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GLS 815

for Geoffrey Poitras

A Monopoly on Belief

The Creation of the Roman Catholic Church

For over two thousand years, the Roman Catholic Church has been a dominant player in the religious market. An institution of great power, wealth and influence, it was one of the cornerstones in the creation and development of western civilization politically, socially, culturally, psychologically and economically.

In this paper, I will discuss how, by forming a monopoly on belief, Roman Christianity was able to take over the religious marketplace in Rome. Within four hundred years, become the most powerful system of religious belief in a once flourishing religious market, eventually becoming the official state religion and voice for God in the Roman Empire. I will discuss some of the events that influenced early Christianity and the forming of the Church, and with a focus on the Gnostics as one of the few serious threats to the unification, organization and ultimate market domination of the Catholic Church I will illustrate some of the marketing techniques used by the Church to achieve a monopoly on belief.

A great many factors conspired to make the monopoly possible. To understand more fully how a new message or sect was able to enter the religious market and eventually eliminate the competition, it is essential to examine the context and the culture at that time. For any product to succeed, a need (physical, psychological or spiritual) must first be identified. This is a basic principle of business: supply and demand.

How did a small Jewish sect looked upon with contempt and suspicion manage to survive, grow, evolve, fragment, become co-opted, branded, turned into a monopoly and ultimately become the state religion and official belief? Some answers may lie in the political, social and economic context of the Roman Empire in the first three centuries

AE. Other answers can be found in the competing religions and cults that co existed in the city of Rome at the point the early Christians began their ministry.

Ancient Rome in the first century was a place where extreme tolerance for other people's gods was practiced. The Romans believed that all people had gods who cared for and protected them in their own lands. As the Empire expanded and people came to Rome either as slaves, prisoners, or as immigrants from invaded nations, they brought with them their Gods, Spirits and beliefs which were assimilated them into the Roman culture. Roman and Greek Gods and Goddesses, Judaism, Paganism, Zoroastrianism, to name a few lived alongside Neo Platonics, Epicureans and Stoics. Beliefs entered the market as a result of imperialism; the Empire expanding and assimilating through war and invasion.

There seemed to be an unlimited capacity to accommodate new and foreign cults. The only requirement under Roman law was loyalty to the state and to Rome. "Follow your cult as you wish and let everyone else do the same" could easily have been the Empire's motto, as long as loyalty to the state and empire was obeyed.

The Religion of Rome was polytheistic in nature, consisting of the worship of both spirits and Gods. It was a form based, trade based religion with spirits and gods were asked in a manner best described as quid pro quo, to protect, bless and provide prosperity for the family, the community and the state and the Empire beyond. If the God did what was asked for, the worshipper performed a service in return. Sacrifices, prayers and various offerings were traded with the gods for favour.

In essence, the belief was that spirits presided over the small and the personal, while Gods presided over the state and the country. The Romans believed that everything had a

spirit, from the smallest household items – cups, tables, linens, to all aspects of nature; rivers, trees, harvests and including animals. Each household had its own spirit and each family had a shrine, to this spirit. The head of the family – the paterfamilias – was responsible for making regular sacrifices to honor the family's spirit and make sure that it continued to watch over them.

An important aspect of Roman worship was that it was more concerned with form than content. Issues of morality, behaviour, goodness, or character, were not the concerns of the people's concerns; it did not matter what you did or how you behaved; manner of person you were, it mattered that you executed the ritual perfectly. Approval of the Gods, depended on performing the rituals correctly; religious form rather than content dominated the social order. The search for meaning and higher truths, was in the hands of the Gods. One's life and destiny was not one's concern, only the trading of goods and services with the Gods through the correct performance of ritual. Prosperity for the individual meant prosperity for the country and a happy healthy nation.

Roman Emperors understood the importance of Religion. They understood that religion (from the Latin *religio* meaning something that binds) was a unifying force in the expansion of the Empire. It had the power to keep people in place, engaged in their communities, thereby holding the society together creating strength, prosperity and a strong economy for the nation despite individual differences. From the start the Romans combined religion and state. Beginning with Augustus, who claimed the appearance of Halley's comet was proof that he was a son of god, Roman Emperors learned the value of claiming God status for themselves to further solidify the union of state and religion. Pray to your own gods, but sacrifice to the Roman Gods as well and give your allegiance to

Emperor and Empire. The only exception to the this law was extended to the Jewish people, who, though viewed by the Romans as peculiar for their monotheistic beliefs, were an accepted and protected part of Roman society, because of the Romans' respect for religions with a basis in tradition and antiquity.

