

rodney stark the rise of christianity

Rodney Stark and The Rise of Christianity: Unveiling the Growth of an Ancient Faith

rodney stark the rise of christianity is a phrase that instantly brings to mind one of the most influential sociological examinations of early Christianity's explosive growth. Rodney Stark, a distinguished sociologist of religion, provides a fresh and compelling perspective on how Christianity transformed from a small Jewish sect into a dominant religion of the Roman Empire and beyond. Through meticulous research and sociological analysis, Stark challenges traditional explanations and offers a nuanced understanding of the factors that contributed to Christianity's remarkable expansion.

Who is Rodney Stark and Why His Work Matters

Rodney Stark is a prominent American sociologist known for his extensive work on religion, particularly Christianity. Unlike many historians who focus primarily on theological or philosophical aspects, Stark approaches the rise of Christianity through the lens of sociology and social dynamics. His book, **The Rise of Christianity**, published in 1996, stands as a landmark work combining historical data with sociological theory to explain how Christianity grew so rapidly during the first three centuries AD.

Stark's methodology is notable for its empirical rigor, drawing on ancient texts, archaeological findings, and demographic studies to create a plausible narrative that resonates with both scholars and general readers. His work has been influential in reshaping modern understanding of early Christian history and the social conditions that allowed this new faith to flourish.

Understanding the Context: Christianity in the Roman Empire

Before delving into Stark's analysis, it's crucial to appreciate the environment in which Christianity emerged. The Roman Empire was a sprawling, diverse civilization marked by political complexity, religious plurality, and social stratification. Various mystery religions, pagan cults, and philosophical schools competed for followers, making the religious landscape highly competitive.

The Challenge of Early Christianity

Christianity began as a small Jewish sect with relatively few adherents. It was often misunderstood, persecuted, and marginalized by the Roman authorities. Yet, despite these obstacles, Christianity managed to spread across cities and regions, gaining converts from different social classes, including slaves, women, and the urban poor.

The Role of Social Networks

Rodney Stark's sociological insight emphasizes the importance of social networks in the spread of Christianity. In a time before mass media, word-of-mouth and personal relationships were crucial for disseminating ideas. Early Christians formed tight-knit communities that provided social support, charity, and a sense of belonging—attributes that Stark believes were key to attracting new members.

Rodney Stark's Key Arguments in The Rise of Christianity

Stark's thesis challenges many traditional explanations that attribute Christianity's growth solely to divine intervention or political decrees. Instead, he highlights several social and demographic factors that explain the religion's expansion.

High Birth Rates and Low Infant Mortality

One of Stark's surprising arguments is that early Christian communities had higher birth rates and lower infant mortality compared to their pagan counterparts. This was largely due to the Christian emphasis on caring for the sick, widows, and orphans, creating healthier and more stable family environments. This demographic advantage naturally led to a steady increase in Christian population over time.

Conversion Driven by Social Benefits

Stark points out that Christianity offered tangible social benefits that encouraged conversion. Charity, mutual aid, and community gatherings created a support system that was especially attractive during times of crisis such as plagues or economic hardships. This social capital made Christianity appealing beyond its spiritual message.

Role of Women and Marginalized Groups

Women and marginalized groups played a significant role in the spread of Christianity. Stark notes that Christianity's relatively egalitarian stance toward women and its promise of eternal life resonated with those socially disadvantaged, providing them with a new sense of dignity and hope.

Persecution as a Catalyst

Contrary to the belief that persecution weakened Christianity, Stark argues it actually strengthened the movement. Persecution created martyrs and forged a strong group identity among believers. It

also drew attention to the faith, sparking curiosity and sympathy from outsiders.

Insights from Rodney Stark's Sociological Approach

Rodney Stark's work offers several valuable insights that can be applied to understanding religious movements more broadly.

The Power of Community

One of the core takeaways from Stark's analysis is the critical importance of community in religious growth. Christianity's success was not just due to its doctrine but also to the way it built and maintained supportive, caring communities that met both spiritual and social needs.

