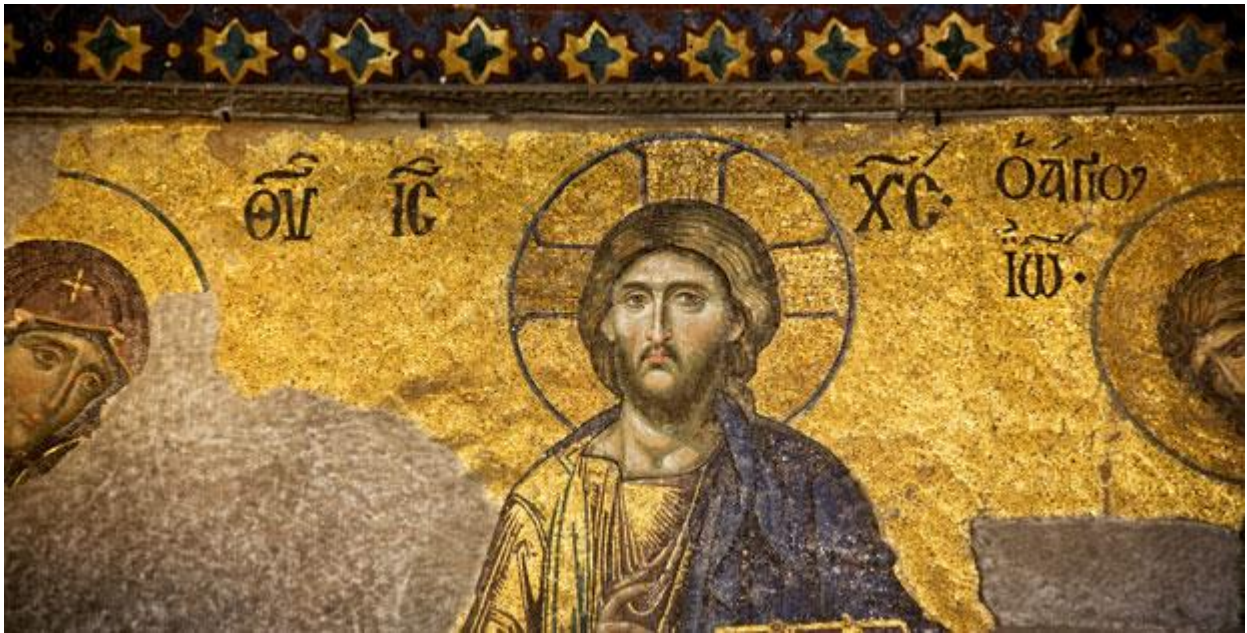


The History of the Church

*From its Beginnings,
into the Modern World*

A 13-week course



Hope Chapel of Colorado Springs

Part of our Discipling Series

The History of the Church

*A 13-week Course developed by
Capitol Hill Baptist Church 2009*

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INTRODUCTION

This course was written in large part by Mark Dever of Capitol Hill Baptist Church. Where you find personal comments, they are his. Corrections, formatting, and minor revisions have been made to the original text. Classroom handouts are available separately. An Appendix has been added with a chronology of events since the close of the New Testament.

The Church is like a foundry in which fine steel is purified and forged into weapons and tools capable of sustained use by their Master. *In God's foundry, there are no unnecessary events, personalities, institutions, or battles.* Each one achieves His purposes, and refines His people. Church history, then, is the story of the preservation, proclamation, and propagation of the one true gospel to each generation, by the Spirit of God, through the people of God.

This is a massive story, with myriad events, personalities, movements, and doctrinal disputes. Trying to put it all into a 13-week course is impossible. Most things must be left out of the story. What remains are the things each historian *chooses* to keep – what he considers *most* important for a Christian to know in order to be *familiar* with Church History. This course provides a general knowledge of church history, and serves merely as a framework for further study.

Church history is necessarily the study of the *visible* church, the church that is seen and known by the world, for better or worse. That's why church discipline is essential to maintain the purity of church doctrine and practice, according to the authority of Scripture. Without church discipline there is no church. But why learn church history at all?

We cannot fight the battle of faith today in defense of the truth once delivered to the saints, unless we know the battles which the church before us has fought and won. The battle never changes materially. The enemy is the same, the weapons with which he fights, and with which we fight, are identical.

A Church which loosens itself from the moorings of the past is a church hopelessly adrift in the seas of time, doomed to be smashed to pieces on the shoals of error. Faithfulness requires that we know the fruit of the Spirit of Truth. – *Arie den Hartog*

At Hope Chapel, we want you to have a general understanding of church history *in the context of Gospel living*. It is part of equipping you for the work of ministry, for edifying the body of Christ, so that you will not be blown about by every wind of teaching. Rather, learn to speak the truth in love, that you may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ (Eph 4.12-15).

The Elders

Hope Chapel of Colorado Springs

Introduction

1. Beginnings to AD 313: Expansion and Persecution

“...and on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria...Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.” Acts 8: 1, 4

Prolegomena; or, what is church history and why study it?

To be a Christian is to be a part of history. And to grow as a Christian is to be a student of history. This does not mean that every Christian enjoys researching old documents in musty archives, or reading the latest historical best-seller by David McCullough or Steven Ambrose — nor even that every Christian knows the most basic facts of world history. Rather, it means that every person who has been redeemed from sin by Jesus Christ, has also been incorporated into the grand drama of salvation history. Our God, after all, is the God of history, its Author and Director. He has revealed himself in history, through the people whom He has chosen for His own, through entering history as the God-man who dwelt among us, *and* through His holy, inspired Word. All Christians are called to read the Bible, study the ways of God with man, and gather with our fellow saints to worship the Lord. To do these things, is to engage in the most wonderful and reverent study of history conceivable.

Yet virtually every university history department in the country would reject this definition of history. And understandably so — for the truth of redemptive history cannot be known by the unregenerate mind. Here we need to establish a clear distinction between two kinds of history. The first, ***redemptive history***, describes God’s work in salvation. It is about His sovereign action in saving His people, in glorifying Himself through building His church and bringing all history to a great consummation. The facts and meaning of redemptive history can be known with assurance. For we see it plainly revealed in the Scriptures; and we see it in God’s faithful hand preserving His church through all time and to the end of time. The second kind is ***natural history***. This is the kind of history that you studied in high school, that you find in academic history departments, on the bookshelves at Barnes and Noble, and on the History Channel. It is the record of events, of names and dates, of the rise and fall of civilizations, and of stories from the past.

Here our distinction becomes of vital importance. For while God is assuredly the Lord of both redemptive history *and* natural history, and is in complete control of both, He does not reveal them to us in the same manner. God reveals redemptive history through *special revelation* — that is, through the *Bible*, through the *faithful preaching of the word*, and in our *lives* as Christians. Only Christians can know redemptive history, because only Christians have been given God’s special revelation. On the other hand, natural history can be known through *general revelation*, which just refers to the knowledge that God makes available to any person with eyes and ears and a willingness to study.

Even though they are distinct categories, redemptive history and natural history are also intertwined deeply. For example, we know Jesus Christ both as our personal Savior and as a historical figure. He entered history at a particular time (the first decades of the first century), in a particular place (Roman-ruled Palestine), as a particular man. Any person can study natural history and learn that a man named Jesus of Nazareth lived in Israel in the first century and caused quite a stir. But only a Christian, to whom God has revealed redemptive history, can know that Jesus Christ is the also the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

So which kind of history will this class address? In a word, ***both***. We will study God’s *redemptive* work throughout history, and we will look at the interplay and influence of the secondary causes of *natural* history.

1. Beginnings to AD 313: Expansion and Persecution

Humility and caution should restrain us, however. Christians have often been too certain to declare the particular actions of God in history, sometimes conflating or confusing the natural with the redemptive. Eusebius, perhaps the first Christian historian, confidently declared in the 4th century, that a Christian Rome under Constantine was the glorious consummation of God's kingdom. Rome began to fall just decades later, causing despair for those who believed Eusebius; and leaving Augustine to theologically disentangle Christ's kingdom from the earthly empire of Rome [*City of God*]. As for ourselves, we must balance the assurance that God is history's author, with humility and restraint in discerning His clear purposes and actions. As C.S. Lewis observed, "I do not dispute that History is a story written by the finger of God. But do we have the text?"

So as we begin our journey into the Christian past, several affirmations should guide us. *First*, our sovereign God is in control. *Second*, His purposes are "true and righteous altogether." *Third*, He has not revealed to us precisely how He works out His purposes. *Fourth*, our faith in redemptive history and our knowledge of natural history can give us insights into the past — though we "see through a glass, darkly," we still see. *Fifth*, He has revealed to us how the story will end: in the "blessed hope" of our Lord's certain return, when we enter the New Jerusalem, when history becomes eternity.

The question remains: why should Christians study history? First, *because God commands it*. He admonishes the people of Israel over and over again, to "remember" His faithfulness in delivering them from slavery in Egypt, in bringing them through the wilderness and to the Promised Land. In the New Testament, we are urged to remember the teaching we have received, and to recall God's work in our lives. History at its highest — the study of God's gracious work in the past — should inspire us to worship Him. Second, *history can instruct us*. Many challenges or opportunities we face as the church today are "nothing new under the sun;" the answers found in the past can often be brought to bear today. The third reason is related. *History should humble us*. In the words of one Christian historian, Wilfred McClay, studying the past should "disabuse us of our narcissism." Looking into the past reminds us of the relative insignificance of our own lives — that we are not the lords of our own destiny; that people greater than us have come before; that whatever we may attain in this life will be but a passing shadow. Finally, *history should encourage us*. What could be more edifying than witnessing a glorious display of God's majesty in the pageant of the past, of taking encouragement in our own lives as we see His faithfulness throughout all time?

Political And Religious Context of the Early Church

Jesus of Nazareth was born into a land governed by the Roman Empire. Through the first and second centuries AD, Roman emperors extended their rule over a vast realm that stretched around the Mediterranean Sea from Spain and Morocco all the way to Greece and Asia Minor, and plunged northward into present-day France and England. The Empire ranged some 3000 miles from east to west, about the length of the United States; and historians estimate that it contained about 50 million people. By the beginning of the second century, Rome reigned preeminent and unrivaled over the western world.¹

Though Rome had no external rivals, it did have internal issues. Christ was born into a Roman Empire experiencing considerable turmoil. Luke records that Augustus Caesar occupied Rome's throne. His predecessor, Julius, had curtailed the fledgling democracy of the Roman Senate and consolidated authority into his own hands. Rome was no longer a republic; the age of imperial rule had begun. In the midst of this, local rebellions almost continually broke out against Roman rule, particularly among the Jews. Ever vigilant to maintain their authority, Roman leaders kept a constant watch for threats to their control.

¹ C. Warren Hollister, *Medieval Europe*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994., pp. 7-11.

1. Beginnings to AD 313: Expansion and Persecution

The Empire's official state religion worshipped an evolving pantheon of capricious deities who supposedly governed the forces of nature. When it would conquer a new land, Rome habitually incorporated the local gods into its imperial religion. As the empire grew in authority and prominence, worship of the emperor himself became the official cult. The goal of all religious devotion, in the eyes of Roman authorities, was to maintain civic unity and to attain divine favor.

Meanwhile, new philosophies and schools of thought contributed to a popular religious atmosphere that hadn't been seen in the Empire for some time. Many religions besides Christianity started (and usually ended) during this period. "Mystery religions," as they were called, were widespread in the 3rd century among those who were searching for answers that were more intellectually and spiritually satisfying than the official cults could offer.

Christianity emerged in many ways as an outgrowth of Judaism; and Christians were self-conscious about their roots in the ancient religion. They believed the same set of Scriptures, and they even claimed to worship the same God, Jehovah, who created and ruled the world. Jesus Christ had grown up in a Jewish family and was unmistakably Jewish in His teachings and practice. Many of the earliest Christians still worshipped in the Temple, kept the Jewish Sabbath, and thought of themselves as "good Jews" who believed Jesus was the Messiah. For a time, Christianity existed in relative peace under Rome because of the official protection that was afforded to Judaism — since the new religion looked like a small sect within the older faith.

Expansion Of Christianity

The book of Acts tells of the early years of Christianity's expansion throughout the Empire. At first, the missionaries of the new religion, most notably the apostles Peter and Paul, preached their faith in Jewish synagogues. By AD 150, Christianity had spread throughout the empire. Churches existed in every province between Syria and Rome, in Alexandria, Carthage, and even northward into what would become France, and east into Central Asia and India. So rapid and thorough was the permeation of Christianity into the Empire, that in 200 AD, one rather intrepid Christian wrote to the Romans:

We have filled all that belongs to you – the cities, the fortresses, the free towns, the very camps, the palace, the senate, the forum. We leave to you the temples only.²

People from all walks of life embraced the new faith. Most early Christians lived in urban areas, and most were middle-class, though people from lower and upper classes believed as well. Many were of a Hellenized Jewish background, though converts came from all manner of ethnic and religious origins.

Why did people become Christians? In a theological sense, we know that salvation is a sovereign act of divine grace. From a human perspective, however, we can stretch our historical imaginations to consider how this strange new faith first appeared and attracted new believers. *First*, Christian charity held great appeal. Christians became known and admired for their kindness, hospitality, and generosity to those in need. *Second*, in contrast to the rigid social hierarchy of the Roman Empire, Christians valued all persons equally, and modeled a community that broke down social barriers. *Third*, Christians valued all persons individually. Whereas Rome placed a premium on civic unity — making the individual person subordinate to the imperial cult — Christianity affirmed the dignity and worth of each human being. *Fourth*, Christianity promised the power of good over evil. Many Romans believed in evil spirits, and this new faith seemed to offer protection against the demonic. Related to this, a *fifth* reason for Christianity's appeal was its promise of deliverance from death, and of eternal life. *Finally*, as persecution of Christians intensified, the bold and faithful witness of many believers facing torture and death could not be

² S.M. Houghton, *Sketches From Church History*, Banner of Truth: Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1980., p.11. Quote is from Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 37. Circa 200 AD.

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ignored. Something about this faith must be real, people reasoned; why else would these Christians die for it?

The hand of God is readily visible in the expansion of Christianity. For centuries, God had been preparing the world, and the Roman Empire in particular, for the introduction of the Gospel. When it finally came in the person of Christ, conditions were ripe for its rapid spread and assimilation into Roman culture. With the conquests of Alexander the Great, Greek had become the unifying language of the Mediterranean. Barriers of language, then, did not exist, and the message of Christ moved rapidly by word of mouth and written literature. Not only that, but the Jews had been dispersed throughout the empire. We find Paul going straight to the Jewish synagogues in every city he visited. The infrastructure of the empire was unprecedented. A system of roads crisscrossed the land, and the government protected travelers from bandits and other perils. The Empire had carved out extensive trade routes inside its borders and with other civilizations; these proved a useful inlet into Europe and Asia. Quite apart from its intentions, even Rome's periodic persecutions of the Christians often aided the spread of the Gospel. As we read in Acts 8:1-4, when the great persecution broke out in Jerusalem, the Christians were scattered abroad throughout the region, taking the news of Christ with them.

Official Roman Persecutions

This growth often occurred in the midst of tremendous suffering. Throughout the first three centuries of Christian history, no less than ten official persecutions were unleashed against the church. These persecutions were not necessarily empire-wide; most of them were local, pressed by provincial officials. They were severe, however, and thousands of Christians were tortured and put to death in horrific and cruel ways.

We see this in the New Testament, of course — from Stephen's martyrdom, to Peter and Paul's imprisonments, even to Peter's exhortations in his first epistle addressed to believers suffering under Nero's persecution. Indeed, for virtually all of the apostles, persecution was more the rule than the exception, as tradition tells us they shared a common fate of martyrdom. Many of these accounts may well be true. However, they should be treated with some skepticism, as by the second century the churches in different cities began claiming apostolic origins, and wanted to point to a martyred apostle as their founder. This also indicates the focus that many early Christians placed on persecution, and the reverence they had for those who suffered. With that in mind, consider the fate of the Apostles. And if you or people you know wonder if Jesus was just a hoax, consider that those who knew Him best were willing to die for who they believed He was.

- Paul was imprisoned under Nero, then beheaded in Rome
- James the brother of John was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12:2)
- Thomas went as far as India where he was "slain with a dart" (arrow?)
- Simon Peter was crucified (according to Jerome) upside down in Rome under Nero
- Simon the Zealot preached throughout Africa, was also crucified
- Mark founded the church in Egypt and was burned alive
- Bartholomew preached in Armenia and "after diverse persecutions, he was beaten down with staves, then crucified; and after being excoriated, was beheaded."
- Andrew evangelized in Ethiopia, was crucified
- Matthew preached in Egypt and Ethiopia, until the king had him "run through with a spear"
- Philip ministered in Greece, was "crucified and stoned to death"
- James the brother of Jesus was beaten to death by Pharisees and Sadducees
- John the apostle was exiled on the isle of Patmos, and later died of natural causes.³

³ This list from *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*

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As for the rest of the church, the first significant persecution broke out under Nero. In 64 AD, a tremendous fire engulfed the city of Rome. Many people in the city, probably with good cause, blamed Nero for the tragedy. The Roman historian Tacitus writes of the emperor's response:

"To kill the rumors, Nero charged and tortured some people hated for their evil practices – the group popularly called "Christians." The founder of this sect, Christus, had been put to death by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, when Tiberius was emperor."⁴

Tacitus continues:

"First those who confessed to being Christians were arrested, and on the basis of their testimony a great number were condemned, although not so much for the fire itself *as for their hatred of humankind*. Before killing the Christians, Nero used them to amuse the people. Some were dressed in furs, to be killed by dogs. Others were crucified. Still others were set on fire early in the night, so that they might illumine it. Nero opened his own gardens for these shows."

Notice Tacitus' charge of "hatred of humankind." Nero seems to have persecuted Christians for three reasons: his desperate desire to distract attention from the great fire, widespread hostility towards Christians because they did not worship Roman gods, and the hostility of Jews towards Christians. On the second factor, which relates to Tacitus' accusation, many Romans perceived Christians as atheists and anarchists for their refusal to worship the pagan deities or the emperor. Such obstinance enraged the Romans. The deities, they thought, would bring natural disasters, drought, and disease in retribution for the large section of the population who refused to worship them. Tertullian wrote that any time a natural disaster occurred, whether flood or drought, the cry would immediately go up, "The Christians to the lions!" Other misunderstandings of Christian practice led to even wilder accusations against them. Because of the Christians' talk of "love," and because even husbands and wives referred to one another as "brother" and "sister," they were sometimes accused of incest. Finally, the Christian observance of the Lord's Supper gave rise to numerous accusations of cannibalism [for eating the flesh and blood of Christ].

As to Nero, political rivals deposed him four years later, and the disgraced tyrant took his own life. Just two years after that, in AD 70, the Romans forces quelling yet another Jewish rebellion, also destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem. Tragic though it was, as one Christian historian points out, this also marked a decisive "turning point" in church history. Christianity made its final break from Judaism, as it lost its last ties with the Temple and with Jerusalem, and emerged as its own distinctive faith.⁵

But persecution would return. In AD 98, the Emperor Trajan launched a campaign against the church that would last for almost two decades. In a revealing correspondence between Pliny the Younger, governor of the province of Bithynia, and Trajan, Pliny asked if the mere mention of the name "Christian" merited punishment, or only the activities associated with it. Trajan replied that Christians should be punished only if they refuse to recant their faith and "worship our gods." If they do recant, they are to be set free. One of Pliny's letters describes his practice:

"This is the course that I have adopted. I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it, I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment. If they persist, I sentence them to death, for their inflexible obstinacy should certainly be punished. Christians who are Roman citizens I reserved to be sent to Rome. I discharged those who were willing to curse Christ — a thing which, it is said, genuine Christians cannot be persuaded to do."

⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44

⁵ Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1997).

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Some professing Christians actually did renounce Christ, and the church would suffer for centuries over questions regarding how to treat apostates who requested readmission into the fellowship.

Another period of relative tranquility and growth came from about 125 until the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), who triggered a new campaign of persecution. Many Christians were martyred during these years, including eminent church leaders such as Polycarp. Eusebius records that when the proconsul ordered Polycarp to curse Christ, the response came back:

“ ‘For eighty-six years,’ replied Polycarp, ‘I have been his servant, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?’ ”

“ ‘I have wild beasts,’ said the proconsul. ‘I shall throw you to them, if you don’t change your attitude.’ ”

‘Call them,’ replied the old man.

‘If you make light of the beasts,’ retorted the governor, ‘I’ll have you destroyed by fire, unless you change your attitude.’ ”

Polycarp answered: ‘The fire you threaten burns for a time and is soon extinguished. There is a fire you know nothing about – the fire of the judgement to come and of eternal punishment, the fire reserved for the ungodly. But why do you hesitate? Do what you want.’ ...

The proconsul was amazed, and sent the crier to stand in the middle of the arena and announce three times: ‘Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian.’ ... Then a shout went up from every throat that Polycarp must be burnt alive...

The rest followed in less time than it takes to describe. The crowds rushed to collect logs ... When the pyre was ready ... Polycarp prayed: ‘O Father of thy beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ, I bless thee for counting me worthy of this day and hour, that in the number of the martyrs I may partake of Christ’s cup, to the resurrection of eternal life of both soul and body...’

When he had offered up the Amen and completed his prayer, the men in charge lit the fire, and a great flame shot up.”⁶

Following this season of trial, Christians enjoyed another two decades of relative peace, as the faith continued to grow throughout the empire. From 197-212, more persecution broke out. From lynchings in Alexandria, to mob attacks in Rome, to judicial executions in Carthage, believers found their faith tested severely.

The persecution abated until 235, then it began to grow again. Conditions became very severe in 250, as the new emperor Decius assumed the throne desiring to restore Rome to its earlier glory. To promote civic unity, he mandated that all citizens engage in public sacrifices to Roman gods. Those who complied were granted *libelli*, or certificates, proving that they had performed the required rites. Those who refused were considered treasonous, and punished severely. Some Christians avoided the sacrifices and still acquired the certificates from greedy, corrupt officials. Many apostatized and denied their faith. Others fled into exile. Some believers resisted and were executed. But the Church had grown complacent, and was ill-prepared to handle such persecution. Many of those who still professed faith divided and turned against each other in disputes over whose faith was genuine and whose was compromised. By 251, one historian writes that “*all over the Mediterranean Christianity lay seemingly in ruins.*”⁷ This should caution us against “romanticizing” persecution, or thinking that it always only strengthens and grows the church. Under Decius, persecution almost succeeded in destroying the church. Before he could

⁶ Eusebius, *History of the Church*, IV 15

⁷ WHC Frend, *The Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1965), 111.

