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On Early Church Organization: An Economic Analysis of The *Didache*

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ABSTRACT. According to conservative estimates, early Christianity was extraordinarily successful at evangelization: in its first 200 years, its membership increased by a factor of 28. I offer an explanation for the early Church's success, based on an economic reading of The *Didache*, an important 1st Century Christian document that deals with church organization. I argue that early Christians were motivated to evangelize, based on a model of non-price competition (Ekelund and Tollison, 2011), and that the *Didache* reflects this impetus. Specifically, there are three claims that this paper advances. First, that Christianity's difficult and culturally alienating moral strictures were, paradoxically perhaps, important in winning converts. Second, Chapters 11-12 of The *Didache*, which deal with church organization, balance the needs of evangelism with the necessity of preventing free-riding (Iannaccone, 1992). Third, early Christians placed much weight on the importance of so-called 'prophets and teachers,' specialized labourers who were instrumental in spreading the faith. In these three ways, the *Didache* provides full expression to a paradigm that is already taking shape in the *New Testament*.

Pope Benedict, in his first encyclical, defends the Catholic Church's three primary purposes: to care for the poor, to worship God, and to spread the Gospel. This last goal, evangelism, was of particular importance to 1st Century Christians, as Green (2004: 76) attests: "Christianity burst on the world with all the suddenness of good news: good news proclaimed with great enthusiasm

and courage by its advocates." The results can be seen in Christianity's rapid spread across the Roman Empire. Hopkins's (1998) conservative estimates suggest that there were 7,000 Christians at the end of the 1st Century, and 200,000 at the end of the 2nd Century, an increase by a factor of 28.

How was a small religious sect from Judea capable of such rapid expansion so that, in 337, Constantine became the first Christian emperor of Rome?[1] A number of explanations have been posited: Christianity's unique emphasis on the afterlife (Ekelund and Tollison, 2011), an optimal "level of tension" with its cultural setting (Stark, 1996), the Roman peace or *pax Romana* (Green, 2004: 30-33), and a pre-existing Jewish network (Stark, 1997: 129-145), alongside many others. Undoubtedly the question of Christianity's success will continue to be vigorously debated.

In this article, I contribute, modestly, to the discussion of early Christianity's rapid spread; I focus on The *Didache*, a 1st Century Christian document, which provides guidance on morality and local church organization.[2] I argue that early Christians were motivated to evangelize, based on a model of non-price competition (Lesson and Russ, 2017; Ekelund and Tollison, 2011), and that the *Didache* reflects this impetus. Christianity's early success is, in part, attributable to the early Church's prudence in managing local affairs, in order to maximize converts.

[1] Although Constantine was favourable towards Christians throughout his reign, he himself remained a pagan until his deathbed baptism in 337.
[2] Specifically, I use Roberts and Donaldson's (1897) English translation of the *Didache*. Where I cite the Bible, I use the *Authorized King James Translation*.

This essay does not make the strong claim that the *Didache* was written to *prescribe* a business model of evangelism, but rather that the *Didache reveals* such a phenomenon of early Christianity, embodied unselfconsciously in a document written for another purpose. Specifically, there are three claims that this paper makes. First, that Christianity's difficult and culturally alienating moral strictures were, paradoxically perhaps, important in winning converts – in other words, Christianity provided a distinct religious product. Second, Chapters 11 and 12 of *The Didache*, which deal with church organization, balance the needs of evangelism with the necessity of preventing free-riding. Third, early Christians placed much weight on the importance of so-called 'prophets and teachers,' who were instrumental in spreading the faith. In these three ways, the *Didache* provides full expression to a paradigm that is already taking shape in the *New Testament*. In general, I do not claim that *The Didache* is a primary cause of Christianity's early success, even if it provided good guidance, but rather that it is a symptom of an underlying dynamic already at work in the early Church.

