Kreider, Alan, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbably Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016)

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The growth of the Christian church in the Roman Empire is mysterious. Scholars who spend their entire lives studying this phenomenon continue to find it surprising. Why did this minor mystery religion from the eastern Mediterranean – marginal, despised, discriminated against – grow substantially, eventually supplanting the well-endowed, respectable cults that were supported by the empire and aristocracy? What enabled Christianity to be so successful that by the fifth century it was the established religion of the empire? (p 1 – zero to everything)

What do I have to add to these two approaches? Four things.

First, patience. Patience was not a virtue dear to most Greco-Roman people, and it has been of little interest to scholars of early Christianity. But it was centrally important to the early Christians. They talked about patience and wrote about it; it was the first virtue about which they wrote a treatise… (p 1)

Christian writers called patience the "highest virtue," "the greatest of all virtues," the virtue that was "peculiarly Christian." The Christians believed that God is patient and that Jesus visibly embodied patience. And they concluded that they, trusting in God, should be patient – not controlling events, not anxious or in a hurry, and never using force to achieve their ends. (p 2)

Second, habitus – reflexive bodily behavior. The sources rarely indicate that the early Christians grew in number because they won arguments; instead they grew because their habitual behavior (rooted in patience) was distinctive and intriguing. Their habitus – a term I have learned from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu – enable them to address intractable problems that ordinary people faced in whys that offered hope. When challenged about their ideas, Christians pointed to their actions. They believed that their habitus, their embodied behavior,m was eloquent. Their behavior said what they believed; it was an enactment of their message. And the sources indicate that it was their habitus more than their ideas that appealed to the majority of the non-Christians who came to join them. (p 2)

Fourth, ferment. Early Christians did not write explicitly about ferment, but I find it a useful metaphor to describe the way their patient growth occurred. It operated reticently, by what theologian Origen called God's "invisible power." It was not susceptible to human control, and its pace could not be sped up. But in the ferment there was a bubbling energy – a bottom-up inner life – that had immense potential. We will see this ferment throughout the book. (p 3)

A word about my own subjectivity. How does who I am shape this book? I am an American male, a Mennonite Christian, and a Harvard PhD with a dissertation/book on an aspect of the English Reformation. In the 1970s the

Mennonite church called me to work as a missionary in England, and I lived there for thirty years, doing many things. I pastored a small church and served as the director of the London Mennonite Centre and later of the Centre for Christianity and Culture at Regent's Park College, Oxford. I participated in the Anabaptist Network and was active in the peace movement. I am married to Eleanor Kreider, whose passion for liturgy led her to take a course at Notre Dame that carefully examined the church orders. She shared her discoveries with me. In the mid-1980s I began to study the early church seriously. Since then I have taught early Christianity in several countries – where I have found interest especially in the Global South – and have written a small cluster of books and articles. In 2000, Eleanor and I moved back to our native Indiana, where I have taught church history and mission at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Now, in my retirement, in this book I am drawing together my teaching about early Christianity.

Does my subjectivity shape the book? Of course it does, and that dynamic can be bad or good, or both! For example, in reading the early Christian writers closely I have been astonished to discover the widespread presence of the theme of peace in the life and mission of the church. And I have asked myself: Why have others not seen this? Why did I not see t his earlier? And why do I see it now? Is it because of subjectivity on my part? Or have others ignored peace because of their subjectivities? And what essential things do I persist in ignoring and misreading? Readers must judge. (p 4)

Chapter 1 – The Improbably Growth of the Church
In the first three centuries the church was growing. Contemporaries commented on t his; the second-century AD Epistle to Diogenetus observed that Christians "day by day increase more and more." (D*iogn. 6.9*, trans. E.R. Fairweather, *Early Christian Fathers*, ed.d C.C. Richardson, LCC 1 (1953), 218) At the turn of the third century, in Carthage in North Africa, the theologian Tertullian with extravagant exaggeration referred to the Christians as "a great multitude of men – almost the majority in every city." (Tertullian, *Scap 2,* trans. R. Arbesmann, FC10 (1950), 154) Fifty years later, in his Sunday homilies in Caesarea in Palestine, the great Origen made confident statements about the church's worldwide growth:

> Behold the Lord's greatness … Our Lord Jesus has been spread out to the whole world, because he is God's power … The power of the Lord and Savior is with those who are in Britain, separated from our world, and with those who are in Mauretania, and with everyone under the sun who has believed in his name. Behold the Savior's greatness. It extends to all the world. (Origen, *Hom. Luc. 6.9*, trans J.T. Lienhard FC 94 (1996), 27)

(p 7)

In places where we would expect to find instructions to engage in mission – for example, a growing church's catechetical materials preparing people for baptism – we look in vain for references to evangelization. The best surviving summary of catechetical topics, Cyprian's *To Qurinus* 3, contains 120 precepts for catechumens in Carthage, but not one of them admonishes the new believers to share the gospel with the gentiles. Early Christian preachers do not appeal to the "Great Commission" in Matthew 28:19-20 to inspire their members to "make disciples of

all nations"; they assume that the "apostles" (Jesus's eleven plus Paul) had done this in the church's earliest years and that it had already been fulfilled in the church's global expansion. (Goodman, Martin *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994, 106-8) When writers referred to the Matthew 28:19-20 text, it was to buttress the doctrine of the Trinity or to address the issue of baptism, not to inspire missionary activity.

To be sure, the Christians continued to use the word *apostolos*, but it had lost its connection to mission. Except for the very early Didache (11.2, 5) in which traveling "apostles" were a part of the community's life, Christian writers thought of apostles as bishops who in succession protect the apostolic truth, not as missionaries who embody and carry out the apostolic task. In the mid-third century the large and influential church in Rome had a substantial staff containing scores of presbyters, deacons, subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, readers, and doorkeepers – but not a single apostle. (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.43.11) Nor did it or any other church known to us have accredited "evangelists" or "missionaries." (Molland, "Besass die alte Kirche ein MIssionsprogramm?," 59). (p 10)

Most improbable of all, <u>the churches did not use their worship services</u> to attract new people. In the aftermath of the persecution of Nero in AD 68, churches around the empire – at varying speeds in varying places – closed their doors to outsiders. By the end of the second century, most of them had instituted what liturgical scholars have called the *disciplina arcani*, the "discipline of the secret," which barred outsiders from entering "private" Christian worship services and ordered believers not to talk to outsiders about what went on behind the closed doors. (Yarnold, Edward SJ *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century* (Slough, UK: St Paul Publications, 1971, 50-51) <u>Fear motivated this closing</u> – fear of people who might disrupt their gatherings or spy on them. By the third century, some churches assigned deacons to stand at the doors, monitoring the people as they arrived. They admitted catechumens to the opening part of worship, the service of the word with its readings and sermon, but not pagans; and to the service of the Eucharist that followed they admitted neither pagans nor catechumens – only the baptized members of the community and believers from other churches with letters of recommendation. (Athenagoras, *Leg.* 1.3; *Did. Apost.* 2.39; Gregory of Pontus, *Canonical Epistle 11;* Origen, *Cels.* 3.51) It is not surprising that pagans responded to their exclusion from Christian worship by speculation and gossip. (Minucius Felix, *Oct 9.3*) The baptized Christians, on the other hand, knew how powerful the worship services were in their own lives – early fourth-century North African believers said simply, "We cannot go without the Lord's supper." They knew that worship services were to glorify God and edify the faithful, not to evangelize outsiders. (*Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* 12; in *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*, trans. And ed. Maureen A. Tilley, TTH 24 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996, 36-37)

And yet, improbably, the movement was growing. In number, size, and geographical spread, churches were expanding without any of the probable prerequisites for church growth. The early Christians noted this with wonder and

attributed it to the patient work of God. (Brox, "Zur christlichen Mission," 207) Teaching catechumens in Caesarea around 240, Origen observed that throughout history God had been faithful to Israel, sending them prophets, turning them back from their sins.