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carry his pogrom against the church any further, Decius died in battle; the persecution abated for a few short years.

But in 257, the emperor Valerian initiated a new attempt to stamp out the church. He gave detailed instructions that bishops, presbyters, and deacons were to be punished immediately by death, while Roman senators and military officers who were Christians were to lose their dignity and property. And civil servants who were Christians were to be made slaves and sent in chains to labor on imperial estates. Some believe this persecution was longer lasting and resulted in more deaths than any previous persecution.

Valerian was taken prisoner by the Persians in 260, and his successor son permitted relative religious freedom, which the church enjoyed for the next 40 years. During this time, the church grew and grew, pervading all levels of Roman society and spreading throughout North Africa, Egypt, Syria, and Armenia. Christianity had attained such prominence by the year 300, that Frend writes *“the question had become on what terms Church and Empire could cooperate, and whether a settlement would come peacefully, or after one final, bloody encounter.”*⁸ On February 23, 303, the emperor Diocletian gave his awful answer. Hoping to impose a uniform order on the empire, concerning customs, the military, currency, and religion, he issued an edict designed to end the Christian menace to imperial unity. Initially Christians were not put to death; rather, they were imprisoned or enslaved, churches were destroyed, and Scriptures were burned. But the next year, Diocletian fell ill and Galerius took over. He ordered all uncompliant Christians to be executed. Blood flowed freely as many Christians suffered martyrdom during this time, known as the “Great Persecution.”

The Lord preserved His church, however, and in 311, Galerius recanted. He admitted failure to extinguish Christianity because too many Christians refused to obey him and remained faithful. He issued an edict saying, “let the Christians once more exist and rebuild their churches” and “pray to their God for our well-being, for that of the state and for themselves.” More importantly, Christians, by their persistence, their good works and love, and their sheer numbers, had increasingly grown to be tolerated by the masses throughout the Roman empire.

The next two years brought sporadic outbreaks of persecution, until Constantine took power in 313, and declared an empire-wide policy of tolerance for Christianity. For its first three centuries, the Church had survived some of the most severe opposition imaginable. Could it now survive acceptance?

⁸ William HC Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (New York: Doubleday 1967), 324-325.

1. Beginnings to AD 313: Expansion and Persecution

2. Gathering the Saints, and Defending the Faith

The Development of Scripture, Worship, and Leadership in the Early Church

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering...not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.” Hebrews 10: 23, 25

Introduction

Writing to the Roman Emperor Trajan, a governor named Pliny the Younger described the practice of the early Christians in the early second century:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed, but to abstain from all fraud, theft and adultery, never to break their word, or deny a trust when called upon to honor it.⁹

How did early Christian worship practices develop? And where did the church turn for guidance and leadership? In the midst of the expansion and persecution that we considered last week, the early Christians faced two other sets of challenges. *First*, they needed to develop their own gatherings, in ways that gave glory to God, maintained the unity of the body, and clearly separated Christianity from other religions of the day. *Second*, they needed to defend the faith against the many theological and philosophical challenges that rose against it, from both within and without.

In this class, we will explore the nature of early Christian worship gatherings, how the ordinances of baptism and communion were practiced, how the canon of Scripture was formed, and how the church leadership developed.

These were trying times. Truth mixed with error, persecution with growth, division with unity. If there is one theme that defines this class, however, it is *God’s faithfulness*. In the midst of these confusions and challenges, the Lord proclaimed His word, and preserved His people.

The Practice Of Early Christian Gatherings

Have you ever wondered where the order of our worship service came from? Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, taking the offering, singing, and preaching, are all prescribed in Scripture – and were all practiced by the earliest Christians. After Jesus had ascended into heaven, Christians began to meet together for times of teaching and praise. During the earliest decades of the faith, many believers still worshipped in the Jewish Temple and observed the Sabbath. In addition, the Bible indicates that Christians also began to meet in private homes, like that of Priscilla and Aquila in Romans 16:3-5. Many of these meetings were probably held in secrecy, especially during times of intense persecution. It was not until the late second and early third centuries that buildings were erected to serve the purpose of church gatherings.

Christians met on the first day of the week. This, of course, was in celebration of the fact that on the day after the Jewish Sabbath, Jesus had risen from the dead. Within several years, this first day of the week had come to be known as “the Lord’s Day,” as John calls it while he is exiled on the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:10). Early Christians were well aware of their ties to Judaism. As a result, their worship seems to have been patterned, at least in the first years, after the familiar model of worship in the synagogues. Prayer, singing hymns and psalms, and Bible-reading were consistent parts of an early Christian gathering. Apostolic letters would be read when they were

⁹ Pliny the Younger, *Letters* x.96. AD 112

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available; but until the New Testament began to take some shape in the mid-second century, most of the Scripture-reading and teaching was from the old Jewish Scriptures, our Old Testament.

The early Christians practiced two ordinances as commanded by the Lord Jesus – BAPTISM and the LORD’S SUPPER. The Church took baptism quite seriously, often mandating intensive study and preparation before a believer could be baptized, and usually requiring that baptism be overseen (if not administered) by an elder or bishop. This seems to have been in part because the church was so distinct from the culture. Surrounded by a world hostile to their beliefs, early Christians needed to keep their faith and their community pure, and to make sure that any new members clearly understood the Gospel, and were committed to the church.

The *Didache* is an anonymous manual of church practices from the early second century. Though not inspired in the same way as Scripture, it offers a helpful record of the practices of the early church. On baptism, it records the following instructions:

This is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then ‘baptize’ in running water, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’ Before the baptism, moreover, the one who baptizes and the one being baptized must fast, and any others who can.”¹⁰

BAPTISM: Two aspects of baptism seem to have divided the early Church -- whether infants should be baptized, and whether baptism is regenerative. The first recorded mention of infant baptism comes in about 200 AD from the pen of Tertullian, and he *condemns* the practice of infant baptism. By about 250 or so, other church leaders wrote in defense of the practice, and it became more and more prevalent in the fourth and fifth centuries. As to what baptism actually accomplishes, some early church leaders believed baptism had salvific or regenerative qualities – that is, it actually removes sin and brings salvation. Others held to a more biblical view, that baptism serves as an outward sign and seal of an inward reality: our faith in Christ.

THE LORD’S SUPPER: The early church also practiced the Lord’s supper, or communion. One of the fathers of the early church, Justin Martyr, wrote in about AD 150 his *First Apology*, which gives a detailed account of early Christian gatherings. Justin records that the Lord’s Supper was a “memorial of the passion” of Christ. He writes:

At the end of our prayers, we greet one another with a kiss. Then the president of the brethren is brought a bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he takes them, and offers up praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and the Holy Ghost, and gives thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at his hands. When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their joyful assent by saying Amen.... Then those whom we call deacons give to each of those present the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and carry away a portion to those who are absent. We call this food “Eucharist.”¹¹

In most cases, the first part of the service was open to anyone, including the times of Scripture-reading, prayer, singing, and exhortation. The second part of the service, however, which included the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, was reserved only for those who were baptized believers in Christ.

This merits our reflection. The ordinances strengthen not only our faith in Christ and our unity with other believers today, but with the universal Church throughout the ages. When we receive

¹⁰ “The Didache” in Richardson, Cyril C. ed. *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Touchstone 1996), pp.174-75.

¹¹ Justin, *Apology* I 65-66, AD 150 – “eucharist” means “an act of gratitude” – to God.

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baptism, or partake of the Lord's table, we join by faith with the millions of Christians who have gone before us, in confessing together "One Lord, One faith, One baptism."

The Canon Of Scripture

In many ways, the most remarkable aspects about the development of the Canon of Scripture are how early the church reached practical agreement, and how little dissension emerged. The word comes from the Greek word (*kanon*), meaning "rule or standard." Christians use it to describe the standard books of the Bible which provide the final "rule and authority" for our faith. Of course, because of their roots in Judaism, early Christians already affirmed biblical authority, for they saw the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Old Testament, as the Word of God. They only faced the question of which books should be added to this Old Testament canon.

Christians immediately accepted the writings of the apostles, such as Paul's letters, as authoritative and inspired by God. Even within the Bible, in 2Peter 3:16, the apostle Peter recognizes Paul's writings as "Scripture." These epistles were circulated widely among different churches in the first and second centuries, as early as 80 AD. Early Christians also recognized the four Gospels. By the end of the second century, the church had in practice a collection of New Testament Scriptures including the Gospels, Acts, and Paul's letters.

EARLY HERESIES. Sometimes it takes an external threat or challenge to force Christians to clarify and defend our beliefs, and establishing the canon was no exception. In the mid-second century, a heretic in Rome named Marcion began attracting followers to his false teachings, and he tried to form a different canon of Scripture. Marcion thought that matter was evil and the spiritual realm was good [called *dualism*]. He argued that two different gods existed: the evil god of the Old Testament, who had created this miserable world and who was petty, harsh, and cruel; and the good god of the New Testament, who was kind and loving and who had sent Jesus to earth (as an adult, not born as an infant) to bring Christians back to the spiritual world. Have any of you ever had a non-Christian friend complain that the "God of the Old Testament" is judgmental and the "God of the New Testament" is loving? This is nothing new, and is as wrong now as it was in the second century. Not surprisingly, since Marcion hated the Old Testament, he also hated the Jews. So he decided to form his own "bible." He rejected the entire Old Testament as well as Matthew, Mark, and John in the New, since he believed "Jewishness" had contaminated all of those books. He only affirmed the Gospel of Luke and the writings of Paul as true.

Early Christians rightfully condemned Marcion for his heresy. But challenges such as his and others (e.g., the Montanists, who claimed to still be receiving divine revelation through their prophets) forced the church to make official, the canon of Scripture that it was already using in practice. The church developed a simple set of standards for inspiration. The document had to have been written by an apostle or close friend of an apostle, it had to agree with the faith and doctrine in the acknowledged and undoubted letters of the apostles, and it had to be functioning as scripture widely within the church.

While the vast majority of the New Testament gained early and wide acceptance, a few challenges arose. *Pseudepigrapha*, or "fake writing," was common in the day. An unknown author would write a letter or treatise and sign the name of an apostle to give it credibility. So-called "gospels" of Thomas, Mary, Barnabas, and even Jesus Himself circulated through the churches at one time or another. Some books seem to have been given some consideration but were finally rejected. For example, the Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the Epistle of Barnabas, did not gain acceptance due to questions of doctrine or authenticity. The book of Hebrews faced some questions due to its uncertain authorship, but it was accepted because of its evident apostolicity. John's Revelation likewise received some scrutiny because of its apocalyptic view of the future, which bothered some Christians who were enamored of the Roman empire.

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While many early church fathers from early in the second century described the vast majority of New Testament books as Scripture, the first written document we have that lists all twenty-seven books of the New Testament is Athanasius's Easter Letter 39, written in 367. Nevertheless, in the words of the renowned theologian and biblical scholar B.B. Warfield, "the canon of the New Testament was completed when the last authoritative book was given to any church by the apostles, and that was when John wrote the Apocalypse (Revelation), about AD 98 ¹²...we must not mistake the historical evidences of the slow circulation and authentication of these books... [as] evidence of slowness of 'canonization' of books by the authority or the taste of the church itself."¹³

When you read your Bible today, do not take it lightly. Read it with confidence that God has spoken, that He has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures, and that we read the same Bible as the one handed down by the first apostles of Christ's church.

Leadership Structure In The Early Church

Though the Lord Jesus is the ultimate head of His church, He also instituted human leaders from the very beginning. Paul and the other apostles were careful to appoint officers in every church they planted. By the middle of the first century, the New Testament tells us that the churches had two offices: "deacons," and "elders" or "overseers." The *Didache* also gave instructions on the government of the church. About church officers, it reads:

You must, then, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons who are a credit to the Lord; men who are gentle, generous, faithful, and well-trying. For their ministry to you is identical to that of the prophets and teachers.¹⁴

At first, each church had its own elders or bishops. As the Church continued to grow through the third century, though, bishops were unable to keep up with the responsibility of so many people. The bishops became leaders over thousands of people and perhaps scores of congregations in a single city. Presbyters, or priests, were appointed to assist the bishop in his duties. All the churches of a city were under the care of that city's bishop. In Rome, for example, the bishop performed all baptisms and personally blessed all the bread and wine for the eucharist, which the presbyters would then carry to the congregations scattered throughout the city. The bishops were also solely responsible for the finances of the churches, which would eventually contribute to all manner of scandal and abuse.¹⁵

In theory, all the bishops were equal, but in practice, those over the larger cities gradually exerted more and more influence. Great centers of trade and learning were, understandably, seen as having greater authority. The mother church at Jerusalem had occupied the position of authority until AD 70 when the Romans destroyed it. The center of authority then shifted West and rested on the churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, and Carthage. Very early in the history of Christianity, Rome became the pre-eminent church in the Empire. The capital city's political grandeur, and the traditions of Peter's and Paul's martyrdoms there, quickly led to Rome being recognized as the greatest of the churches. As early as the late second-century, 200 years before the city's primacy would be authoritatively asserted, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons would declare that

¹² Some authorities put John's Revelation at AD 68, concluding that the later date was mistaken by Irenaeus - WHG

¹³ B.B. Warfield, *The Formation of the Canon of the New Testament*, 415-416. [Other scholars think that Revelation was written prior to Nero's death in AD 68.]

¹⁴ The "Didache" in Richardson, 178.

¹⁵ In *The Church, Her Members, And Governance*, Wycliffe writes of an endowment of lands and wealth from Emperor Constantine I, to pope Sylvester I, making the church the largest and wealthiest landowner remaining after the fall of Rome. It required a bureaucracy to manage it all. That may have been just a legend. - WHG

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it is a matter of necessity that every church should agree with [the church of Rome] on account of its pre-eminent authority.¹⁶

Of course this doesn't mean that the 2nd century bishops of Rome had the expansive and infallible supervisory functions that its later bishops would assert; but it is clear that the seeds of that overarching primacy were sown very early.

Rome's supremacy did not go unquestioned, however. Though the formal split between West and East, between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, would not occur until the 11th century, the seeds of division can be seen as early as the 2nd century. Disputes over raw power, mixed with differences in style and substance. For example, Victor, Bishop of Rome from 189-199, threatened to excommunicate the Eastern Churches in Asia Minor who disagreed with him on the correct date for Easter. Even this early, the Eastern Church, which emphasized the Greek language and a more mystical understanding of the faith, began to distinguish itself from the Western Church, which emphasized Latin and a more rational faith.

Some of the differences and errors we have seen – whether on baptism, or church leadership, or disputes between East and West – raise questions about why parts of the church went wrong so early. There are a few reasons. *First*, remember that only Christ is infallible; as sinful people, all Christians will make mistakes. We even see this in the New Testament, when Paul tells the Galatians in chapter 2 how he had to rebuke the Apostle Peter for potential legalism. *Second*, the early church did not always have the clear guidance of Scripture, mostly because of a very limited number of copies, limited literacy, but also because some questions were still being settled over the canon. *Third*, many parts of the culture – intellectual, spiritual, and moral – had negative influences on the faith. And the early Christians were the first to wrestle with these problems – which include some of the same challenges that still face Christians today.

Church Fathers

After the deaths of the apostles, other leaders emerged to take their place. Because of the tremendous influence they would exert on the development of doctrine and practice in the Church, these men were called “Fathers.” We will take a brief look at some of the most important of them. Two of the earliest – known as “Apostolic Fathers” because they were trained by one or another of the Apostles – were Ignatius and Polycarp.

Ignatius was the Bishop of the church in Antioch early in the second century. Roman authorities under Emperor Trajan captured Ignatius and brought him to Rome. What little survives about his life is contained in seven letters that he wrote to various churches during this long journey to Rome for his martyrdom. Ignatius argued that there should be only one bishop over each congregation, instead of the plurality of elders that Clement addresses in his letter to Corinth. He was determined to validate his faith by dying as a martyr. Upon arriving in Rome to stand trial, he begged the church there not to do anything to block his execution, which took place in 117 AD.

Ignatius addressed one of his seven letters to another influential church father, Polycarp, bishop of the church at Smyrna. Polycarp had been a disciple of the Apostle John. One of the letters that Christ commands to be sent to the seven churches in Revelation is addressed to Smyrna. Polycarp wrote several letters, but only his epistle to the Philippians remains. The story of his martyrdom, which we read in the last class, was written first by his church and is one of the earliest accounts of Christian martyrdom.

Many Church Fathers in the Second and Third centuries focused on the intellectual challenges facing Christianity. Convinced that their beliefs could prevail against any other philosophy, they became known as the “Apologists” for their efforts to explain and defend the new faith.

¹⁶ Quoted in Latourette, *History of Christianity*, Vol. 1, p.118

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Christianity was born into a world obsessed with ideas and with the spiritual realm. The description we read in Acts 17:21 of Paul in Athens, could well apply to much of the Mediterranean world: “Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.” Epicureans, Stoics, Platonists, Aristotelians, Gnostics, mystics, and just about every other flavor of philosophy and religion, clamored for the people’s attention.

The most eminent of these was JUSTIN MARTYR, an early leader in the Eastern Church. Justin began as a pagan philosopher from Palestine. One day while meditating alone on the seashore, perhaps in Ephesus, a stranger approached Justin, pointed out the faults in his thinking, and exposed him to the ancient Jewish prophets and their witness of Christ. Already impressed by the constancy of Christians facing martyrdom, Justin was convinced and became a Christian in about 132. He immediately set out to prove the truth of Christianity to Greek philosophers. Focusing on Christ as the “Logos” or “Word” that we read of in John 1, Justin argued that Christ fulfilled all of the incomplete notions of Plato’s philosophy. Justin earned his name “Martyr” in about 165, when he was beheaded in Rome, probably after he had bested a pagan philosopher in a debate.

Another eloquent apologist in the East was ATHENAGORAS of Athens. Well-versed in pagan philosophies, Athenagoras contended for the supremacy of Christianity, because it was based on direct revelation from God, rather than on the speculations of limited human reason. Moreover, he held that because pagan gods were created in man’s image, they were inadequate and infantile. Only the God of the Bible reigned supreme, as all wise, perfect, powerful, and good. Though he did much to defend the faith, Athenagoras at times conceded too much to Greek thought, making God sound more like a philosophical ideal than the living Lord of the universe.

GNOSTICISM. A prominent leader in the West, IRENAEUS studied under POLYCARP and became bishop of the church at Lyons in 177. Irenaeus directed most of his writings against Gnosticism. Both a group of mystical sects and a philosophical error, Gnosticism described matter as evil and the spirit as good, denied the creation of the world by one God, and claimed to possess secret knowledge, or “gnosis,” necessary to attain salvation. Irenaeus responded in his work *Against Heresies*, by asserting apostolic succession – the notion that “the canon (or rule) of truth,” which had been handed down from the apostles and was now preserved in the church, provided the sole key to interpreting Scripture. Moreover, against the Gnostic belief that matter and flesh were evil, Irenaeus pointed out that history culminated in God taking on flesh and dwelling on earth in the person of Jesus Christ.

TERTULLIAN (c. 160-240), the bishop of Carthage in the West, was the first Christian to write extensively in Latin. He developed much of the language that would be used in theology even to this day. For example, Tertullian first used the word *trinitas*, or Trinity, to describe the nature of God as “one substance, three persons.” His masterpiece was the *Apology*, in which he used precise legal reasoning to argue to Roman officials that Christianity should be tolerated. An eloquent writer, Tertullian famously declared “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Yet this wise and witty church leader took an unfortunate turn. Around AD 220, Tertullian joined the Montanists, a strange and heretical apocalyptic sect that claimed to be the culmination of history. Here again, we are reminded that even the most eminent of early church leaders were not immune from gross error.

Another Eastern father trained in philosophy was CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (not to be confused with Clement of Rome.) Influenced by Justin, Clement also sought to reconcile two worlds, to persuade Christians of the wisdom of Greek philosophy, and to persuade philosophers of the truth of Christianity. This led him to invent the notion of “purgatory” as a place to cleanse the soul, an idea that was eventually adopted by the Roman Catholic Church. Clement read Scripture as more allegorical than literal, which accounts for some of the weaknesses in his thought. He served as bishop of Alexandria till AD 202, when he was forced to flee the persecution erupting in the city.

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When the persecution finally passed, ORIGEN, a disciple of Clement and a towering figure in the history of the church, became Bishop. Born in Alexandria about 185, Origen proved to be a brilliant scholar and the most prolific church writer of his day. He produced the greatest work of scholarship in the early church, a massive work called the *Hexapla* that put in six parallel columns the ancient Hebrew text of the Old Testament together with five Greek translations. He made the first effort to present the fundamental doctrines of Christianity in a systematic theology, and made great attempts to present the truths of Christianity in the language of the prevailing Platonic philosophy of the day. As with others, this Greek philosophy unfortunately led him astray. The church condemned him for his belief in the pre-existence of souls, reincarnation, and universal salvation. He died in AD 254 under the persecution of Emperor Decius.

Finally, we come to CYPRIAN, another eminent Western churchman. He was already a wealthy and influential citizen of Carthage when he became a Christian in AD 246. Cyprian came to place great emphasis on the unity and authority of the Church. He was the first to describe the office of the Bishop of Rome as the “Chair of Peter,” thus connecting apostolic authority with the primacy of Rome, and laying the foundation for the modern papacy. During the Decian persecution, he opposed those who felt that lapsed Christians should be allowed back into the church, writing his most important work, *The Unity of the Catholic Church* to combat that idea. “There is no salvation outside the Church,” he famously proclaimed. Cyprian died a martyr in AD 258.

Conclusion

Christ promised in John 14:18 that “I will not leave you as orphans.” He gave us His Word in the Scriptures, His body in the Church, and His Spirit through baptism and communion. However, as the errors and divisions in the early church demonstrate, we must always place our faith in Christ and not other Christians. Yet we should realize the importance of the corporate body to preserve biblical truth – and we should praise God for His providence in guiding the Church through such challenges.

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3. Constantine, Controversy, and Councils, 312-500

“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” II Timothy 1:13-14

The early Christians faced several crises of authority. By the end of the first century, all of the apostles were dead, most of them as martyrs. Various biblical writings circulated, but the Spirit had not yet guided the church to agreement on a uniform canon of Scripture. Nor was there a clear tradition of common doctrine, or confessions, to set the boundaries of orthodoxy. Divergent voices arose within the church as various leaders emphasized different beliefs and practices. And some leaders introduced new, and often “unhelpful” or even heretical beliefs and practices into the faith. All of this occurred in the midst of political uncertainty. Periodic yet brutal campaigns by the Roman Empire to exterminate the Church suddenly gave way to Constantine’s acceptance and even endorsement of the faith. This raised many new questions for the church about the relationship between earthly and heavenly authority. Threats from without, and turmoil from within, threatened the church’s very existence during its first few centuries, while Christians worked out their faith with “fear and trembling.”

