

- *Much of Roman culture was shaped by Greek thinking especially after Greece came under Roman rule in 146 B.C.*
- *The Greeks tried first to build their society upon the city-state (the polis), comprised of all citizens.*
 - *All values had meaning in reference to the polis.*
 - *Thus, when Socrates (d. 399 B.C.) had to choose between death and exile from that which gave him meaning, he chose death.*
 - *But the polis proved to be an insufficient base on which to build a society.*

Mark's Audience
Romans whose culture was based on Greek thought



- *The Greeks and later the Romans also tried to build a society upon their gods. All values had meaning in reference to the polis.*
 - *The gods were amplified humanity, not divinity. They were not basically different from human men and women. They made mistakes, they had affairs, they got drunk.*
 - *Because they had no infinite god, their collective gods were not big enough to support the society.*
 - *Thus, they had no sufficient reference point either individually or collectively. No ultimate basis on which to make decisions or to provide values.*

Mark's Audience
Romans whose culture was based on Greek thought



- *In the days of Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.), Rome turned to an authoritarian state.*
- *Prior to Julius Ceasar, the senate could not keep order with rampant crime and rivals fighting for power. Self-interest outweighed social interest.*
- *Thus, in desperation the people accepted authoritarian government.*
- *5 Levels of Human Government:
Theocracy > Collective compact >
Pragmatism > Hedonism > Anarchy*

Mark's Audience
Romans under the Caesars



- *After Caesar's death, Octavian (63 B.C. – 14 A.D.) (Caesar Augustus) came to power.*
 - *Poet Virgil, Octavian's friend, wrote the Aeneid with the object of showing that Augustus was divinely appointed and Rome's mission was to bring peace and civilization to the world.*
 - *After 12 B.C. he became the Pontifex Maximus as head of the state religion urging everyone to worship "the spirit of Rome and genius of the emperor".*
 - *Emperors ruled as gods and tried to legislate morals and family life.*

- *But a human god is a poor foundation so Rome became cruel and decadent as the logical end of its worldview.*

Mark's Audience Romans under the Caesars



- *Before Nero*
 - *In general, the Empire did not differentiate Christians from Jews in the time before Nero and thus granted them the same privileges as Jews.*
 - *A few martyrdoms are recorded, but these were not instigated by Roman authorities.*
 - *The Jewish establishment was involved in the martyrdom of James ca. 35 as recorded in Acts.*
 - *Herod Agrippa I, a client of Rome, executed James the brother of John ca. 44.*
 - *Paul confesses he set out to persecute Christians in Damascus.*
 - *James, the brother of the Lord, was executed ca. 62 by Ananias the high priest. No persecutions by the Emperor are reported.*

Mark's Audience Romans under the persecution of Nero



- *During Nero (54-68 AD)*
 - *The cruel persecution of Christians in Rome by Nero was not directly related to their religion.*
 - *They were singled out as a scapegoat for Nero who is reported to have started a major fire in Rome to make way for his civic improvements. The Christians were condemned for being arsonists, not for being Christians.*
- *The persecution of Christians by Nero was terrible.*
- *Paul and Peter were executed during this time, ca. 64.*
- *Nero legislated that the profession of Christianity was now illegal - non licet esse Christianus.*

Mark's Audience Romans under the persecution of Nero

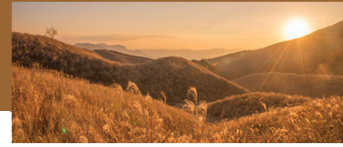


- *After Nero*
 - *Christians are seen as set apart from Jews.*
 - *They met in secret, professed to eat the body and blood of the Lord, called each other brother and sister and gave each other the kiss of peace, they were accused of immorality, cannibalism, incest, infanticide, magic, etc.*
 - *Jews had been excused from honoring the gods as Christians were seen as a Jewish sect. It soon became clear they were not Jews and thus their failure to honor the gods became a crime against the empire.*
 - *Most opposition came from the common people, not Roman officials. Roman officials were concerned with keeping the peace, not religion.*

Mark's Audience Romans under the persecution of Nero



The Response of Early Christians



— *It was the Christians who were able to resist religious mixtures, syncretism. This speaks volumes of the strength of their worldview. This strength rested on:*

- *God being an infinite-personal God.*
- *His speaking in the OT, the life of Jesus and the NT in ways people could understand.*
- *Thus, Christians had knowledge about the universe and mankind that people cannot find out by themselves and they had an absolute by which to judge society and the political state in which they lived.*
- *And they had grounds for basic human dignity and the value of the individual made in the image of God.*

The Response of Early Christians

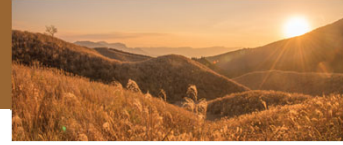


— *They were not killed because they worshiped Jesus. Nobody cared who worshiped whom as long as the worshiper did not disrupt the unity of the state centered on emperor worship.*

— *Christians were killed because they were rebels, especially after their rejection by the Jews lost for them that immunity granted since Julius Caesar's time.*

1. *They worshiped Jesus as God and worshiped the infinite-personal God only. Worshiping the one and only God was counted as treason. They rejected all forms of syncretism. All other gods were false gods.*
2. *No authoritarian state can tolerate those who have an authority by which to judge that state and its actions. The Christians had that absolute in God's revelation.*

The Response of Early Christians



— Even though Emperor Constantine ended persecution of the Christians, legalized Christianity (313) and made it the official state religion (381) most people went on in their old ways.

