

In reading St. Justin's [First Apology](#), I was startled to find this reference; the bold phrase is what I wish to point out. This is followed by a further description of the practice of the community.

Chapter 14: "...we who formerly delighted in fornication, but now embrace chastity alone; we who formerly used magical arts, dedicate ourselves to the good and unbegotten God; **we who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to every one in need;** we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies, and endeavour to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ, to the end that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all."

Chapter 67: And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost. ... And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.

Justin was killed about 165, so his defense would have been shortly before that. This was a full century after some of the New Testament documents. The other ethical statements do not surprise as they are still followed today, but to find that in the second half of the second century that the Christian community still shared a common purse was unknown to me. I wonder if this was not lost when Christianity was co-opted by Empire. In any case, it reinforces my readings in the contemporary practice of a [New Monasticism](#).

Just as significant is how they did *not* spend money. Perhaps there were other expenses; it seems clear though that in Justin's account the primary purpose was for the maintenance of the community, continuing in the spirit of Jesus and of Paul in II Corinthian 8.

Most of the evangelical church today would come undone were one to attempt to restore that original community model, even without trying to live in a communal setting. We prefer the luxury of contending for [our own personal brand of] the faith in doctrinal stance and in so doing usually diverting attention from the messy polity, personal obligation and necessary humility of an openly shared life.

I noted also this letter of Marcus Aurelius, found as an appendix at the end of Justin's [First Apology](#):

Epistle of Marcus Aurelius to the senate, in which he testifies that the Christians were the cause of his victory.

The Emperor Cæsar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Germanicus, Parthicus, Sarmaticus, to the People of Rome, and to the sacred Senate greeting: I explained to you my grand design, and what advantages I gained on the confines of Germany, with much labour and suffering, in consequence of the circumstance that I was surrounded by the enemy; I myself being shut up in Carnuntum by seventy-four cohorts, nine miles off. And the enemy being at hand, the scouts pointed out to us, and our general Pompeianus showed us that there was close on us a mass of a mixed multitude of 977,000 men, which indeed we saw; and I was shut up by this vast host, having with me only a battalion composed of the first, tenth, double and marine legions. Having then examined my own position, and my host, with respect to the vast mass of barbarians and of the enemy, I quickly betook myself to prayer to the gods of my country. But being disregarded by them, I summoned those who among us go by the name of Christians. And having made inquiry, I discovered a great number and vast host of them, and raged against them, which was by no means becoming; for afterwards I learned their power. Wherefore they began the battle, not by preparing weapons, nor arms, nor bugles; for such preparation is hateful to them, on account of the God they bear about in their conscience. Therefore it is probable that those whom we suppose to be atheists, have God as their ruling power entrenched in their conscience. For having cast themselves on the ground, they prayed not only for me, but also for the whole army as it stood, that they might be delivered from the present thirst and famine. For during five days we had got no water, because there was none; for we were in the heart of Germany, and in the enemy's territory. And simultaneously with their casting themselves on the ground, and praying to God (a God of whom I am ignorant), water poured from heaven, upon us most refreshingly cool, but upon the enemies of Rome a withering hail. And immediately we recognised the presence of God following on the prayer—a God unconquerable and indestructible. Founding upon this, then, let us pardon such as are Christians, lest they pray for and obtain such a weapon against ourselves. And I counsel that no such person be accused on the ground of his being a Christian. But if any one be found laying to the charge of a Christian that he is a Christian, I desire that it be made manifest that he who is accused as a Christian, and acknowledges that he is one, is accused of nothing else than only this, that he is a Christian; but that he who arraigns him be burned alive. And I further desire, that he who is entrusted with the government of the province shall not compel the Christian, who confesses and certifies such a matter, to retract; neither shall he commit him. And I desire that these things be confirmed by a decree of the Senate. And I command this my edict to be published in the Forum of Trajan, in order that it may be read. The prefect Vitrasius Pollio will see that it be transmitted to all the provinces round about, and that no one who wishes to make use of or to possess it be hindered from obtaining a copy from the document I now publish.

I am beginning to wonder if the contemporary American evangelical church is not largely devoid of power, authority and credibility because we have substituted the life-changing power and witness of the Gospel within integral community for the comfort of lifestyle churches and the ephemeral power of economic boycott and political sanction—and losing the witness of Jesus in

the process.

Share this page: