 'Christians perform their rites and teach their doctrines in secret . . . they do this with good reason to escape the penalty that hangs over them' (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.7).
- 21 Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 1.3.
- 22 *Testamentum Domini* 1.36 (J. Cooper and A.J. Maclean, eds., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902); this is traditional material, reflecting pre-Christendom practice. The

- date and place of origin of the document are matters of scholarly debate. I agree with Grant Sperry-White (*The Testamentum Domini: A Text for Students*, Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study, 19 [Bramcote, Notts: Grove Books, 1991], 6) in locating the document in Asia Minor, in the second half of the fourth century (but before 381), not least because of a reason that Sperry-White does not offer: the prominence of charismatic phenomena in the church's life that may suggest some kind of continuity with the piety represented by Montanism (1.24, 32, 47).
- 23 *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.39 (only pagans who promise to repent, and say 'We believe', are received into the congregation 'that they may hear the word'); *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.5.39. See also Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Canonical Epistle* 11; Laodicea, Canon 43 (152), and the comments of Origen (*Contra Celsum* 3.51), and Epiphanius (*Panarion* 3.2.21).
- 24 Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 32.6.
- 25 Cyprian, *Ep.* 73(74).11; Firmilian of Neocaesarea, in Cyprian *Ep.* 74(75).15, quoting Cyprian on this theme.
- 26 Cyprian, *Ep.* 75(69).2.
- 27 Aristeides, *Apol.* 16; *Epistle to Diognetus* 2; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.75; Hippolytus, *Comm. Daniel* 1.17; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 41, 35.
- 28 *Didascalia Apostolorum* 6.23.
- 29 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.10.
- 30 Justin, *Trypho* 8.
- 31 2 Clement 13:3.
- 32 K. Beyschlag, 'Zur Geschichte der Bergpredigt in der Alten Kirche', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 74 (1977), 297; R.M. Grant, 'The Sermon on the Mount in Early Christianity', *Semeia* 12 (1978), 215–31.
- 33 For example, in Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum*, four of eight explicit New Testament quotations come from Matthew 5–6, and two quote Matthew 5:44 and 5:46; in Athenagoras, *Legatio*, of 23 citations five come from Matthew 5–7, and two of these refer to Matthew 5:44, 46. The location of enemy-love in the argument of these two works is absolutely central: Theophilus, 3.14; Athenagoras, 11.2. In the entire corpus of patristic citations from Matthew's gospel up through and including Irenaeus, the most quoted verses (both cited 17 times) are Matthew 17:5 ('This is my Son', from the Transfiguration account) and Matthew 5:44 ('Love your enemies'). If one adds the entire pericope of the sixth antithesis (Matthew 5:43–48), the total number of citations rises to 37, making this by far the most frequently cited passage in Matthew. This information comes from the statistical tables in Wolf-Dietrich Köhler, *Die Rezeption des Matthäusevangeliums in der Zeit vor Irenäus*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe, 24 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987, 541–42. (I owe this reference to Professor Peter Lampe of the University of Kiel.) It would be fascinating to compare this with citations from other New Testament writings.
- 34 W. Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 185–86. See also V.P. Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1973), 106 (re. 1 Thessalonians 5:15: 'The parallelism is so close [see also 1 Pet. 3:9 that the apostle may be dependent on a catechetical tradition akin to that behind Mt. 5:38–39, 44, and Lk. 6:29, 35]'; C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), II, 645 (cf. Rom. 12.17 with 1 Thess. 5.15 and 1 Pet. 3.9: 'The close similarity between [these passages] . . . suggests that we have here the fixed formulation of the catechetical tradition.').
- 35 E. Hoornaert, *The Memory of the Christian People*, trans. R.R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 81.
- 36 Pierre de Labriolle, 'Paroecia', *Bulletin du Cange* (Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi) 3 (1927), 196–99. He comments: 'The idea of the heterogeneity of the Christians from their pagan neighbours and the society where they live is one of those which one finds most frequently in the texts' (198). For other samples, see 1 Clement, preface;

- Polycarp, *Phil.* preface; 2 Clement 5:1; Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.3; *Epistle to Diognetus* 5.5; Pontius, *Vita Cypriani* 11.
- 37 Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.19, 20; *Passio Sanctorum Scillitanorum* (H. Musurillo [ed.], *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], 89).
- 38 Tertullian, *Apol.* 38.3.
- 39 For a partial list, see Justin, *Trypho* 109, 110.3; 1 *Apol.* 39.1–3; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.34.4; Tertullian, *Adv. Iud.* 3; *Adv. Marc.* 3.21; 4.1; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.33; Cyprian, *De Habitu Virginum* 3; Pseudo-Cyprian, *Adv. Iud.* 3.