Demography and Religion

Stark's focus on demographic factors like birth rates and mortality underscores how population dynamics can influence the spread of religious beliefs. In a broader context, this reminds us to consider practical, everyday factors alongside theological ones when studying religion.

Social Networks and Influence

The spread of Christianity highlights the role of social networks and interpersonal relationships in shaping beliefs. This insight remains relevant today in understanding how ideas, including religious and ideological ones, disseminate in societies.

Why Rodney Stark's *The Rise of Christianity* Still Resonates Today

More than two decades after its publication, *The Rise of Christianity* continues to be a foundational text for scholars and enthusiasts of religious history. Its interdisciplinary approach combining sociology, history, and demography provides a model for studying complex social phenomena.

Moreover, Stark's work encourages readers to look beyond simplistic explanations and appreciate the multifaceted nature of religious growth. Whether one is a student of religion, history, or sociology, the lessons embedded in Stark's research offer a richer understanding of how faith communities evolve and thrive.

Applying Stark's Ideas to Modern Religious Movements

The principles outlined by Rodney Stark can be observed in contemporary religious movements as well. The emphasis on community support, social cohesion, and addressing practical needs remains central to many faith groups seeking to expand their influence.

By examining the rise of Christianity through a modern sociological lens, Stark invites us to reflect on the social dynamics that continue to shape religious landscapes worldwide.

Final Reflections on Rodney Stark and the Rise of Christianity

Rodney Stark's analysis of the rise of Christianity is a powerful reminder that the growth of a religious movement is often rooted in ordinary human experiences—community, care, social networks, and demographic realities. His work demystifies a historical phenomenon that has shaped much of Western civilization, providing a grounded and insightful narrative.

For anyone curious about how Christianity evolved from a fringe sect to a dominant world religion, Stark's *The Rise of Christianity* offers an engaging and enlightening journey through history, sociology, and faith. It is a testament to how careful scholarship can reveal the human stories behind monumental historical changes.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is Rodney Stark and what is 'The Rise of Christianity' about?

Rodney Stark is a sociologist of religion known for his research on early Christianity. 'The Rise of Christianity' is his book that explores how Christianity grew from a small Jewish sect to a dominant religion in the Roman Empire.

What factors does Rodney Stark identify as key to the growth of Christianity in 'The Rise of Christianity'?

Stark highlights several factors including the appeal of Christian ethics, strong community support, effective social networks, the role of women, and the religion's response to plagues and social crises.

How does Rodney Stark use sociological methods in 'The Rise of Christianity'?

Stark employs sociological theories and quantitative analysis, such as modeling conversion rates and demographic data, to explain the rapid expansion of Christianity in historical context.

What role do miracles and martyrdom play in Rodney Stark's explanation of Christianity's rise?

Stark argues that miracles and martyrdom enhanced the credibility and attractiveness of Christianity, inspiring conversions and strengthening the commitment of believers.

How does Rodney Stark's interpretation of early Christian growth differ from traditional theological explanations?

Unlike traditional theological views that emphasize divine intervention, Stark offers a social-scientific explanation based on human behavior, social dynamics, and historical circumstances.

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

The book has influenced scholars by providing a rigorous sociological framework for understanding religious growth, encouraging interdisciplinary approaches to the study of Christianity's history.

Additional Resources

Rodney Stark and the Rise of Christianity: An Analytical Review

rodney stark the rise of christianity represents a pivotal scholarly framework that seeks to understand the rapid expansion of Christianity from a small Jewish sect into a dominant religious force in the Roman Empire. As a prominent sociologist of religion, Rodney Stark's approach blends historical data with sociological theory, offering a fresh perspective that challenges traditional theological and purely historical narratives. His analysis is valuable not only for historians and theologians but also for sociologists, anthropologists, and anyone interested in the dynamics of religious movements.

Understanding Rodney Stark's Approach to the Rise of Christianity

Rodney Stark's work, particularly in his seminal book **The Rise of Christianity**, employs a methodical and empirical approach to examine the factors that contributed to Christianity's growth in the first three centuries CE. Unlike many earlier studies that focused on theological developments or doctrinal disputes, Stark emphasizes social mechanisms and demographic realities. His research integrates quantitative evidence, such as population estimates and conversion rates, with qualitative insights into community life and cultural practices.