> [God] was always patient by sending those who cure; up till the Chief-healer came, the Prophet who surpassed prophets, the Healer who surpassed healers. They forsook and killed the one who had come … God selected another nation. See how great the harvest is, even though there are few workers. But also in another way God plans always that the net is thrown on the lake of this life, and all kinds of fish are caught. He sends out many fishers, he sends out many hunters, they hunt from every hill. See how great a plan it is concerning the salvation of the nations. (Origen, *Hom. Jer.* 18.5.3, trans J. C. Smith, FC 97 (1998), 195-196)

This was *patient ferment*. The patient God was at work, Origen affirmed, and God used not influential or powerful people but obscure fishers and hunters to achieve a huge end. There is an inexorability about this process that the eminent German theologian Adolf Harnack likened to "a steady fermenting process." (Harnack, Adolf *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Cristentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 4th ed. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1924, 1:226…) Ferment refers to the "mysterious, bubbling life forces," micro-organisms at work collaboratively in ways transcend human understanding. (Katz, Sandor Ellix, *The Art of Fermentation: An In-Depth Exploration of Essential Concepts and Processes from around the World* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2012, 19) As Origen spoke, the ferment was happening. It was brewing, but not under anyone's control. It was uncoordinated, it was unpredictable, and it seemed unstoppable. .The ferment was spontaneous, and it involved ordinary ingredients that at time synergized into a heady brew. The churches grew in many places, taking varied forms. They proliferated because the faith that these fishers and hunters embodied was attractive to people who were dissatisfied with t heir old cultural and religious habits, who felt pushed to explore new possibilities, and who then encountered Christians who embodied a new manner of life that pulled them toward what the Christians called "rebirth" into a new life. (Justin, *1 Apol.* 61.3-4, 10 trans. E. R.. Hardy, *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. C.C. Richardson, LCC 1 (1953), 282-83: Cyprian, *Don* 3-4) Surprisingly, this happened in a patient manner. (p 11-12)

Cyprian relates the faith that the Christians are to demonstrate to a particular virtue – *patience*. Their faith is a patient faith: "Therefore, as servants and worshipers of God let us show by spiritual homage the patience that we learn from the heavenly teachings. For that virtue we have in common with God." (Cyprian *Pat.* 3 (Conway, 265) Christians, said Cyprian, are to be visibly distinctive. They are to live their faith and communicate it in deeds, and their deeds are to embody patience. *Patientia*: when Christians make this virtue visible and active, they demonstrate the character of God to the world. In order to encourage embodied witness, witness that is true to God and true to the Christian tradition, Cyprian wrote *De bono patientiae* (*On the Good of Patience*), one of three treatises on patience written in the early Christian centuries that help us understand the changing character of the early church's ferment. (p 14)

In embodying patience, Christ perfectly expressed the way that God works to bring God's mission to completion. God, in dealing with Israel across the centuries, was never in a hurry. God instructed the people, sent them prophets, and "was always patient by sending those who cure." In the fullness of time, God sent "the Chief-healer, the Prophet who surpassed prophets, the Healer who surpassed healers." The people rejected and killed Jesus, but they did not frustrate God's purposes. God's mission is unhurried and unstoppable. With persistent patience God fished in wider waters, so that "the net [will be] thrown on the lake of life, and all kinds of fish are caught." In this way, Origen teaches, God's plan for the salvation of the nations will be realized. (Origen, *Hom. Jer.* 18.5.3 (J.C. Smith, 195); also *Hom Jer.* 16.1) (p 18-19)

Above all this is why for Tertulian patience is preeminent; it is rooted in the character of God. According to Tertullian, God is the exemplar of patience. God is promiscuously generous; he shares the wonders of creation, the brilliance of the sun and seasons, with everyone – the just and the unjust alike (Matt. 5:45). God endures ungrateful, greedy people who worship idols. God does not compel belief, but "by his patience he hopes to draw them to himself." (Tertullian, *Pat.* 2.3 (Daly, 195)) And the means by which God seeks to attract people is incarnation. "God allows himself to become incarnate" (Tertullian, *Pat.* 3.2 (Daly, 195)) – a self-position of patience. (p 21)

Tertullian urges Christians, who live by Jesus's precepts, to wear their oppressors out with patience: "Let wrong-doing grow weary from your patience." (Tertullian, *Pat.* 8.2 (Daly, 207)) (p 23 – Boom!)