The early Christians were seen as an upstart religion, a cult of the moment consisting of peasants and uneducated rabble who were mainly outside of Rome. However, because the religious market of the empire was such a diverse, open and thriving market, for the first century they were more or less tolerated. There were no laws in place yet, to persecute them nor was there any particular interest in doing so. With a stable economy and a fairly high standard of living, as is consistent with strong economic times, tolerance extended across the board.

The few persecutions that happened tended to be local and did not amount to much. In fact, the government would often step in to protect Christians from the mob. It is important to note that the early Christians were not a cohesive group. There were many sects with many different ideas about what exactly Christianity was, and who Jesus was. Pagans detested them and though they were a Jewish sect, the majority of Jews did not want to be affiliated with them. However, for a time, the many sects within Christianity and the many sects of Gnostics (both Christian and Jewish) got along reasonably well, one reason being they had Rome as a common enemy. The Romans assumed the various sects of Christianity, Gnosticism and some of the Jewish faith were the same and treated them with equal contempt, and so for the first century the sects were allied under Roman rule. In 64 CE Nero called them *"A secret society that speaks in a private code – Men*

following a malefic superstition." and led one of the few government sanctioned persecutions against Christians.

A core reason early Christian sects were suspect and despised was their monotheistic belief. Ultimately however, it was their refusal to swear allegiance to Roman Gods and the Emperor along with their refusal to participate in Roman festivals and Roman worship that helped to create the persecutions of the second and third centuries. By the end of the first century, the cult and its various sects had spread throughout the empire, and was beginning to be seen as a threat to traditional Roman values. It had begun to take over the religious market place.

How was this small and unpopular cult able to take hold? How was this new message able to be heard amongst all the messages in the market? There were many factors, sociological, psychological, political and economic that created fertile ground for the message the early Christians preached. Rome had been ruled by a series of corrupt and autocratic Emperors, predominantly military men whose focus was the continued expansion of the Empire, personal power, excesses in lifestyle and little or no concern for the population. Weak and self-serving governing invited invasions from within and without putting the Empire on a path toward disintegration. Endless war and brutality, and the overextension of Imperialism created extreme living conditions: slavery, poverty, illness, despair lived along side extraordinary wealth. Constant unrest, steady streams of new Emperors, fluctuating taxation, inflation, threat of invasion and instability, plagues, shortages and hoarding resulting from drought and war had the people living in constant fear. In all likelihood, if these conditions were to be analyzed today, the sociological and

psychological context of Rome would be diagnosed as an entire population suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

This distress and tension in the population opened a space, possibly even created a spiritual need (demand) for the new message the early Christians were offering: a message of mercy, forgiveness and salvation. These were radical ideas at the time for the majority of Romans. Mercy was not a concept germane to everyday life in ancient Rome. On the contrary, the practice of mercy would have been regarded as weakness as would have forgiveness. As mentioned earlier, these were qualities of content not form, qualities that belonged to the gods.

Like any new business, the Christians used traditional marketing techniques. Beginning with identifying a need and supplying a product to address that need, the Christians moved on to identifying a demographic and targeting its product to that demographic. An important factor as mentioned right from the start, is that early Christianity was a Jewish sect, based on the teachings of a Jewish Rabi. The message was not a new message within the Jewish community. It was in fact an ancient message thought to belong to a particular Jewish sect. Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist and Simon Magus were all members of that sect and credited with being among the founders of the new Christian cult. Another founding group of early Christianity were the Gnostics, who were both Jewish and Christian and held similar beliefs to the content of the new message. In time these groups would turn on each other in the struggle to create the official story, identity and eventual religious monopoly, but to start, they worked together to create the early church and to spread the word.

