

CHRISTIANITY: How a Tiny Sect from a Despised Religion Came to Dominate the Roman Empire.
Fortress Press, Minneapolis

It takes a particular skill to write an introduction to the history of Christianity from a fresh angle. The author is a first-rate scholar with the intelligence and style to do so in this astute retelling of the beginning centuries of Christianity as it emerged from being a small Jewish sect to dominate the Roman Empire. This narrative explores with compelling verve how it is possible that an unknown, wandering Jewish teacher from the tiny northern province of Galilee, with fishermen as followers, gave birth to religious communities scattered all over the world. Along the way, this beautifully designed book provides historical sketches of key leaders who emerged as the band of believers became the church. From the Apostle Paul to the early monastic communities, probing historical questions are raised that reveal just how astonishing the story of Christian origins really is. Woven with the history are intriguing comments about social mores and political consequences, along with the theological arguments that give rise to creeds and convictions. This wonderfully strange story of Christianity's unlikely rise to dominate the ancient world and influence Western civilization, including art, music and architecture, is accompanied by illustrations. For a glimpse into how early Christians developed the social practices that sustained their lives under threat and eventually led to vital communities, read this well-written book.

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