



# GRECO ROMAN WORLD AND CHRISTIANITY

THE CONTEXT FOR CHRISTIANITY

# The story of assimilation and integration

- ▶ The Greco-Roman context (also that of Jewish context) in many ways helped nurture the Christian faith in Early centuries.
- ▶ The Framework of Judaism, Monotheism, Greek or Hellenistic syncretism, Pantheon of Gods, Roman Political and Social structure all catalyzed spread of Christianity in its own peculiar manners.

# The story of assimilation and integration

- ▶ Christianity assimilated and contextualized itself in the environment.
- ▶ When Jews argued exclusivity, Paul assimilated the other (gentiles) into the Christian fold. Galatians 3:28; Philippians 4:22.
- ▶ Roman empire model used in various civil structures  
Roman Catholic Church

*Christianity, once sowed in the Jewish soil,  
nurtured in Greco-Roman environment and  
flourishes in four quarters of the earth*

▶ *While we live, worship & serve in the European context few pertinent thoughts to ponder...*

1. How good are we at integrating with the society we live in?

2. Can we also turn the 'hostile' environments into one which helps us propagate the faith in new means and forms, without losing the fundamental ?

## *Pax Romana* - Roman peace

“The Matrix within which Christianity developed and spread.”

The term "**Pax Romana**," literally means "Roman peace," refers to the time period from 27 B.C.E. to 180 C.E. **Pax deorum**, another important Latin phrase meaning "peace of the gods" in Roman Empire.

A state of comparative tranquility throughout the Mediterranean world from the reign of **Augustus Caesar** (27 BCE–14 CE) to the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161 – 180 CE). Augustus laid the foundation for this period of concord.

# Augustus Caesar (27 BCE - 14 CE)

- ▶ In 27 BCE, when he had formally declared Rome a republic again, the senate bestowed on him the title Augustus, which means the 'venerated' or the 'revered one', with religious connotations.
- ▶ The famous calendar decree of 9 BCE from Asia Minor calls the birthday of the divine emperor the beginning of 'the good news' (*euangelia*).
- ▶ The great achievement of Augustus in the eyes of his contemporaries was the establishing of the *pax Augusta* (or *Romana*), an unprecedented time of peace, primarily an end of the civil wars and its repercussions throughout the whole empire.

**“Roman empire was used by God in a special way.”**


**The way God used imperialism.**

## Features of Roman empire


(some of these lead to spread of Christianity):

- ▶ Peace and Security throughout the empire
- ▶ Trade, (interestingly it reached parts of south Indian e.g .Arkemade, North of Pondicherry) Trading colonies, Establishment of Trading post, Trade of Pottery & Glass.

Contd.

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- ▶ Communications, Transportation
  - ▶ Aramaic, Greek, Latin ( languages )
  - ▶ Robust Legal system
  - ▶ Common Roman Currency – like an International Currency
  - ▶ Affluent Society -Prosperity (Wealthy in the society also helped spread of Christianity)
  - ▶ No much technical advancements



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- ▶ Religion- View of Universe (Geocentric view existed, Earth as the center).  
Thus to please planetary Gods was important, God of Destiny- Fate.
  - ▶ Religious idea : Preservation of Empire through sacrifice. Pontiff (Latin)-  
one who builds the bridge. Supreme Pontiff- Emperor (later The Pope  
emerges as supreme pontiff).
  - ▶ Family Relations, Gender inequality.

# Greek culture and Philosophy

- ▶ Greek culture – Greeks were intellectual supremacy but several of them were slaves to Roman aristocrats
- ▶ **Philosophical concepts**
  - Plato , Aristotle, Stoics ; influenced Christianity immensely ( Epicureans had less influence)
  - Plato ( Ultimate reality can be known , but not through senses- through transcendent faculty ; ‘to remove our mind from matter’ , Augustinian theology is indebted to platonic thought). ‘Lifting up hearts from the material’.

# Plato

- ▶ Plato : two issues ; from Imperfect , impermanent - to a perfect , permanent, eternal reality. To move from sense objects to mental objects
  - Platonic discipline: Permanent reality/ virtues( 4 important virtues) :
  - 1. Justice 2. Truth 3. Beauty 4. Goodness
  - *Summam bonam* “ summit of the good” - is Divine


# Aristotle


Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E) made significant and lasting contributions to several aspects of human knowledge, from logic to biology to ethics and aesthetics.

- ▶ For Aristotle - Right here , not above!

# Four causalities for a reality:

- ▶ **The material cause:** “that out of which”, e.g., the bronze of a statue. (PMG uses the e.g of a glass used for drinking water to explain )
- ▶ **The formal cause:** “the form”, “the account of what-it-is-to-be”, e.g., the shape of a statue.

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- ▶ **The efficient cause:** “the primary source of the change or rest”, e.g., the artisan, the art of bronze-casting the statue, the man who gives advice.
  - ▶ **The final cause:** “the end, that for the sake of which a thing is done”, e.g., health is the end of walking, losing weight, a glass used for drinking water.



The Authors of the books of Bible clearly depict influences of their context and learning. E.G There are several instances where Paul reflects and shares the thoughts of early Greek Philosophy and Social structure.

There isn't a text without context and rather,  
There isn't anything without a context...

# Sources and Further readings:

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*Light from the Gentiles: Hellenistic philosophy and early Christianity : collected essays, 1959-2012 , by Malherbe, Abraham J, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 2014*