A key demographic targeted was women who embraced and became a major "purchaser" of the message and a powerful market entry point. The central issues of peace, love, forgiveness and mercy appealed to the mothers of past, present and future soldiers. The new spiritual practice focused on relational qualities of self and other, community; content over form. In addition to its content, early Christians/Gnostics placed women on an equal footing with men and give them a voice and a place in their society not only as teachers, healers and preachers, but as voters and decision makers within the body of the Gnostic/Christian sects. A woman living in Rome at that time was not privy to such equality. She may have had influence, but she did not have a vote or a voice in government. Until marriage she was the property of her father and after marriage she became the property of her husband. If she became a widow she would be chaperoned. She may have received a basic education but was given officially, only the roles of wife and mother. A wealthy woman may have had a bit of freedom, a rare few had service-oriented businesses like midwifery, but by and large her responsibility was to care for the home, to spin, weave and make clothes. Independence was not hers. The freedom and equality offered her by the new religion would have had enormous appeal.

Other demographics targeted were the poor, the disenfranchised, slaves, peasants, the uneducated and the gentiles. The inclusion of all people, all classes, races, and religions, was another part of the new religion's appeal. For the first time a spiritual product was being supplied to the poor that preached the virtues of being poor rather than the virtues of material wealth and possessions. A further important development that created a shift in the religious market was the destruction of the temple of Judea in 70 AE following the Jewish uprising. The Jews were angered by the corruption of the Romans, in particular

the Emperor Caligula. They were suddenly being forced to worship Roman Gods when this had never been an issue. They rose up in protest and the Roman army went into Judea. Forty thousand Jews were killed, the temple destroyed and Jews were forbidden to proselytize. It was ruled illegal to convert to Judaism and the Jews left the market, creating an opportunity for the new sect to take over in its place.

As the sect broadened its base to reach out to gentiles, pagans and barbarians, the strict rules of Judaism were relaxed and the sect became it's own religion – Christianity. To build the new church, the early founders actively recruited. They advertised and marketed using simple door-to-door salesman techniques. Following his vision on the road to Damascus and his conversion to Christianity, Paul became the first travelling salesman for the new message clocking 10,000 miles spreading the Gospel and writing endless letters, a form of pre–press for the places he visited.

As the cult began to grow in number and move away from its early identity as a Jewish sect into Christianity and the early church, infighting began amongst the various sects. Factions developed around issues of who had the official story, who had the right to tell it as well as the divinity of Christ, the meaning of the resurrection and what the new religion and Church would provide. These factions were contentious and the ongoing disputes began to threaten the existence of the early church. The sociologist Max Weber has shown that if a religious movement doesn't develop a certain institutional structure within a generation of its founder's death, the movement will not survive. Unification of the story, or in business terms, the goods and services the new church would provide became essential to its survival in the thriving religious market. The main threat from within came from the Gnostics. There were a number of points on which the Gnostics

disagreed with the newly emerging institution, but the main problem was the question of authority. Following the crucifixion, the resurrection and Jesus' promise to return, the question of authority became a serious issue. Who would be his proxy on earth, who had the authority to speak for him until he returned?

With the gospels written in the first century – (60 – 70 AE) the official story had begun to take form. The establishment of basic clerical administration: Bishop, Deacon, Priest followed. Interestingly, the clerical form was modeled after the Roman Colleges and Senate. In 96 AE following a schism amongst the members of the Church in Corinth around this issue of authority to preach and speak the word, Bishop Clements wrote "God delegates his authority of reign to rulers and leaders on earth. The designated rulers are bishops, priests and deacons. Anyone who does not obey this is disobeying God."(96) Who was he speaking to? Gnostics and Christian Gnostics who were part of the formation of early Christianity and the early church.

The Gnostics and/or Gnosticism seems to have been something of an umbrella term used to describe almost anyone who disagreed with the early church. Efforts to destroy the competition or competing ideas about Christianity, were enormously successful. Until the discovery of the Nag Hammadi in 1945, the 52 writings known as the Gnostic Gospels, the only information we had about the Gnostics came from Orthodox Church writings. And none of that information was good. The church could say anything it wanted, make any accusations because there were no corroborating witnesses and writings. Texts and Gnostic literature was destroyed. We had only the Church's word on who the Gnostics were and what they believed.

