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The Success of Christianity by Bill Lockwood

The most remarkable period of Christianity's growth was the first three centuries after the birth of Christ. Especially was this the case in view of the fact that its victory over the world occurred in the most "unfavorable circumstances." Those circumstances included being ignored as a "Jewish sect, then slandered, proscribed, and persecuted, as a treasonable innovation, and the adoption of it made punishable with confiscation and death" (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, p. 14). What are some of the causes of this remarkable growth?

First, the chief cause of the ultimate triumph of Christianity is what world-class scholar of yesteryear, Philip Schaff, calls "the intrinsic worth" of Christianity as the religion of universal salvation. By universal salvation Schaff means that Christianity is adapted to all classes, conditions, and relations among men, to all nationalities and races, and to all grades of culture. For example, unlike Islam's appeal to the corrupt inclinations of the heart by the devaluation of women, Christianity elevates women. Women and men are on equal footing before God (Galatians 3:25-28). The intrinsic worth of Christianity.

A *Second* cause is the powerful outward proof of its divine origin by the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Prophecies from the Old were so strikingly fulfilled in the New Testament that Paul and the apostles' preaching recorded in the book of Acts emphasized this as a powerful demonstration of the divinity of Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, it is unanswerable.

Added to these considerations is the *Third*—the testimony of miracles. Not a letter from an inspired New Testament writer is without mention of the supernatural works with which they were endowed. Paul will say, "in the power of the Holy Spirit, in signs and wonders" (Romans 14:17) he preached the gospel. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you, in signs and wonders and manifold powers" (2 Corinthians 12:12). These wonders continued throughout the New Testament age but ceased after the apostolic period (1 Corinthians 13:8).

The *Fourth* cause Schaff calls a "powerful negative advantage." This was the hopeless condition of the Jewish and heathen world. The fearful judgment of God upon the city of Jerusalem sent Judaism wandering "restlessly" about the world without a national existence. "Heathenism ... was inwardly rotten and in the process of inevitable decay....The only star of hope in the gathering night was the young, the fresh, the dauntless religion of Jesus, fearless in death, strong in faith, glowing with love, and destined to commend itself more and more to all reflecting minds as the only living religion of the present and the future."

Thus, Christianity conquered the ancient world. From a persecuted religion it advanced to the point of being a legal religion in the Roman Empire.