This quickly brings us to the question of authority: Who or what determines the true faith? Early Christians relied on the same sources we do today: Scripture and creeds. Last week we looked at the process of recognizing the canon. This week we will look at church councils. We will also continue to highlight certain church fathers of particular significance.

The Rise Of Constantine

In 312, a dramatic political change occurred in Rome that would have profound consequences for the Christian faith. A Roman leader named CONSTANTINE prepared for battle against Maxentius, his last rival for the throne. As Constantine himself later recounted the story, he decided to pray to the “Supreme God” for victory. As he was praying, he had a vision of a flaming cross that hovered in the sky emblazoned with the words, “Conquer by this.” Later that night, Christ appeared to him as he slept and showed him the sign of the *Chi-Rho* – the first two letters of Christ’s name in Greek – “as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies.”¹⁷ When Constantine’s army met that of Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge outside of Rome, Maxentius’s army was routed, their general executed, and Constantine took possession of the capital, vowing to serve this new God whom he believed had won him the battle and the crown.

The next year, 313, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which granted Christians the right to worship, restored to them their properties and churches, and allowed them to be compensated for other losses they had suffered under persecution. He also permitted Christians to serve openly in the Roman government. Much as these measures brought great relief to the church, Constantine’s own faith remained, then and now, a puzzle. He seems to have embraced it as much for political benefit as out of genuine conviction — after all, Rome still operated under the assumption that the emperor was to seek the favor of the gods for Rome’s benefit.

Constantine did not fully understand the doctrines of Christianity, much less its implications. While he did not permit his own image to be worshipped in the temple, he allowed the imperial cult to remain, and continued to practice some pagan rites. He also maintained images of pagan deities on his coinage for more than a decade, most notably his personal favorite, the Sun, which he may have identified with Christ. Theologically, he remained confused, flip-flopping between Arianism and orthodoxy, often depending on which side seemed to be more powerful, rather than on which side was true. A man with a fierce temper, he had both his wife and his son put to death on charges of adultery (it is unclear if the charges were valid or not). Finally, Constantine refused

¹⁷ Downey, *Eerdman’s Handbook to the History of Christianity*, p.139.

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to be baptized until he was on his deathbed, perhaps out of a fear of mortal sin, or a rather superstitious belief in the power of baptism. After he died in 337, a succession of emperors veered between orthodoxy, Arianism, and paganism, until THEODOSIUS I ordered the destruction, in 380, of all pagan temples and made Christianity the official state religion of Rome.

Constantine left a mixed legacy for the church. Besides the relief that he granted Christians from persecution, he gave the faith a status and respect that it had never before enjoyed. He also used his power and prestige to help settle church disputes, such as convening the monumental church council at Nicea in AD 325. But in his effort to harness the power of Christ in the service of Rome, he laid the foundation for the harmful establishment of “caesaropapism,” the belief that the secular ruler, by divine mandate, becomes head of the church as well. Constantine even saw himself as the “13th Apostle.” And with the official endorsement of the empire, belief in Christ became more a means to political advancement than a matter of faith and repentance. Christianity became a cultural norm, and the church became confused with the world. Many of the ancient practices of the pagans began to infiltrate Christian worship, leading to unbiblical practices such as the veneration of Mary and the saints. Finally, Christians at times became the persecutors rather than the persecuted. When the pagan cult was outlawed, Roman officials banned pagans from the army, and even sentenced to death people who denied the Trinity (ARIANS) or repeated baptism (DONATISTS). Such are some of the dangers of allowing the state rather than God to govern the church. This should caution us as well. Much as we Christians are supremely blessed to live in America, we should not confuse our country or our government with God’s special covenant people.

Fourth-Century Fathers

Besides Constantine, three other 4th century leaders merit our attention.

AMBROSE, bishop of Milan, was a well-educated, refined man of Rome who attained great influence with the Roman government. At one point, he successfully squelched an effort by the Roman empress Justina to bring Arian worship into the church. Later in his life, he became a close personal advisor of Emperor THEODOSIUS. Christianity had come far in three centuries, from martyrdom at the Emperors’ hand, to a seat at their tables. After the Arian bishop of Milan died, a spontaneous outpouring of support from the people elected Ambrose to the bishopric of Milan. This early example of potent congregationalism succeeded in completing the overthrow of Arianism in the West. Yet Ambrose left perhaps his greatest legacy by serving as a mentor to **AUGUSTINE**.

The leading biblical scholar of the late 4th and early 5th centuries was **JEROME**, who lived at Antioch. Cantankerous and combative, Jerome fervently denounced heretics and fellow believers alike. In 374, Jerome went to Rome to serve as secretary for Pope Damasus. During his time there, Damasus commissioned him to make a new translation of the biblical texts into Latin. When Damasus died, Jerome moved to Bethlehem and completed the *Vulgate*, which became the standard translation used by the Roman Catholic Church. Jerome also wrote commentaries on most of the Bible, and was a renowned exegete and teacher. He regarded a Christianized Rome as the culmination of divine agency in human history. When Rome fell, his faith was deeply shaken. He asked, “How can the mother of nations become their tomb?”

The most influential and important of the Fathers was **AUGUSTINE of Hippo**. Indeed, while the most trenchant Christian mind of his day, the subtle, prophetic, and profound Augustine may also be the greatest thinker the church has known in any day. Theology, political philosophy, and ethics have all been inescapably shaped by his thought. Born in 354 in a small town in what is now Algeria, he spent his young adult years living a sinful and licentious life, even to the point of fathering an illegitimate son by his concubine. Years of philosophical questioning and spiritual

searching eventually led him to an overwhelming conviction of his own sin. This culminated in a dramatic conversion, which he described in the *Confessions*, a classic of Christian devotion:

Now when deep reflection had drawn up out of the secret depths of my soul all my misery, and had heaped it up before the sight of my heart, there arose a mighty storm, accompanied by a mighty rain of tears... And, not indeed in these words, but in this effect, I cried out to you: 'And You, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? Oh, do not remember against us our former iniquities.' ...I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or girl I know not which – coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, 'Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it.' ...So I quickly returned to the bench..., for there I had put down the apostle's book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence I read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.' I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty, and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.¹⁸

Reviewing his own early rebellion and struggles to discover not just meaning *in* life, but the meaning *of* life, Augustine came to understand that "our hearts are restless, and do not rest until they find their rest in You."

He had studied under Ambrose, from whom he learned the philosophical truth of the faith. After assuming pastoral duties as Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, Augustine immersed himself in the theological and philosophical contentions of the day. This was no mere intellectual indulgence for him. Rather, as a pastor, he saw the consequences of false teachings and errors in the daily lives of those under his care.

For example, in a misguided effort to create a completely pure church on earth, a group called the DONATISTS taught that any ordination of a minister, or any administration of baptism or the Lord's Supper, that was not performed by an indisputably pure and genuine bishop, was invalid. This made the legitimacy of ordination and the sacraments, dependent not on *God* but on *man*. And it provoked many severe crises of faith for devoted Christians, frightened that their baptism might not be valid because they could not be completely sure of the virtue of the minister who baptized them. Against Donatism, Augustine taught that it was the Lord God who created and controlled ordination and the sacraments, and that they were valid if they were performed as prescribed by God, in His name and for genuine believers.

Augustine's most fierce and famous dispute was against PELAGIANISM. The British monk Pelagius, whose followers spread his teachings throughout North Africa, denied original sin. He taught that humans are born basically good, and through enough effort, we can attain perfection. It followed that, since we are not true sinners, we do not need a true Savior – and so, Christ did not die as a perfect substitute in our place, but merely set a good moral example that we should follow. Though this heresy is ancient, it persists to this day. Modern examples of Pelagian doctrinal errors might include some varieties of liberal Protestantism, "health and wealth" teachings, Mormonism, Christian Science, etc. In responding to the Pelagian heresy, Augustine relied first on Scripture, and second on his own experience as a wretched sinner in rebellion against God, who had been saved only by grace. He contended that not only was every human being born sinful as a son or daughter of Adam, but that we invariably choose to sin; and through our own effort, we could do nothing to save ourselves. Rather, only through God's initiative in graciously choosing to give us the gift of faith in Christ could we repent of our sins and trust in Christ for our salvation.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* (Penguin edition), 177-178.

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Augustine's greatest masterpiece is *The City of God*. Writing in the immediate aftermath of Rome's invasion by barbarian hordes, he responded to pagan critics who blamed Christianity for Rome's fall, and to Christians like Jerome, whose faith had been shaken by their beloved city's demise. Augustine made clear that Christians inhabit two "cities": the city of man, which is our temporal residence on earth and which is based on love of *self*; and the City of God, which is our eternal home and which is based on love of *God*. In this life, we inhabit both cities, and must be good citizens of both, but must never confuse the two – which some Christians had done in identifying Rome as the perfect city. After all, God's kingdom was not bound to any earthly kingdom. And just as Christians could not achieve their own salvation, neither could they create an eternal paradise on earth, for their (and our) final home is in heaven.

Four Questions, And Four Councils

From the very beginning, one way the church affirmed its faith was through creeds. As we saw last week, the early Christians recited simple creeds before being baptized, to affirm their common faith and to guard against error. The earliest and most eminent is the APOSTLE'S CREED, a version of which we find as early as 110 AD from the pen of Ignatius of Antioch.

Other challenges soon arose, however. The Church held four councils during the fourth and fifth centuries, to resolve pressing theological matters as well as to settle contentious political disputes. We can summarize each council as an attempt to answer each of four questions, all centered on the nature of Jesus Christ. **First**, Is Christ divine? **Second**, Is Christ human? **Third**, if yes to both, how are the two elements combined? And **fourth**, what language or terms do we use to describe Him?

COUNCIL OF NICEA (325 AD)

The Council of Nicea in 325 addressed this first question. The controversy began around 318 when the city of Alexandria erupted in dispute. One of the elders, ARIUS, under the influence of Platonic thought and desiring to maintain the absolute supremacy of God the Father, proposed that Jesus had been created, had not existed eternally, and could therefore not be divine like the Father. The bishop over the city, Alexander, and his archdeacon Athanasius, vehemently opposed this false teaching and defended the Trinity and the Incarnation from serious error. In 321, a synod called at Alexandria deposed Arius and condemned his doctrine; but this just exacerbated instead of ending the struggle. A spellbinding orator and charismatic personality, Arius then succeeded in winning to his side several of the leading church members, and the situation grew steadily worse. After writing to the disputants in an effort to quell this "theological trifle," Constantine finally realized the enormity of the issue. He exercised his authority as head of the church, to call an empire-wide council at Nicea to decide the issue (in Northwest Asia Minor). Constantine himself was sympathetic to Arianism, and was more concerned to preserve cultural and political unity than theological orthodoxy. Alexander and Athanasius vigorously and persuasively defended God the Son as being of the same "substance" as God the Father, and succeeded in persuading almost the entire council along with the emperor. Arius himself was deposed and excommunicated, and the council adopted a creed that stands today as an orthodox statement of Christian belief. Athanasius' treatise, *On The Incarnation*, laid the foundation for that orthodoxy.

Athanasius based his defense of orthodoxy on three grounds. *First*, the truth of Scripture, many passages of which taught the full divinity of Christ. *Second*, the logic of salvation, by which for Christ to atone for our sins and mediate between God and man, He had to be fully divine. *Third*, the experience and support of many common Christians. Ordinary believers had been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and had prayed to Christ for years. Many of them supported Athanasius, for these new teachings of Arius struck them as muddle-headed and wrong. Here again, we see an early example of congregationalism, as the lay people resisted heresy promoted by their leaders. In praising Athanasius, C.S. Lewis made a trenchant observation:

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“He stood up for the Trinitarian doctrine, ‘whole and undefiled,’ when it looked as if all the civilized world was slipping back from Christianity into the religion of Arius – into one of those ‘sensible’ synthetic religions...which, then as now, included among their devotees many highly cultivated clergymen.”¹⁹

As one Christian scholar has noted,

“Arius’s appeal to what he considered the logic of monotheism illustrates a recurring tendency throughout Christian history to subject the facts of divine revelation to current conceptions of ‘the reasonable’.”²⁰

Arianism persists in various forms even today. Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example, hold to this false teaching. We must always remember that our faith is grounded finally on the revelation of God in the person of Christ and in the Word of the Bible – not in whatever may seem “reasonable” to us at any given time. Just about every Christian belief has been denounced as “unreasonable” at different times and places in history – whether the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, the inspiration of the Bible, the divine creation of the world, the equality of all human beings, or ones that are quite unpopular and “unreasonable” today, including the existence of hell, the exclusivity of Christ for salvation, the omniscience and sovereignty of God, biblical sexual morality...

COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (381)

After Constantine’s death, the Nicene consensus began to unravel. Nicea may have affirmed Christ as fully God, but soon new groups of heretical theologians began to make new mischief. One cabal, led by Apollinaris and known (as you might guess) as the APOLLINARIANS, denied that Christ had a human soul, thus pressing the second big question of Christ’s humanity. Meanwhile, another group known as the PNEUMATOMACHIANS, or Fighters Against the Spirit, denied the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. Besides their heresy, their ridiculous name also limited their ability to attract more followers – people probably didn’t want to join a group they couldn’t pronounce. Nevertheless, the Council of Constantinople in 381 rejected both these heresies, and affirmed the full divinity of all three persons of the Trinity, as well as the full humanity of Christ. This Council also slightly modified the Nicene Creed to give us the version we still confess together today. As one Christian scholar has observed, “The turning point in Christian history represented by the Nicene Creed, was the Church’s critical choice for the wisdom of God in preference to human wisdom.”²¹ And human wisdom, as we read in 1Corinthians, is really no wisdom at all, but just “foolishness to God.”

Constantinople also marked the final death of Arianism. Though it had been formally rejected at Nicea, Arianism had not been fully expunged from the church. Athanasius, for example, found himself exiled no fewer than five times after Nicea, as the imperial office seesawed from Christian, to Arianism, and back again. Many Arian theologians were re-appointed to their posts, some of them even becoming top advisors to Constantine. In some ways, the Arian dispute also touched on the relationship of church and state. Arian emperors and their followers usually favored direct government control over the church. Just as God ruled over the Son, they reasoned, so should the Empire rule over the Church. Orthodox Christians tended to reject this model as they rejected Arianism. The Church needed to have some autonomy, particularly in spiritual matters. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan whom we looked at earlier, gave a powerful illustration of this when he refused communion to Emperor Theodosius, until Theodosius confessed and repented a particular sin.

¹⁹ Quoted in Noll, 55.

²⁰ Mark Noll, *Turning Points*, 54.

²¹ Noll, 59.

COUNCIL OF EPHESUS (431); OR, A TALE OF TWO CITIES

With Jesus' full divinity and full humanity established, many thought that lasting peace could finally come to the church. It proved to be an empty hope. If Jesus was both God and man, our third question arose: *how are these two elements related to each other?* This question proved especially vexing in the Eastern Church, both because the West was more focused on fending off the barbarian invasions, and because the West did not share the East's taste for philosophical speculation. The questions, though technical, were of vital importance. Two schools of thought emerged in the East, centered in two different cities. They were divided as much by intellectual disagreement as by political rivalry. One group, centered in Antioch, emphasized the human nature of Jesus; they held that his two natures were distinct and only loosely connected within the person of Christ. Another group, situated in Alexandria, emphasized Jesus' divinity to such an extent that they diminished his human nature.

In 428, a man named NESTORIUS became Bishop of Constantinople. Raised under the Antioch teaching, he argued further that neither of the two natures of Christ shared in the properties of the other. He could not bring himself to believe that the divine had either been born or crucified, railing against the idea that the eternal God could be three days old, and saying at one point that "God is not a baby." CYRIL, Bishop of Alexandria, accused Nestorius of heresy; a bitter exchange of letters ensued. Cyril wanted to maintain a strict unity of Christ's nature, rather than creating a duality as Nestorius had. He wrote that if Nestorius were right, and the two natures of Christ were strictly separated, then it was only the human nature that had suffered and died, and mere humanity could never accomplish redemption. The emperor, in 431, called the bishops of the empire to assemble in Ephesus to decide the question. Cyril and his Alexandrian supporters arrived in the city first, convened the council before Nestorius's supporters had even arrived, and promptly excommunicated Nestorius. One good turn deserves another. So when John, the Bishop of Antioch, arrived with Nestorius's supporters, they convened their own council across town, declared themselves the true council, and excommunicated Cyril. In return, Cyril's council fired off yet another round of excommunications, this time targeting Bishop John and the Antiochenes. Fed up with this squabbling, Emperor Theodosius II intervened. He had both Cyril and John arrested and declared the various excommunications void. Theologically, the emperor sided more with the Alexandrians. He banished Nestorius into exile in a monastery, and saw to it that the Council of Ephesus affirmed the dynamic interchange of the two elements in the person of Christ.

COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON (451)

The messy resolution at Ephesus was really little resolution at all. Though Ephesus affirmed the two natures of Christ, the difficult fourth question of how to describe their relation remained. Just a few years later, the controversy flared again. In 446, a monk in Constantinople named EUTYCHES began to argue that *before* Christ's incarnation He had two natures; but *after* His incarnation, these two unions were thoroughly blended, the human nature being dissolved into the divine, much as a drop of wine is dissolved into the sea. The nature of Jesus, therefore, was neither perfectly divine nor perfectly human. Emperor Theodosius learned of this latest controversy in the East, and called a council in 449 to settle the question. Dioscorus, the Bishop of Alexandria, who supported Eutyches, paid the Emperor large amounts of gold, and shrewdly maneuvered his supporters to guarantee that their views would prevail at the council. They would not even listen to a letter sent by LEO, Bishop of Rome in the West, defending the orthodox view of Christ's two natures. Instead, the corrupt Dioscorus declared the orthodox view to be "heretical" and banished anyone who held it from leadership in the church. An infuriated Bishop Leo dismissed this council as a "robber's synod." Chaos, division, and heresy seriously threatened the Church.

In one of those bizarre yet providential turns of history, a clumsy horse helped solve the debate. The next year, the horse that Emperor Theodosius was riding stumbled, and the Emperor fell and broke his neck. The new emperor who succeeded Theodosius affirmed the orthodox view of Christ,

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and immediately called for a new council at CHALCEDON, across the river from Constantinople, in 451. This time, Leo's position was accepted. He described his views in the *Tome of Leo*, which declared Christ to be a single person, "*perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man ... in two natures, inconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparately.*" Moreover, Leo connected this doctrine with Christ's saving work. Christ came "*so that death might be conquered and so that the devil, who once exercised death's sovereignty, might by its power be destroyed, for we would not be able to overcome the author of sin and of death unless he whom sin could not stain, and death could not hold, took on our nature and made it his own.*"²²

Chalcedon affirmed an orthodox Christology, but it was almost as important for what it did *not* say. Chalcedon laid down the fences guarding the orthodox doctrine of Christ as one person who is truly God and truly Man, yet it resisted the temptation to define precisely what cannot be precisely defined. The Apostle Paul several times describes the Gospel as a "mystery," and at its core is the mystery of how God became Man. One reason so many of these early church figures fell into error, was that they tried to go beyond what Scripture has revealed in how we can describe Christ. The Lord used the Council at Chalcedon to reject these various errors, to affirm a biblical view of Christ, and to establish barriers preventing us from speculating beyond that biblical view.

Yet Chalcedon revealed a growing divide in the Church. Much as the East came to accept the Chalcedonian theology, the East also came to resent the West's (particularly Rome's) assertion of supreme authority at Chalcedon. Though the official split between East and West would not happen for another 600 years, the effective split had already begun.

Conclusion

In our second class we saw how the church survived persecution, and asked whether it could survive acceptance. Acceptance brought a new set of challenges, of course, but it also brought new opportunities. As the faith continued to grow, the church also clarified what it did and did not believe. These were not just esoteric theological disputes — for in many of these cases, questions about Christ's nature impinged directly on matters of the Trinity and salvation. Here again, we see our Lord faithfully preserving his church amidst all sorts of challenges and from all sorts of errors. And here also we see the supreme importance of the Bible, the final authority governing our church and our lives — God's word to His people then, and now.

²² Quoted in Noll, 74.

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“By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.” 1 John 4:17

Last week we considered the problem of authority in the church, and where Christians should look for guidance in determining orthodox doctrine and practice. This week, our theme will be the relationship between the church and the world. Christians have always wrestled with our relationship to the world. On the one hand, we believe that the world is a sinful, messy, corrupting place that will eventually be destroyed by the Lord’s final judgment, and we need to keep ourselves as separate from the world as possible. On the other hand, we affirm that God created the world and called it “good,” that the creation displays His glory, and that we in turn are called to live faithfully and labor actively in the world, loving our neighbors and helping to steward God’s handiwork until Christ returns. Both of these convictions are true, and yet they are not easily reconciled. What is a faithful Christian to do?

Today we are going to look at about 650 years of church history, and consider at least two different ways that Christians have tried to understand this question of their relationship with the world – either *withdrawing* from the world, or *conquering* the world.

Before we begin, a word on time and history. You’ll notice that we are considering an unusually large chunk of time today – about 650 years – in 45 minutes. To give a sense of perspective, this is almost three times the length of the national history of the United States, almost ten times the average lifetime of an American. In other words, it is a tremendous swath of history. However, as most church or world history surveys agree, these centuries were not as eventful or momentous as other eras before and after. This should not surprise us. In His providence, God will sometimes allow great lengths of time to go by without many significant developments, punctuated by small time periods of tremendous activity and importance. We see this in the Bible. For example, the first 11 chapters of Genesis cover more time than the entire rest of the Bible; there were over 400 years from the close of the Old Testament to the birth of Christ; Jesus had 30 years of relative anonymity, followed by three years of public ministry. History sometimes slows, and it sometimes quickens. This is not to say that the huge gaps of time intervening between dramatic events are meaningless. God is just as sovereign, and in some ways just as active, in the slow times as in the momentous. Rather, they are relatively quiet periods of stability, growth, and preparation for whatever revolutionary changes might lie ahead. After all, as 2Peter 3:8 tells us, “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

Background and historical context

This period is commonly known as the “Dark Ages,” because of its relative lack of intellectual and cultural development, and its beginning is usually traced to the “fall” of the Roman Empire in the early fifth century. However, did Rome actually “fall”? Not in the absolute, dramatic sense that you might think – conquered and destroyed in one fell swoop by barbarian hordes. Rather, a series of invasions over one hundred years repeatedly diminished Rome’s power and authority, until by about 500, the Western half of the Roman Empire had ceased to exist.