The Nag Hammadi revealed a very different story. Though there were varied beliefs within Gnosticism from extreme to moderate, there was a main theme common to all Gnostics that was the notion that the divine is to be discovered through an interior search, rather than through an external savior or institution. In Gnostic thought, the self and the divine are identical. God and authority is within. This was a major issue for the Orthodox Church who put God and authority outside the individual and into the hands of the church. Among the gospels found, which include the Gospels of Mary, Philip, Thomas the Contender, Judas and The Gospel of Truth, this quote from The Gospel of Thomas the Contender best describes the concept. "Whoever has known himself has at the same time already achieved knowledge about the depths of all things." Or as Elaine Pagels writes in her book "The Gnostic Gospels" "To know oneself at the deepest level is to know God. This is the secret of gnosis." (xix) These ideas were in direct contrast with the direction the church was heading in the second and third centuries and had to be eradicated. There were more issues too that the Gnostics brought to early Christianity that proved too complex or threatening to the creation of a unified product that could control the market. The Gnostics could be described as entirely too permissive and open to be able to maintain market domination. In truth, the concept of a monopoly, market domination, control in the material world and power were of no interest to the Gnostics. Their interest was in spiritual awakening. As an instrumental part of the formation of the church, the Gnostics themselves had many issues with the direction the church was heading. They did not believe the church was teaching the true message of Christ, not did they believe the Church was adequately challenging its congregation toward the search for salvation and higher knowledge – gnosis. They believed the church was patronizing

and placating, offering little more than a form to worship in and ultimately dependency on an institution for salvation rather than the search for self and meaning. In direct opposition to the church, who now claimed sole authority over interpretation of the gospels and of the teachings of Jesus, the Gnostics believed they had the right to interpret for themselves and that Jesus taught this. Gnostics who wrote and circulated gospels thought of themselves as Christians who had received, in addition to the other gospels, secret oral teaching intended for initiates that instructed on the realization of divinity. Jesus was identified by some Gnostic sects as an embodiment of the supreme being incarnate whose intent was to bring *gnōsis* to the earth. Others believed Jesus to be merely a human who attained divinity through gnosis and taught his disciples to do the same. They believed Jesus taught two ways: one for the masses, one for the initiated – the spiritually mature. Christ described himself as a teacher, not a master. He suggested that one needed authority, or a master only until one is able to know for oneself. Then she could make decisions and act on her own authority – her own spiritual maturity. This would make the initiate his equal. They believed one did not become a Christian, but a Christ.

The Gnostics believed in two worlds; one of spirit the other of matter, and that our spirits were trapped in matter. Their concern was with transcending, transforming and releasing the spirit from matter. Intuitive knowledge was their method of salvation from the material world. Their elaborate theories of how spirit got involved in matter, creation myths in the Judaic tradition and mystical ideas had no place in the new church.

Not did other revolutionary Gnostic ideas. They were anti- institution of every kind: including governmental, religious and marriage. They disdained the private ownership of

land and lived communally with equal distribution of wealth, self-rule, inclusion and equality for all as their basis. They had no concept of heresy believing all aspects of life, all ideas and experiences were needed in order to arrive at true understanding. For Gnostics, the only teacher was observation and experience. Unlike the emerging Church, spiritual curiosity was encouraged. Gender equality was a given, in part due to the basic belief that God was both the Father and Mother. "The Ineffable, The Depth" – The Father, "Grace, Silence, the womb" – The Mother. (Women played an important role as teachers as well as initiates. They were "not only placed on equal footing with the male, but recognized as the possessor of a favored particle of the original power." (94) According to the Gospel of Mary, who was believed to be an initiate, Jesus taught that men and women were unbalanced because men did not treat women as equals. We were therefore not fully human. She also suggested that the resurrection was not a literal event but an internal experience, a dream or vision, symbolic of a spiritual awakening into a higher consciousness – awakening metaphorically from the dead into Christ consciousness; the knowledge of Self and the Divine, full spiritual maturity.

This concept was unacceptable to the church. The resurrection and guarantee of an afterlife were key to its growth and survival. Another concept that would have been threatening to the church's promise of an afterlife was the concept of reincarnation – a concept central to Gnosticism and said to have been taught by Jesus. The Gnostic understanding of evil as a product of error, a misunderstanding, rather than part of divinity or a divine plan did not work for the church either. Church leaders wanted no part of the strict equality in the form Gnostic worship took. There were no official leaders in Gnostic worship. Lots were drawn at each meeting to decide who would run the

meeting. There was no top down vertical organization along the lines that the Roman Colleges, the Senate, and now the Church was practicing. The Church dismissed Gnostic principals of equal access, participation and inclusion as frivolous and dangerous. The issue of women sharing positions of authority along with men – teaching, engaging in discussion, performing exorcisms, healings and even baptisms which made them the same as bishops was intolerable – a heresy.