- 40 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 23.
- 41 Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.52–56; *Passio Perpetuae* 21 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 131).
- 42 *Passio Perpetuae* 9 (Musurillo, *Acts*, 117).
- 43 Eusebius, *HE* 5.1.60.
- 44 Tertullian, *Apol.* 50.13.
- 45 Celsus, in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.55.
- 46 E.G. Hinson, *The Evangelization of the Roman Empire: Identity and Adaptability* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1981), 49; E. Ferguson, 'Some Factors in the Growth of the Early Church', *Restoration Quarterly* 16 (1973), 45.
- 47 *Epistle to Diognetus* 5.
- 48 Tertullian, *Apol.* 3.1.
- 49 Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 8.4.
- 50 Athenagoras, *Legatio* 23.
- 51 Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 2.32.4. Other passages which relate exorcism to conversion are Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 4; Tertullian, *Apol.* 23.18; *Acts of Thomas* 20; Pseudo-Clement, *De Virginitate* 1.10; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 27.5–7; Origen, *Homilies on Samuel* 1.10; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.18; *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.1.
- 52 On the role of miracle in conversion, see the debate between MacMullen, 'That was what produced converts. Nothing else is attested', in *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 96; and Lane Fox, who knows of 'no historical case when a miracle or an exorcism turned an individual, let alone a crowd, to the Christian faith' (*Pagans and Christians*, 330). Lane Fox, in view of the testimony of contemporaries in n.51 above, seems to understate the extent to which contemporaries felt that miracle was a component in conversion. MacMullen, on the other hand, engagingly overstates his case, not least because of the seriousness with which he takes the reports of miracles in the ministry of Gregory [Thaumaturgus] in Pontus in the mid-third century. It is fascinating to compare the accounts of two contemporary leaders' strategies for dealing with the plague: that of Gregory, who is said to have combated disease by the miraculous power of his presence, and that of Cyprian (who believed in miracle), who urged the Carthaginian Christians to stay in the plague-ridden city and nurse the infected. For Gregory, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Gregory*; Victor Ryssel, *Eine syrische Lebensgeschichte des Gregorius Thaumaturgus* (Zürich: August Frick, 1894); for Cyprian, see Pontius, *Vita Cypriani* 9; Cyprian, *De Mortalitate* 14, 16.
- 53 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 7.18.
- 54 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 14 (my italics).
- 55 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 14.
- 56 Justin, 2 *Apol.* 6.
- 57 Cyprian, *Ep.* 1, *Ad Donatum* 3–4; Pontius, *Vita Cypriani* 4. In one of his treatises (*De Lapsis* 11) Cyprian interprets those whose 'wealth fettered them like a chain' as those who are in spiritual bondage—'booty and food for the serpent'.
- 58 J. Lofland and R. Stark, 'Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective', *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965), 871.
- 59 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 16.
- 60 Brox, 'Zur christlichen Mission', 223; J. Foster, *After the Apostles: Missionary Preaching in the First Three Centuries* (London: SCM, 1951), 40, 42.
- 61 Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 310. For an example of the evidence, see the list of

- clothing at the disposal of the church of Circa in North Africa in 303, in *Gesta apud Zenophilum* 3, in R. MacMullen and E.N. Lane (eds.), *Paganism and Christianity, 100-425 C.E.: A Sourcebook* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 249.
- 62 *Didascalia Apostolorum* 3.5. In this instance, the male church leaders did not entirely approve of this gift!
- 63 *Didascalia Apostolorum* 26; Tertullian, *Ad Uxorem* 2.7; *Apostolic Constitutions* 1.10.
- 64 Augustine to Firmus, *Ep.* 2\* 4.1-7 (Divjak), cited in P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 342.
- 65 Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 8.4; 9.2.
- 66 Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 113-14.
- 67 Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 330. The father of a reader in an Egyptian church in 303 was named Copreus, meaning 'off the dung heap' (282).
- 68 Hermas, *Sim.* 9.20.2; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.61.
- 69 B.E. Bowe, *A Church in Crisis: Ecclesiology and Paraenesis in Clement of Rome*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, 23 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), 4, 155.
- 70 E.g. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26.4-5. For comment, see S. Benko, 'The Libertine Gnostic Sect of the Phibionites according to Epiphanius', *Vigiliae Christianae* 21 (1967), 103-19.
- 71 Athenagoras, *Legatio* 32.
- 72 Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 31.7; 38.5.