The first incursions began in 376, when tribes of nomadic horsemen known as the Huns swept through the Black Sea region and terrorized its inhabitants, the Goths. Understandably, the Goths needed to seek refuge, though they disagreed where to go. A split emerged, with the Visigoths fleeing West into the Roman Empire, and the Ostrogoths staying in the East, to be absorbed into Hun control. After settling in Rome, the Visigoths were treated inconsistently by Roman rulers, sometimes tolerated and sometimes persecuted. Alaric rose up as ruler of these Visigoths, and in 410 he led his people in a three-day uprising known as the “sack” of Rome. This rebellion shocked and traumatized the Roman people, who lost their delusions of invincibility. Some of them blamed Rome’s turn to Christianity for its “fall.” As we saw last week, many Christians who had come to

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identify Rome with the kingdom of God recoiled in horror as well. Jerome, who on hearing of the catastrophe by this time, had already left Rome for Bethlehem. He wrote: “My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth and sobs choke my speech.” Other Christians, most famously Augustine, responded to Rome’s vulnerability by pointing out that God did not identify his kingdom with an earthly kingdom. Rather, in the words of Hebrews, we join with Abraham in “looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

Though Alaric and the Visigoths caused much damage, the city was not destroyed, but soon recovered. Also, Alaric’s attack on Rome was not necessarily an invasion, since he and his people had been living in the empire for over 30 years. Rather, Rome was transformed, as more and more of these Germanic tribes came to live within its borders. Rome just became less and less “Roman.” Later barbarian leaders showed some deference to Rome as well, particularly to church authorities. For example, Attila the Hun considered invading the city in 452, but Bishop Leo I (whom we looked at last week for his positive role at the Council of Chalcedon) persuaded Attila not to do so. Today we think Attila the Hun epitomizes savage brutality. But in this case at least, Attila the *Negotiator* might be more appropriate.

Meanwhile, other barbarian tribes began invading other parts of the weakened empire, so that by 500, the Western Empire had been divided between several barbarian kingdoms: In Italy, the Ostrogoths, and then the Lombards, were masters of the country. The Visigoths controlled most of modern-day Spain on the Iberian Peninsula; the Vandals ruled North Africa; and the Angles and Saxons colonized the British Isles. The most important of the tribes, though, would prove to be the Franks, who consolidated their control of Gaul (present day France, which derives its name from the Franks), and the Rhine Valley.

Most of these Germanic tribes were either pagan, or Arian — the Christian heresy that we touched on in previous weeks. However, in a reversal of what you might expect, over time most of these new inhabitants of the old Roman empire, came to embrace orthodox Christianity, which they identified with Rome’s previous days of glory.

Meanwhile, in the East, the Emperor Justinian took the throne in 527. During his 38-year reign, he halted the advance of the barbarians and even recovered much of the territory that had been lost in the East. Justinian also brought about a renaissance in Byzantine law and culture, codifying old Roman laws and building a towering, spectacular church known as the *Hagia Sophia*, which still stands today in Istanbul. Upon entering the church for the first time after its completion, Justinian fell to his knees and exclaimed, “O Solomon! I have outdone you!” As one historian describes it, “the dome... hung as it were by a golden chain from heaven, a link in the hierarchy rising from the finite to the infinite, and descending from the Creator to the creature.”²³

The Eastern Empire, and all of the Christian faith soon encountered a new threat, however, coming not from the north or west, but from the sandy wastes of Arabia to the south. Born about the year 570, a man named MOHAMMED claimed to receive visions from the angel Gabriel, which came to be recorded in the book known as the Koran. In Mecca, Mohammed gathered a band of followers, but they failed to convert the rest of the city and were soon expelled by rivals. They began to retreat to Medina, and in a pilgrimage revered in Islamic history as the *Hegira* [“hijira”], this battered group attracted more and more Arab disciples along the way. Mohammed returned victoriously to Mecca in 630, and his new religion soon began to grow at a staggering pace. From the start, Islam expanded by the sword. While Mohammed died in 632, two years later, all of Arabia had come under Islam; and within ten more years, Muslim armies had taken Syria, Palestine (including Jerusalem), and Persia. By one hundred years after Mohammed’s death,

²³ Roland Bainton, *Christianity* (New York: Houghton Mifflin 1987), 109.

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Islam had conquered Egypt and the rest of North Africa, southern France and parts of Spain, and had laid siege to Constantinople — still the imperial and spiritual capital of the East.

What did this mean for Christianity? *First*, Islam's dramatic expansion, though often by force, revealed some of the weaknesses of Christianity, particularly in North Africa. The church was beleaguered by doctrinal disputes, corruption, and political strife, and had no Scriptures in the language of the people, rendering it quite vulnerable to an outside threat. *Second*, Islam deepened the division between East and West, in terms of geography, communication, and theology. *Third*, Islam forced the Western church to shift its focus to northern Europe, where Christianity had only begun to take root.

To retreat from the world: Monasticism

During these times of political and religious chaos, what was a faithful Christian to do? One answer was the course of MONASTICISM: to withdraw from the world and pursue only the things of the spirit. Monks began to appear in the fourth century. Frustrated by the confusions and corruptions of the church, they withdrew into the desert to pursue a pure life of spiritual meditation and worship. One of the more well-known and zealous of these was SIMEON STYLITES, who spent about the last 30 years of his life isolated on top of a great pillar, in order to escape the temptations of the world and the devil, and focus only on God. He used buckets to bring up his food to him, as well as spiritual questions written down by pilgrims seeking his wisdom. Though this may strike us as rather extreme (and for good reason), Simeon's life also illustrates the fervency of some monks' Christian devotion, as well as how many other Christians revered them.

BENEDICT OF NURSIA is the most eminent and influential monk of this era. He left an enduring legacy in writing, the *Rule of St. Benedict*, a sort of handbook for monks then and now. He was born near Rome in 480. By the age of 20, Benedict had grown so disgusted with the moral degeneracy around him, that he retreated to live in a cave. From there he founded a succession of monastic communities, culminating in 525 with the establishment of the monastery at Monte Cassino, which exists to this day.

In writing the *Rule*, Benedict focused not just on what monks should and shouldn't do, but *why*. He was also concerned to create an enduring standard that would preserve monasteries over the long haul. The entire order centered on an integrated life of obedience to and focus on God. It created self-contained, self-supporting, communities of monks. The *Rule* prescribes a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience, forbidding the ownership of private property, and setting out a rigorous schedule of prayer, worship, Bible study, and work. Monks gathered eight times daily for prayer, seven times throughout the day and once at midnight.

Here is an excerpt from the *Rule* on sleeping:

All the monks shall sleep in separate beds... If possible, they should all sleep in one room. However, if there are too many for this, they will be grouped in tens or twenties, a senior in charge of each group. Let a candle burn throughout the night. They will sleep in their robes, belted but with no knives, thus preventing injury in slumber. The monks then will always be prepared to rise at the signal and hurry to the Divine Office. But they must make haste with gravity and modesty... When they arise for the Divine Office, they should encourage each other, for the sleepy make many excuses.²⁴

Benedict placed great emphasis on the importance of the abbot who governed the monastery:

Always remember, concerning the election of an abbot, that he should be chosen by the entire community, in fear of God; or if that proves unsatisfactory, by part of the community, however small, who would choose more rationally. The abbot should be chosen for his virtue and wisdom,

²⁴ *The Rule of St. Benedict* (New York: Image Books Doubleday 1975), 70.

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even if he ranks lowest in the community... The newly elected abbot must ponder his great responsibilities and remember to Whom he must render account. He is to know it is better to profit others than to rule over them. He must be knowledgeable in Divine Law so as to know when to 'bring forth new things and old' (Matt. 13:52). He must be virtuous, sober and merciful, and always hold mercy before justice; thus he may obtain mercy. He shall hate vice and love the brothers. He shall act with prudence and moderation as concerns punishment, for if a pot is scoured too vigorously to remove rust, it may break. Let him remember his own frailty, for 'the bruised reed must not be broken' (Isaiah 42:3). We do not intend that he allow vices to grow. He must weed them out with prudence and charity, as each case demands. He should try to be loved, more than feared. Neither must he be worried or anxious, nor too demanding, obstinate, jealous or over-suspicious; for he will never have peace... He will follow the present Rule in all matters. Thus, administering it wisely, he may hear from the Lord what the good servant who gave grain to his peers in due season heard: "Amen I say to you, over all his goods will he place him" (Matt. 24:47).²⁵

Here we see Benedict's pastoral heart for his monks.

In many ways, Benedict's *Rule* stands out for its moderation. Though strict, it mostly kept its focus on the spiritual goals of the monastic life, and avoided the extreme deprivations of Simeon Stylites and his ilk. Benedict's *Rule* in turn exercised a tremendous influence on Christianity for the next five centuries, and beyond. It encouraged countless men (and women) to pursue more seriously the Christian life in a sacrificial way. Many monasteries and monastic orders were established as a result, and they often served as crucial anchors for the church during the difficulties of the Middle Ages.

How should we evaluate monasticism, then and now? To begin, we should affirm many positive functions that it served.

First, it focused many people on Christ instead of on the temptations of this world; and its spiritual disciplines helped countless believers, monk and non-monk, to grow in their faith.

Second, monks also played a vital role in evangelism. During these centuries, missionary monks took the lead in spreading the Gospel into northern Europe, and they often endured tremendous hardship in order to share the faith. For example, it was a monk named Patrick who first brought Christianity to Ireland in 432, spending the next thirty years ministering there, establishing monasteries and emphasizing missions.

Third, in matters of doctrine, monks played a vital role in preserving orthodox theology, both through their own rigorous catechizing and through their scrupulous attention to copying the Scriptures and other important documents with precise detail – this was, after all, 1,000 years before the printing press.

And *finally*, monks often performed important services in their communities, such as teaching local children, helping build homes and churches, providing medical care, and growing food. As one Christian scholar has concluded, "almost by themselves, monks for more than a thousand years sustained what was most noble and most Christ-centered in the church."²⁶

Monks had their problems, however. The most pressing concern we should have as Christians concerns the monastic *perspective on salvation*. Such a rigorous, disciplined life could lead very easily into a belief in salvation by works; and for some monks, it sadly did. Related to this is the monastic *withdrawal from the world*. We all know too well just how awful the temptations of the world can be now; and back then it was little different. The Bible cautions us repeatedly not to

²⁵ *Ibid*, 99-100.

²⁶ Mark Noll, *Turning Points* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 1997), 104.

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make the mistake of Demas, whom Paul laments in 2Timothy 4:10. He deserted Paul because he “loved this present world.” But we should also take care not to withdraw too much, for the world is still God’s creation, and we are still called to be salt and light, to preserve the creation, to love our neighbors, and to share the Gospel. It is possible to focus so much on “spiritual things” that we neglect our present responsibilities, and serve as a poor witness. The monastic life has the same temptation. Ironically, in their efforts to escape the world, many monks and monasteries fell prey to the world. Over time, numerous monastic orders accumulated fabulous amounts of wealth, and political and religious power. This led almost inevitably to *serious corruption*, which in turn tarnished their witness and undermined their work. For too many monks, in trying to *escape* the world, they became *ensnared* by the world.

To conquer the world: Christendom

Most Christians did not solve the problem of the church and the world in the monastic way, by *withdrawing* from the world. Instead, they took the opposite approach: trying to *conquer* the world. This is a rather crude over-simplification, but it touches on a crucial development during these centuries in church and world history: the merger of religious and secular authority. This occurred through two tracks, the growth in power of the papacy, and the re-emergence of powerful emperors ruling Europe. As papal and imperial authority came together, CHRISTENDOM emerged: a Christian empire spanning the continent of Europe, that would endure for centuries.

Growth of the papacy: As we have seen in previous weeks, in the early centuries of the church, the Bishop of Rome periodically attempted to assert his authority over the rest of the church, and many Christians, especially in the West, viewed the church in Rome with special reverence. Bishop Leo I in the fifth century took particular steps to assert his authority in matters of doctrine, and to increase the power of his office. He seems to have been the first Bishop of Rome to claim the title “pope,” from the Greek word *papa* used for senior church officials. The pontificate attained its greatest stature to date, however, under Gregory I, who held the office from 590-604.

Known by his contemporaries and to history as “Gregory the Great,” he was born to wealthy parents about 540, and received a refined education. Gregory initially cared little for theology or philosophy, but he showed considerable administrative skills. He was appointed by the emperor to direct the civil affairs of the city of Rome. After serving in other positions of both church and government office, in 590, Gregory was elevated to the papal throne by popular acclaim. He fought hard to prevent his coronation, even appealing to the emperor in Constantinople not to give the imperial confirmation, still necessary at that time. As Pope, Gregory faced a bewildering set of difficulties. With the imperial structure of the West in tatters, he had to make sure that the people of Rome were fed and that the public buildings remained in good repair. He also had to defend Rome from the invasions of the barbarians; and he managed the estates of the church with such skill, that revenue increased dramatically.

Besides meeting these challenges, Gregory reformed the worship services of the church, wrote extensive commentaries on Scripture, and even wrote the first biography of the monk Benedict. He also initiated a change in the church’s mission strategy that shifted its focus to northern and western Europe. This led to the monk Augustine undertaking his famous missionary journey to England, leading to the conversion of the Angles and the Saxons.

More than any other pope, Gregory established the “papal monarchy,” the idea that the popes were the successors to the great Caesars of the earlier Empire. Gregory died in 604. His successor popes over the next two hundred years would not attain his stature in religious or secular matters. Yet, because of his reign, the Germanic kings to the North would come to look not to the emperor, but to those who followed on the papal throne, as the political authority in Rome.

Re-emergence of the Empire: Besides the papacy’s growth in authority, political developments in Europe saw the emergence of new, powerful emperors from the Franks. In 496, the king of the

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Franks, CLOVIS, converted to the Christian faith. Clovis had married a Christian woman, and in a manner very similar to Constantine, on the eve of battle he promised to serve his wife's God if he won. A victorious Clovis then had the Frankish people embrace Christianity as well.

By the end of the seventh century, Clovis' dynasty had weakened, and a new ruler emerged named CHARLES MARTEL, who gained renown for his battle victories against Muslim invaders. During this same time, a monk named BONIFACE was commissioned by the pope to undertake missionary work among the tribes living in the land of modern-day Germany. Charles Martel directly assisted Boniface and other missionary monks — an activity that endeared him to the pope. Boniface's missionary work helped to unite France, Germany, England, and the Continent, all under the Christian banner. Boniface also forged a close relationship with Charles Martel's son, PEPIN, heir to his father's throne. But for Pepin to take the crown, he desired the blessing of the most powerful religious authority of the day — the pope.

The pope, recognizing that the barbarian Lombards still posed a fearsome threat to Italy, agreed to have Boniface anoint Pepin, *if* the new king would in turn agree to protect Rome from the Lombards. King Pepin honored his alliance to the Pope and led his army into Italy where he inflicted a crippling defeat on the Lombards. The Pope and King Pepin also teamed up against one other inept Frankish king, known as Childeric the Stupid (I am not making this up), who still claimed the throne. They forced Childeric to give up his crown and become a monk. Not all inhabitants of monasteries, it seemed, were there by choice.

CHARLEMAGNE. Pepin's son Charles completed this process of allying church with empire. Known as Charlemagne, he is regarded as one of the most remarkable rulers in Western history. He was a brilliant warrior, a patron of learning and the arts, and a statesman of rare ability. In 774, he marched into Italy and completely defeated the nettlesome Lombards. Victory followed victory, until he ruled almost all of Europe.

Christmas day of 800 witnessed another momentous event. Charlemagne attended a worship service at the main cathedral in Rome. At the end of the service, Pope Leo III came up to the emperor and placed a crown on his head. The people in the church, prompted by the pope, then arose and shouted out three times: "To Charles Augustus, crowned by God, great and peace-giving emperor of the Romans, life and victory!" The process was complete. Church and state were united, and one emperor — who was crowned by one cleric — ruled all of Europe.

What did this conquering of Europe mean for the relationship between the church and the world? To begin with the positives: *first*, this cooperation between church and king did help spread the Gospel, though regrettably many of the conversions came more by compulsion than choice. *Also*, the legacy of a Christian culture, with its developments in ethics, politics, scholarship, and arts did contribute much good to our Western civilization.

This arrangement brought much harm, however. *First*, and most tragically, too many Christians came to love this fallen world too much. No matter how much good we may accomplish on earth, we must always remember the stern warning of James: "Do you not know, that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" (James 4:4). *Second*, as we also saw with Constantine, medieval Christendom confused the kingdom of man, with the kingdom of God. This is especially important for those of us who work in politics: no matter how wonderful the legislation we write, or the policies we implement, we will never create the kingdom of God as a political order. *Third*, as we will see in coming weeks, this arrangement brought great corruption into the church. Too many religious leaders became enamored of their own power, and engaged in scandalous financial and sexual sin. They forgot that the church belongs not to *them*, not to the *state*, but to *Christ*.

The great split of 1054 between East and West:

One theme that we have touched on every week thus far concerns the growing divide between the Western and Eastern churches. The separation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church did not become formal until 1054, but it had been in practice for centuries before. Differences in language, style, and emphasis had grown quite pronounced. In the words of Orthodox scholar Timothy Ware:

From the start, Greeks and Latins had each approached the Christian Mystery in their own way. At the risk of some oversimplification, it can be said that the Latin approach was more practical, the Greek more speculative; Latin thought was influenced by juridical ideas, by the concepts of Roman law, while the Greeks understood theology in the context of worship and in the light of the Holy Liturgy. When thinking about the Trinity, Latins started with the unity of the Godhead, Greeks with the Threeness of the persons; when reflecting on the Crucifixion, Latins thought primarily of Christ the Victim, Greeks of Christ the Victor; Latins talked more of redemption, Greeks of deification... These two distinctive approaches were not in themselves contradictory; each served to supplement the other, and each had its place in the fullness of Catholic tradition. But now that the two sides were becoming strangers to one another – with no political and little cultural unity, with no common language – there was a danger that each side would follow its own approach in isolation and push it to extremes, forgetting the value in the other point of view.²⁷

Differences in ruling structure emerged as well. While both East and West saw close cooperation between church and state, in the West the church still ostensibly reigned supreme (as we saw symbolized by the pope crowning Charlemagne). Whereas in the East, the emperor essentially governed the church. They also differed on church governance. The church leaders in the East, known as patriarchs, resented and emphatically rejected the pope's claim to absolute supremacy. The Eastern patriarchs were willing to call the pope "first among equals," but would go no further.

Finally, a very specific theological difference became enormously important. In 589, the Western church, believing that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, had inserted the word *filioque*, which means "and the Son," into the Nicene Creed. This was probably to defend against the encroachments of the Arian Goths who controlled Spain and even part of Italy. The Eastern Church believed the Spirit proceeded only from the Father, and also objected to the apparent nonchalance with which the West had casually amended such a foundational creed.

All of these differences reached a boiling point in 1054, when Pope Leo IX sent an envoy to Constantinople to demand the submission of the Eastern patriarch. When the patriarch refused, the papal envoy excommunicated him. Not surprisingly, the patriarch responded in kind, thus formalizing the Great Schism, which persists to this day.

Conclusion

The ninth and tenth centuries saw neither strong emperors nor virtuous popes, as the closely allied church and state descended into conflict, confusion, and stagnation. Despite periodic efforts at reform and renewal, the monasteries had become rather corrupt as well, and no longer offered a refuge for Christian purity. Neither withdrawing from the world, nor attempting to conquer the world, had solved the problem of the church's relationship with the culture. Meanwhile, Islam continued to challenge Christendom from the south, even as it ruled over Jerusalem and the ancient lands revered by many Christians. Faithful Christians during this time needed more than ever to cling to God's promises, in the midst of what seemed a growing darkness.

²⁷ Quoted in Noll, *Turning Points*, 135.

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*“For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.”
Hebrews 13:15*

Introduction

If you have ever visited Europe, one of the most striking features of the landscape to American eyes are the churches. From small parish churches to soaring cathedrals, the medieval churches of Europe are a striking testimony to the wealth, prestige, and power of the church as Western Europe emerged from the political and social devastation of the barbarian invasions, which we considered last week. From splendid architecture, to achingly beautiful artwork, to brilliantly illustrated manuscripts, the aesthetic achievements of the church of the high middle ages are stunning. But it also speaks of an underlying theology, a theology in which the trappings of worldly wealth and power were increasingly seen to properly belong to the church. After all, if Christ was King, shouldn't his church possess all the power of royalty? And shouldn't the state, mere earthly authority, bow in the face of superior right? In the face of renewed and reorganized political power, this inevitably led to conflict between the power of the church and the power of the state. The centuries from AD 950-1500 witnessed fearsome conflicts between the emperor and the pope, between church leaders and political authorities, as people from all walks of life tried to discern the proper relationship between earthly authorities and heavenly authority. Sadly, in a legacy that today still tarnishes the name of Christianity, wrong answers to these questions led to wrong actions: THE CRUSADES. Yet out of this confusion and corruption, the Lord was planting the seeds of dramatic renewal – and reform.

Roots Of Conflict, Seeds Of Renewal

Almost as soon as Charlemagne had succeeded in uniting Europe under his rule, a new wave of invasions began to flood the continent in the ninth and tenth centuries – Vikings from the North, including Danes (then some of the world's fiercest warriors), Muslims from the south, and Hungarians from the East. Over time, Charlemagne's empire dissolved into numerous smaller kingdoms controlled by local barons and nobles. The common people began to look not to the emperor for protection, but to their more accessible and efficient local lords, who siphoned away the power of the imperial crown.

During these two centuries, the Christian faith also experienced a geographic expansion unlike any it had seen before, or would see for several centuries. Just as the barbarian invaders of Rome had embraced the Christian religion of their new land centuries earlier, so now missionaries began preaching in those very lands from which the invaders had come to ravage Europe. In a short time, almost all of Scandinavia – Denmark, Norway, and most of Sweden – had come under the Christian name. Christianity also made great strides in lands such as Iceland, Greenland, Russia, and Hungary, and even a Muslim tribe in Mesopotamia embraced the Christian faith.

All was not well with the church, however. When secular power began to accrue to feudal lords, they also grasped for religious authority. Known as the “INVESTITURE CONTROVERSY,” this became one of the most important and fiercely contested episodes in all of church and European history. In it were the roots of the Reformation, as well as modern notions of church and state. At its heart lay the foundational questions of where authority originated – the church, or the state? – and what were the responsibilities of each? In “investiture,” a king, baron, or noble would grant, or “invest” a property to a priest or bishop as a way of granting that church leader a position of religious authority. So, while many clerics gained much wealth through accumulating these properties, they also lost their authority as independent ministers of God. Meanwhile, the lords claimed the right to appoint bishops in their lands, and even lesser nobles usurped the authority of appointing parish priests within their domains. This practice brought many problems. Political leaders often selected clergy based more on cynical expediency than on spiritual integrity. And

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many church leaders became exceedingly corrupt — more interested in accumulating property and concubines than in tending the Lord's flock.

