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# Christianity: how a despised sect from a minority religion came to dominate the Roman Empire

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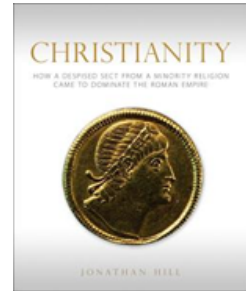
## Book Review

### **Christianity: how a despised sect from a minority religion came to dominate the Roman Empire**

Jonathan Hill

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011

Were I to teach a course on the history of Early Christianity (either at the undergraduate or the seminary level) this is the basic text I would require. A number of reasons account for this choice. First of all, the book is well-written, easy to read and easy to understand. It is not only clear and straightforward but also generously supplied with illustrative material. As well, visible boxes of data on special topics appear on numerous pages rendering the text more clearly focused as well as more attractive. Scholarly material is up to date, always a challenge for introductory texts. Key women appear regularly, although I would have liked more time and depth to be spent on this topic. The role of the Roman imperium in the struggles of the Jesus sect is given due attention. Above all, unlike so many historical overviews of this epoch, or any other for that matter, that present an aura of objectivity, Hall's volume has a clear underlying focus. The subtitle "How a Despised Sect Came to Dominate the Roman Empire" underscores what the entire book tries to demonstrate. Not only does he make a solid case but also he never loses sight of that basic theme.



When I was a seminarian in the mid-1960s church history texts and lectures centered around theological ideas in the context of the "Great Man" or "Great Theologian" view of history. This male-centered sense of history produced a range of disembodied theological abstractions. Hall avoids this trap superlatively, but he moves too far in the other direction. He treads rather lightly through the conceptual world of the first four centuries during which the Jesus sect became imperial Christianity. However, this text plus a second required book containing a representative sampling of primary materials in translation would close such a gap quite nicely.

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