- 73 Brox, 'Zur christlichen Mission', 211.
- 74 *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.54; cf. *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.11-12.
- 75 *Apostolic Tradition* 29.
- 76 *Canons of Hippolytus* 19.
- 77 Eusebius, *HE* 7.32.7-12; Pontius, *Vita Cypriani* 9. For comment, see Kretschmar, 'Das christliche Leben', 124; R. Stark, 'Epidemics, Networks, and the Rise of Christianity', *Semeia* 56 (1992), 159-75.
- 78 Julian, *Ep.* 22 (MacMullen and Lane, *Paganism and Christianity*, 270-71.).
- 79 'The First Greek Life of Pachomius', in A. Veilleux (ed.), *Pachomian Koinonia, I: The Life of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 300-301.
- 80 H. Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 56. Cf. the analysis of Kretschmar, 'Das christliche Leben', 120.
- 81 J. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 120. For recent discussion of the origins of infant baptism see E. Ferguson, 'Inscriptions and the Origin of Infant Baptism', *JTS* 30 (1979), 37-46; D.F. Wright, 'How Controversial Was the Development of Infant Baptism in the Early Church?' in J.E. Bradley and R.A. Muller (eds.), *Church, Word and Spirit: Historical and Theological Essays in Honor of Geoffrey W. Bromiley* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 45-63; idem, 'The Origins of Infant Baptism: Child Believers' Baptism?' *SJT* 40 (1987), 1-23; idem, 'One Baptism or Two? Reflections on the History of Christian Baptism', *Vox Evangelica* 18 (1988), 7-23.
- 82 Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, 86.
- 83 Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 32.4.
- 84 Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 1.7.
- 85 A further concern of the Christian leaders was that potential baptismal candidates might have been infected by one or more heresies that were circulating in the Christian world. For a discussion of the deferring of baptism, see Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship*, 87.
- 86 M. Gärtner, *Die Familienerziehung in der alten Kirche*, Kölner Veröffentlichungen zur Religionsgeschichte, 7 (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1985), 80.
- 87 Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, 299, views the lectures of Justin and Valentinus as a separate category from the catechism which had been provided either in the *oikos* or the formal catechetical instructions as described in *Apostolic Tradition*. From

- Justin's *Acta 3* (Musurillo, *Acts*, 45) it appears that 'anyone who wished' could come to his school, which would not be characteristic of the carefully screened entrance to the church's formal catecheses. On the other hand, he reports (1 *Apol.* 61) that 'those who are persuaded and believe that the things we teach and say are true, and promise that they can live accordingly', are allowed into the final preparations for baptism, while Justin prays and fasts along with them. Justin may best be viewed, therefore, as a teacher who serves both as catechist and befriending sponsor.
- 88 A. Hamman, 'Catechumen, Catechumenate', in Angelo di Berardino (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992), I, 151.
- 89 *Apostolic Tradition* 15-16.
- 90 R. Webber, 'Ethics and Evangelism: Learning from the Third-Century Church', *Christian Century* (24 September 1986), 806.
- 91 Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 22.5; *Apostolic Tradition* 15.
- 92 *Apostolic Tradition* 17.
- 93 The basis for the material in this paragraph, largely drawn from the *Apostolic Tradition* and from Origen's daily catecheses in Caesarea between 239-242, is the work of Pierre Nautin: his introduction to Origen, *Homélies sur Jérémie*, Sources chrétiennes, 232 (Paris: Cerf, 1976), 100-12; and his *Origène: Sa vie et son oeuvre*, Christianisme Antique, 1 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 391-407. Some of Nautin's reconstructions, for example of three-year lectionary/catechetical cycles, though immensely learned, seem a little too ingenious. Nautin also, in my view, misses the point of catechism, which was not just to cover the Bible ('The preaching which they heard in the assemblies served them as catechism', *Homélies sur Jérémie*, 110) but to prepare the catechumens to be members of communities whose life and witness took place in potentially dangerous circumstances.
- 94 E. Ferguson, 'Irenaeus' Proof of the Apostolic Preaching and Early Catechetical Tradition', *Studia Patristica* 18, 3 (1989), 119-40.
- 95 Ferguson, 'Irenaeus' Proof of the Apostolic Preaching', 134.
- 96 E.g. Egeria, *Travels* 46.2-3; Augustine, *De Cat. Rud.* 1.3, 6; 2.18-24, 26-27.
- 97 Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 4.6.
- 98 *Didache* 1.1; Barnabas, *Ep.* 18-21. For a variant, which does not use the exact expression 'two ways', see *Epistula Apostolorum* 37-39.