Central to Stark's thesis is the assertion that Christianity grew not because of miraculous interventions or imperial edicts but through rational social processes. This approach aligns with his broader sociological perspective that religion, like other social phenomena, follows patterns that can be analyzed and understood using scientific methods.

Key Factors in Rodney Stark's Explanation

Stark identifies several critical factors that fueled the rise of Christianity:

- **High-Quality Social Networks:** Early Christian communities fostered strong bonds of mutual support, care for the sick and poor, and ethical conduct, which attracted converts.
- **Demographic Advantages:** Christian families tended to have higher fertility rates and lower mortality due to better care and social cohesion.
- **Appeal to Marginalized Groups:** Christianity's inclusive message resonated with women, slaves, and the poor, groups often neglected by Roman society.
- **Effective Conversion Strategies:** Rather than coercion, conversion spread through personal relationships and social networks.
- **Resilience during Persecution:** Rather than suppressing Christianity, persecution often strengthened community bonds and public visibility.

These factors combined to create a self-reinforcing growth model, where communities expanded naturally and effectively.

Comparative Analysis: Rodney Stark Versus Traditional Historiography

In the context of historical studies on early Christianity, Rodney Stark's sociological method stands out for its empirical rigor and attention to demographic data. Traditional accounts often emphasize theological debates, martyrdom, and political events like Constantine's conversion as primary causes for Christianity's rise. Stark, however, argues that these factors are secondary or overemphasized.

For instance, while Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 CE is often cited as a turning point, Stark points out that Christianity's growth was already well underway by then. His investigation into conversion rates suggests that Christianity had reached a significant minority status—possibly as much as 10% of the Roman population—before any imperial endorsement.

This perspective shifts the focus from top-down political or theological changes to bottom-up social dynamics. Stark's analysis also highlights the importance of family structures and social networks, areas typically underexplored in classical historical narratives.

Social Networks and Conversion Dynamics

A particularly insightful element of Stark's theory is his use of social network analysis. He argues that conversion is more effectively understood as a relational process within communities rather

than a mass phenomenon imposed from above. Converts tended to be recruited through close personal contacts and through communities that provided tangible benefits, such as healthcare and social support.

This emphasis on interpersonal relationships and communal benefits offers parallels with modern studies of social movements and viral phenomena. It also explains why Christianity was able to thrive even under sporadic persecution: the social fabric of the Christian communities was resilient and self-sustaining.

Rodney Stark's Impact on Religious Studies and Sociology

The publication of **The Rise of Christianity** significantly influenced both religious studies and the sociology of religion. Stark's interdisciplinary methodology encourages scholars to employ quantitative data alongside traditional qualitative analysis. This approach has paved the way for new research into the growth patterns of religious movements, not only in antiquity but in contemporary contexts as well.

Moreover, Stark's work underscores the importance of examining the social utility of religion. Christianity's early appeal was closely tied to its practical support systems, moral teachings, and community structures, rather than abstract theological doctrines alone. This insight has implications for understanding why certain religions succeed over others in specific historical and cultural contexts.

Critiques and Discussions

While widely praised for its thoroughness, Rodney Stark's explanation has also drawn critique. Some scholars argue that his model underestimates the role of theological innovation and the influence of charismatic leaders. Others suggest that the reliance on demographic estimates may oversimplify complex social realities.

Nonetheless, these critiques often acknowledge the value of Stark's empirical approach and his challenge to conventional narratives. The ongoing scholarly dialogue around **Rodney Stark: The Rise of Christianity** demonstrates its role as a foundational work that continues to inspire debate and further inquiry.

Applying Rodney Stark's Insights Today

Beyond historical analysis, Stark's framework offers valuable lessons for understanding religious growth and social movements in the modern era. His identification of social networks, demographic factors, and community support as critical to expansion can be applied to contemporary religious groups, social activism, and even marketing strategies.