Worlds Collide—Papacy and Empire

The 10th century witnessed a bitter struggle ensue between the HOLY ROMAN EMPERORS, who held that they had the power to appoint popes, and the church leaders themselves, who cited centuries of precedent in their claim to that same authority. For decades, popes and anti-popes were appointed and deposed with staggering frequency — all of them, sometimes as many as three, claiming to be the legitimate successor to the chair of Peter. The only consistency during these chaotic years was the corruption and lust for power that consumed popes and emperors alike. In 985, the controversy reached a boiling point when Boniface VII died suddenly (probably the victim of poisoning), and was dragged through the streets of Rome, his body left naked and unburied for the gawking eyes of the populace. In the middle of the turmoil, Henry III became emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and determined to put a stop to the papal tug-of-war in Rome. In 1049, he convened a synod in Germany, and strong-armed the resignation or deposition of all three rival popes and the election of Leo IX to the papal throne. Leo was already well-schooled in the thought of those who wanted to reform the papacy and take it out of the hands of the princes. So, instead of taking his office immediately upon his election, Leo trudged from the synod in Germany all the way to Rome, dressed in a beggar's clothes, refusing to take the office until his election was confirmed by the clergy and people of Rome. Leo was one among many reformers who refused to allow the papacy to be merely a creature of the Emperor. Upon Henry's death in 1059, a new pope named Nicholas II issued the "Papal Election Decree," which declared that henceforth, the Cardinals — a select group of bishops designated by the pope — and not the emperors, would elect the popes.

Nicholas' action was masterminded not by himself, for he was not by any means an outstanding intellectual or spiritual leader, but by an archdeacon in the church of Rome named HILDEBRAND. Hildebrand was widely influential in Rome through the reigns of more than one pope, and carried out his agenda of reform with unbending diligence. In 1073, upon the death of the reigning pope, Hildebrand was literally carried from his home to the center of Rome, where the cardinals quickly ran a formal election to install the deacon as pope. Hildebrand took the title Gregory VII, after his role-model Gregory the Great of the late 6th century. Over the course of his twelve-year tenure on the throne, Gregory VII would make papal power even more widely felt than had his great mentor from the past. Gregory's VII's conception of the papal office was sweeping. He believed that the world had been organized around two great powers — the emperors, and the pope — who were to cooperate with one another to govern the world. In case of dispute, though, the pope, as the spiritual ruler, was to take precedence. Gregory made several other assertions, such as that the pontiff alone may use the title "universal;" that only the pope has authority to instate or depose bishops; that no one may judge him or reverse any of his decisions; that the Roman church has never erred, nor will it err to all eternity; and that the Popes may depose emperors. In order to halt the investiture practice of lay princes appointing bishops, Gregory demanded that all bishops must make a pilgrimage to Rome to receive the insignia of their office, a move which understandably angered many of the princes, not least, the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV.

In 1075, soon after Gregory outlawed lay investiture, the Emperor decided to test his power, and appointed a German to the highly prestigious Archbishopric of Milan. An infuriated Gregory suspended the appointment, along with several other imperially appointed bishops. Henry responded by denouncing the Pope, calling him by his previous name, Hildebrand, "not pope, but false monk." He ended the letter with a stunning demand: "I, Henry, King by Grace of God, and all my bishops, say to you, Come down, come down, and be damned throughout the ages!"

To Gregory, this was nothing less than an attack on the Church of Christ itself. So Gregory responded with his most potent weapon — he excommunicated and deposed Henry IV, forbidding

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anyone in Christendom to serve him as King. It was not for kings to judge popes, but for popes to judge kings. This was the most drastic step that the pope had ever taken, attempting to dethrone the mightiest monarch in Western Christendom. Gregory's excommunication and deposition left Henry feeling not just defeated, but terrified. It stunned the people of the 11th century. Henry hastened in search of the Pope, and found the pontiff fortified inside the fortress of Canossa. In the dead of winter, 1076, the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV stood barefoot outside the walls, begging for the Pope's forgiveness. It was one of the most dramatic scenes in all of medieval history – the Emperor humble and barefoot in the snow, the Pope torn between his belief that Henry's contrition was just a political move, and his responsibility to forgive a repentant sinner. Finally, Gregory received Henry back into communion and restored him to his throne. Never before had the Pope stood so unassailably superior to the secular prince. And though the great Pope would die in exile in 1085, apparently a defeated man, this moment would remain a point of great pride for the Popes for centuries to come.

After the death of Gregory VII, several powerful popes filled his position, such that the 12th and 13th centuries saw the papacy reach its pinnacle of authority. The greatest of these, and arguably the most powerful of any pope, was Innocent III, who reigned from 1198-1216. Innocent further solidified the pope's claim to absolute spiritual authority. He declared that "the successor of Peter is the Vicar of Christ... he has been established as a mediator between God and man, below God but beyond man; less than God but more than man; who shall judge all and be judged by no one."²⁸ Innocent conceded that kings were given certain functions, but they derived their authority from the popes. As the moon only reflected the light of the sun, so royal power derived its dignity and splendor from pontifical power.

A gifted diplomat and politician, he often played the rulers of Europe against one another, and gained more and more power for the papacy. Innocent used his power to compel the King of France to take back a wife he had divorced, by placing all of France under an "interdict" (which prohibited the entire nation from participating in Mass) until the horrified people persuaded their king to recant. But it wasn't just Europe that the popes sought to control.

The Crusades

It was after the death of Gregory VII, that the Western Church began to look South and East at the vast empire that the Muslims had created. The CRUSADES is a term which refers both to a series of military campaigns, and to an entire attitude of militancy in the church during these two centuries. They had several causes. The chief of these was to recapture from the infidel Muslims, the Holy Places in Jerusalem and other cities that had fallen into their hands. The Western Church, despite its rocky history with the Eastern Church, also still felt some obligation to help its Byzantine brethren. In coming to the aid of the Byzantine church, the Popes also hoped to repair, at least in part, the breach that had developed between the two halves of the Church. In addition, the feudal states had tied Europe's collective hands with incessant warfare, and the Popes saw the Crusades as an opportunity to end this fighting between Christians. Nothing is so quick to create peace, they thought, as a common enemy. The crusaders themselves had a variety of motives for fighting. Some did so out of a genuine, though perhaps misguided piety; many others did so out of greed for material gain and political power; and others fought out of simple bloodlust.

The First Crusade began in 1096 at the prompting of Pope Urban II. A new and powerful nation, the Osman Turks, had embraced Islam and were threatening Constantinople itself. The Emperor of the Byzantine Empire, realizing his dire situation, called on the Western church for help. Pope Urban answered the summons. In 1096, he preached a sermon in which he called on the people of Western Europe to take up arms and avenge the atrocities of the Muslim infidel and to rescue the holy land. The sermon ended with an impassioned promise, "Undertake this journey for the

²⁸ Quoted in Shelley, 185.

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remission of your sins, with the assurance of the imperishable glory of the Kingdom of Heaven!” If they would fight and die in this holy war, the Pope would grant them a plenary indulgence – all their sins would be forgiven and they would be guaranteed entrance into heaven. The people responded with fervent shouts of “God wills it!” With that, some 25,000 soldiers set out for Constantinople, pillaging and murdering many who were unfortunate enough to be in their path. After wintering in Constantinople, the Crusaders moved through Asia Minor and took the city of Antioch in 1098. In 1099, they managed also to recapture Jerusalem. One contemporary describes the slaughter that ensued:

Some of our men... cut off the heads of their enemies; others shot them with arrows, so that they fell from the towers; others tortured them longer by casting them into the flames... It was necessary to pick one’s way over the bodies of men and horses. But these were small matters compared to what happened in the temple of Solomon [where]... men rode in blood up to their knees and bridal reins. Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies.²⁹

The idea that the Kingdom of God was to be an earthly kingdom, brought to fulfillment by the authority of the Popes and political power, had finally come to fruition. Jerusalem was placed under the rule of one titled the “King of Jerusalem,” while the Pope appointed several bishops and archbishops to the region. Few if any willing converts were made to Christianity from the Muslim people; many feigned faith in Christ only to spare their lives.

The victory was short-lived. By the end of the 12th century, the Muslims had been united under the leadership of a new and able ruler named Saladin, who is to this day a legendary figure in the Islamic world. Though a fierce warrior, Saladin also came to be known as a moderate statesman and an honorable combatant. In 1187, Saladin proclaimed a *jihad*, or holy war, against the Christians, and his forces soon recaptured Jerusalem itself.

In 1202, Innocent III, who as we’ve already noted would prove to be the most powerful pope of all time, called for another Crusade and another attempt to retake the Holy Land. The armies aimed at Egypt, where Saladin had his headquarters. In order to avoid the hardships of overland travel, the Crusaders chartered Venetian ships to carry them across the Mediterranean. Influenced by greedy Venetian merchants, the troops took a detour from their purported goal of defeating Muslims, and instead attacked Constantinople. In 1204, the Crusaders took the city.

“The soldiers were told that they might spend the next three days in pillage. The sack of Constantinople is unparalleled in history. For nine centuries, the great city had been the capital of Christian civilization. It was filled with works of art that had survived from ancient Greece and with the masterpieces of its own exquisite craftsmen... But the [Crusaders] were filled with a lust for destruction. They rushed in a howling mob down the streets and through the houses, snatching up everything that glittered and destroying whatever they could not carry, pausing only to murder or to rape, or to break open the wine-cellars for their refreshment.... Palaces and hovels alike were entered and wrecked. Wounded women and children lay dying in the streets. For three days, the ghastly scenes of pillage and bloodshed continued, till the huge and beautiful city was a shambles.... There was never a greater crime against humanity than the Fourth Crusade.”³⁰

Several other Crusades followed, though with little success. The Holy Roman Emperor managed to gain Jerusalem in 1229 by negotiation, but it fell to the Muslims once again in 1244 and would remain in their possession until the 20th century.

²⁹ Quoted in Bruce Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 189. Note: this followed 250 years of Muslim attacks.

³⁰ Steven Runciman, quoted in Mark Noll, *Turning Points*, 141.

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All in all, the Crusades failed to achieve any of their goals. However, the Crusading attitude ingrained itself deep into the minds of Europeans. Crusades were launched against Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula, against heretical sects, and even against fellow Christians whom the Pope deemed hostile. Innocent also instituted the INQUISITION, which represented the crusading attitude turned towards Christendom. It empowered church authorities to “inquire” into the orthodoxy of suspected heretics, and to take coercive and often severe measures, including torture and execution, against anyone who could not prove their innocence. The Inquisition was employed inconsistently and sporadically, often depending on the whims of ruler and region. Its most notorious manifestation was the Spanish Inquisition of the late 15th century. The Crusades left other legacies as well, such as further enhancing the power of the papacy. They also had the unintended result of exposing western Christendom to Muslim scholarship, which in turn revived Aristotelian philosophy and deeply influenced thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas.

How should we as Christians today regard the Crusades? After all, they are frequently invoked by non-Christians as a favorite example proving the alleged hypocrisy and pretensions of Christianity. We should be mindful of a few points.

First, the Crusades left hardly anyone blameless, Christian or Muslim. Let us not forget that it was in one sense the Muslims who had first initiated the conflict by invading and conquering the Holy Land in the name of Islam. European Christendom only sought to recover what they regarded as their rightful land. Likewise, the Crusades did not cause a 1,000-year resentment by the Islamic world toward the West – as the renowned scholar Bernard Lewis has pointed out, Islamic history texts paid hardly any notice to the Crusades until the 19th century; they have been “recovered” recently as a purported grievance.

Second, because we understand human nature to be sinful, we should not be surprised at the wrongs or even evil sometimes committed in the name of our faith. Our identity is rooted in Christ, not in the past actions of other Christians.

Third, we should see the Crusades in the context of the many other problems plaguing the Medieval Church – corruption, confusion over church and state, and especially confusion over how we are saved – not by our efforts, no matter how strenuous, but by God’s grace.

Whither Christendom? Monks and popes

Christendom continued to experience periodic efforts at reform during these centuries, most often led not by popes, but by monks in monasteries. The most important of these orders were the Cluniacs, the Cistercians, and the Franciscans. The Cluniacs, founded in 910 with a grant of property by a duke guilt-ridden over murdering his brother, had a unique charter that kept them completely free from lay control. Cluniac monasteries, emphasizing separation from the world and independence, spread at a rapid pace and soon became quite wealthy in their own right. In a perpetual theme, this wealth soon led the Cluniacs to corruption, and to calls for a new monastic order.

In 1098, the Cistercians were founded, in large part as “anti-Cluniacs.” Cistercians, not surprisingly, emphasized simplicity, poverty, manual labor instead of scholarship, and private prayer over corporate. Some of their writings remain with us to this day, such as the hymn “O Sacred Head Now Wounded.” Cistercians also expanded at an astounding rate: from 5 monasteries in 1119, to 350 in 1150, to 647 houses in 1250. The most eminent Cistercian monk and perhaps the most famous church figure of his day, was BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX (1090-1153). Bernard served as a sort of spiritual director for much of Europe. His powers of persuasion were so compelling that it was said that mothers hid their sons, and wives their husbands, when Bernard came recruiting for his monasteries. He wrote “On Loving God,” which argued that the end of human life is love of God, whom we should love “for God Himself” and “without limits.”

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Bernard's influence extended long after his death. John Calvin, for example, held him in very high regard. Finally, in 1209, Francis of Assisi founded the Franciscans, who took Cistercian frugality one step further by renouncing all worldly possessions. His order also experienced rapid growth, as new monks responded to his emphasis on God's goodness and mercy, and Christ's perfect humanity. As the Franciscans grew, Francis himself eventually renounced control of the order and went into seclusion.

Despite these recurring attempts at reform, the papacy continued its quest for worldly power, and so eventually came to be controlled by the power it sought to wield. After Innocent's death, the papacy declined into weakness and chaos, and was so dominated by the King of France, that he succeeded in moving the papacy to Avignon, a period later known as the Babylonian Captivity. Eventually, there were simultaneously three separate popes, each backed by various European rulers, each denouncing the others. Though this SCHISM was finally healed in 1414 by the election of a new, fourth pope, the damage had been done. By 1500, the popes were seen as greedy, ambitious, power players in European politics. One contemporary quipped, "The popes are supposed to feed Christ's sheep, not fleece them." The high tide ushered in by Gregory VII and Innocent III would never return.

Roads To The Reformation

By 1500, several historical streams had converged that made conditions ripe for the Reformation of the 16th century. The monastic revival, the moral decline of the Papacy, and the evolving political atmosphere in Europe, would all contribute. Another stream that flowed into this river was the beginning of an intellectual movement known as SCHOLASTICISM. The goal of the scholastics was to ascertain the relation of faith and reason. They often employed Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle in this task. In one historical irony, Crusaders had encountered the work of Muslim scholars in studying and translating Aristotle, and had brought this recovered learning back to Europe.

One of the most important of the scholastics was ANSELM, who lived from 1033 to 1109. Anselm was the Archbishop of Canterbury, an able administrator and a skilled theologian. Strongly influenced by Plato, Anselm held that faith must inform reason. "I believe, in order that I may understand," he declared. He developed the renowned "ontological" argument for the existence of God. As Anselm put it, God is "that than which no greater can be conceived" and whose non-existence would be inconceivable. After all, "if a man's mind could conceive anything better than [God], the creature would rise above the Creator and judge him, which is absurd."

He distrusted human senses, and rather urged taking the presupposition of God's existence as a foundation for studying other realms. Perhaps his greatest work was "Why God became Man," in which he connected Christ's Incarnation with his atoning death. Anselm emphasized that our sin had so offended a perfectly holy God, that no human effort could ever pay our penalty – it could only be paid by the death on the cross of the perfect God-Man, Jesus Christ.

Scholasticism reached its peak in THOMAS AQUINAS. Born into a wealthy Italian family in 1225, the young Thomas soon displayed a precocious gift for learning and a desire to enter a Dominican monastery. His horrified family strenuously tried to prevent this by tempting him with a prostitute, kidnapping him, and even offering to purchase for him the position of Archbishop of Naples. None of this availed, and Thomas followed his calling by pursuing studies in Paris, followed by a life of teaching there and in Italy. Aquinas used primarily Aristotelian philosophy to discuss the truths of Christianity. Unlike Anselm, Aquinas often took human senses and reason as a starting point, and believed that by working backwards from there, much could be ascertained about God. He developed the "First Cause" argument for the existence of God, contending that everything that existed needed to be caused by something and come from somewhere. Working backwards to its logical origin, this led to God as the original "prime mover" or "first cause" behind

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everything else in existence. He believed that since both revelation and nature were made by the same God, faith and reason were in no way contradictory to one another. Aquinas also developed the notion of “natural law,” which holds that moral rules instituted by God can be known by human reason without special revelation, and be obeyed without special grace. More than anyone else in all the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas provided Christianity with a firm intellectual base, and gave reason a place within the Christian faith.

Over time, Aquinas’ optimism about human reason and human nature, which he himself had inherited from earlier Roman Catholic tradition, was developed by subsequent theologians into the notion of JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE through man’s cooperation with God. Some of the leading teachers of this theology were the German Nominalists. So for example, Gabriel Biel taught that “God does not deny his grace to those who do what is in them.”³¹ According to the Nominalists, human nature was such that it was possible, *without the aid of grace*, to love God perfectly, if even for just a moment. In this act, by “doing one’s very best”, it was possible to earn what Biel called a congruent merit, that is, “it was possible for a sinner to have some claim on God, even to demand certain things from God, on the basis of one’s own natural abilities and good works.”³² It was Biel that Luther studied as a young theology student in Erfurt, and through whom he came to understand the theology of Thomas Aquinas.

Therefore, on the one hand, because of Aquinas’ writings about the relation of reason and faith, the church was better able to interact with a new movement appearing in European universities about this time— HUMANISM, which would play a major role in bringing about the Reformation. On the other hand, because of Aquinas’ optimism about human nature (an optimism developed even further by the Nominalist theologians), Luther would eventually be driven, first to despair, and then to the gospel of JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE, and thus bring about, finally, a true Reformation of the church.

Conclusion

Efforts such as the Crusades, and measures taken to give more power to the papacy, not only failed, but they also revealed the inadequacy and error of locating the kingdom of God too close to earth – and of putting it too much in the hands of human works. The church in crisis needed to recover a sense of God’s sovereignty, and of God’s grace. It needed a REFORMATION.

³¹ David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (2nd ed.), 37.

³² Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 66.

5. The High Middle Ages, 950-1500

6. Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, 1483-1546

“...we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.” Gal 2:16

Introduction

What accounts for Luther’s enduring appeal? You may recall that two classes ago we considered the question of history and time, how hundreds of years may elapse with little of apparent importance occurring, punctuated by very brief periods of momentous change. The early 16th century is one of those times. No matter what they may think of his religious beliefs, scholars are united in regarding Luther as one of the most consequential figures in world history. The revolution that he inspired led to a fundamental re-ordering of society, the rise of the modern nation-state, a new conception of human liberty, of the family, and great advances in the arts, literature, and learning. Luther’s greatest significance, however, for his day and for our day, is in his answer to the most important question any person will ever ask: “What must I do to be saved?”

In this, Luther led the way in recovering the biblical gospel, the good news of Christ that we are saved from our sins by God’s grace through faith, and not by our own effort.

Background

Developments in the church in the two centuries preceding Luther help illuminate the crisis he provoked. The church had long been straying from its biblical roots, and Luther was not the first to protest against these errors. While the fifteenth century witnessed the great flowering of arts, philosophy, literature, and commerce known as the RENAISSANCE, sadly the church remained stagnant and corrupt. The Crusades of the 12th and 13th centuries, which represented two centuries of iniquitous conduct by the Church outside of Europe, may have been a low point, but in their aftermath, the situation became even worse. The 14th and 15th centuries saw rampant corruption and abuse within the Church. The papacy degenerated into bitter feuding and bizarre conflicts that saw at times two or even three men all claiming to be the true pope. Desperate for funds to maintain their own power and military campaigns, many popes, cardinals, and bishops deliberately kept many low-ranking church positions vacant. They used this practice, known as “absenteeism,” because the money from the people’s offerings would be sent directly to the pope, filling his coffers while depriving the people of pastoral care. Moreover, in an abuse known as “simony” (after Simon the Sorcerer, who in Acts 8:18-24 tries to buy spiritual authority from Peter), many church officials would sell positions of church authority to the highest bidder. Many popes and other church officers also kept concubines and fathered illegitimate children, flouting the celibacy requirement. By 1500, clerical concubinage was so common, that it became a recognized system, taxed by the church.

The corruption of the papacy reached its depths under Pope Alexander VI, who reigned from 1492 to 1503. One scholar describes Alexander as “a rake whom [even] Catholic historians regard as an unspeakable disgrace.”³³ This pope fathered at least seven children by four different mistresses, and rarely if ever denied himself any earthly pleasures. Well aware of his venality, the people of the day said that “Alexander is ready to sell the keys, the altars, and even Christ himself. He is within his rights, since he bought them.”³⁴

Mired in this rampant corruption, the church failed to protect and promote the true Gospel. Superstition and idolatry crept in, as the common people were encouraged to venerate dubious “relics” of saints, including purported splinters and nails from the Cross, and even pieces of bone

³³ Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press 1952), 17.

³⁴ Quoted in Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, vol. 1* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco 1984), 373.

and hair from the apostles. Historian Roland Bainton describes one German prince's collection of indulgences:

The collection included one tooth of St. Jerome, of St. Chrysostom four pieces, of St. Bernard six, and of St. Augustine four; of Our Lady four hairs, three pieces of her cloak, four from her girdle, and seven from the veil sprinkled with the blood of Christ. The relics of Christ included one piece from his swaddling clothes, thirteen from his crib, one wisp of straw, one piece of the gold brought by the Wise Men and three of the myrrh, one strand of Jesus' beard, one of the nails driven into his hands, one piece of bread eaten at the Last Supper, one piece of the stone on which Jesus stood to ascend into heaven, and one twig of Moses' burning bush.³⁵

These relics offered more than just sentimental value. Church leaders taught – and the people believed – that viewing or even owning these relics, along with purchasing indulgences, could provide relief from the penalties of sin.