Finally, this paper contributes to the social science literature on mechanisms of religious conversion. Gooren (2007) reviews a number of these approaches, including social networks, spoiled identity and religious seeker-ship, socialization, religious markets, recruitment, cultural factors, and convert role monitoring and mastering.[3] He synthesizes these approaches into one called the conversion career approach, which is predicated upon five levels of religious

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[3] In particular, Gooren (2007) explicates the need for both internal stability and external outreach which I delineate here. The Church uses 'incorporating activities' (recruitment and monitoring), 'creating activities' (showing the requirements for membership), and 'shaping' activities (to discipline the new convert) in order to ensure that new members assimilate into the Church's fabric, and so that the Church has an inner stability to its operations. At the same time, the Church operates in a religious market, and must make its product attractive for potential converts.

participation, which are in turn influenced by personality, social elements, culture, and contingency factors. Of particular relevance to my inquiry, Gooren (2007) argues that, "[w]hether one likes the term or not… religious competition means that… a *religious market* is already in operation," and suggests more research be conducted on such markets. In this article, I analyze Christianity amidst a competitive religious market in the Roman empire.[4]

I structure this paper as follows. In section I, I survey the literature and background of the *Didache*, and offer a model of non-price competition. In section II, I discuss the *Didache*'s moral strictures, and contrast these with wider moral principles in the Roman empire. Section III argues that Chapters 11-12 of the *Didache* are intended to police internal church affairs, and prevent free-riding, and Section IV goes over the role of evangelists. Section V concludes.

SECTION I: BACKGROUND AND MODEL

The *Didache,* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, was well-known in the early Church. Most scholars date it to the 1st Century (O'Loughlin, 2010), and believe that it is, in fact, four separate texts that were fused together into one.[5] Church Fathers like John of Damascus, Eusebius, and Athanasius wrote about it and, although they venerated its importance as close to scripture, rejected it as canon for inclusion in the Bible. Originally thought lost to history, the Orthodox metropolitan of Nicomedia, Philotheos Bryennios, rediscovered the *Didache* in 1873 in

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[4] Snow and Machalek (1984) emphasize the shift from an external to an internal locus of control within religious groups.

[5] The *Didache* has been dated all the way from 70 AD to 170 AD, but the weight of scholarly opinion prefers the earlier dating.

Constantinople, amidst a pile of early Church manuscripts. Ten years later, the *Didache* was published, and since then, has elicited much scholarship and debate.

The early Church read the *Didache*, and it was widely circulated, being afforded high esteem (van de Sandt and Flusser, 2002). Its importance in Christianity's beginnings is demonstrated by the later Church's inclusion of the *Didache* in its documents, including the Apostolic Constitutions, which was written in Syria in the fourth century. Papyrus from Egypt, and Ethiopic documents, which contain *Didache* fragments, further suggest that the document was widely disseminated during the first few centuries AD. However, after the fifth century, the *Didache* fell out of use, as Christianity morphed into a state religion. The text's exaltation of itinerant prophets and teachers, as well as its avoidance of discussion of a monarchical bishop, were no longer relevant. There was no longer, by then, the same earnest rush to gain converts in the midst of a competitive religious landscape.

The scope of this article does not permit a full discussion of *Didache* scholarship, but instead concentrates on the text's relevant elements that can be subject to economic analysis. Milavec (2003: 173-227) puts forward a 'social safety net' theory of the *Didache*. He argues that *Didache* communities shared resources through artisans' cooperatives, which insured community income against the Roman empire's extortion. Draper (2011), although rejecting Milavec's model, draws similar conclusions. Probing the *Didache* using Moxnes's (1988) model of reciprocity and redistribution, Draper:

"… affirms Aaron Milavec's claim that the *Didache* provides an economic 'safety net' for

its members. However, contrary to his depiction, [Draper] would argue that this would not

be only by means of cooperation between artisans in workshops, as the community would

have had members in all kinds of economic situations, including slaves, wives of

unbelievers, agricultural workers without skills, teachers and wealthier members who

could act as patrons."

Although there is some truth to Milavec (2003) and Draper's (2011) 'safety net' hypothesis,

there are two problems with it. Both authors set the *Didache* against a rapacious Roman

economy that relied on patron-client relations. The early Christians, we are told, combatted the

state's predation by forming strong communities with internal insurance schemes. Yet this

primitivist view of the Roman economy has recently been challenged (Temin, 2012; Harper,

2011), and, at the very least, the spectre of a Roman bureaucrat greedily extorting slaves, grain,

and land at whim is simplistic. During the *pax Romana* (27 BC to 180 AD)*,* Roman law and

order ensured a flourishing of market activity, with relatively sound property rights protection,

even for smallholders (Kehoe, 2015). When surveying land ownership patterns across the Roman

empire, Harper (2015) remarks that:

"The theory of progressive accumulation is built on primitivist models of ancient economic

history… But the putative mechanics of a constant accumulation focus on the growth of

social power and disempower market mechanics. In reality, land was a factor of

production, like labour and capital. It circulated, along with other commodities, in markets,

however imperfectly." (pg. 60)

It is more likely that early Christians formed safety nets in order to safeguard against sporadic persecution, an idea only passingly mentioned by Milavec and Draper. Herein lies another problem with the safety net hypothesis: it does not provide a compelling reason for the development of a safety net to begin with. Draper (2011) contends that the *Didache* forms an "alternative economy to the exploitative and oppressive patron-client networks of the ancient Roman economy." Yet surely such a claim is self-refuting: setting up a separate economy within the Roman empire does not, in itself, protect Christians from Roman theft, unless there are schemes within the economy itself to do so. If there were uniform benefits to be had from a safety net in the Roman empire, then surely non-Christian communities would have also knit them. Most importantly, Milavec and Draper do not confront the modern evidence against their primitivist assumptions.

That being said, the safety net model is correct in one regard: early Christian communities pooled resources for their collective good. This is clearly seen in Acts 2:44-46 and Acts 4:34-37, in which the Jerusalem church holds all things in common, with Christians selling their property and giving the proceeds to the Apostles to distribute. This was not an isolated incident: in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, St. Paul commands the churches to take a weekly collection; later, in 2 Corinthians 8:3-5, he writes that the Macedonian church's collection for the poor is impressive. In general, local churches realized that they had to channel community funds for church organization and charity.

I depart from Milavec and Draper in proposing my own theory. My model assumes that early Christians sought to optimize evangelization throughout the Roman empire. Early Christianity

was competing with many religions to win converts. So-called mystery faiths, like Mithraism, devotion to Isis, and the cult of Cybele had more appeal in the 1st Century, and even certain similarities with Christianity (Newsome, 1992: 27-30; Lea, 1996: 46-48). For example, the mystery religions promoted teachings about a god who died and was resurrected, a promise of immortality to adherents, and removal of class and social distinctions within the group. Yet it was Christianity that cornered the market for religious ideas and became Rome's state religion.

Even if Christianity's survival were not evidence of its concern with evangelism, early Church writings suggest that evangelism was prioritized (Plummer, 2006). The earliest gospel, Mark, records Jesus's final command to his disciples as "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15);[6] this spirit of evangelism is attested to in scholarly work. Ware (2005), for instance, argues that the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians commanded them to partner with him in mission, preaching the gospel to neighbours and friends. Marshall (2000) contends that the authors of the Gospels and Acts expected local churches to actively proselytize, and Schnabel (2004: 1451-1475), in his monumental study of early Christian mission, concludes that "… Paul indeed assumed that Christians would be involved in missionary outreach at least at the local level." According to Bokenkotter (2004: 18), such missionary fervour resulted in over 40 churches being established in northern Africa, Asia Minor, Arabia, and Greece by 100 AD. There is even evidence that Christianity in India can be traced back to the 1st Century testimony of the Apostle Thomas, though this is disputed (Missick, 2000). The data, then, point towards early Church concern with spreading the gospel.

[6] This is the so-called 'Great Commission' of the Gospels.

To evangelize effectively requires two complementary elements: external outreach and internal stability. The first is required to gain converts to begin with. The second is essential to ensuring that Christians remain within the faith, and that no internal ruptures within Christianity fracture the growing religion. This observation has been noted by many scholars of religion, including Pierre Bourdieu (Dianteill, 2003; Bourdieu and Saint-Martin, 1982; Bourdieu, 1971), who points to the role of Catholic bishops, as a homogenous, predictable group of men within the Church, in mollifying internal conflicts and contradictions – particularly in diverse societies with various competing interests. Furthermore, Bourdieu points to the role of specialists, such as prophets and priests, who occupy positions within the religious field, a hierarchically structured social area in which actors compete for status. Yet his otherwise rich vision of religion has been limited by the lack of attention paid to laypeople, and by his conceptualization of the Church as a closed, monolithic system. Verter (2003), extends Bourdieu's original model, arguing that spiritual capital (which includes the energies, monies, and thought spent on a religion) needs to be invested wisely in order to gain followers from outside the religion, as well as to enforce compliance within it; he also includes laypeople within Bourdieu's framework as important catalysts for institutional change.