For example, new religious movements or faith-based organizations that build strong interpersonal

ties and offer concrete social benefits tend to grow more sustainably. Similarly, understanding the dynamics of conversion and retention through a sociological lens can inform policies and programs aimed at social cohesion and community development.

- **Community Building:** Emphasizing genuine social support and inclusion can enhance group resilience.
- **Demographic Awareness:** Recognizing population trends helps in planning outreach and engagement.
- **Network Utilization:** Leveraging existing relationships accelerates growth and influence.

These practical insights underscore the continuing relevance of Rodney Stark's research beyond its historical origins.

The study of *Rodney Stark The Rise of Christianity* remains a critical intersection of sociology, history, and religious studies. Its comprehensive and data-driven approach invites ongoing reflection on how religions grow and adapt, illuminating patterns that resonate across time and cultures.

[Rodney Stark The Rise Of Christianity](#)

rodney stark the rise of christianity: The Rise of Christianity Rodney Stark, 1996-06-02
Rodney Stark, a sociologist by training, has written a book that should end much of the Christian-bashing occurring in academia. Stark demonstrates that Christianity became popular very quickly because it offered its adherents a better faith than competing religions and treated those believers better both physically and spiritually.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: The Rise of Christianity Rodney Stark, 1997-05-09
This fresh, blunt, and highly persuasive account of how the West was won—for Jesus (Newsweek) is now available in paperback. Stark's provocative report challenges conventional wisdom and finds that Christianity's astounding dominance of the Western world arose from its offer of a better, more secure way of life. Compelling reading (Library Journal) that is sure to generate spirited argument (Publishers Weekly), this account of Christianity's remarkable growth within the Roman Empire is the subject of much fanfare. Anyone who has puzzled over Christianity's rise to dominance...must read it. says Yale University's Wayne A. Meeks, for The Rise of Christianity makes a compelling case for startling conclusions. Combining his expertise in social science with historical evidence, and his insight into contemporary religion's appeal, Stark finds that early Christianity attracted the privileged rather than the poor, that most early converts were women or marginalized Jews—and ultimately that Christianity was a success because it proved those who joined it with a more appealing, more assuring, happier, and perhaps longer life (Andrew M. Greeley, University of Chicago).

rodney stark the rise of christianity: The Triumph of Christianity Rodney Stark, 2011-10-25
The religious historian and author of God's Battalions delivers an accessible and illuminating account of Christianity's rise in the West. In The Triumph of Christianity, celebrated sociologist and religious historian Rodney Stark traces the extraordinary rise of Christianity through its most pivotal and controversial moments to offer fresh perspective on the history of the world's

largest religion. Stark gathers and distills decades of authoritative research into a concise and highly readable volume that explores Christianity's most crucial episodes. Stark begins with an overview of the pre-Christian religious landscape before examining how Christianity spread among the Roman Empire's elite—especially women—and then expanded throughout Europe. Eschewing dense chronologies, Stark delivers a fascinating and often surprising narrative, bringing readers right to the heart of Christian history's most vital controversies and enduring lessons.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: Cities of God Rodney Stark, 2006-10-31 A leading expert on early Christianity presents new, authentic, and sometimes startling facts and statistics about the rise of early Christianity, and reveals how it grew to become the world's greatest religion.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: The Rise of Christianity Rodney Stark, 2020-06-16 A landmark reinterpretation of why Christianity became the dominant faith of the West The idea that Christianity started as a clandestine movement among the poor is a widely accepted notion. Yet it is one of many myths that must be discarded if we are to understand just how a tiny messianic movement on the edge of the Roman Empire became the dominant faith of Western civilization. In a fast-paced, highly readable book that addresses beliefs as well as historical facts, Rodney Stark brings a sociologist's perspective to bear on the puzzle behind the success of early Christianity. He comes equipped not only with the logic and methods of social science but also with insights gathered firsthand into why people convert and how new religious groups recruit members. He digs deep into the historical evidence on many issues—such as the social background of converts, the mission to the Jews, the status of women in the church, the role of martyrdom—to provide a vivid and unconventional account of early Christianity. The author plots the most plausible curve of Christian growth from the year 40 to 300. By the time of Constantine, Christianity had become a considerable force, with growth patterns very similar to those of modern-day successful religious movements. An unusual number of Christian converts, for example, came from the educated, cosmopolitan classes. Because it offered a new perspective on familiar concepts and was not linked to ethnicity, Christianity had a large following among persons seeking to assimilate into the dominant culture, mainly Hellenized Jews. The oversupply of women in Christian communities—due partly to the respect and protection they received—led to intermarriages with pagans, hence more conversions, and to a high fertility rate. Stark points out, too, the role played by selflessness and faith. Amidst the epidemics, fires, and other disasters that beleaguered Greco-Roman cities, Christian communities were a stronghold of mutual aid, which resulted in a survival rate far greater than that of the pagans. In the meantime, voluntary martyrdom, especially a generation after the death of Christ, reinforced the commitment of the Christian rank and file. What Stark ultimately offers is a multifaceted portrait of early Christianity, one that appeals to practical reasoning, historical curiosity, and personal reflection.