The selling of indulgences consolidated many of these problems into one loathsome practice. An indulgence was the Church's remission of works of penance to atone for a particular sin – or sometimes sins. To support this idea, church leaders developed the notion that Christ and the saints had built up a treasury of surplus merit that could be transferred by the church to the people, and purchasing indulgences provided this merit to the people. Some believed that indulgences would only apply to earthly penalties for sins, while many others held that indulgences would reduce the time spent in purgatory, and still others believed the most powerful indulgences would guarantee salvation. For example, Pope Urban II offered a plenary indulgence – covering all sins committed – to the first crusaders. A man named Tetzel, perhaps the most successful and notorious peddler of indulgences in Luther's day, summed up the principle in a pithy jingle: “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs.”

Not surprisingly, the sale of indulgences brought fabulous wealth to the church. Besides leading the people astray spiritually, the increasing costs of indulgences placed severe financial hardship on these sinners who were desperate for salvation.

At its worst, the church's malfeasance and the abuse of pastoral authority by many clerics resembled that condemned by God in Ezekiel 34:2-3, 10:

“Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock... Thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I shall demand my sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I shall deliver my flock from their mouth.’”

This should remind us of the tremendous importance of godly, biblical leadership in the church – of the very high standards that God holds our pastors and elders to in matters of both character and doctrine, and also of our responsibility to support them, pray for them, and in turn make sure that they remain true to the Bible.

By this time, almost everyone realized the need for reform in the church, but how to do it? Time and again, new popes would take office promising improvements, but to no avail. They would either be frustrated by the entrenched corruption, or fall prey to it themselves. Others hoped that reform could come through convening church councils to cultivate agreement and spur action; but these failed as well.

Meanwhile, two other voices arose to challenge the church – not only for its corrupt practices, but for its erroneous doctrines.

³⁵ Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Penguin 1995), 53.

Pre-Reformation

JOHN WYCLIFFE

In the late 14th century, an Oxford professor and English government official named John Wycliffe grew frustrated with the divisions in the papacy, which was at the time contested by two rival popes. Wycliffe argued that since God ordains authority, those in leadership should follow the example of Christ as humble servants, not greedy overlords. Furthermore, influenced by reading Augustine, Wycliffe held that Christ's true church is not necessarily the pope and his hierarchy. Rather, the real Body of Christ consists of those elected by God unto salvation. This teaching had powerful implications. *First*, Wycliffe came to believe that the pope and many other church leaders were probably reprobate. *Second*, because all true believers comprised the church, it followed that they should be able to read the Bible in their own language, in order to know God's will for themselves and for the church. He and his friends, Nicholas Hereford and John Purvery, translated the Latin Vulgate Bible into English. *Finally*, Wycliffe declared transubstantiation in the Lord's Supper to be false. Transubstantiation, which had only been declared an official doctrine of the church in the 13th century, held that the bread and wine actually become transformed into the body and blood of Christ. Wycliffe found this irrational and unbiblical. And while he held that Christ was physically present in the elements, they also retained their natural substance of bread and wine.

Though not formally excommunicated, Wycliffe soon found himself out of favor with church authorities. He retired to the margins of English society, followed by his death in 1384. His followers, known as Lollards,³⁶ eagerly began to spread his teachings, as well as copies of English Bibles, throughout the land. Though many Lollards were put to death for their beliefs, they took Wycliffe's writings as far as Bohemia, or present-day Czechoslovakia.

JOHN HUSS

Wycliffe's teachings found an eager audience in a Bohemian priest known as John Huss, who in 1402 became rector of the University of Prague. Huss's original concern was moral. Disgusted by the degenerate church authorities, he sought to restore Christian leadership to its former ideals. Influenced by Wycliffe, Huss came to believe that only God's elect people comprised the true universal church, and that the Bible provided the supreme authority by which all Christians are to be guided and judged – including the pope. Huss also warned his people against the widespread superstitions of the day, worship of images and relics, and misplaced belief in false miracles.

About this time, the antipope John XXIII (not to be confused with the modern pope of the same name), hoping to expand his power, proclaimed a crusade against Naples. He decided to finance it by selling indulgences. Huss believed that only God can forgive sins, and that attempting to profit off God's prerogative was profoundly wrong. He protested against the Pope's cynical move. In response, the Pope excommunicated Huss. A sympathetic emperor, Sigismund, then invited Huss to defend himself before the upcoming COUNCIL OF CONSTANCE IN 1414. Though promised safe passage, Huss was arrested upon his arrival. In July 1415, he was burned at the stake when he refused to recant his beliefs. As he was being tied to the stake, Huss prayed aloud "Lord Jesus, it is for you that I patiently endure this cruel death. I pray you to have mercy on my enemies." After he died, Huss's outraged followers vowed to carry on his legacy, and pockets of Hussites persisted throughout Europe for the next century, until the actions of an obscure German monk named Luther brought them new hope.

³⁶ *Lollard* was a derogatory nickname given to Wycliffe's followers. Many were without an academic background; or if educated, it was only in English, not Greek or Latin. It comes from a word that means a mumbler, or mutterer.

The Protestant Reformation

By the early 1500s, then, Europe was a vibrant, troubled, tumultuous, unstable place. On the one hand, the Renaissance brought great advances in culture, commerce, learning, and scholarship. New inventions like the printing press, combined with discoveries of old books, to expand dramatically the understanding of the past. On the other hand, too many people were deprived of the Bible in their own language, or the literacy to read it; they were mired in superstition, believing more in their own works of magic and merit than God's work in Christ; and they were oppressed by a decadent clergy. They remained ill-equipped to answer that pressing question: "What must I do to be saved?"

The stage for reformation was set. Onto it walked the most unlikely of figures: a monk with a hammer, a manifesto, and a mission.

Martin Luther, 1483-1546

Born in Germany on November 10, 1483, Luther was a precocious young boy; his father early on planned for him to attend the university to become a lawyer. From his youth, Luther was deeply religious. He grew up under church teaching, and spent most of his early years in mortal fear of divine judgment and the devil in hell. When he was 22, he found himself caught in a thunderstorm and was thrown to the ground by a bolt of lightning. In a fit of terror, Luther cried out, "St. Anne help me! I will become a monk!" He knew of no better way to protect himself from the Evil One than to abandon the study of law and enter a monastery.

Luther soon thereafter joined a monastery in Wittenberg, Germany and began the long road toward mortification of his sin and fitness for the kingdom of heaven. Once in the monastery, Luther became a "monk's monk," devoting himself constantly to the most rigorous forms of prayer, fasting, and work. Through all his efforts to earn God's favor, however, Luther never escaped the paralyzing fear that had plagued him his entire life. Luther tried all of the remedies that were recommended by the Church and his superiors at the monastery. He attended mass, venerated saints and relics, and even made a pilgrimage to Rome, where he climbed the steps of Pilate's judgment seat, kissing every step for good measure as he went. None of these prescriptions seemed to work. Luther also tried to perform penance for his sins, but he was convinced that no amount of penance could make amends. Also, he was convinced that even if he could perform penance and contrition for all the sins in his mind, there were countless sins that he did not know, indeed that he could not know. Luther was convinced that God was an awful judge waiting to damn him. His superior counseled him to find solace in Christ, but even Christ seemed too terrible to contemplate.

What a contrast this presents with our day and age. As one witty commentator (Irving Kristol) put it, "When Americans sin, we quickly forgive ourselves." We are Christians living in an age of self-fulfillment and self-esteem. We affirm ourselves for our own virtues, and blame others for our failings. We have much to learn from Luther's misery over his sin, his terror at God's righteousness, and his desperation to find forgiveness.

Luther's supervising priest wisely encouraged him to become a professor of the Bible at the university, which Luther took up with characteristic vigor. His first project was to teach the Psalms, which he did by systematically working through them in numerical order. When he reached Psalm 22, he seized on the statement, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Luther understood this to be the cry of Jesus on the cross. How could this be? Christ forsaken? The perfect, righteous judge sharing in the penalties of mankind? But Christ, Luther knew, was without sin, without cause to be punished. So it must be that God made him who was without sin to be sin for us, to take our sin and be treated as if it were his own! This realization of God sending Christ to be our substitute, to bear the penalty of death that we deserved, shook Luther to the core. The anguished, guilt-ridden young monk now had a profound sense of God's forgiveness – not of

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working to merit salvation, but of free, unmerited forgiveness. This understanding that salvation came not by works of penance, but by faith alone in the crucified savior, was further confirmed as Luther studied more and more in the New Testament — most notably, the book of Romans. Here it should be stressed that Luther and the other reformers did not see themselves as innovators, developing a new type of theology. They only sought to call the Church back to its *roots*, to the theology of early church fathers like Augustine, and most especially, to the Bible.

Luther would only later comprehend just how radical this recovery of the Gospel was. Now he faced the immediate challenge of trying to reconcile his understanding of salvation as a free gift of God's grace, with the church's practice of selling indulgences. The problem of indulgences had only grown worse. Pope Leo X, as corrupt and decadent as many of his predecessors, wanted to build an opulent new cathedral named after St. Peter. He commissioned a new round of indulgences to be sold to pay for the construction. In Luther's mind, this could not stand. On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed a series of 95 propositions to the door of the castle-church in Wittenberg. These "95 Theses," as they quickly came to be known, made two major points. *First*, if the pope truly has such control over purgatory and can reduce the length of time there through indulgences, then why doesn't he just release everyone from the wretched place? *Second*, and more importantly, Luther held that remorse for sins is not a bad thing. One should not seek to escape it by gathering indulgences, whether through paying money or visiting shrines. In fact, it is precisely this contrition that leads one to trust in Christ.

The 95 Theses provoked an immediate and dramatic response. All of Germany became convulsed by the controversy. Luther found his cause being taken up by other scholars (known as "humanists"), who shared both his concerns about the corruptions of the church and his affinity for original source texts, in this case the Bible. With the help of the printing press, Luther's 95 Theses were circulated throughout Germany, and made it even to the chamber of Pope Leo X. In 1518, Luther was summoned to appear before a Diet in the city of Augsburg to answer charges of heresy. Luther refused to recant; he declared that the pope and church councils could err.

He had only just begun. In 1520 Luther published a series of books and tracts attacking the pope and elaborating on his positions. The most inflammatory and consequential of these was titled *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. In it, Luther argued that the papacy was the kingdom of Babylon that had dragged the church into captivity, just as the children of Israel had been exiled in Babylon centuries earlier. He also affirmed that only baptism and communion as true sacraments instituted by Christ in the New Testament; he denied that the other five sacraments administered by the Roman Catholic Church (confirmation, confession, marriage, ordination, and last rites) were sacraments at all. If anything, he saw them as superstitions, manipulated by a corrupt church claiming that only its practices could transfer grace and mediate between God and man. As Luther pointed out, the effectiveness of the sacraments depended finally not on the *church* administering them, but on the *faith* of the recipient. In other words, communion is only true communion if the person receiving it truly believes in Christ — not because the elements themselves have been mystically transformed by the priest. The sacraments were God's gift to His people — not magic powers controlled by corrupt church authorities.

Here was the most severe challenge medieval Catholicism had ever faced. It had fought wars with Islam over territory, and had conflicts with European emperors over the relationship between civil and church authority. But now the very core of the Church's authority had been denied. If the church could not control the application of God's grace through its various sacraments, then how would people trust it, or even continue to support it?

Not surprisingly, *The Babylonian Captivity* caught the attention of a distressed Pope Leo X, who issued a bull (or written mandate) *Exsurge Domine*. The declaration began, "Arise O Lord, and judge Your cause! A wild boar has invaded Your vineyard!" The bull gave Luther sixty days to submit to the Pope. On the final day, Luther celebrated the expiration of the deadline by burning

the bull and a set of writings that supported papal claims. By this time, Emperor Charles V decided to enter the controversy. He summoned Luther to appear before the Diet at Worms on April 17, 1521. Upon arriving, Luther was presented with a pile of his books and commanded to renounce them. After asking for some time to consider the matter, Luther reappeared before the Diet and gave his reply.

Since Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will give an answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God, I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.

As one scholar has said, “with these words, Protestantism was born.” And it was born on the foundation of the Bible as the supreme and final authority.³⁷

Luther’s doctrine was condemned, but he was given forty days to return home. After that, anyone could hand him over to the authorities to be burned. Unbeknownst to Luther, his prince, Frederick the Wise, had made plans to protect Luther. On his way home, Luther was kidnapped and taken to Frederick’s castle at Wartburg, there to spend the next year in hiding. Even though struggling with depression, Luther managed to be extraordinarily prolific. While at Wartburg, he wrote many significant works, including a German translation of the Bible that is still celebrated today for its precision and elegance of language.

Back in Wittenberg, Luther’s followers carried out concrete reforms of the church based on Luther’s teachings. On Christmas Day, 1521, one of these ministers held a mass after the new fashion – in plain clothes, with no mention of sacrifice, and in the German tongue. For the first time in their lives, the people heard in their own language the words, “This is my body!” At this mass, the host was actually handed to the people instead of being placed on their tongues. In Wittenberg, priests and monks began to marry, and Luther himself followed suit in 1525 when, appropriately enough, this former monk married Katharine, a former nun.

From 1517 to 1525, in the words of one scholar, Luther was “both the most revered and the most hated man in Europe.” Over the next two decades, until he died in 1546, Luther kept a lower profile, and continued to pastor and write prolifically – essays, sermons, and even hymns. He engaged in numerous theological debates with the leading thinkers of the day. For example, he carried on a lengthy discussion with the humanist scholar Erasmus, over the nature of human freedom and the effects of our sin on our inability to choose God on our own. These essays have been collected in a marvelous book, *The Bondage of the Will*, which is still in print.

Luther also struggled to manage the momentous changes that he had unleashed, changes that he had not envisioned when he nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg door. He did not hesitate to viciously attack those whom he thought took the reforms too far, to revolution. For instance, many German peasants regarded Luther as a folk hero of sorts. Inspired by his example of standing up to authority, these peasants started a violent rebellion against the landowners and rulers. A horrified Luther called on these peasants to cease and desist. When they refused, he wrote an angry essay called *Against the Murderous and Thieving Hordes of Peasants*, in which he argued that the peasants’ revolt should be put down by violent force. Later, he wrote some particularly harsh and unfortunate condemnations of the Jews, and called for them to be driven out of the land. Though Luther seems to have been upset by reports that Jews were trying to persuade Christians to abandon the faith, his words nonetheless left a bitter taste in a land where anti-Semitism would have a particularly tragic and wicked history.

³⁷ Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 1997), 154.

Meanwhile, the theological principles of the Reformation spread rapidly through Europe. In the next two weeks we will look particularly at their effects in Switzerland and England. Christianity, Europe, and the world would never again be the same.

“THE MEASURE OF THE MAN”

How should we evaluate Luther today? He was the first to admit that he was far from perfect. Contentious, impetuous, prone to violent mood swings, and not always correct, he left a legacy that is hardly untarnished. The church soon degenerated into countless divisions, and Europe descended into horrific religious wars. But on the things that mattered most, Luther was profoundly correct, profoundly gifted, and profoundly important.

Roland Bainton, Luther’s most eminent biographer, noted that Luther accomplished in Germany, all by himself, what in England took *many* leaders, including William Tyndale on Bible translation, Bishop Thomas Cranmer on liturgy, Bishop Hugh Latimer on preaching, Isaac Watts on hymn-writing, and several generations of theologians besides. “Genius” is a word grossly over-used today, but it certainly applies to Luther. The church would not see anyone as gifted until Jonathan Edwards two hundred years later.

Luther’s greatest importance for us as Christians, comes in his theology. Luther understood the nature of God and the reality of grace in Christ, in a way that few others have. For Luther, the key was the Cross. In his words,

He deserves to be called a theologian... who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross... A theologian of *glory* calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the *cross* calls the thing what it actually is.³⁸

Luther saw the great temptation that had so corrupted the church of his day, and still entraps too many of us today: what he called the “theology of glory.” By this he meant a theology that glorifies human effort and human wisdom, and that does not glorify God. A theology of glory begins with man, with what man thinks he can do, thinks he wants, and how man can find his own personal fulfillment. This theology will prove horribly deceptive and utterly inadequate, since it denies the reality of our helplessness before God.

For Luther, this was all delusion. He was not interested in what we can “do” for God, but in what God in Christ has “done” for us. The “theology of the cross” summed up for Luther the great paradox that a perfect, righteous, and omnipotent God would make himself vulnerable to the point of powerlessness, to die a humiliating death that we deserved, all for the purpose of graciously redeeming His miserable, rebellious people. Luther’s “theology of the cross” does not disregard glory; it just gives the glory to God.

Bainton provides the best summary of Luther’s life:

The God of Luther, as of Moses, was the God who inhabits the storm clouds and rides on the wings of the wind. At his nod the earth trembles, and the people before him are as a drop in the bucket. He is a God of majesty and power, inscrutable, terrifying, devastating, and consuming in his anger. Yet the All-Terrible is the All-Merciful too. ‘As a father pities his children, so the Lord...’ But how shall we know this?

In Christ, only in Christ. In the Lord of life, born in the squalor of a cow stall and dying as a malefactor under the desertion and derision of men, crying unto God and receiving for answer only the trembling of the earth and the blinding of the sun, forsaken even by God — and in that

³⁸ Quoted in Noll, 167.

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hour taking to himself and annihilating our iniquity, trampling down the hosts of hell, and disclosing within the wrath of the All-Terrible, the love that will not let us go.³⁹

³⁹ Bainton, 302.

7. Zwingli, Calvin, and the Reformed Churches, 1500-1564

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” Exodus 20:2-3

One man does not a revolution make, or even a reformation. If the Protestant Reformation had been the product only of Luther’s brilliance and stubbornness, it would have been nothing more than a stand-off between a pugnacious monk and a corrupt pope — only remembered as a curious footnote to history. Yet the Reformation was much more. It was a clear movement of the hand of God in history, bringing different Christian leaders in different regions almost simultaneously to similar conclusions. Among them: God is sovereign in history and in salvation. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and not as a result of good works or superstitious ritual. The Bible is the supreme and final authority in matters of faith and life.

Luther’s insights were either shared or followed by many others across Europe. In different localities, however, the Reformation took on some different emphases. Church leaders grappled with the full implications of the recovered Gospel. What did this mean for the practice of Christian worship? For the relationship between the church and the world? Or, for that matter, the relationship between different churches?

Meanwhile, while this class will focus on two particularly significant leaders of the Reformation, we should not forget that the Reformation was most significant as a movement in the hearts and minds of countless people across Europe. In this, it was inseparable from — indeed, was inspired by and guided by — the Bible. And not just the Bible, but the Bible in the people’s own languages, spread rapidly by copies pouring off the recently invented printed presses. Between 1520 and 1530, the Bible was translated into German, French, and English, and given into the hands of eager people desperate to learn the will of God, through the Word of God.

The Reformation In Zurich

ULRICH ZWINGLI (1484-1531)

At the same time that Luther was locking horns with the Roman Catholic church, a similar struggle was ongoing in a small, newly constituted country halfway between Wittenberg and Rome — in Zurich. When we think of Switzerland today, we think of fine watches, tasty chocolates, and political neutrality. Switzerland’s national roots, however, deeply intertwine with the roots of the Reformation. For the new nation’s relative political autonomy also created a fertile environment for religious reform. If we take Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin to be the three leading Reformers, it is both remarkable and not coincidental, that the latter two conducted their reforms in Switzerland.

Born in 1484, Zwingli was a contemporary of Luther’s generation. He became ordained to the priesthood in 1506, and soon thereafter through study of Scripture, independently concluded that the Church was deeply corrupt, and that Church doctrine was incorrect in many areas. Zwingli felt strongly the influence of Wycliffe and Huss, as well as Erasmus, all of whom we looked at last week. Erasmus was particularly important for Zwingli, in that his methods of intellectual inquiry — which were to study carefully the original source texts, and avoid the distortions brought by tradition and ritual — pointed Zwingli away from the Catholic traditions and teachings he had inherited, and towards the source of Christian revelation: the Bible. By 1516 (the year before Luther posted his 95 Theses) Zwingli said that “led by the Word and Spirit of God, I saw the need to set aside all these [human teachings] and learn the doctrine of God direct from His own Word.” This was more than just a passing emotion; for Zwingli followed up by copying down in Greek all of Paul’s epistles, and then he memorized them.

Having realized that the Bible was the supreme authority, Zwingli appropriately sought to apply this to his life, and the life of the church. True reformation, after all, springs not from one man’s opinions, or even one social group’s frustrations, but from the Word of God. And so we can date

the beginnings of the Reformation in Zurich to New Year's Day, 1519, when Zwingli – already a very popular preacher among the people – commenced a series of expository sermons beginning in the first chapter of Matthew. He even preached through the genealogies as he began to work through the New Testament, chapter by chapter.

This new focus on the Bible and biblical doctrines soon brought tensions to a crisis, as Zwingli realized he could no longer stay in communion with the Roman Catholic church. The next year he renounced his salary from Rome, and in October 1522 he resigned his office as priest. The Zurich City Council immediately hired him to be the city's official preacher, reflecting Zwingli's widespread popularity and support. Here again we see the vitality of congregationalism; Zwingli himself acknowledged his support from the people, observing that "the common man adheres to the gospel, although his superiors want nothing of it."⁴⁰

Zwingli's – and Zurich's – final break with Rome came a few months later in early 1523. Zwingli sought to defend himself against the criticisms of the Catholic hierarchy by calling a special town council meeting. Here he presented his 67 Articles, theological points that he had composed to summarize his differences with Rome.

Zwingli declared that those 600 Christians who had gathered, were a legitimate church council; and he challenged the small delegation representing the local Catholic bishop, to refute any of his points. Again, here is a potent illustration of congregationalism: the Catholic authorities were aghast that Zwingli would believe this gathering of ordinary Christians, under the authority of the Bible alone, could be equal to an official church council led by the Pope, Cardinals, and Bishops. But Zwingli and the people of Zurich, who by now had been sitting under biblical preaching for four years, believed it was; and the council issued a decisive verdict in Zwingli's favor. This became known as the *First Zurich Disputation*. It marked a key moment in the Reformation; it vindicated Zwingli against the charge of heresy, and it produced the first Reformed confession of faith.

ZWINGLI'S DOCTRINE

Zwingli affirmed the core doctrines of the Reformation – salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on Scripture alone, and to the glory of God alone. From here, Zwingli focused in particular on the fundamental distinction, even the great divide, separating the Creator from His creation – separating God from man. It followed that Zwingli thought idolatry is the most fundamental and most heinous sin committed by humanity. For what is idolatry, but ascribing to creatures that which is due the Creator? At the core of Rome's errors, corruptions, and excesses, Zwingli sniffed the stench of idolatry. Appalled at the rampant superstition of his day, Zwingli sought to expunge all relics, icons, and other manner of idols from his churches and the lives of his people, and turn their worship to God in heaven alone. In the words of one scholar,

Thoughtless prayers, prescribed fasts, the bleached cowls and carefully shaved heads of the monks, holy days, incense, the burning of candles, the sprinkling of holy water, nun's prayers, priest's chatter, vigils, masses, and matins – this "whole rubbish heap of ceremonials" amounted to nothing but "tomfoolery." To depend upon them at all for salvation was like "placing ice blocks upon ice blocks."⁴¹

Zwingli did more than preach against these rituals and objects – he purged them. One distraught Catholic wrote to the Emperor in 1530, describing the condition of Zurich's churches after Zwingli's reforms: "The altars are destroyed and overthrown, the images of the saints and the paintings are burned or broken up and defaced... They no longer have churches but rather

⁴⁰ Quoted in Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 115.