- 99 *Didascalia Apostolorum* 5.5; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.7; John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 143-46, 155-60; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.8; *Homilies on Joshua* 15.1.
- 100 Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3.1-2 (good works and wealth); living in peaceful community (3, 8, 9, 21, 22, 109, 113); relations with outsiders (34, 44, 62); virginity and continence (32).
- 101 Athenagoras, *Legatio* 11.2.
- 102 Aristeides, *Apol.* 15.
- 103 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 14.
- 104 *Apostolic Tradition* 18-19.
- 105 *Apostolic Tradition* 20.
- 106 *Canons of Hippolytus* 19.
- 107 Although *Apostolic Tradition* 20, does not spell out the content of the teaching when the candidates 'hear the gospel', fourth-century catechists used this as a period to 'hand over' and expound the Creed.
- 108 W.H. Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 59.
- 109 Tertullian, *On Baptism* 20; for comment, see K. McDonnell and G.T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 98-105.
- 110 *Apostolic Tradition* 21.
- 111 M.R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 24.



- 112 Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 1.4.  
 113 The writers are equally reticent in reporting on the 'charismatic' dimension of their worship. Tertullian speaks (*De Anima* 9.4) of a woman who throughout the various parts of the Montanist liturgy was accustomed to have 'gifts of revelation'. More surprisingly, Origen, in un-Montanist Jerusalem, describes a scene during one of his homilies in which a woman began to cry out and what was evidently an exorcism took place (Origen, *Homilies on Samuel* 1.10). It is not easy to reconstruct the liturgical setting for the prophetic ministry which evidently flourished in much early Christian worship. Cf. H. Kraft, 'Die Lyoner Märtyrer und der Montanismus', in E. Dassmann and K. S. Frank (eds.), *Pietas: Festschrift für Bernhard Köting* (Münster: Aschen-dorff, 1980), 251.  
 114 Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 5.5  
 115 Cyprian, *Ep.* 1; *Ad Donatum* 4.  
 116 Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14.  
 117 W. Klassen, 'The Sacred Kiss in the New Testament: An Example of Social Boundary Lines', *NTS* 39 (1993), 132.  
 118 E.g. the martyrs, all them apparently catechumens, in the amphitheatre of Carthage in 203, who were reported as 'kissing one another they sealed their martyrdom with the kiss of peace' (*Passio Perpetuae* 8).  
 119 See Eleanor Kreider, 'Let the Faithful Greet Each Other: The Kiss of Peace', *Conrad Grebel Review* 5 (1987), 29-49.  
 120 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 65.  
 121 Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.12; Athenagoras, *Legatio* 32.  
 122 *Didache* 14.2.  
 123 *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.54.  
 124 *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.53-54. For other pre-Christendom texts about the peace, see Tertullian, *De oratione* 18; *Apostolic Tradition* 18; Cyprian, *De Oratione Dominica* 23; Origen, *Homilies on Romans* 10.33.  
 125 Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.2.  
 126 Tertullian, *De Oratione* 17; cf. Origen, *On Prayer* 31.2.  
 127 Origen, *On Prayer* 31.5.  
 128 Tertullian, *De Oratione* 11. See also *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.53: '... those who bear anger and malice towards their brethren God does not hear; and though thou pray three times in one hour, thou shalt gain nothing, for thou art not heard by reason of thine enmity against thy brother.'  
 129 The earliest recorded eucharistic prayer is in *Apostolic Tradition* 4, which is a sample of what may commonly have been prayed but not an invariable formula, even in Rome (see *Apostolic Tradition* 9). Justin reported that the president would 'offer prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability' (1 *Apol.* 67). The *Didascalia Apostolorum* (2.58) even seems to indicate that, when a bishop from another congregation came as a visitor, the eucharistic prayer might be divided; with the visitor being allowed to 'speak over the cup'. Benedictine scholar Allen Bouley has pointed out that it was only in the mid-fourth century that fixed formulae became usual (*From Freedom to Formula: The Evolution of the Eucharistic Prayer from Oral Improvisation to Written Texts*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Christian Antiquity, 21 [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1981], 208).  
 130 Justin, *Trypho* 41.  
 131 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 65; trans. Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak* (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Co., 1971), 94.  
 132 Tertullian, *De Oratione* 11.  
 133 Cyprian, *De Oratione Dominica* 24.  
 134 Cyprian, *Ad Quirinum* 3.26.  
 135 Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5.13.3; see also 4.17.5; 4.18.2.

- 136 Cyprian, *De opere et eleemosynis* 7; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.35.  
 137 Cyprian, *De opere et eleemosynis* 13.  
 138 Cyprian, *De Lapsis* 6.  
 139 Barnabas, *Ep.* 19.8; *Didache* 4.8; Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.11.  
 140 Eusebius, *HE* 4.23.10; 6.34.11.  
 141 Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.7; on Galen, see R. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 79-82.  
 142 E.E. Ellis, *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 94ff. I owe this reference to Professor Everett Ferguson.  
 143 *Gesta apud Zenophilum* 6.  
 144 Cyprian, *De opere et eleemosynis* 15; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.36; 5.1. For comment, see A. Hamman, *Vie liturgique et vie sociale* (Paris: Desclée, 1968), 265.  
 145 For the development of the offertory in Rome; see J.A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, trans. F.A. Brunner (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1986), II, 1-10.  
 146 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 67.  
 147 Cyprian, *De opere et eleemosynis* 15, 20, 26.  
 148 I have benefited from reading the illuminating, and as yet unpublished, MS of D.C. Norrington, *The Sermon in the Early Church and Today*.  
 149 S.G. Hall (ed.), *Melito of Sardis on Pascha and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), xix.  
 150 Justin, 1 *Apol.* 67.  
 151 P.F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1992), 139-40.  
 152 E.P. Sanders, *Judaism, Practice and Belief, 66 BCE-66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992), 202.  
 153 Tertullian, *Apol.* 39.3-4.  
 154 As to the place of origin of 2 Clement, C.C. Richardson proposes Egypt (*Early Christian Fathers*, Library of Christian Classics, I [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953], 186); P.F. Beatrice says Syria or possibly Egypt (*Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, 1, 181); R.M. Grant is confident of Rome (*The Apostolic Fathers* [New York: Thomas Nelson, 1965], 2, 109), as is G.F. Snyder (in Everett Ferguson [ed.], *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* [New York: Garland, 1990], 217).  
 155 2 Clement 17:3, 5; 19:1.  
 156 2 Clement 11:2-3; 12:1; 20:1.  
 157 2 Clement 13:3-4.  
 158 2 Clement 6:9; 20:1.  
 159 Norrington, *The Sermon in the Early Church*, 10, 34, 110; J. Heinemann, 'Preaching, in the Talmudic Period', in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 13 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), cols. 995-96; G.W. Doyle, 'Augustine's Sermonic Method', *WTJ* 39 (1976-77), 236; F. Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, trans. B. Battershaw and G.R. Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 427-28; Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 1.7; 1.8; 5.13; Egeria, *Travels* 46.4.  
 160 Pontius, *Vita Cypriani* 9.  
 161 Pontius, *Ibid.*, 9.  
 162 Cyprian, *De mortalitate* 20.  
 163 Cyprian, *Ibid.*, 26.  
 164 R. Stark, 'Epidemics, Networks, and the Rise of Christianity', *Semeia* 56 (1992), 159-75. For comparable events in Alexandria in 260, see Eusebius, *HE* 7.22.2-10.  
 165 MacMullen, *Christianizing*, 85.  
 166 MacMullen, *Christianizing*, 119. Sir Herbert Butterfield's more restrained equivalent expression is 'inducement and compulsion' (*Christianity and History* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949], 135).  
 167 For the persistence of believers' baptism into the Christendom period, see

- A. Piédagnel (ed.), *Jean Chrysostome: Trois catéchèses baptismales*, Sources Chrétiennes, 366 (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 256–57, who regards infant baptism in the Eastern and Western churches as available and justified by some theologians but 'not generalized' in practice until the sixth century. A leading authority on baptismal practice, the Rev. S. Anita Stauffer, points to 'abundant adult baptisms in the West until about the eighth century, although infant baptism was also practiced on an increasing basis (depending on what specific area is under consideration)' (personal communication, 10 March 1994).
- 168 N. Chadwick, *The Celts* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 194.
- 169 Bede, *Epistle to Egbert* (5 November 734), 5, in J.N. Hillgarth (ed.), *Christianity and Paganism, 350–700: The Conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 161.
- 170 Hamman, *Vie liturgique et sociale*, 279.
- 171 L. Allen, 'The Sermon on the Mount in the History of the Church', *Review and Expositor* 89 (1992), 245–62.
- 172 Tony Grist, 'Paganism today leaves room for a sense of wonder', *Guardian*, 15 April 1991, 35.
- 173 Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 23.
- 174 This paper owes much to the detailed criticisms of S. Anita Stauffer, Everett Ferguson, Eoin de Bhaldraithe, O. Cist., and, as always, Eleanor Kreider.