Another heresy was the Gnostic definition of redemption. Redemption came with *Gnosis* the realization of the true source of power – "the depth" of all being. Those who came to gnosis were given a secret sacrament called redemption which meant they were released from illusion. For the Gnostics, redemption was worked for and could not be given by anyone.

The Gospel of Truth states "The Kingdom is inside you. - If you will not know yourselves you will dwell in poverty and you will be that poverty." (128) To the Christian Gnostics, the meaning of The Kingdom is awakened consciousness. It is available to and for all people and there is no person, place, thing, sect, religion that can own that nor any external event that will usher it in.

The Church and the Apostles believed the coming of the Kingdom to be a cataclysmic event that would occur in their own lifetime. The division between actual and mystical began. While the Church was creating the belief that the Kingdom, the liberation of humanity, would occur through events. Gnostic Christians held to the belief the Kingdom, liberation, would come through inner transformation.

The Gnostics and the Church continued to separate along a variety of lines. The church used language of illusion and enlightenment rather than sin and repentance. Gnostics taught that Jesus did not come to save us from sin, but to help us become enlightened. Gnostics saw Church leaders as confused and ignorant and questioned the authority of the clergy. Early Christian Gnostics did not want to leave the Church but saw Christianity as fragmenting and as separatists. Inclusive only if you join it. The church having begun as open to all was becoming increasingly insular and rule bound. More importantly, the teachings of Christian Gnostics began to spread to Pagans and Jews, threatening to undermine the Church. Clearly, if one could interpret the gospels for herself and become equal to Christ, denounce material possessions (as Christ did along with Gnostics and other sects) was anti institutional and did not recognize the Church or the State as having authority or power, that person or group would be a threat to any body seeking power or authority. The Gnostics were a direct threat to the survival of the newly emerging Christian Church, just as the newly emerging Christian Church was becoming a threat to Rome.

Two outspoken and influential early Christian Gnostics were Valentinus (100 – 160) a theologian and Basilides (c 100 – 139) a religious teacher in Alexandria. Both men fought the church for the church to include the principles of an inner process toward spiritual awakening, and opposed the churches claims to sole authority over interpretation and claims that the Apostles had given the church this authority. They suggested the apostles did not have the right, nor did they possess the true teachings of Jesus. The Gnostics believed there were three states of consciousness: asleep, drowsy and awake. They believed the Pagans were asleep (steeped in matter and ignorance), the Christians

Drowsy (still ignorant of secret teachings and the profound nature of truth) while only the Gnostics were awake (redeemed, having achieved Christ consciousness).

Bishop Irenaeus (c 200 CE) The Bishop of Lyon an early Church father along with Tertullian (160 – 240 AD) a Pagan convert to Christianity vehemently opposed the Gnostic philosophy and belief and lead the charge against the Gnostics and their teaching. Both men understood that the survival of the church depended on unity and saw the Gnostics as a threat to that unity. They wrote extensively against the Gnostics calling them liars and heretics. In "Prescription Against Heresies" Tertullian wrote "The heretics will not listen and understand that a search is sensible when one does not yet know the truth – with Christ and His gospel, we have reached the end and goal of our seeking. True faith is always simple" (520) Bishop Irenaeus added his voice to the canon with "Against Heresies" (c 175 – 185) and "The Destruction of Falsely So-Called Knowledge" which specifically attacks "The Gospel of Truth" - Exposing Gnostic heresies so everyone could "avoid such an abyss of madness and of blasphemy against Christ." (xviii)

Both men used any means at their disposal to slander, denounce and destroy the credibility of the Gnostics – and indeed the credibility of anyone who questioned the authority of the church or taught any other interpretation than the church's they ultimately eliminated the threat. The Gnostic refusal to recognize the hierarchy of the church would not be tolerated. One doctrine, one god, one interpretation of scripture (belonging to the bishops) one spiritual authority and representative for Christ on earth, one united Church was the goal and the Gnostic Christians were no longer needed or wanted in the newly formed and almost completely unified church.