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

rodney stark the rise of christianity: The Victory of Reason Rodney Stark, 2006-09-26

Many books have been written about the success of the West, analyzing why Europe was able to pull ahead of the rest of the world by the end of the Middle Ages. The most common explanations cite the West's superior geography, commerce, and technology. Completely overlooked is the fact that faith in reason, rooted in Christianity's commitment to rational theology, made all these developments possible. Simply put, the conventional wisdom that Western success depended upon overcoming religious barriers to progress is utter nonsense. In *The Victory of Reason*, Rodney Stark advances a revolutionary, controversial, and long overdue idea: that Christianity and its related institutions are, in fact, directly responsible for the most significant intellectual, political, scientific, and economic breakthroughs of the past millennium. In Stark's view, what has propelled the West is not the tension between secular and nonsecular society, nor the pitting of science and the humanities against religious belief. Christian theology, Stark asserts, is the very font of reason: While the world's other great belief systems emphasized mystery, obedience, or introspection, Christianity alone embraced logic and reason as the path toward enlightenment, freedom, and progress. That is what made all the difference. In explaining the West's dominance, Stark convincingly debunks long-accepted "truths." For instance, by contending that capitalism thrived centuries before there was a Protestant work ethic—or even Protestants—he counters the notion that the Protestant work ethic was responsible for kicking capitalism into overdrive. In the fifth century, Stark notes, Saint Augustine celebrated theological and material progress and the institution of "exuberant invention." By contrast, long before Augustine, Aristotle had condemned commercial trade as "inconsistent with human virtue"—which helps further underscore that Augustine's times were not the Dark Ages but the incubator for the West's future glories. This is a sweeping, multifaceted survey that takes readers from the Old World to the New, from the past to the present, overturning along the way not only centuries of prejudiced scholarship but the antireligious bias of our own time. *The Victory of Reason* proves that what we most admire about our world—scientific progress, democratic rule, free commerce—is largely due to Christianity, through which we are all inheritors of this grand tradition.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: *The Triumph of Faith* Rodney Stark, 2015-11-03

The Triumph of Faith explodes the myth that people around the world are abandoning religion. Stark marshals an incredible amount of data—surveys of more than a million people in 163 nations—to paint the full picture that both scholars and popular commentators have missed. He explains why the astonishing growth of religion is happening, and what it means for our future. Stark's lively, eye-opening book is full of insights that defy the conventional wisdom. He reveals:

- Why Islam is not overtaking Christianity
- 81 percent of people around the world claim to belong to an organized religious faith
- Half of the people around the world attended a worship service in the past week
- Despite all the attention paid to the "New Atheists," atheists remain few, anywhere
- Latin America has never been so Catholic—and that's because there are now so many Protestants there
- Of all the great world religions, only Buddhism may not be growing