The tension between external outreach and internal stability has also been noted by rational choice theorists of religion. Stark and Iannacone (1994), for instance, talk about how a pluralistic, competitive religious market arises due to the inability of a single religious firm to satisfy consumers' demands for both inclusive outreach and exclusive membership. External competition between religious firms (such as between Christianity and paganism), as well as

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internal struggles within a religious firm, determine important outcomes, such as religious

participation (Diotallevi, 2002; Iannaccone, 1992a; Iannacone, 1992b).

Leeson and Russ (2017) maintain that one strategy which Christian evangelists employed was to

make their brand more attractive to religious consumers. During the early modern era,

competition between Catholics and Protestants drove both to lower tithes, build schools, and

prosecute alleged witches in order to win followers. Of course, this also implied an impulse

towards stricter organization, clearly demarcating insiders from outsiders.

In the early Church, castigation of heresies was part of this differentiation between the 'true'

Church, and false prophets. Internal stability cannot be preserved when local churches preach

radically different doctrines, and thus, at various times in its early history, popular heresies like

Arianism, Docetism, and Nestorianism were condemned, with the ecumenical councils

formalizing such censure. At the same time, the early Church offered benefits to members.

Ekelund and Tollison (2011: 56-60) argue that Christianity's early spread is due mainly to its

critical emphasis on a well-defined afterlife, which believers could attain through belief in Christ

and good deeds on earth. Competing faiths, by contrast, either did not clearly outline a life after

death, or failed to emphasize such a vision in its teachings. Ekelund and Tollison's go on in their

work to apply entrepreneurship and network theories to Christianity's early spread, though they

do not extend their analysis to the *Didache*.

Like Ekelund and Tollison (2011), I consider the Church as analogous to a business company

which seeks to maximize profits. In the Church's case, of course, the goal is not profits, but

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converts. Driven by a conviction that non-believers would be doomed to eternal damnation if not exposed to the Gospels, Christian missionaries sought to convert widely. Like in a business firm, organizational skills are required to ensure that targets are met, and that the company remains in the black. A tight purse string ensures the Church's continued viability since otherwise, freeloaders can drain the organization's coffers. The Church must consider all these factors, while warding off religious competitors.

The notion of the Church as a competitive firm which seeks adherents is already developed in rational choice theories of religious conversion (Stark and Iannaccone, 1994; Iannaccone, 1992a; Iannaccone, 1992b). Furthermore, management scholars have applied organizational theories, typically used for analysis of business corporations, to religious groups (Tracey, 2012).

I mention a necessary caveat here: my analysis does not imply that Christian missionaries were cynical and calculating, tricking converts into belief in Christ's divinity in order to ensure quarterly conversion (sales) figures. The early Church, whether guided by heavenly or earthly wisdom, was efficient in its drive to evangelize, and economics can be used to understand that proselytizing ability. The question of early Christians' inner convictions is a separate one, but I believe they held them sincerely, given their willingness to face persecution under Nero, Decius, Diocletian, and others. Nevertheless, what occupies my attention herein is economics, not theology.

From this model of the Church as a convert-maximizing organization, then, come three propositions germane to my analysis of the *Didache*:

(1) Christians had to market and sell a distinct religious product, in order to differentiate themselves from other religious competitors. Such a product should have mass appeal, while making reasonable requests upon consumers. One way to do this was to prescribe a distinct morality, which was appealing in some ways, while making reasonably stringent demands.

(2) The Church had to control free-riding. Free-riders can threaten a religion by draining its resources, a point that Iannaccone (1992) makes:

> "[S]triking examples are found in communes and communal cults… Consider, for example, the Shakers' problems with transient members, or the Moonies' struggles with 'exploiters' who joined the movement for 'inexpensive room and board, money… or sex.'"