Some Gnostic communities tried to organize against the onslaught. Evidence of this is in The Apocalypse of Peter, which denounces Church officials. "Others call themselves Bishops and Deacons as if they had received their authority from God. Those people are waterless canals." (106) while still others denounced Catholic Christians as the heretics who claimed the truth belonged to them alone even though they didn't understand it nor did they understand the mystery.

Irenaeus went into a rage and countered with the statement that the "so called Gnostics be recognized as agents of Satan by all who worship God." (70) calling them decadent, asocial, elitist, and megalomaniac. He accuses them of being arrogant, shocking, and derivative, stealing from Paganism, and the philosophies of Plato, Epicurus, and Pythagoras. "According to them, man must perpetrate every possible infamy in order to be saved" (70)

The alleged infamy in many cases was justice and equality. The infamy they preached was that God didn't want good things of the earth to be owned by a select few, and that inner knowing, Gnosis, was the only authority. Neither Tertullian or Irenaeus mentioned the rigorous spiritual practices required to attain gnosis.

Regardless of the struggles within the emerging Catholic Church, Christianity was on the rise. The Empire was beginning to enter its decline and with it the decline of the loyalty of the people to Roman Gods and religious practices. The new religion, once popular primarily amongst the uneducated, poor and disenfranchised predominantly outside Rome, was beginning to spread to the ruling class and take a serious place in the religious market in Rome and Alexandria as well as the countryside.

By 200 AE Christianity is an institution. There is a hierarchy of Bishop, Priest and Deacon. Irenaeus declares there can only be one truth, one church and no other, and no salvation outside the institution. As God leads in heaven so will the Clergy lead on earth as God's proxy. The Bishops all agree and a generation later Ignatius states that as there is only one God there should be only one Bishop, foreshadowing the Pope. The laity should revere this Bishop as though he is God: a mirror of God's reign in heaven. It is at this point that Rome enters what some call the crisis of the second and third centuries. Some important events that created the crisis were the Antonine Plague, 165–180 with a total of 5,000,000 deaths. Conversion to Christianity and Judaism were declared illegal. The government began to actively pursue Christians because of their perceived threat to Roman Rule and Roman Values. Emperor Decius began a series of Christian persecutions (c 249-251) in an attempt at Nation Building. From the years 251 – 270 the Plague of Cyprian raged throughout the empire decimating the army and creating manpower shortages. At its height an estimated 5000 died daily in Rome. The Christians were blamed, helping fuel the persecutions. From 257 – 258 Valerian continues persecutions after Decius as the barbarians broke through the northern front into the Empire.

In an attempt to hold the empire together Emperor Diocletian instituted the Tetrarchy in 293, dividing the empire into East and West to be ruled by two Emperors. In 301 – he attempted wage and price controls doubling the face value of coins. This was a fiscal disaster. Inflation ensued, the poor were taxed off their land, and crime rates soared, loyalty to the Republic plummeted, economic insecurity and domestic peace are threatened, while the cost of policing civil unrest skyrocketed. "The poor were driven by

their afflictions into various criminal enterprises losing sight of the law – feelings of loyalty – entrusted their revenge into crime." From De rebus bellicus 368 Anonymous. (90)

The Diocletian Persecutions 303-305 were another attempt by Diocletian to regain the Empire through the demonizing of the other. The army was purged of Christians and so many clergy were arrested they had to free the criminals. The propaganda the Romans used (Christians hate the human race, practice incest, cannibalism and use black magic) sounded eerily like the propaganda that Christians had used against the Gnostics.

The Diocletian persecutions backfired. Christians who were willing to go to their deaths became a huge selling feature for the new Church. Some Christians went so far as to ask to be martyred, inadvertently advertising proof that the promised afterlife was real, and more people converted. The monopolization of belief, the monopolization of the Roman religious market by the Christian church was all but complete. The church had managed to achieve the essentials required for total market domination. They had homogenized the message and created a product no one else was selling. They had managed to all but do away with the competition, with the exception of the Arians and the Donatists.