As Stark shows, secularists have been predicting the imminent demise of religion for centuries. It is their unshakeable faith in secularization that may be the most "irrational" of all.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: *How the West Won* Rodney Stark, 2014-03-17 Finally the Truth about the Rise of the West. Modernity developed only in the West—in Europe and North America. Nowhere else did science and democracy arise; nowhere else was slavery outlawed. Only Westerners invented chimneys, musical scores, telescopes, eyeglasses, pianos, electric lights, aspirin, and soap. The question is, Why? Unfortunately, that question has become so politically incorrect that most scholars avoid it. But acclaimed author Rodney Stark provides the answers in this sweeping new look at Western civilization. *How the West Won* demonstrates the primacy of uniquely Western ideas—among them the belief in free will, the commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, the notion that the universe functions according to rational rules that can be discovered, and the emphasis on human freedom and secure property rights. Taking readers on a thrilling journey from ancient Greece to the present, Stark challenges much of the received wisdom about Western history. *How the West Won* shows, for example:

- Why the fall of Rome was the single most beneficial event in the rise of Western civilization
- Why the "Dark Ages" never happened
- Why the

Crusades had nothing to do with grabbing loot or attacking the Muslim world unprovoked · Why there was no “Scientific Revolution” · Why scholars’ recent efforts to dismiss the importance of battles are ridiculous: had the Greeks lost at the Battle of Marathon, we probably would never have heard of Plato or Aristotle Stark also debunks absurd fabrications that have flourished in the past few decades: that the Greeks stole their culture from Africa; that the West’s “discoveries” were copied from the Chinese and Muslims; that Europe became rich by plundering the non-Western world. At the same time, he reveals the woeful inadequacy of recent attempts to attribute the rise of the West to purely material causes—favorable climates, abundant natural resources, guns and steel. How the West Won displays Rodney Stark’s gifts for lively narrative history and making the latest scholarship accessible to all readers. This bold, insightful book will force you to rethink your understanding of the West and the birth of modernity—and to recognize that Western civilization really has set itself apart from other cultures.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: A Star in the East Rodney Stark, Xiuhua Wang, 2015-05-02 What is the state of Christianity in China? Some scholars say that China is invulnerable to religion. In contrast, others say that past efforts of missionaries have failed, writing off those converted as nothing more than “rice Christians” or cynical souls who had frequented the missions for the benefits they provided. Some wonder if the Cultural Revolution extinguished any chances of Christianity in China. Rodney Stark and Xiuhua Wang offer a different perspective, arguing that Christianity is alive, well, and on the rise. Stark approaches the topic from an extensive research background in Christianity and Chinese history, and Wang provides an inside look at Christianity and its place in her home country of China. Both authors cover the history of religion in China, disproving older theories concerning the number of Christians and the kinds of Christians that have emerged in the past 155 years. Stark and Wang claim that when just considering the visible Christians—those not part of underground churches—thousands of Chinese are still converted to Christianity daily, and forty new churches are opening each week. *A Star in the East* draws on two major national surveys to sketch a close-up of religion in China. A reliable estimate is that by 2007 there were approximately 60 million Christians in China. If the current growth rate were to hold until 2030, there would be more Christians in China—about 295 million—than in any other nation. This trend has significant implications, not just for China but for the greater world order. It is probable that Chinese Christianity will splinter into denominations, likely leading to the same political, social, and economic ramifications seen in the West today. Whether you’re new to studying Christianity in China or whether this has been your area of interest for years, *A Star in the East* provides a reliable, thought-provoking, and engaging account of the resilience of the Christian faith in China and the implications it has for the future.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: Cities of God Rodney Stark, 2007-10-30 How did the preaching of a peasant carpenter from Galilee spark a movement that would grow to include over two billion followers? Who listened to this good news, and who ignored it? Where did Christianity spread, and how? Based on quantitative data and the latest scholarship, preeminent scholar and journalist Rodney Stark presents new and startling information about the rise of the early church, overturning many prevailing views of how Christianity grew through time to become the largest religion in the world. Drawing on both archaeological and historical evidence, Stark is able to provide hard statistical evidence on the religious life of the Roman Empire to discover the following facts that set conventional history on its head: Contrary to fictions such as *The Da Vinci Code* and the claims of some prominent scholars, Gnosticism was not a more sophisticated, more authentic form of Christianity, but really an unsuccessful effort to paganize Christianity. Paul was called the apostle to the Gentiles, but mostly he converted Jews. Paganism was not rapidly stamped out by state repression following the vision and conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 312 AD, but gradually disappeared as people abandoned the temples in response to the superior appeal of Christianity. The oriental faiths—such as those devoted to Isis, the Egyptian goddess of love and magic, and to Cybele, the fertility goddess of Asia Minor—actually prepared the way for the rapid spread of Christianity across the Roman Empire. Contrary to generations of historians, the Roman