Tertullian knows that some – no doubt many – outsiders will reject the patience that Christ lived and taught and that Christians are learning. He is not surprised by their rejection; he believes that God in his patience allows this. But other outsiders, Tertullian observes, look at the Christians and their approaches to life and are intrigued. Patience, he asserts, "attracts the heathen." (Tertullian, *Pat.* 15.3 (Daly, 220)) And it poses questions for them. Why, the pagans wonder, do Christians live as they do? For this reason, Christians don't need to feel frantic. As we shall see in later chapters, Christians do what they can to share their faith and to bring people through baptism into the life of God's people. But Christians are not impatient. They entrust all things, including their own lives and the salvation of all people, to the God who patiently is making all things new. (p 24-25)

Cyprian may have sensed that patience – the characteristic virtue of the church – was under pressure. But patience would help his people live as Christians in their pressure-filled situation. So Cyprian set out to renew their conviction that there was something *good* in patience. He followed in Tertullian's tradition by writing a treatise on patience, but he changed its title; instead of *On Patience (De patientia)*, Cyprian's title was *On the Good of Patience (De bono patientiae).* Cyprian believed that patience was good; he had to show people what that good was and demonstrate why it mattered. (p 26)

If patience is not *good* in the lived experience of humans, it isn't worth talking about. (This *(Pat. 3)* is the context for Cyprian's use of the famous slogan "We do not speak great things but we live them") (p 26)

To be sure, people do things that grieve and anger God; they visit the temples, engage in idolatrous rites, and worship images. God in patience endures all these things. Patiently, God waits for the time when humans will be converted from idolatry, malice, and crime to fullness of life. (Cyprian, *Pat.* 44 (Conway, 266)) (p 27)

Simultaneously, Lactantius challenges his Christian readers to be true to their patient approach to mission. They can do this confidently, without thinking that everyone, coerced by state power, must worship their God: "We … make no demand that our God, who is everyone's God willy nilly, be worshipped by anyone unwillingly, and we do not get cross if he is not worshipped. We are confident of his supreme power." (Lactantius, *Inst.* 5.20.9 (Bowen and Garnsey, 524) Christians must be willing to listen to their critics ("we are ready to listen") and to engage with them in rigorous debate. (p 34)

Conclusion: The Many-Dimensioned Good of Patience

With Lactantius we have completed our overview of early Christian writings about patience. The authors, living in different places and milieus, have different accents. But their writings contain themes that define patience and that recur and fit together, constituting a gestalt of patience. In bread terms, these themes are as follows:

- *Patience is rooted in God's character:* God is patient, is working inexorably across the centuries to accomplish his mission, and in the fullness of time had disclosed himself in Jesus Christ.
- *The heart of patience is revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ:* Jesus' life and teaching demonstrate what patience means and beckon those who follow him to a patient lifestyle that participates in God's mission.
- *Patience is not in a hurry:* Patient Christians live at the pace given by God, accepting incompleteness and waiting.
- *Patience is unconventional:* It reconfigures behavior according to Jesus's teachings in many areas, especially wealth, sex, and power.
- *Patience is not violent:* It accepts injury without retaliating in kind, because violence is not God's calling to them and cannot bring fundamental change.
- *Patience gives religious freedom:* It does not compel religious beliefs and observances.
- *Patience is hopeful:* It entrusts the future confidently to God.

(p 35)

When he stated that the Christians' "strange patience" caused pagans to become believers, hew as on to something. (Justin, *1 Apol.* 16.4 (Hardy, 252)) (p 36)

… There are things that cannot be done in certain circumstances ("that's not done") and others that cannot *not* be done." (Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*,

141, 146) This is knowledge that is not taught but inhaled; it is learning that we acquire without being aware that we are learning. As philosopher James K. A. Smith puts it, following Bourdieu, “Habitus is acquired, is learned, by incarnate d=pedagogies that in oblique, allusive, cunning ways work on the body and thus orient the whole person.” (Smith, James K. A., *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013, 98)) Learning habitus involves bodily movement – kinesthetic – and the engagement of the imagination – poetics. (Ibid. 15) It is habitus that constitutes our profoundest sense of identity; that forms our deepest convictions, allegiances, and repulsion; and that shapes our response to ultimate questions – what will we live for, die for, and kill (or not kill) for. (Tertullian, *Apol. 39.7*) (p 40)

