

“They were passionately convinced of the truth of the gospel. They were persuaded that men and women were lost without it. It was the key to eternal life, without which they would perish. They shared in God’s own love, poured out on a needy world. They paid heed to Christ’s Great Commission. They sought to interpenetrate society with the gospel which had had so profound an effect upon them. Christianity for them was no hour’s slot on a Sunday. It affected everything they did and everyone they met. As far as we can tell, their church life was warm and nourishing for the most part, and equipped people to move out with the good news. The ordinary Christians, the missionaries, the academics, the women, all seem to have shared in this same passionate commitment to the cause. Indeed, Glenn Hinson in his book *The Evangelisation of the Roman Empire* sees them as fulfilling an almost military project. The militaristic analogies favored by Christian writers from St Paul to Tertullian, despite the fact that the Christians refused to enter the army, suggest a coherence, a recognition of spiritual battle, and a fierce (and frequently apocalyptic) commitment such as existed in the Qumran Covenanters. The first Christians were rather like the early Communists: small groups bound together by an overmastering passion. Or like the Maquis in the Second World War, secret groups of men who would stop at nothing in order to bring the final day of victory nearer. But our Western churches show little of that spirit. They prefer to see themselves as a hospital rather than an army. Yet this almost military vision, commitment and sacrifice is a major characteristic of the overflowing churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America today. Without something like it in the West, how will anyone in our jaded society be moved? They may be pardoned for reflecting, ‘These people are Christians, are they? Very nice for them, if they like that sort of thing. But it has nothing to offer me. Not until we in the West burn with a passion which is almost a pain to reach people with the gospel will they be likely to take the matter seriously.’”

Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*