mystery cult of Mithraism posed no challenge to Christianity to become the new faith of the empire— it allowed no female members and attracted only soldiers. By analyzing concrete data, Stark is able to challenge the conventional wisdom about early Christianity offering the clearest picture ever of how this religion grew from its humble beginnings into the faith of more than one-third of the earth's population.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: Summary: The Victory of Reason BusinessNews Publishing,, 2017-01-30 The must-read summary of Rodney Stark's book: The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success. This complete summary of The Victory of Reason by Rodney Stark, a prominent American sociologist of religion, presents his argument that Christianity and its institutions are responsible for the most significant breakthroughs of the past millennium. In his book, the author explains how Christianity is what led to the success of the West. Added-value of this summary: • Save time • Understand how Christianity contributed to the founding of Western civilization • Expand your knowledge of politics and religion To learn more, read The Victory of Reason and discover why the West owes all of its successes to Christianity.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: Bearing False Witness Rodney Stark, 2016-04-26 As we all know and as many of our well-established textbooks have argued for decades, the Inquisition was one of the most frightening and bloody chapters in Western history; Pope Pius XII was anti-Semitic and rightfully called "Hitler's Pope," the Dark Ages were stunting the progress of knowledge to be redeemed only by the secular spirit of the Enlightenment. The religious Crusades were an early example of the rapacious Western thirst for riches and power. But what if these long held beliefs were all wrong? In this stunning, powerful, and ultimately persuasive book, Rodney Stark, one of the most highly regarded sociologists of religion and bestselling author of The Rise of Christianity (HarperSanFrancisco 1997), argues that some of our most firmly held ideas about history, ideas that paint the Catholic Church in the least favorable light are, in fact, fiction. Why have we held these wrongheaded ideas so firmly and for so long? And if our beliefs are wrong, what is the truth? In each chapter, Stark takes on a well-established anti-Catholic myth, gives a fascinating history of how each myth became conventional wisdom and presents a startling picture of the real truth. For example, instead of the Spanish Inquisition being an anomaly of torture and murder of innocent people persecuted for "imaginary" crimes such as witchcraft and blasphemy, Stark argues that not only did the Spanish Inquisition spill very little blood, but it was a major force in support of moderation and justice. Stark dispels the myth of Pope Pius XII being apathetic or even helpful to the Nazi movement, such as to merit the title "Hitler's Pope," and instead shows that the campaign to link Pope Pius XII to Hitler was initiated by the Soviet Union, presumably in hopes of neutralizing the Vatican in post-World War II affairs. Many praised Pope Pius XII's vigorous and devoted efforts to saving Jewish lives during the war. Instead of understanding the Dark Ages as a millennium of ignorance and backwardness inspired by the Catholic Church's power, Stark argues that the whole notion of the "Dark Ages" was an act of pride perpetuated by anti-religious intellectuals who were determined to claim that theirs was the era of "Enlightenment." In the end, readers of Bearing False Witness will have a more accurate history of the Catholic Church and will also understand why it became unfairly maligned for so long. Bearing False Witness is a compelling and sobering account of how egotism and ideology often work together to give us a false truth.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: The Deliverance of God Douglas A. Campbell, 2009-08-07 This book breaks a significant impasse in much Pauline interpretation, pushing beyond both Lutheran and New perspectives on Paul to a non-contractual , apocalyptic reading of many of the apostle's most famous, and most troublesome, texts. His strongly antithetical vision identifies participation in Christ as the sole core of Pauline theology and produces the most radical rereading of Romans 1-4 for more than a generation. Even those who disagree will be forced to clarify their views as never before.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: Marriage and Modernization Don S. Browning, 2003-03-20 The processes of modernization and globalization promise more wealth and health for many people. But they are also a threat to the stability and quality of marriage and family life. This