Justin Martyr and Tertullian wrote in the same vein. (Tertullian, *Apol. 50.15*; Justin, *2 Apol. 6.6 (5.6);* Lactantius, *Inst. 5.22.18-19*) Historians have come to a similar judgment: “Every public execution was a great and often successful advocating opportunity for the church.” Reinbold, Wolfgang, *Propaganda und Misison im ältesten Christentum: Eine Untersuchun zu den Modalitatäten der Ausbreitung der frühen Kirche*, FRLANT 188 (Göttingen; Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2000, 314) It was not primarily what the Christians said that carried weight with outsiders; it was what they did and embodied that was both disconcerting and converting. It was their habitus – their reflexes and ways of life that suggested that there was another way to perceive reality – that made the Christians interesting, challenging, and worth investigating. (A Maryknoll priest, William Frazier, has observed, based on twentieth-century experience, that “the way faithful Christians die is the most contagious aspect of what being a Christian means.” Cited in Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991, 122)) (p 51)

As Michael Pollan, who writes insightfully about food, observes, “A ferment generates its own energy from within. It not only seems alive, it is alive. And most of this living takes place at a scale inaccessible to us without a microscope.” (Pollan, Michael, *A Natural History of Transformation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2013, 295)) (p 73)

Missionaries on t he Move: Migration Mission

Extraordinary Christians – the Twelve

According to early Christian tradition, exemplary men took the lead in the spread of Christianity. In the New Testament, after his resurrection Jesus summoned his discipels and gave them his call to “make disciples of all nations: (Matt. 28:19). According to the *Didascalia apostolorum*, a third-century Syrian church order, his disciples gathered together and decided to share the missionary task among themselves: “[We] … divided the world among ourselves into twelve parts, and [went out] to the nations so that we could preach the word in all the world.” (*Did. Apost.* 6.8.1, trans. And ed. Alistair Steward-Sykes, *The Didascalia Apostolorum: An English Version with Introduction and Annotation* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009, 229-30)) This scenario was a commonplace in early Christian writings. (p 74)

The non-itinerant Christians had a characteristic approach to their day-to-day life, which was to keep a low profile. They were known to be “silent in the open, but

talkative in hid corners." (Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 8.3, trans G. H. Rendall, LCL 250 (1931), 335) They did not want to cause a stir or to find public places to preach their message. Even when martyrdom offered their leaders the opportunity to address the masses, the leaders were diffident. In second-century Smyrna when the proconsul urged the Christian bishop Polycarp to "try to move the people," the bishop responded dismissively, "As for the mob, I do not think they deserve to listen to a speech of defense from me." (Mart. Pol. 10 trans. and ed. Herbert A Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972, 11)) A few years late in Gaul, Pothinus said only, :If you are worthy, you will know." (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.1.29 (trans. Musurillo, *Acts*, 71)) Polycarp and Pthuinus evidently thought that it was their behavior as martyrs, not the words they might speak, that would convey the Christian faith to the watching world. In general this is a principle: the churches did not seek attention but instead propagated the gospel by other means. (p 78 – faithful, radiant, discreet and discerning)

Domesticity
The church of the early centuries was rooted in the *domus*, both the physical space and the cluster of people who lived there, both kin and not kin. (Cooper, Kate, "Closely Watched Households: Visibility, Exposure, and Private Power in the Roman *Domus, Past and Present* 197 (2007): 5) (p 79)

As Origen put it in a Sunday sermon: "You catechumens – who gathered you into the church? What goad compelled you to leave your houses and come together in this assembly? We did not go to you from house to house. The Almighty Father put this zeal into your hearts by his invisible power." (Origen, *Hom. Luc* 7.7, trans J. T. Lienhard, FC 94 (1996), 31) Instead of urging the Christians to go from house to house, or recommending that they replace their evangelistic methods with something more effective, Origen expressed his patient trust in God's "invisible power." (p 81)

Communities as Cultures of Patience
It wasn't easy to live lives of patient ferment. As best they could, the early Christian individually followed Jesus patiently. Where, we may wonder, did they learn the habitus of patient living? Most probably it was in Christian communities. There, together with others, individual believers were formed in the disciplines that gave a distinctive character to a new culture that was visible to others and that, in their view, offered hope for the world. (p 91)

For Justin the life is as important as the teachings; indeed, the teachings <u>are incomprehensible without the lived reflexes that exegete them.</u> (Justin, *1 Apol*, 16.8) Significantly, a century alter the great intellectual Origen agreed: at the beginning of his apology *Contra Celsum*, he states that Christ "makes his defense in the lives of <u>his genuine disciples, for their lives cry out the real facts</u>." (Origen, *Cels*, preface 2, trans H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965, 4)) (p 94- our lives speak the gospel or not)

To people like these, Christian writings made sense. Clement of Alexandria wrote: "For God does not compel, since force is hateful to God, but He provides for those who seek." (Clement of Alexandria, *Quis div.* 10 (Butterworth, 289)) Irenaeus

wrote: God works "by means of persuasion … [God] does not use violent means to obtain what he desires." (Irenaeus, *Haer*. 5.1.1, trans A. Roberts, *ANF* 1:527) The Epistle to Diogenetus states, "Compulsion is not God's way of working." (*Diogn* 7.4, trans E. R. Fairweather, *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. C. C. Richardson, LCC 1 (1953), 219) Tertullian added that obligatory worship is false worship: "No one, not even a man, will wish to receive reluctant worship." (Tertullian, *Apol*. 24.6 (Glover, 133)) (p 119)

As Tertulllian put it around AD 200, "Christians are made, not born." (Tertullian, *Apol*. 18.4 (Glover, 91)) (p 134 – fashioned)

The *Apostolic Tradition's* model for becoming Christian can be schematized as follows:

1. Evangelism	First Scrutiny: Relationships & Jobs	2. Catechumenate	Second Scrutiny: Habitus & Character	3. Baptismal Preparation	Third Scrutiny: Exorcism	4. Baptism
Encountering Christians, finding a sponsor		Hearing the Word		Hearing the gospel		Singing a new song*
Years or months		Until "character" is formed		Weeks or months		For life

*The phrase "singing a new song" comes not from the *Apostolic Tradition* but from Origen, *Hom. Exod*. 5.5.

(p 148)

Transforming the habitus. Irenaeus insisted that the church's overarching goal was "renewing [people] from their old habits into the newness of Christ." (Irenaeus, *Haer/* 3.17.1, trans A. C. Coxe, ANF 1:444) Tertullian agreed, commenting that God has given free will to people so that they might "constantly encounter good by spontaneous observance of it, and evil by its spontaneous avoidance." (Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.6, trans P. Holmes, *ANF* 3:302) But the spontaneity of habitus did not just happen; it needed to be formed, not least in the area of idolatry.

Avoiding idolatry. Idolatry, according to Tertullian, is suffocating; it sucks people down to Hades. "The fear of [idolatry is] our leading fear; any 'necessity' whatever is too trifling compared to such a peril." So the church's law, peculiar to Christians, is avoiding idolatry in its many permutations in society; and the church's teaching, "inculcated on such as are entering it," prepared the catechumens to be alert to idolatry and, at all costs, to renounce it. (Tertullian, *Idol.* 24, trans. S. Thelwall, *ANF* 3:75-76) (p 157)

Why did the early Christian church grow? As we have seen in previous chapters, it grew because Christians behaved in ways that were distinctive and suggested novel approaches to thorny problems. It grew because the patience Christians exhibited was counterintuitively creative. (p 185 – so devoid in SDF driven Anglican growth)

Meals/Eucharists
At the heart of the early Christian worship was table fellowship. Throughout the first three centuries Christian communities gathered once a week for a meal. Across time these communities moved from an early model, which Tertullian called "our small feasts," to a later model, which Origen called a "great feast". (Tertullian, *Apol*,. 39.14 (Glover, 14); and Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 14.4, trans R. E. Heine, FC71 (1982), 201) I call these models the "evening banquet: and the "morning service." Both kinds of meals involved remembering Jesus as the communities ate bread and drank from the cup. Both were private: they took place in buildings that were often domestic and from which outsiders could be excluded. Both were accompanied by reading, teaching, and prayers. Each had a distinctive habitus that needed to be shaped and that formed the character of the worshipers. (p 186)

The morning service was in the tradition of the evening banquet, but it expressed itself in a somewhat different form, which has become classical – the *ordo* of Western liturgical tradition. (Lathrop, Gordon W., *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) It had several elements:

- *Order of service:* The Word now preceded the sacrament. Whereas in the evening banquet the meal (including the bread and wine) had come before the Word (in the symposium), in the morning service the Word (readings and sermon) came before the meal (the reception of the consecrated elements).
- *Quantity of food:* The quantity was now slight. The evening banquet's meal was replaced by a symbolic meal with "normative tokenization" of bread, wind, and water. (McGowan, "Food, Ritual, and Power," 156)
- *Quantity of words:* The words that ordinary worshipers spoke decreased, and the words that the leaders – the clergy – spoke increased. The sermons grew longer, and the style of worship became monological rather than communal.