⁴¹ Quoted in George, 131.

stables.”⁴² Zwingli wanted Christian worship to focus on the transcendent, living God in heaven – not on human creations or pale images.

Much as Luther and Zwingli agreed on the essentials of the Gospel and on the need to reform the church, they had some important differences. Perhaps most eminent was their dispute over the nature of the Lord’s supper. Luther had opposed the Catholic mass because he saw it as a *work* – as something we are required to do in order to gain favor with God. Thus, Luther still affirmed Christ’s physical presence in the Lord’s supper – though Luther did part ways with Rome in some important ways on communion, as we saw last week. Zwingli opposed the Catholic mass because he saw it as *idolatrous* – as a superstitious reverence for something in the place of Christ. Thus Zwingli differed with Luther and saw the Lord’s supper as only a symbol or memorial to Christ. This disagreement provoked a bitter dispute between the two. Zwingli wished Luther had kept quiet, so “we would not have been forced to swallow your loathsome stuff;” and Luther denounced Zwingli as “seven times more dangerous than when he was a papist.”⁴³ They met in 1529 for a famous debate that failed to resolve their differences; they parted in an unfortunate enmity that remained to their deaths.

Zwingli also differed with Luther over what could take place in Christian worship gatherings. While Luther allowed what the Bible did not prohibit, Zwingli rejected what the Bible did not prescribe. The “Regulative Principle,” as it came to be known, holds that church gatherings should only include those practices mandated by Scripture: prayer, Scripture readings, confessions of faith, singing of hymns and songs, the preaching of the word, baptism, and the Lord’s supper. One practical illustration of this difference came over organs. Luther loved them and found them a powerful addition to church music; whereas Zwingli, though an accomplished musician, removed the organ from his church.

Finally, Luther and Zwingli held somewhat different positions on the nature of the two kingdoms of man and of God. This arose again from their different fundamental concerns. As one scholar puts it, “Luther’s Reformation was born out of his tortuous quest... to answer the question: How can I be saved? ...Zwingli was more concerned with the social and political implications of reform. Zwingli’s central question was: How can *my people* be saved?”⁴⁴ As such, Zwingli believed in a much closer relationship between church and state, where both church and the civic community were almost united as one body and the kingdom of God brought nearer to earth. In his words, “the Christian man is nothing else but a faithful and good citizen; and the Christian city is nothing other than the Christian church.”⁴⁵ Luther thought only the magistrates could wield the sword; and that was to keep the peace, but not to defend the faith. Zwingli had no such compunctions. He was a passionate Swiss nationalist, so much so that as chaplain of the Zurich army, he took up armor and the sword in a war against the Catholic forces. On October 11, 1531, Zwingli suffered mortal wounds on the battlefield, and uttered his last words: “You may kill the body, but you cannot kill the soul.”

Zwingli’s followers in Zurich carried on his legacy, particularly the great theologian Heinrich Bullinger,⁴⁶ whose writings would have great influence on English Protestants who had fled to the Continent to escape the Catholic Queen Mary in their own land (Bloody Mary). These were the ancestors of the Puritans. We will consider them more next week. Meanwhile, Zwingli’s teachings also came to influence a young Frenchman beginning to have his own qualms about the Roman Catholic Church – John Calvin.

⁴² John Eck letter, quoted in George, 131.

⁴³ Quoted in George, 149.

⁴⁴ George, 132.

⁴⁵ Quoted in George, 134.

⁴⁶ Bullinger’s *Decades* was a Systematic Theology. He was also an author of the Second Helvetic Confession.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

France's recent mischief in matters of international relations has understandably soured many Americans towards our erstwhile ally. One often hears the question, "has any good thing come from France?" If nothing else, John Calvin's life should remind us that France has indeed made significant contributions to the world, and to the church.

Born in Noyon, France, in 1509, Calvin as a youth was deeply religious, serious, and moral. His father had originally intended that he study theology, but after having a falling out with the local Bishop, his father changed his mind and sent young Calvin to law school. Besides his legal studies, Calvin also steeped himself in classic works of philosophy and literature. Again, we see here the influence of humanism, with its emphasis on clear thinking, rigorous logic, and especially the original text sources. With this background, it naturally followed that Calvin, like his predecessors Luther and Zwingli, would be drawn to the Bible.

At some point later in his studies, Calvin experienced a rather sudden conversion in which "God subdued my heart to teachableness."⁴⁷ Soon after, he came under close scrutiny for his Protestant sympathies; King Francis I ordered his arrest for heresy. In 1535, to escape imprisonment, he fled to Basel, Switzerland. Basel was a haven for refugees at this time (e.g., Erasmus and Farel). It was there, at age 26, that Calvin published his first draft of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which was written as a defense to the man who had ordered his arrest, the King of France. The full title Calvin chose for this first edition of his classic work tells much of his heart: *The Institute of the Christian Religion, Containing almost the Whole Sum of Piety and Whatever It is Necessary to Know in the Doctrine of Salvation. A Work Very Well Worth Reading by All Persons Zealous for Piety, and Lately Published. A Preface to the Most Christian King of France, in Which this Book is Presented to Him as a Confession of Faith*. The "Institutes" became a bestseller as soon as it was released, and Calvin was to revise, expand, and republish the *Institutes* several times throughout his life, bringing it to its completed form in 1559 (which is the version we read today).

TO GENEVA

Basel was German speaking, so the young Frenchmen eventually decided to go to Strasburg, France. To evade arrest, Calvin chose a circuitous route that took him to Geneva for one night. Another Protestant preacher, William Farel, had already planted himself in Geneva and begun to agitate against Rome and for reform. In one scholar's vivid description, Farel arrived as "a refugee from France, a fiery red-bearded Elijah bellowing at the priests of Baal."⁴⁸ Just as Elijah had Elisha for a comrade and successor, Farel also realized his need of assistance, and he implored the visiting Calvin to stay and help reform Geneva's religious life. Convinced that his gifts and calling were more suited to a solitary life of quiet study and contemplation, Calvin resisted. Farel then cursed Calvin: "May God condemn your repose, and the calm you seek for study, if before such a great need you withdraw, and refuse your succor and help." Calvin later confessed that "these words shocked and broke me, and I desisted from the journey I had begun."⁴⁹ The young Frenchman stayed. Geneva – and the church worldwide – would never be the same.

Staying in Geneva meant diving into theological strife. During Calvin's first two years, he and Farel fought with the city government over whether the church was allowed to excommunicate unrepentant sinners. The city magistrates, unsympathetic with Calvin's desire for a pure church membership, found such church discipline too rigorous, so they expelled Calvin in 1538. This is a good reminder that good people are not always popular, and good ideas are not always embraced.

⁴⁷ Quoted in John McNeill, editor's introduction, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, li.

⁴⁸ Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, 118.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol.2, 65.

Many of the leading figures in church history have not only been persecuted by their enemies, but also rejected by their supposed friends. We must always be faithful to Scripture, even when doing so, is lonely or costly. Calvin and his faithful friend Farel then left for Strasburg. Calvin spent three very happy, productive years there, during which he married a widow and became father to her two children. In 1541, the Geneva authorities realized their mistake and invited Calvin back to Geneva. Initially reluctant to give up his idyllic life in Strasburg, a sense of duty and mission eventually compelled his return to Geneva, where he would stay for the rest of his life.

His first Sunday back in Geneva, after a three-year exile, Calvin ascended the pulpit at his old church, the cathedral of Saint Pierre. His listeners, fully expecting to hear a vindictive or self-righteous sermon gloating about his return, were surprised to hear Calvin instead open the Bible and simply resume expository preaching through the very text at which he had left off three years earlier. In this way, Calvin bore powerful witness to his own submission to the Word of God, resisting the temptation to distort it for his own petty purposes. He maintained a rigorous preaching schedule during his next 23 years in Geneva, preaching two sermons from the New Testament every Sunday, and one sermon from the Old Testament every day during the week, on alternate weeks. When not preaching or studying, Calvin kept a dizzying pace of pastoring, counseling, teaching, and corresponding with thousands of people ranging from kings and emperors to poor, imprisoned Protestants. He did all of this in the midst of acute physical suffering. Always of a frail constitution, towards the end of his life Calvin detailed a catalogue of his various ailments: arthritis, kidney stones, hemorrhoids, fever, nephritis, severe indigestion ("whatever nourishment I take sticks like paste to my stomach"), cholic, and ulcers. He rarely let these afflictions inhibit his ministry, even preaching his last sermon by being carried into the pulpit on his bed.⁵⁰

Under Calvin's pastorate in Geneva, every citizen was supposed to be under the moral discipline of the church. While Calvin only held the office of minister, and sought to preserve both the independence and the supremacy of the church, Church and State worked closely together to create a "Christian" city. Calvin became Geneva's dominant figure, influencing even education and commerce policies. Though Calvin and his fellow church leaders found themselves frequently at odds with the city council, he succeeded in part in forging a unified Christian community whose members were in good standing with both church and civil authorities. Meanwhile, Geneva became a haven for oppressed Protestants, and a training ground and center for the Reformation in Europe. Calvin did not confine his vision to Geneva. He sent out missionaries to spread the Gospel not only throughout Europe, but as far away as Brazil.

Cynics and critics are often quick to disparage Calvin for an unfortunate episode that took place during his tenure in Geneva. The Spanish physician and theological mischief-maker Michael Servetus had been stirring indignation throughout all of Europe for his denial of the Trinity. He was arrested upon his arrival in Geneva, tried, convicted, and burned at the stake. While today we rightly understand religious liberty and freedom of conscience to permit citizens to hold heretical beliefs, in the 16th century such notions were profoundly threatening to civil order. After all, how could one be a good citizen while denying God's truth? While it was the city council and not Calvin who ordered Servetus' execution, and while Calvin argued for the less painful death by beheading, Calvin did agree to the execution – just as almost every other Catholic and Protestant in Europe did. As one scholar reminds us, "Servetus would have expiated these heresies at the stake in Catholic France had he not escaped and paid the same penalty in Protestant Geneva."⁵¹ So while we should not defend Calvin in this regard, neither should we judge him by a historical standard that was not his own.

⁵⁰ George, 246.

⁵¹ Bainton, 136.

WRITINGS: INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION AND COMMENTARIES ON SCRIPTURE

To put him in context, Calvin should be appreciated as a second-generation reformer, after the first generation led by Luther and Zwingli. It was they who had recovered the Gospel, fought the battles, and broken decisively with Rome, laying the foundation for successors such as Calvin to refine, systematize, and further implement the reforms into a positive vision of the church and of the Christian life. *Calvin's Institutes* is widely recognized as the single most influential book of the Protestant Reformation, and one of the greatest theological works of all time. What he wrote about in the *Institutes*, he tried to live out in Geneva. Calvin also wrote renowned Commentaries on almost every book of the Bible, commentaries that are still both in print and in use by many scholars and pastors today. Again, Calvin paid more than just lip service to the Bible; he devoted himself to Scripture as God's revealed Word.

Calvin divided the *Institutes* into four parts or books, meant to follow the outline of the Apostles creed: I. The Knowledge of God the Creator; II. The Knowledge of God the Redeemer; III. The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ, Its Benefits and Effects; and IV. The External Means by Which God Invites Us into the Society of Christ.

Though Calvinism is often caricatured as focusing only on human sin and God's sovereignty in salvation, any fair reading of Calvin's seminal work will reveal a Christian profoundly concerned with declaring the whole counsel of God for the entire Christian life. Indeed, the *Institutes* begins with the question of the *knowledge of God* and the *knowledge of ourselves*, and how the two are connected, even inseparable. After all, observes Calvin, on the one hand, "no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God;" and on the other hand, "it is clear that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinize himself."⁵²

Notice Calvin's paramount concern here – it is not abstract theorizing about an impersonal deity; rather it is earnest grappling with the relationship between God and man. So if Luther's foundational question was "what must I do to be saved?" then Calvin's basic questions were two, and even more foundational: "Who am I? and, Who is God?" Here, Calvin showed an acute perception of human nature. He believed that all human beings had in them a "seed of religion," a need to worship something or someone. This leads either to *idolatry* and love and worship of the self, or else to *piety* and love and worship of God.

Again, Calvin's answer to this second question about the nature of God is often misunderstood. Though Calvin is widely and rightly known for his emphasis on the sovereignty of God, this does not give the full picture. For Calvin, God's sovereignty points to God's *majesty* and *glory*. In Calvin's words,

"Although God lacks nothing, still the principal aim He had in creating men was that His name might be glorified in them... And were this not so, what would become of the many evidences of Scripture which tell us that the sovereign aim of our salvation is the glory of God?"⁵³

Calvin saw God's glory manifest most vividly in Christ's work in securing our salvation. As our substitute who suffered the penalty of death that we deserved for our own sins, Christ served as the only sufficient Mediator between a holy God and sinful man. And those who by faith trusted in Christ for their salvation could be sure that God would hold them secure. This is why Calvin came to focus on God's election in salvation – not as a smug, self-satisfaction for arrogant or complacent Christians, but rather out of a pastoral concern, to assure anxious Christians of God's absolute reliability in saving them. And just who are the "elect"? Though this cannot be known with certainty or finality by mere humans here on earth, Calvin believed that three measures

⁵² *Institutes*, 1.1.1,2.

⁵³ Quoted in George, 202-203.

provided helpful guidance for discerning who is likely saved: participation in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, an upright moral life, and a public profession of faith.

Calvin's emphasis on God's glory and sovereignty in salvation led naturally to a great love for the church as Christ's body here on earth. Going beyond Luther's preoccupation with *justification*, Calvin also focused on *sanctification*, or the believer's responsibility, out of gratitude for God's grace, to then live a new and holy life. Here the church was key for Calvin, both as a help in sanctification and as a display to the world of God's glory in making a holy people. He distinguished between the INVISIBLE CHURCH, which included all people for all time who had been saved by Christ, and the VISIBLE CHURCH, which was the particular local manifestation of Christ's body. There was and would always be a tension between the invisible church, which consisted of all the elect and could only be known by God; and the visible church, those local congregations whose members usually included both believers and unbelievers. Calvin hoped for the visible church to mirror the invisible church as closely as possible. He identified two distinguishing marks of a true visible church: the right preaching of the Word and the right administration of the Sacraments. If these were followed faithfully, the Gospel would flourish.

Conclusion

By the time of Calvin's death in 1564, it had become clear that the Reformation was no mere passing fancy or local disturbance. It was a monumental era on several fronts, as a social upheaval, a political revolution, a scholarly renaissance, and most of all, a recovery of the Gospel. Nor was it confined to Luther's Wittenberg, Zwingli's Zurich, or Calvin's Geneva. The ideals and doctrines of the Reformation spread rapidly throughout Europe, sometimes taking root in fertile and welcoming fields, other times encountering severe resistance and violent persecution. Within decades, Reformed or Lutheran churches came to predominate in Switzerland, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, parts of France, and England and Scotland — which we will focus on next week. The Reformation also unleashed movements beyond its control and beyond the imagining of the original Reformers. Groups like the Anabaptists took certain Reformation insights even further (often to excess), separating from society and often from each other. Though these divisions and errors served as reminders of the persistence of sin, Christians then and now can join in rejoicing that God stayed faithful to His promises, proclaimed His Gospel, and preserved His people.

7. Zwingli, Calvin, and the Reformed Churches, 1500-1564

8. The English Reformation, 16th Century

“And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result...” Genesis 50:20

A notorious adulterer, lecher, and murderer started the Reformation in England. What are we to make of this? King Henry VIII rightly deserves history’s harsh judgment as one of England’s most reprehensible monarchs. He took multiple wives — the fortunate ones he merely dismissed and divorced, while two others were put to death. Yet this same scoundrel defied the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and laid the foundation for the Reformation to begin in the English Church.

As Christians, we do not need to shy away from these unsavory facts. Scripture and history bear numerous examples of God bringing good results out of humanity’s wicked actions. It is not for nothing that Romans 8:28 promises us that “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Look carefully — Paul does not say here that “all things *are* good” but that God causes “all things to *work* for good.” And so it is with our theme verse today, where Joseph points out to his brothers how their evil actions in selling him into slavery, were used by God to accomplish His good purposes. How liberating this is for us as Christians: we can condemn evil actions for what they are, while still trusting that the Lord’s sovereign work in history will prevail for good.

We will see the same thing today, as we consider how God used King Henry’s sinful actions to accomplish God’s righteous purposes.

We will also see the considerable costs of bringing reform to England, not least in human lives. Besides their *common faith* in the biblical God, many heroes of the English reformation shared a *common fate*: martyrdom. Tyndale, Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, and many others went to the stake for their convictions.

I should also comment on our timeline. As you may have noticed — in this week and in the two previous weeks — that our class has focused in on the momentous events of the Reformation in the 16th century. This focus comes in part from the apparent quickening of God’s action during this time in history. But this also marks a point of departure in our own timeline. Up until now our narrative has tried to cover the entirety of church history from the beginning through the 16th century. From this point, church history takes off in numerous directions. Our class will focus on those strands of history leading into our own particular tradition, and eventually into our own local church. Consider it as a “family tree” of sorts. Our church descends directly from the English Reformation, particularly English Puritanism.

England’s Own Reformation

The first thing to remember about the Reformation is that it did not spring entirely from Martin Luther. The Roman Catholic Church did not confine its corruptions and errors to Luther’s Germany; neither did movements for reform come only from Germany. Luther stands as a towering figure of singular importance, of course. But as we saw last week and will see again today, movements for reformation arose somewhat *independently*, somewhat *spontaneously*, and somewhat *simultaneously* in other areas of Europe. I qualify all of these with “somewhat” because nothing occurs in a vacuum; and Luther’s ideas did influence many other reformers. The Reformation represents a rare confluence of courageous Christians in several different lands all striving to recover the Gospel and reform the Church. They soon came to see that they were not alone. They then began to encourage each other, influence each other, often join together and sometimes split apart. Though the Reformation was not without its excesses and errors, I believe we can still see it as one of the clearest moments of the hand of God acting in human history — in places like Wittenberg, Zurich, Geneva — and England.

8. The English Reformation, 16th Century

As we saw a couple of weeks ago with John Wycliffe and his followers, the “Lollards,” the church in England had begun to experience murmurings of its own reform by the end of the 1300s. In this same century, the English parliament passed a series of laws intended to give the king authority over papal decisions in England. Though these measures were employed sporadically and with little effect, Henry VIII resurrected them two centuries later in his own feud with Rome.

Meanwhile, by the early 1500s, a small group of English theologians and pastors at Cambridge University began to discuss reforming the church. By 1520, these meetings gathered energy and urgency when this group encountered Luther’s writings. Though they were declared illegal, they had been filtering into England. The group gathered in a pub called the *White Horse Inn*. It soon became known throughout the city as “Little Germany” because the Luther aficionados met there. Future heroes of the English Reformation such as Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer and Tyndale all spent time together at Cambridge during these days, and likely frequented the White Horse Inn.

Two things should encourage us here. *First*, consider the legacy left by these Cambridge gatherings, which continues to this day. Reformed pastors of our churches stand in this noble tradition of Cambridge churchmen. *Second*, consider the fruit that the Lord often produces when believers gather together for a specific purpose. Church history bears countless examples of great movements of evangelism, intellectual life, or social reform, that grew out of small gatherings of Christians for prayer, fellowship, and discussion around a common purpose. This was true of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect, Lewis and Inklings, the Student Volunteer Movement, etc. We should think of ways that we might gather intentionally with a small group of believers, and “stimulate one another to...good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). The Lord does not necessarily call all of us to massive, world-changing revolutions. But it could be that we are called to think and pray deliberately with others about improving the tone of our workplace, sharing the Gospel in our neighborhood, studying a particular idea, or starting a small new ministry to those in need.

These same decades brought the further development of the English Bible, an effort led by William Tyndale. Tyndale received his degree from Magdalen College, Oxford; then he studied at Cambridge. He became convinced of the need for an accurate translation of the Scriptures into English from the original Hebrew and Greek. Not only had Wycliffe’s version of 120 years earlier been banned in England, but it was also imprecise or even inaccurate in some places, because it had been translated from the Latin Vulgate, which was the only version permitted by the Catholic Church. An inaccurate translation can pose serious theological problems. The most notorious example comes from the Vulgate’s rendering of Matthew 4:17, which has Jesus say, “Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” As both Luther and Tyndale discovered in the original Greek text, the most accurate translation of this is “Repent,” One can easily see how this one change in word had tremendous consequences. Believers learned that Christ offered forgiveness for those who “repent and believe,” rather than for those who try to atone for their sins by doing works of penance.

For such reasons, Tyndale realized that the people needed to read an accurate version of the Bible *in their own language*. The Church authorities forbade this, and so Tyndale sought exile on the European continent to do his translation, which he completed in 1525. By the standards of the day, his version was a model of accuracy and elegance, such that 100 years later the King James Version would use 90% of Tyndale’s text. Meanwhile, these English Bibles began to make their way back to England. They became so widely used that by 1537 Edward Fox, Catholic Bishop of Hereford, told his fellow priests:

Do not make yourselves the laughing-stock of the world; light has sprung up, and is scattering all the clouds. The lay people know the Scriptures better than many of us.

Tyndale paid the ultimate price for his efforts. An eminent historian describes this courageous man’s violent end, while he lived in exile in Belgium.

8. The English Reformation, 16th Century

“In May 1535 Tyndale...was tempted by the squalid betrayer Henry Phillips (who posed as one of his converts) to pass outside the immunity of the English House in Antwerp. At once he was seized by agents of the [Catholic crown] and imprisoned... After long disputations he was condemned in August 1536 for obstinate heresy; and the following October, strangled, his body being consigned to the flames.”⁵⁴

Amidst these efforts at reform, the English struggled with many of the same problems in the church that plagued Germany and elsewhere. Many priests and monks were licentious and corrupt, and neglected their religious duties. The reign of Cardinal Wolsey exacerbated these resentments. Appointed by the Pope, Wolsey held unprecedented powers in England, in both church and state. As one scholar describes it, Wolsey “combined in his own person the Church of England, the Church of Rome, and the Kingdom of England – for he was the Archbishop of York, a cardinal and legate of the pope, and chancellor of the realm.”⁵⁵ In our day, this is like the same man being Vice President of the United States, the Catholic Cardinal of Washington – and a pastor of our church. Wolsey could appoint or depose bishops, grant degrees in theology, arts and medicine, dispense with barriers to holy orders, and absolve a person from excommunication. The English recoiled from this spectacular display of authority, but even more from Wolsey’s opulent and indulgent lifestyle. As the most notorious symbol of Rome, Wolsey became the target for much of the anticlerical sentiment in the country.