- Apathy was the chief mark of the later Empire as seen in lack of creativity in the arts. Officially sponsored art was decadent.
- The elite preferred social life to intellectual interests.
- Rome slumped lower and lower aggravated by inflation and a costly government.
- Authoritarianism increased to counter apathy such as laws passed to bind small farmers to their land.
- So few thought the old civilization worth saving.
- Invasion by the barbarians completed the breakdown but Rome fell because it had no sufficient inward base.

The Response of Early Christians



— Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* said the following 5 attributes marked Rome at its end

1. A mounting love of show and luxury (affluence);
2. A widening gap between the very rich and the very poor (among countries and within a country);
3. An obsession with sex;
4. Freakishness in the arts, masquerading as originality; and
5. An increased desire to live off the state.

Look familiar?

5 Marks of the Early Church



1. *The spread of Christianity.*

- *By the time of Constantine, the flame of evangelism had reached the entire Roman Empire. It is reported that by the 4th century (300s), there were 30,000 Christians in Rome.*
- *Why did Christianity spread?*
 - *The passion of the Church.*
 - *The transforming effect of the gospel.*
 - *The universal offer of salvation.*
 - *Christianity offered answers to a crumbling empire.*
 - *The martyrdom of the faithful.*

5 Marks of the Early Church



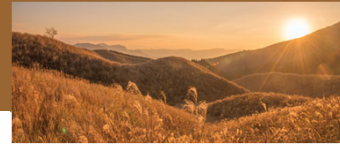
3. *The formulation of orthodoxy, basic Bible truth.*

- *Concerning Jesus | Was He God, Man, some combination, or both?*
- *Concerning Scripture | What was Bible?*

4. *Concerning Church Leadership | The rise of the bishop.*

- *The need to answer heresy.*
- *The need to answer apostates.*

5 Marks of the Early Church



5. *The rise of the apologist*

- *An apologist is someone who takes the truths of Christianity and defends them as reasonable. He takes the fallacies of a culture and shows that Christianity alone meets those deepest needs. Paul was an apologist (Acts 17).*
- *Modern examples = CS Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, Oz Guinness, Norm Geisler, RC Sproul, John Piper, John MacArthur, Albert Mohler.*
- *If you were someone who wanted to present Christ to your world, there was no scholarship foundation; there was “fideism” faith only . . .*

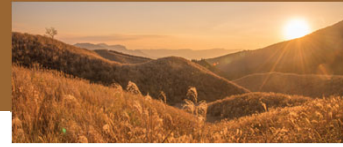
5 Marks of the Early Church



5. *The rise of the apologist, Clement of Alexandria in North Africa*

- *He believed just as the Jew had the law of God to bring him to Christ, the gentile world had philosophy. Not that he felt it was inspired.*
- *But philosophy began with the failure of the gods. And philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, saw that the gods weren't big enough to give the dignity of man, a reason for existence, and a system of morality. So they began to create a rationalistic system by which they could give a unity to all of existence.*
- *But philosophy does not work and Clement saw that. It didn't work then and it doesn't work today which is why in the 1960s, we ended up with existentialism where you became your own god and created your own reality.*

5 Marks of the Early Church



5. *The rise of the apologist, Clement of Alexandria in North Africa*

- *So Clement wrote a trilogy.*
 1. *Protrepticus (Exhortation to the Heathen) lays a foundation in the knowledge of divine truth, the religious basis of Christian morality.*
 2. *Paedagogus, The Instructor, was the second in the trilogy and goes onto develop a Christian ethic.*
 3. *Stromata, gives the individual cases of conduct.*

- *So Clement saw the Jew and Greek reaching out on their own terms. The Jew was reaching out on the basis of the given law (Jews seek a sign). And the Greek on the basis of philosophy (and the Greeks seek for wisdom). And he would go to the Greek world and say you are looking for an absolute. And that Absolute is God.*

5 Marks of the Early Church



5. *The rise of the apologist, Clement's student, Origen*

- *Origen put together the first systematic theology – God, Christ, Holy Spirit, Man, Sin, Salvation, Prophecy, Bible.*

- *Preserved the “humanness of Christianity”. We no longer just had to say “I believe it because I believe it” we could show the teachings of Christ in the Scriptures answered the deepest needs of man. The rationality of our faith was preserved, it was internally logically consistent and externally could be lived out in a real world.*

- *Origen was such a force that the Roman empire felt they had to make this man deny his faith. So they tortured Origen for three solid years every day. He never recanted but died three months after his release at the age of 69.*