Ironically, it was the Diocletian persecutions in Roman North Africa that created the final step needed for the monopoly on belief that became the Roman Catholic Church, finally driving out of the last powerful sellers in the Christian market, the last few dissenting voices. The Arians who questioned the divinity of Christ, and the Donatists who questioned the purity of certain clergy and questioned who could perform the sacraments.

During the persecutions the Governor of Carthage in Northern Africa was quite lenient. Christians were only required to hand over their sacred books and denounce their faith. Certain Church leaders surrendered sacred books and writings as well as turning in fellow Christians and renouncing their faith. They were considered collaborators and called traditors (surrenderers, traitors). However they were able to return to their original posts and continued to hold offices and positions of authority within the Church. (Specifically the Bishop of Carthage) Bishop Donatus protested. Those who agreed with him (the Donatists) claimed that the sacraments performed by the traditors were invalid. The Catholic Church maintained its stance that one could receive the Eucharist from an unrepentant sinning Priest and not be damaged by his corruption as long as he followed the form, the ritual, harkening back to earlier Roman religious concepts of form over content. The Church voted against the Donatists' objection but the Donatists refused the verdict and the problem persisted. The Diocletian Persecutions ended in April 311 and the following month Emperor Galerius issued the edict of toleration allowing anyone to practice the religion they chose.

The turning point that ensured the success of the Christian church came in 312 when Constantine had a vision of the cross before the Battle of Milvian Ridge, the battle for control of the Western Empire. He instructed his army to wear the Christian symbol of the cross into battle and his army won. From this point on Constantine turned his favour to the Christians.

In 313 he issued the Edict of Milan, increasing religious freedom for everyone, promising the Church his protection and pointedly refusing to protect the Donatisits. In 314 he became involved with the Donatist issue and in 316 the two factions made an

unprecedented request and asked Diocletian to act as judge over their dispute, an act that fused for the first time the new religion with the state. Constantine aligned with the Church and ruled against the Donatists and the new message, the Church, was now part of the traditional Roman system of Church and State co-mingling. State and Religion had come full circle in form; the difference being a shift from polytheism to monotheism.

It is not possible to know if Constantine's conversion was sincere or if he was simply able to see that the wave of Christian conversion could not be stopped and the days of the great Empire and Emperor were numbered. In 250 CE 1.9 % of the population was Christian. By 350 CE the number rose to 56.5%. Christian population increased from increased from 6,000,000 in 300 to 10,000,000 in 315 CE." (92) The "rising majority of believers" (92) helped create "one of the preconditions for monopolization." (92)

Politically astute, ambitious and determined to remain in power, Constantine was able to recognize that Christianity had the potential to offer a new unity and new power to an Empire already in decline. It has been documented that Constantine continued to sacrifice and perform rituals to Roman Gods giving credence to speculation that his conversion was strictly political.

In "Economic Origins Roman Christianity, Ekelund and Tollison assert "Constantine presents himself as a divinely appointed unifier. " (98) His goal is political – to unify the Empire by creating one Christianity whose clergy will in turn support him. He is able to suppress Pagan and Donatists who are a danger to political unity. Constantine converts to Christianity and immediately begins the "transfer of wealth from Pagan temple and Donatists to the state and the Church." (98)

With Constantine's conversion the Catholic Church had the last piece in place to fully take over the market: state endorsement and legitimization. Constantine acted quickly to accelerate the process. He knew infighting in the Church had to end and that a formal code, identity and vision of exactly what the Church offered had to be firmly established. In business terms, the Church needed "branding".

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design that identifies the goods and services of one seller and differentiates it from others. Branding is about getting your prospects to see you as the only service that provides a solution to their problem – the only real choice." (i) Constantine understood the Roman population needed change but not too much change. The Empire and its religions had always operated on a trade basis and he understood esoteric notions Gnosis, Self, personal autonomy, concepts of humanity and divinity conjoined were not in the best interest of a population in need of a religious system to belong to and be contained by and more importantly, those concepts were not good for him as their leader. A population who aspired to self knowledge and self rule, who rejected the material world and all the systems of top down Roman hierarchy – as the Gnostics taught, would certainly mean the end of his role as Ruler of the Roman Empire. A unified Church with traditional rules and values inclusive of the new message was needed.