new book -- at once sobering and constructive -- looks at the impact of these processes on marriage and asks what Christianity, in cooperation with other religions, can do to strengthen married life today. Among the deleterious effects of modernization and globalization on marriage are a worldwide drift of men away from the responsibility of parenthood and the tendency of mothers too readily to take on the task of childrearing alone. After looking at recent research on these and other problems, Don Browning suggests that the cure for modern marital disruption entails reforming and reconstructing the institution of marriage while also nurturing relevant forms of social support. Yet the effort to initiate a world marriage revival requires a complex cultural work, and Browning explores the key contributions that the religions of the world must make for such an effort to be successful.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: For the Glory of God Rodney Stark, 2015-01-27

Rodney Stark's provocative new book argues that, whether we like it or not, people acting for the glory of God have formed our modern culture. Continuing his project of identifying the widespread consequences of monotheism, Stark shows that the Christian conception of God resulted--almost inevitably and for the same reasons--in the Protestant Reformation, the rise of modern science, the European witch-hunts, and the Western abolition of slavery. In the process, he explains why Christian and Islamic images of God yielded such different cultural results, leading Christians but not Muslims to foster science, burn witches, and denounce slavery. With his usual clarity and skepticism toward the received wisdom, Stark finds the origins of these disparate phenomena within monotheistic religious organizations. Endemic in such organizations are pressures to maintain religious intensity, which lead to intense conflicts and schisms that have far-reaching social results. Along the way, Stark debunks many commonly accepted ideas. He interprets the sixteenth-century flowering of science not as a sudden revolution that burst religious barriers, but as the normal, gradual, and direct outgrowth of medieval theology. He also shows that the very ideas about God that sustained the rise of science led also to intense witch-hunting by otherwise clear-headed Europeans, including some celebrated scientists. This conception of God likewise yielded the Christian denunciation of slavery as an abomination--and some of the fiercest witch-hunters were devoted participants in successful abolitionist movements on both sides of the Atlantic. *For the Glory of God* is an engrossing narrative that accounts for the very different histories of the Christian and Muslim worlds. It fundamentally changes our understanding of religion's role in history and the forces behind much of what we point to as secular progress.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity Éric

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

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Battalions, distinguished scholar Rodney Stark puts forth a controversial argument that the Crusades were a justified war waged against Muslim terror and aggression. Stark, the author of *The*

Rise of Christianity, reviews the history of the seven major crusades from 1095-1291 in this fascinating work of religious revisionist history.

rodney stark the rise of christianity: Summary of Rodney Stark's The Triumph of Christianity Everest Media,, 2022-05-28T22:59:00Z Please note: This is a companion version & not the original book. Sample Book Insights: #1 The Romans were not the only ones to adopt a polytheistic religion. The Jews in the West and the Zoroastrians in the East rejected these ideas about the gods, and instead adopted a morally demanding monotheism. #2 Despite worshiping many gods, societies were not religiously diverse. The primary mission of pagan temples was to ensure that the gods favored the state and its ruling elite, and they served a clientele rather than a membership. #3 The Jews and the Zoroastrians were the first major groups of monotheists. They both faced the challenge of explaining the existence of evil. Judaism postulated the existence of Satan, while Zoroastrianism taught that Ahura Mazdā was engaged in a battle with the inferior Angra Mianyu. #4 The Romans were far more religious than the Greeks, Persians, Egyptians, or other pagans of their era. The Romans had a very free marketplace, and no state religion. Instead, they had many different faiths that were supported by voluntary contributions.

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