Such free-riding can cause a religious sect's downfall, particularly in its early stages (Kanter, 1973: 157-158). Early Christianity, then, had to adopt mechanisms to prevent free-riding. This was especially difficult for a religion that relied upon loose networks stretching across the Mediterranean. An itinerant preacher, for example, could stumble upon the doorstep of the Church in Rome, requesting food and lodging: is this man sincere, or is he a fraud, intent on conning the church? Dealing with such problems, in the absence of fast information or transport links, required careful thinking.

(3) The Church should develop and support skilled specialists in evangelization. These men and women would be educated and well-provisioned for the arduous task of spreading the gospels: a

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'salesforce,' in the language of business. This, in turn, required both specialization and a hierarchy, as will be discussed shortly.

SECTION II: A STRENUOUS MORALITY

During the Roman empire, religion and morality were fluid and dependent on class distinctions. Although people prayed to local and household deities, they were content to worship other gods for political, social, and cultural reasons (Hurtado, 2016: 78-81). Slaves were compelled to worship their masters' gods, and social functions often involved sacrifices or prayers to various divinities; the meat sacrificed to idols, at such functions, was then feasted upon, and it was considered rude to abstain from such meals.[7] In addition, morality itself was gender and class specific. For instance, when documenting Roman sexual mores, Harper (2016: 22-79) makes a number of observations. First, men who raped married women suffered legal and social penalties, especially when the women were of high status. Second, men, married or not, were free to satisfy their carnal desires with single women, prostitutes, slaves, and children; boys from 15 to 19 years old were particularly sought for pleasure. Women were not afforded such liberal reign over their sexual impulses and were expected to remain chaste. Although philosophies like Stoicism sought to impose control on male sexual passions, they were not widely popular.

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[7] The Jews, with their staunch monotheism, were an exception to this rule, but they were generally tolerated in Roman society and left to their own devices, at least until the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132-136.

Christianity stood in stark contrast to these ancient norms, and even defied them. As *Didache* 2 states, "you shalt not commit adultery, you shalt not commit pederasty, you shalt not commit fornication." In addition to strict monotheism, *Didache* 6 also prohibits eating meat sacrificed to idols, a stricture that would have made Christians seem anti-social to the wider society. When a Christian did commit moral trespasses, *Didache* 4 commands the faithful to "judge righteously," and to "not respect persons in reproving for transgressions," or, in other words, to be blind to social status. In these regards, Christianity stood diametrically opposed to the Roman pagan world.

Stark (1996) writes that a successful religion maintains an optimal level of tension with its cultural context. If the religion makes too few demands upon the faithful, then little differentiates the religion from wider society, and there is no point in joining. However, overly strenuous demands are alienating, and will not win the religion many converts. There is, in mathematical terms, an inverse-U shaped relationship between number of religious adherents, and the religion's moral restraints. Iannaccone (1994) mirrors Stark's observations by observing that strict churches screen members who lack commitment, and thus prevent free-riding. Christianity attained this equilibrium by permitting anyone to join, regardless of status, ethnicity, or gender.[8] Concurrently, it imposed a code of behaviour upon believers that resisted the wider pagan context. In the case of sexual sin, for example, Christianity categorized all forms of sex, outside marriage between man and woman, as *porneia*, or sexual immorality (Harper, 2016: 92). In this manner, Christianity offered its catechumens a unique religious product: one that was inclusive, yet at the same time imposed a difficult code of behaviour that distinguished it from other

[8] The Council of Jerusalem further relaxed requirements of joining Christianity, by allowing Gentile converts to keep their cultural practices, without having to adopt Jewish ones like male circumcision.

practices.

Of course, such rules of conduct would have been useless without methods to regulate them within Christian communities, and the *Didache* suggests that there were. As previously mentioned, Chapter 4 of the *Didache* commands the faithful to 'judge righteously' those found guilty of violating moral laws, and to reprove them for their transgressions. *Didache* 15 echoes this sentiment: "And reprove one another, not in anger, but in peace, as you have it in the Gospel." It is unclear what such punishment entailed, though at a minimum, these passages suggest that the *Didache*'s authors had thought about the internal policing of Christian behaviour. This, in turn, reflects Biblical passages (Matthew 18:15, Luke 17:3, 1 Timothy 5:1-20, Titus 1:13). The author of 1 Timothy 5:20, for example, writes, "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." Such public shaming would have been an effective mechanism to prevent sinning among Christians.

