The Spreading Christianity in the Roman Empire.

Peter Nemeshegyi

There is a striking similarity between the Hellenistic-Roman age and our own age. Therefore a study about the spreading of Christianity in that age has a very contemporary relevance for us.

The situation of the Ancient World at the time of the Christian missions is characterized by the universal presence of the Hellenistic Culture. This culture, which has been rather irreligious in the 4th and 3rd century B. C., has undergone a profound "conversion" during the following centuries and has become intensely religious. This new religiosity has been influenced very much by the various Oriental religions, their mysticism, their individual piety, their soteriology. Men were looking out for somebody liberating them from the clutches of fate.

The urban population of the great Roman Empire had no deep roots; the ancient family-system has fallen to parts; education was drowned in a routine. Some healthy, new guiding ideal was needed. The absence of this showed itself in the craze for cruel entertainment and sexual permissiveness.

Christianity appears in this society in the wake of Judaism, which had already impressed the Greco-Roman world by its monotheism and moral standards. But in Christianity the one living God gets into contact with all nations not through allegorical speculations of philosophers, but through the divinely performed saving deed of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. The deep communitarian and personal piety, the high moral standard based on love, and the firm hope of Christians

showed to people, that these disciples of Jesus are in possession of some supremely important truth, to which they gladly commit their lives, with a wellfounded hope. The greatest missionary power of the early centuries were not professional missionaries, but the christian communities themselves and the fervour of each faithful. Christianity spread by contact, like fire.