(p 190)

The Christians of the early centuries gave surprisingly little attention to the sermon. IN the book of Acts it is of course otherwise. There the classical action of the main actors in the story, Peter and Paul, is the public oration. The apostles address gatherings of strangers. They also speak more conversationally in domestic settings to people they know. But after the two apostles were executed, public orations largely disappeared, not doubt because of persecution. "We have no historical text which refers to formal, open-air sermons outside a church after the Apostolic age." (Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 284) The churches grew, steadily but inexorably, almost completely without missionary

preaching. (See Green Michael, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970, 197)) (p 194)

Formation – Worship Shapes Habitus (p 229)

Augustine did not lightly depart from the approach of earlier Christians. The understanding that Christians should attract nonbelievers by loving behavior was deeply engrained in him. As he put it at the close of a sermon of 404, after the catechumens had left, "[I] am always begging you to win over those who haven't yet believed by leading good lives." Augustine knew that this takes time: "If you all live in a manner worthy of God, the time will very soon come when one of those who have not believed will remain in unbelief." This was a classic mission strategy. (Augustine, *Serm.* 360B.28 (in F. Dolbeau, *Augustine: Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique* (Paris: Institute d'études augustiniennes, 1996, 25_), trans. E. Hill, *Saint Augustine: Newly Discovered Sermons,* vol. 11, in part 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. J. E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997, 383) (p 286)

As a result, patience no longer functioned – as it had in Cyprian's community, for example – as a countercultural habitus to be formed by catechesis. Augustine was aware that people were bound to Donatist schism by the "heavy chain of inveterate habit," which needed to be broken. However, he never conceded that a habitus of impatience lurked darkly in the Roman culture and that Christian catechesis could correct this, re-forming converts so they would behave with patience. (Augustine, *Ep.* 93.5.17 (Teske, *Augustine: Letters 1-99*, 387)) (p 290)

The Future of Patient Ferment

<u>In this book we have traveled from patient ferment to impatient force</u>. This was a slow journey that gained speed in the missional revolution of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. The revolution succeeded in part because impatience dovetailed neatly with the habitus of surrounding non-Christian religions. This impatience shaped the Christianity that conquered Europe, sent crusaders to the Middle East, and spread the faith to many parts of the world. It also led to an assumption that has seemed self-evident to many people, especially since the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century: that in its essence Christianity is violent, and that Christian mission – however loving its professed intentions – is essentially an exercise in imperialism. Historian of late antiquity Ramsay MacMullen expresses this in a significant aside about Constantine's behavior, describing it as "a more truly Christian posture of active aggression." (MacMullen, Ramsay, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, 50)) This observation stings because there is truth in it; there are many *exempla* – experiences, facts – that substantiate the violence of Christianity.

Twenty-first-century Christians must live with this heritage. Of course we can point to other *exempla*. We can point to sacrificial Christian missionaries from many peoples who poured out their lives in loving service; we can point to the witness of minority Christian traditions, and to saints and trailblazers among the majority traditions. And we can point to the *patientia* of the Christians of the early

centuries, a witness that utters a reticent protest against all subsequent expressions of violence, strident or honeyed.

If we Christians today wish to embody this patience and to claim that our faith is not intrinsically violent, we may find it helpful to converse with the early Christians whom we have studied. We will not do things precisely as the early Christians did, but the early believers may give us new perspectives and point us to a "lost bequest." ((Dowley, Roger, *Towards the Recovery of a Lost Bequest* (London" Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission, 1984) As we rediscover this bequest, we will not make facile generalizations or construct how-to-formulas – those would be impatient responses! Instead, consciously seeking the reformation of our habitus by the work of the Holy Spirit and by catechesis rooted in the teaching and way of Jesus, we will begin to live in new ways in today's *saeculum*. We will discover that we are in a good tradition. And we will say with Cyprian and other early Christians: "We do not speak great things but we live them." (Cyprian, *Pat,.* 3, trans, G. E. Conway, FC 36 (1958), 265) (p 296)