Despite its radical nature for the times, Christian morality must have been attractive to two groups: women, and those of low birth. For women, Christian sexual teaching elevated male chastity to the level of female chastity, and a married woman's husband could no longer dally around. Although far from what we would consider gender parity, early Christianity raised women's status. At a time when women were expected to be nearly invisible, the Apostle Paul commends to the Roman church the woman Phoebe, who had been a patroness of many Christians (Romans 16:1), and, indeed, women played important roles as presbyters and deacons in the early Church (Madigan and Osiek, 2005). A second group of converts, low status people, would have flocked to Christianity due to its status-levelling nature. Indeed, Friesen (2004)

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concludes, from a study of the Pauline epistles, that the vast majority of early Christians were at or below the subsistence poverty level. All Christians were equal under God, as *Didache* 4 proclaims. In the New Testament, James writes, "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors" (James 2:9). This position is demonstrated further in Paul's letter to Philemon, in which he adjures Philemon to take back his escaped slave Onesimus, not as a mere servant, but as fellow Christian: "Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee…" (Philemon 1:16). Although he stops short of recommending manumission, Paul's letter is revolutionary for the time, since slaves were considered subhuman, yet Paul claims Onesimus as a son of God (Ruden, 2010: 158-168).

Christianity provided a unique religious product to the Roman world. In addition to its emphasis on life after death (Ekelund and Tollison, 2011: 56-60), its distinct moral requirements made it stand apart from other religions of the day. Even the Mithras cult, which I alluded to earlier as Christianity's competitor, seems to have made no demands on its followers to solely worship Mithras, or to follow radically different moral precepts - nor did the cult of Isis, or the imperial cult itself. Christianity's moral requirements, moreover, were appealing to women and those of law rank. At the same time, those requirements would have made Christians seem anti-social to their pagan neighbours, perhaps causing Christians to rely on their own communities for support.

SECTION III: THE PROBLEM OF FREE-RIDING

Transport in the Roman empire was slow, despite impressive road and sea networks (Terpstra, 2013: 1-2.). Since information flowed as slowly as transport, risks were difficult to assess across long distances. This posed a practical impediment to 1st Century Christian evangelists, since links with distant settlements had to be established in order to spread the Gospel. Church stability itself relied upon frequent Christian communication across the empire; this is partly why St. Paul wrote epistles to the churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, and Thessaloniki. As a stark example, St. Paul gathered church funds from across the empire for the sake of Jerusalem's poor (1 Corinthians 16: 1-4; Corinthians 8:1-9:15; Galatians 2:10; Romans 15: 25-31), which required tremendous coordination. The fact that the Church was able to organize so effectively, despite slow transport links, is a testament to its administrative skills.

Part of these skills involved dealing with so-called free riders: those who reap the fruits of the Church's efforts, without contributing their own. Olson (1965) identified such a problem as endemic to groups providing members with a public good. Readers who have shared an apartment are familiar with the free-rider problem: there is often a flat mate who refuses to wash the dishes, preferring to leave such chores to others, in effect 'free-riding' off others' efforts. The early Church provided its members with communal meals, fellowship, and even funds when they were in need. An obvious danger arises here: too many free-riders can drain the Church of its resources. The Church therefore had to prevent such behaviour, while balancing its calling to care for the needy.

Altruistic charity, unlike that of other religions of the time, was an important mechanism that drove conversion to early Christianity, conferring a sense of identity upon Christians (Kim, 2010). *The Didache* itself exhorts followers of Christ to give charitably in order to attain the Kingdom of God. However, mechanisms had to be developed to contain free-riders.

Didache 11-12 provides evidence of such mechanisms. *Didache* 12 states the following:

"But receive everyone who comes in the name of the Lord, and prove and know him afterward; for you shall have understanding right and left. If he who comes is a wayfarer, assist him as far as you are able; but he shall not remain with you more than two or three days, if need be. But if he wants to stay with you, and is an artisan, let him work and eat. But if he has no trade, according to your understanding, see to it that, as a Christian, he shall not live with you idle. But if he wills not to do, he is a Christ-monger. Watch that you keep away from such."