In 325 Constantine organized The First Council of Nicaea, which has been thought of as the first effort define the product, brand the Church. Constantine invited all the Bishops East and West along with their and entourages, 1,800 people in total. Three hundred Bishops attended. They settled the issue of the Trinity declaring that Jesus and The Father are one, affirming the divinity of Jesus and applying to him the term "God". Arianism

and Donatisism were outlawed. Four gospels were chosen to be the official story and orthodoxy was established. Official authority and exclusive rights to interpretation of the gospel and scriptures were given to the Church. An official day to celebrate Easter was established separating it from Passover and the Jewish calendar further distancing Christianity from Judaism, and twenty new church laws, or canons, were instituted including one that prohibited of the removal of priests. This meant Constantine's people who were in place to support him, could not be removed. Constantine ran the First Council like an Emperor of the Church. Having established the brand, he continued to work tirelessly to support the creation of the Roman Catholic Church. Orthodox Christians were rewarded. Non – orthodox were eliminated, heretics were executed, went underground or disappeared. Christians were given tax breaks. Constantine even went so far as to pay people to become Christians. Churches were built and most importantly the Church was allowed to buy land. Pagan temples were destroyed and violence was used to break up meetings. The few remaining religions or spiritual practices in the market were decimated. With the homogenized message and unique product firmly established the Church finally took over the religious market. By 380 CE Christianity was the official state religion holding total Authority on the interpretation of scripture, the Resurrection, the afterlife; it became the only place to receive salvation and to enter the kingdom of heaven. Just as the Roman Gods, Spirits and State had once been inextricably woven together, the Roman Catholic Church and State were now one. Constantine made himself the Emperor of the new religion, unified Rome and a once universally inclusive little cult became The Roman Catholic Church, a closed institution that held the monopoly on belief well into the late middle ages.

To conclude we return to the original question and answer it in strictly business terms. A suspect and maligned cult took over a thriving religious market by identifying and answering a spiritual, emotional and psychological need. They offered the market a unique and appealing message, and a product no one else was selling. They used strong and effective marketing techniques to recruit customers while convincing their clients that this Church, this institution was the only place, the only system, that could supply or meet their needs, which were answers to life's most difficult questions and solutions to life's most difficult problems.

The monopoly offered salvation, forgiveness and an afterlife all in one place. It solved the problem of death. While other religions may have hinted at an afterlife, The Christian Church guaranteed one. It also qualified that afterlife – happy, peaceful, eternal, while offering an easy to follow guide to achieving the afterlife desired. Beyond the solution to the haunting question "What happens when we die, where do we go" the church offered many other earthly perks. Anyone could join. Membership fees were easy and affordable. It offered less time spent in ritual while increasing and securing social status. Once membership was gained, along with it came instant community and belonging. Fellowship in a bleak world was a precious commodity. Becoming a member gave one an instant reputation of being good and trustworthy which was (and still is) of enormous value for people in business. The Church became a new place in which to network and make business connections.

The more the Church grew, the more it proved its own credibility. Monopolies tend to validate themselves - It *must* be good; it's the only one! The fact that everyone began converting also acted as proof that the Church must be the only true voice for God.

Finally like all successful businesses, gigantic churches and Cathedrals became further proof that The Roman Catholic Church was the one and true church. Conspicuous consumption of space is a great symbol of success and therefore truth. In modern business we can look to examples of sparsely decorated and virtually devoid of merchandise flagship stores on high rental streets like Rodeo Drive and Fifth Avenue. Or we can look to the empty lobbies of Banks and Investment firms on Wall Street. It has become virtually a rule that the bigger and more vacant the space, the more successful the company. The adage 'nothing succeeds like success' seems a fitting description of the mercurial rise to power of the Roman Catholic Church.

The insurance against the times the Church offered was as much a benefit to Constantine as the people of ancient Rome. The high cost of policing the Empire against religious infighting dropped dramatically. With Church doctrine and the rules for living in place, Christians were able to self-monitor. Injustices, poverty, and the ongoing struggles of humanity were more bearable with the guarantee of an afterlife, and easier to shoulder with a strong earthly community. Agency costs went down, the tax base increased, and with Religious unity helping to create political unity, Empire security was restored.

The needs of the market and traditional forms of business answer the question of how a monopoly on belief was possible: basic supply and demand along with political self interest.

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