Within this brief passage, a number of mechanisms are provided for dealing with Christian travellers seeking respite from their journey. The early Church was clearly cautious about false Christians, those claiming to come "in the name of the Lord," but simply seeking the Church's food, shelter, and clothing, without contributing their own resources. If the traveler claimed to come from another Christian community, then it would have been difficult to verify this claim, due to slow transport and information links. Therefore, to use the language of game theory, *screening mechanisms* had to be developed to sort free-riders from true believers. First, the *Didache* suggests getting to know the wayfarer, to "prove him," and to determine whether he is truly a Christian; ostensibly one could test whether the traveller was familiar with the gospels.

Second, the wanderer is to remain no longer than three days; a legitimate traveller would find such a sojourn sufficient, while a free-rider would prefer to remain longer, leeching the church's resources. During the three days, the church is only to give to the traveller what it is able to afford, and no more. Finally, if the traveller wishes to remain with the Christian community, then he must work, either as an artisan or unskilled labourer - he shall not remain idle. These three screening devices ensured that, despite sluggish information networks, the early Church would not be easily deceived.

Didache 11 contains similar screening mechanisms as *Didache* 12, when evaluating wandering preachers and prophets. Although information and transport were slow, the work of itinerant preachers was significant in the early Church (Draper, 1998; Niederwimmer, 1996). St. Paul himself travelled frequently, and tradition holds that Jesus's other apostles journeyed to distant lands like India, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Greece. However, the Church still needed to separate free-riders from true prophets. First, as *Didache* 11 says, the preacher is to be tested, ensuring that what he preaches concurs with accepted Christian teaching:

"Whosoever, therefore comes and teaches you all these things that have been said before, receive him. But if the teacher himself turns and teaches another doctrine to the destruction of this, hear him not."

Second, the preacher is to remain no longer than three days, and may be given food for his journey, but no money: "If he asks for money, he is a false prophet." This stipulation against providing money would have prevented Christian communities from being swindled by false

missionaries and con men. This also implies that travelling preachers held a special calling that entailed near-penury, thus ensuring that the correct sort of person would become a preacher - not one who merely enjoys free food, drink, and money, but one who was truly keen to spread the Gospel. *Didache* 11 goes on to say, "And every prophet who teaches the truth, but does not do what he teaches, is a false prophet." The final screening device, then, is a simple one: to observe the itinerant preacher, and determine whether he follows his own teaching. Given the difficulty of Christian moral teaching, as discussed in Section II, this would have been an effective screening mechanism. Since they were crucial in the spread of Christianity, such itinerant preachers had to be held to a higher standard than typical Christians.

SECTION IV: PREACHERS, PROPHETS, AND BISHOPS

An effective religious operation requires an element of hierarchy and specialization (Hinigs and Raynard, 2014; Tracey, 2012). Hinings and Bryman (1974), for example, maintain that as a religious group grows in organizational complexity, defined by the number of different tasks performed, its hierarchy will necessarily grow in order to ensure that tasks are performed in a coordinated manner. This hierarchy also comes about as tasks are allocated across a broad geographic area – a problem that certainly faced early Christians, as the religion spread across the expanse of the Roman empire.

To this end, *Didache* 13 and 15 deal with the support of prophets and teachers, and the selection of bishops, respectively. Prophets, as already discussed, were vital to the evangelizing mission of

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the church. To ensure internal stability, moreover, required *stationary* teachers and priests, who could allocate Church resources effectively towards local evangelism. This evolution of the Church towards a model of a local, settled priesthood has been noted by others (Cross, 2005). The *Didache* provides guidance to the early church on how to efficiently allocate resources to support the clergy.

Because the prophets were so integral to the Church's mission, they were well taken care of. *Didache* 13 adjures Christians to support priests who lived within their local community. These teachers were to be given the "first-fruit" of every resource: oxen, wine, clothing, silver, etc. Such prioritization of clergy ensured that the church's economic resources were geared towards the critical role of evangelism. This reflects St. Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 9, to actively support the apostles' missions; for instance, in verse 14, he writes, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." These parallel texts require the Church to channel resources towards those who would spread the religion.

A natural problem then arises: an avaricious man might become a priest, solely for the pecuniary benefits it confers. *Didache* 15 provides a brief solution: "Appoint therefore, for yourselves, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, and truthful and proved." The author of the 1 Timothy 3:2 seems to agree when describing the qualities of good bishops: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach." Ostensibly, the community should screen men for the qualities suitable to the bishopric and diaconate, much as they screen travelling preachers, as discussed previously.

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The question of why a local hierarchy had to be established, to begin with, is important. Wilkens (1971) argues that religious organizations cannot readily turn to financial resources or physical sanctions in order to control members to keep internal stability, and therefore require an educated and specialized hierarchy that is able to spread ideological norms, consistent with the organization's religious doctrines. This keeps the religious group's members submissive to the group's overall aims, preventing them from veering off into other ideological domains.

From the Church's beginning, Christians held to a hierarchical structure. The Jerusalem church, described in Acts, held all resources in common, and the disciples allocated monies as required. The disciples' role was later mirrored in that of bishops, who dealt with local church administrative matters. To evangelize effectively, the Church could never have adopted purely democratic decision-making. Firstly, empire-wide Church democracy would have been impossible, given the slow transport and information links noted previously. Secondly, local democratic governance, composed of self-interested individuals, would have allocated funds towards local indulgences, and not necessarily in a manner to maximize converts or maintain internal stability. Thirdly, the minutiae of certain local matters required a specialist. The analogy with a profit-maximizing business firm is apt here: if decisions were made democratically, with each worker having an equal vote, then workers would seek to benefit themselves at the firm's expense, with work itself being sporadically halted so that decisions could be voted upon. Instead, it is better to hire management, trained in business and keen on profit-maximization, to deal with decision-making. Bishops played a similar role in the early Church: but to maximize converts, not profits.

Such observations are mirrored in Mintzberg and Westley's (1992) model of religious organizational change, which argues that how a Church decides to respond to external threats to their existence determines their structure. In viewing religious communities as analogous to business corporations like IBM and Hewlett Packard, the authors acknowledge that specialized hierarchy is required in both cases in order to maintain control over followers, to spread the brand, and to prevent against the possibility of external threats. This is clearly reflected in the *Didache*.

SECTION V: CONCLUSION

Christianity's successful spread across the Roman empire was due, in large part, to its emphasis on clear and effective evangelism. The *Didache* offers us a magnifying glass on the 1st Century Church's concern with spreading the gospel. Christianity's moral strictures distinguished it from the culture at large, as well as from other religious competitors, offering catechumens a clear and simple religious product. The Church's ability to prevent free-riding ensured that resources were never drained to a point of bankruptcy, which would have hindered the work of evangelism. Finally, the evangelists themselves - priests, prophets, and bishops - had their material needs met, in order to promote internal stability and external outreach; bishops, in particular, were put in charge of allocating community funds.

A tepid conclusion can be proffered at this juncture: a religion's successful spread requires that

its organization and hierarchy reflect that of a profit-maximizing business company, with the

only difference being that the former maximizes converts. At first glance, with regards to this

article, such a conclusion appears true: Christianity offered an attractive product, along with an

efficient marketing strategy, and an ability to manage internal resources. Yet such an observation

risks overgeneralization: faiths indeed spread through voluntary conversions, but also through

forced ones. During the Saxon Wars, for example, Charlemagne forcibly converted Saxons to

Christianity. In the history of Islam, the *jizya* was a tax that non-Muslims, who lived within a

Caliphate, had to pay; in many cases, poorer Christians converted to Islam to avoid the tax's

burden (Saleh, 2018). The issue of forced conversions is not, of course, taken up here because

the early Christian Church lacked the power to compel conversion. As Ekelund and Tollison

(2011) suggest, it is best to think of the early Church as a competitive firm, yearning to make its

mark amidst myriad other religious ideas; the later Church, based in Rome, is better thought of as

a monopoly. Regardless, the *Didache* allows us to infer that such a model of the early Church is

essentially correct.

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