The Reformation Of Henry VIII

Such was the situation when a frustrated English king began to experience serious marital problems... Henry VIII’s family complications went a long way back. He married Catherine when her first husband (Henry’s older brother) died. The family obtained a special dispensation from the Pope for Henry to marry his older brother’s widow, which was otherwise a violation of church law. The Pope granted permission for political advantage. But then Henry VIII and Catherine encountered problems. While they had five children, all but one died in infancy; only the infamous Mary survived. Though Henry had fathered an illegitimate son with one of his mistresses, he desperately wanted his queen to bear a son, in order to produce an heir to his throne.

He decided the solution was to divorce Catherine and marry instead Anne Boleyn, who had already caught Henry’s eye. He petitioned Rome to annul his marriage to Catherine. He argued that the former dispensation allowing them to marry in the first place was invalid, because it had violated the biblical command in Leviticus 20:21. The pope refused to grant the annulment, partly because of a reluctance to reverse the decision of his predecessor, and partly because the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who had invaded and captured Rome, also happened to be Catherine’s nephew; he did not want his aunt to be so disgraced. In 1528, frustrated that Cardinal Wolsey could not secure a better result from Rome, Henry had Parliament charge Wolsey with a slew of offences. Wolsey surprisingly acquiesced and was deposed, giving Henry his first victory over church authorities. He desired more.

By this time, Henry had impregnated his mistress Anne Boleyn, and desperately needed an out. Parliament did its part by passing a resolution declaring that the pope had no power to grant the dispensation for Henry to marry Catherine in the first place. And Thomas Cranmer, the new Archbishop of Canterbury and head of the church in England, granted the annulment and agreed to perform the marriage ceremony of Henry and Anne Boleyn. Cranmer was a devout, godly man who had been part of the Cambridge crowd of reformers decades earlier. He had a much more noble agenda beyond helping a lascivious monarch. He saw this as an opportunity to free the English Church from the authority of Rome and to bring about much needed reform.

⁵⁴ A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press 1991), 95.

⁵⁵ Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the 16th Century* (Boston: Beacon Press 1952), 184.

8. The English Reformation, 16th Century

The next year in 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, a sweeping measure of tremendous consequence, which gave the king absolute authority over the English church. Here is just a portion of the Act, showing just how radical it was:

Our said sovereign Lord, his heirs and successors, kings of this realm, shall have full power and authority from time to time to visit, repress, redress, reform, order, correct, restrain, and amend all such errors, heresies, abuses, offences, contempts, and enormities, whatever they are, which by any manner, spiritual authority, or jurisdiction ought or may lawfully be reformed, repressed, ordered, redressed, corrected, restrained, or amended, most to the pleasure of Almighty God, the increase of virtue in Christ's religion, and for the conservation of the peace, unity, and tranquility of this realm.⁵⁶

The breach with Rome was complete. It was in response to this break with Rome that Sir Thomas More went to prison and eventually to his death for refusing to recognize Henry's claim to authority over the church, and legitimacy for his divorce.

What did this mean? This far into the Reformation, the people of England would have noticed little if any change in their worship or church life. Henry still considered himself a loyal Catholic on matters of doctrine; it was just Rome's final authority that he rejected. He continued to attend the Mass, and even earlier he had written a book against the theology of Martin Luther. Parliament passed further measures largely affirming Catholic doctrines. Henry's own marital misery continued until his own death in 1547, as he married and either divorced or killed four more wives. During these years, however, Archbishop Cranmer quietly and persistently placed English Bibles in the churches, helped appoint reform-minded bishops, and spread orthodox notions throughout the land. Note another difference: Luther initially sought *religious* reform of the Church from within, and only later broke with it over questions of doctrine. Henry sought to *politically* separate himself from the church, while still holding to its doctrines. Picture Henry building a road that led to Protestant orthodoxy, but not being willing to travel it himself. Instead, it was Bishop Cranmer who would travel that road...

The Reign Of Edward VI

After Henry's death, his 9-year-old son Edward assumed the crown. Now that the king was gone, and his Protestant-educated son had come to the throne, Protestantism could go forward. Though the boy-king seems to have held his faith sincerely, he was also quite young, and two adult advisors known as "Protectors" helped implement the shift toward Protestantism. Parliament repealed its laws establishing Catholic doctrine; many images were removed from the churches; and priests were allowed to marry. To help him better understand reformed doctrine, he invited Martin Bucer from Strasbourg – a man influenced by Luther and Calvin. He also invited Philip Melancthon, and Calvin himself, but neither came. He corresponded with Heinrich Bullinger of the Netherlands. In 1549 came the publication of the first edition of the Book of Common Prayer, written by Thomas Cranmer, aided by Peter Martyr (Vermigli) and others. With this book Cranmer began to move the Anglican Church away from Catholic doctrines on communion, continued by a second edition published in 1552. The "altar" was called "the table," "priests" were referred to as "ministers," and Christians were told in communion to "feed on [Christ] in your heart with faith by thanksgiving" – in contrast to the Roman view of transubstantiation, where the elements literally become the body and blood of Christ. The next year, Cranmer authored the 42 Articles, which would eventually, with some revisions, become the 39 Articles, the foundational confession for the Anglican Church. The six years of Edward's reign represent a time of tremendous flourishing for English Protestantism.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 1997), 178.

“Bloody Mary”

Times can quickly change. In 1553, the 16-year-old Edward died with no heir to his throne. According to the English historian and theologian J.C. Ryle, the young king’s dying prayer was “O Lord God, defend this realm from papistry, and maintain Your true religion.”⁵⁷ No doubt Edward knew that his half-sister Mary, the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, was next in line for the throne. This prospect horrified English Protestants, and for good reason. The Catholic Queen Mary I took the throne determined to restore Catholicism as the religion of the land by any means necessary. She soon embarked on a rampage that earned her the dubious nickname “Bloody Mary.”

Mary reigned for a little over five years, and did all she could to bring England back under the authority of the Pope. She had Parliament repeal all of the Edwardian laws, banished the Book of Common Prayer, restored the feast days of the saints, and ordered married clergy to dismiss their wives. In November 1554, Reginald Pole arrived in England as the new Archbishop of Canterbury and papal representative. Pole absolved England of schism and welcomed her back into the embrace of Rome. Pole also had a personal grudge against Protestants. Henry VIII had his mother Margaret executed, following the War of the Roses. Many Protestants, fearing reprisal for their refusal to submit to the Pope, fled to the Continent – many to Geneva, where Calvin taught.

We should reflect for a moment on the transience of earthly security. How suddenly the freedom and prosperity that Protestants enjoyed under Edward got snatched away, and how quickly trials came. In a matter of weeks, they found their world turned upside down. As Christians, we should always be thankful for the blessings of freedom, peace, and prosperity; yet we must hold them loosely and realize they may not last. This seems in part what Paul meant when he wrote in Philippians 4:11-13 “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

These words probably encouraged many English Protestants during the coming trials. Mary began her infamous burnings early in 1555, targeting faithful Protestants who would not recant. In all, some 300 people were executed at the Queen’s direction. Most of the martyrs were common people – farmers, smiths, and merchants. Some eminent church leaders went to the stake as well. Bishops Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer had been among the most famous and influential figures in bringing the reformed faith to England. Ridley was Bishop of London and a brilliant theological mind; Latimer was an extraordinary and beloved preacher. They soon incurred the wrath of Mary, who sentenced them to be burned together at the stake in Oxford on October 16, 1555. While imprisoned and pondering their awaiting fate, Latimer sent a moving letter to Ridley:

There is no remedy... but patience. Better it is to suffer what cruelty they will put upon us, than to incur God’s high indignation. Wherefore... be of good cheer in the Lord, with due consideration what he requires of you, and what he promises you. Our common enemy shall do no more than God will permit him. God is faithful, which will not suffer us to be tempted above our strength...

They kept their resolve until the very end. As the executioner tied Latimer and Ridley to the stake and brought the torch near, Latimer turned to his friend and uttered his last:

Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day, by God’s grace, light such a candle in England as I trust shall never be put out.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ J.C. Ryle, *Five English Reformers* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust 1999), 6.

⁵⁸ quoted in Ryle, 18.

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As heirs to this legacy of faith, may we be worthy of their example. The Martyrs' Memorial is a stone monument positioned just outside Balliol College, Oxford, England. It commemorates the 16th-century Oxford Martyrs.

Mary's murderous rampage was not yet through. Thomas Cranmer, the former Archbishop of Canterbury and father of English church reform, had been imprisoned for not swearing allegiance to Rome, and had watched his friends Ridley and Latimer go to the stake. Queen Mary may also have had a personal vendetta against Cranmer, as he had looked favorably on the annulment of her mother Catherine's marriage to Henry VIII. Not content to merely imprison or even martyr Cranmer, the Queen sought to make an example of this prominent leader by forcing him to recant his Protestant convictions. Under extreme duress and for uncertain reasons, Cranmer finally signed a recantation, which Mary's realm gleefully published and circulated throughout England. This reportedly caused great distress to many Protestants. This hardly spared the poor Bishop's life, however, as he still received a death sentence.

The old and courageous churchman was not yet through, however. Before his execution, which took place at St. Mary's Church in Oxford, just a stone's throw from where Ridley and Latimer had died, Cranmer was called on to speak. After confessing his own sins and weaknesses, he repented of his recantation:

[My words] were written contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart, and written for fear of death, to save my life if it might be... And forasmuch as I have written many things contrary to what I believe in my heart, my hand shall first be punished; for if I may come to the fire it shall first be burned. As for the Pope, I refuse him, for Christ's enemy and antichrist, with all his false doctrine.⁵⁹

His conscience clear and his honor restored, Cranmer turned to face his fate. As the flames crept towards him, he extended his offending hand and held it steady until the fire consumed it, crying out, "This hand, this hand!" This may be one of the few instances in church history where a Christian took literally Christ's warning in Matthew 5:30 that "if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell." As JC Ryle considered Cranmer's life, his great accomplishments and significant failings, Ryle concluded "nothing, in short, in all his life became him so well as the manner of his leaving it. Greatly he had sinned, but greatly he had repented."⁶⁰

Elizabeth I

This Catholic resurgence was dramatic, intense, and brief. A childless and unhappy Mary never enjoyed good health. She died in 1558, after a reign of just five years. In the wings waited Elizabeth, second daughter of Henry VIII and first of Anne Boleyn; she was Mary's half-sister. The Emperor Charles V on the continent had repeatedly urged Mary to have Elizabeth killed and thus removed as heir to the throne, but even Bloody Mary had not gone that far.

As Queen, Elizabeth moved immediately to reverse the policies of her sister. She seems to have adopted Protestantism as much from political expediency as from conviction; after all, if she embraced Catholicism, she would also have to concede that her own birth was illegitimate and her crown invalid, since her mother Anne Boleyn had only become queen after Henry successfully defied the Pope. But conviction may also have been present. Raised largely by her step-mother, Catherine Parr (Henry's last wife) in a warmly evangelical and humanist atmosphere, Elizabeth read the NT in Greek every day. And so, whatever the complex motivations, Elizabeth began to restore Protestantism to England. The Act of Supremacy was reenacted, the Pope repudiated, and

⁵⁹ Quoted in Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: Volume 2* (New York: Harper Collins 1985), 78.

⁶⁰ Ryle, 22.

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with the Act of Uniformity, Cranmer's Second Prayer Book was reinstalled as the standard for the English Church. Joyous Protestants began to return to England from their European exile.

The new Queen hesitated to take her Protestantism very far, however. Her main priority was restoring and maintaining national unity. She sought to create a theologically broad and inclusive national church, at least by the standards of the day. Her policies, known as the Elizabethan Settlement, sought to chart a "via media," or "middle way," between doctrinal questions — an ethos that characterizes much of Anglicanism to this day. Some scholars have described the church she encouraged as "Protestant in doctrine, Catholic in ritual," as it still included candles, priestly robes, kneeling during communion, etc.

During the earlier years of her almost half century reign, Elizabeth had some Catholics put to death for their dissent from the throne and loyalty to the Pope. In a sad commentary on human nature and the dark side of church history, that some Protestants saw fit to respond in kind to the persecution they had suffered at the hands of Catholics. Towards the end of her reign, Elizabeth and the remaining English Catholics seem to have agreed on distinguishing between their religious loyalty to the Pope, and their civil loyalty to their English Queen. This anticipated one of the Reformation's eventual legacies, the development of religious toleration. Later in the 16th century, some English Protestants sought to purify the Anglican Church and restore it more completely to its biblical roots. They were the Puritans; we will hear much more about them next week.

Conclusion

We considered at the beginning of our class the fact that God used an evil man, Henry VIII, to bring about a good result — reform in the English Church. We also see that the Lord allowed good men — Tyndale, Ridley, Latimer, Cranmer, and many others — to suffer evil, in order to reform the church. In both cases, the Lord of history accomplishes His eternal purposes. We, in turn, can best understand and appreciate this from an eternal perspective. Another martyr of the English Reformation put it best. While John Hooper was being led to the stake, an old friend approached him and begged him to recant his faith and thus spare his own life. The distraught friend reminded Hooper that "life was sweet, and death was bitter." The courageous Hooper held firm, responding to his friend that "eternal life was more sweet, and eternal death was more bitter."⁶¹

⁶¹ Quoted in Ryle, 12.

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“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” 1Pet 2:9-10

Introduction

What comes to mind when you hear the word “Puritan”?

One would be hard-pressed to come up with an American religious group more maligned today than the Puritans. I know that people have a lot of very negative stereotypes of the Puritans, so much so that “Puritan” has become not just an adjective, but almost an epithet. How many times have you heard someone dismissed as “Puritanical”? This is even how some of the more militant, austere forms of Islam are described today – “puritanical Muslims.” Such derogation of the Puritans is nothing new. Thomas Babington Macaulay, a great English historian in the first half of the 19th century, wrote that, “The Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.” H.L. Mencken, a journalist earlier this century for the Baltimore Sun said, “A Puritan was someone who feared that someone, somewhere, somehow, might be having fun.” And Garrison Keiler said that the Puritans came to America in the hopes of discovering greater restrictions than were permissible under English law. These are the stereotypes that people have of the Puritans. While there may be a little bit of justification in them, there is a lot that is misleading and there is a lot that you would never even know about them, if that’s all that you heard.

When we say “Puritans,” I mean a group of English people, many of them members of the clergy but many laypeople, who from 1550 to 1662 — roughly, from the time of the Reformation in England to the Restoration of the Monarchy — were intent on purifying the Church of England and calling it to a more biblical structure and vision. A good number of them eventually migrated to the New World, as Pilgrims, and helped to found our own nation.

Today as we focus on the Puritans, we will not do it entirely in our usual chronological manner. Rather, we will take a topical approach, looking at Puritan writings, Puritan thought, Puritan worship, etc. We are paying especial attention to the Puritans because their thought and practice remains so very influential in the life of our own church today.

The Puritan Story: Puritanism and the (on-going) Reformation

At the root of Puritanism is the Reformation. And at the core of the Reformation you find one simple idea. That is, that we are made right before God because of what Jesus Christ has done, and only by faith in what Christ has done. We cannot do enough good things to put us in God’s good graces, because we have sinned against Him; and those outward sins are simply manifesting what is a spiritual reality in our hearts. What Luther found, as a Roman Catholic monk, was a rediscovery that in the Bible, the righteousness that we finally have before God is *not our own*. It’s the righteousness of Jesus Christ, a righteousness that God Himself has supplied. This theology of JUSTIFICATION is at the absolute center of the Puritan movement.

So when we talk about the Puritan movement, we’re essentially talking about the Reformation in England. And as this message of justification by faith alone was recovered, Scripture began to move to the central place in the Christian life. As you know, for a thousand years Scripture had been displaced from the role it previously had in the Christian life. The Roman Catholic Church had deliberately forbidden Scripture from being translated into native languages. So one of the first things that Luther did was to translate the Bible into German. That, of course, was what Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale, and others did — they translated it into English.

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Once the Bible was put into the hands of the people, almost immediately, preaching became the absolute center and focal point of worship. What the Puritans rediscovered was that the church was an assembly of God's people, who are regenerated by his Spirit, who are bound together by His Spirit, and sustained by His Word. So very practically, the service became different. Under Roman Catholicism, the mass and infant baptism — not the preaching of God's Word — were understood to be the *means* of salvation. You could see this in the architecture. The baptismal font was at the door of the church, and the altar on which the mass was offered was in the center, while the pulpit was pushed off to the side. Sermons, if there were any at all, lasted little more than five or ten minutes. But all of this changed with the Reformation. All of a sudden, the Word of God, preached and read in a language the people could understand, was placed front and center.

This also rearranged what the pastor was to be. Rather than simply someone who performed the mass, and perhaps read a pre-printed sermon, he was to be a preacher and a shepherd of God's flock. So the Puritans were intensely concerned with the issue of training men for the ministry, and ensuring that only men who were gifted and trained would serve as pastors and preachers. They had their work cut out for them. In the mid-sixteenth century, the Bishop Hooper surveyed the ministers in his diocese, and asked the following questions:

- How many commandments are there?
- Where are they to be found?
- Repeat them.
- What are the articles of the Christian faith?
- Prove them from Scripture.
- Repeat the Lord's Prayer.
- How do you know it is the Lord's?
- Where is it to be found?

Out of the 311 clergy examined, only 50 could answer these questions, and 19 of those did it poorly. Ten did not know the Lord's Prayer, and eight could not answer a single question. These were the *ministers*.

In Puritanism, Christian ministers and lay people alike were reforming something that was already established — the church of England. Planting a new church was unheard-of. There were established churches. Even after the turmoil of the English Reformation, when Queen Elizabeth took the throne, the need for further reform was great. Elizabeth had to deal with the start of the Puritan movement. Many of the Puritans pushed for a thorough reform. They wanted to abolish the bishops and have presbyteries sitting around deciding questions. Some of the more radical ones even wanted to have congregationalism, where the congregation gets to make those decisions itself. During this time, many of our modern denominations were taking shape intellectually. It's where you first hear of *Baptists*.

Elizabeth died in 1603. The Puritans were really excited. This was like the millennium. Now something big was about to happen, because Elizabeth never married, and had no kids. Her nearest relative was James VI of Scotland. Scotland, in the Reformation, had gone Presbyterian under John Knox, who studied under Calvin in Geneva. The Scots hadn't stuck with the bishops, in a kind of half-way Reformation, like England had. No, they'd gone whole-hog. They'd gone Presbyterian. They'd gotten rid of all the bishops; they had pastors who were there serving as collective councils — and this made the Puritans in England excited. They couldn't believe that they were about to get a Presbyterian king. They were so delighted, that when the messenger rode from London to Edinburgh to tell James he was king, they met him at the Scottish border as he travelled south. They had a whole delegation ready with signatures of hundreds of ministers asking him to do various things, like a new translation of the Bible, from which we got the King James version.

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But one of their other requests was that he would eliminate the episcopacy, to which James gave a terse and famous reply. “No bishops, no king.” He knew immediately that to imperil the bishoprics was to imperil the monarchy, and he’d have none of it. So they actually got a very difficult enemy in James I. He said, “I’ve been in Scotland, and I know what it is like to be ruled by every Tom, Dick, and Harry.” *That’s where that phrase comes from.* Because James, as king in Scotland, had to be submitted to the session of a local church, as a local church, and that infuriated him. So he was not about to visit this same malady on the kingdom he had come into.

He is James *Stuart*, so this is called the Stuart period. He rules from 1603-1625. He was a Calvinist in his soteriology — so in that sense he was friendly to the Puritans, friendlier than Elizabeth had been. One contemporary called him “the greatest fool in Christendom.” So he was just a very strange man. When James died, his son Charles I became king.

Charles was morally a better man than James, but he was a little empty upstairs, we think. Charles had a Roman Catholic wife, in order to have an alliance with one of the European countries. He wanted things to be more tolerant, so he started favoring the Arminians. Now, this was seen as heresy under James and Elizabeth. It would be like helping the Pope. So he started raising to prominence, bishops who denied the sovereignty of God, and denied justification by faith alone; this started causing great unrest in the Church of England. It’s in this period that you see the rise of separatism and congregationalism. Separatism is the idea that we need to separate from this corrupt church and go start our own. Congregationalism is a kind of church government where you don’t have a group of pastors meeting to tell you what to do, or a bishop, let alone the Bishop of Rome — you each in your own congregation have to figure it out for yourself. Many people began to move towards this. As Charles I got stronger in his opposition to their teachings, he made William Laud the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was a great opponent of the Puritans. He began to “harry them out of the land,” as Charles put it. He began to find Puritans and get rid of them. Many fled to America.

When our pastor gave tours at Cambridge, he would point to Emmanuel College and say, “This is where America came from.” New England was founded by about 130 ministers, 100 of whom came from Cambridge and 30 from Oxford. So New England was a very Cambridge kind of movement. There were sixteen ancient colleges at Cambridge. Of its 100 ministers, 33 came from Emmanuel college. There were more from that one college than from all the Oxford colleges put together. One of them was a young man converted under Richard Sibbes’ ministry [author of the Bruised Reed]. His name was John Cotton. Cotton became pastor of the church in Boston, in Lincolnshire, England. Cotton had a remarkably fruitful ministry there. Young men training at Cambridge would be sent to Boston to learn how to be a minister from Cotton. Finally in 1633, it became too much. He was being silenced by the bishop for this and that, and fined for this and that. Friends were saying, “Go to New England. Set up a model church.” A bunch of his parishioners had gone there several years earlier, naming their settlement in his honor, “Boston.” They named the town across the river, “Cambridge,” after the place they’d been to school. Then they brought Cotton over to be the pastor in Boston, the *new* one. That’s essentially where America came from. And it was fed by the intolerance of Charles, as he kept harrying the best ones out of the land.

The Presbyterian party in Parliament arose to oppose Charles and his Royalist party. This English Civil War was a bloody and brutal conflict. The Parliamentarians won. The Puritan preachers, in concert, denounced Charles I from their pulpits. In 1649, under Puritan Gen. Oliver Cromwell — after two years of negotiations and scattered battles — Charles I was beheaded. What followed was the Commonwealth, rule by the House of Commons. This horrified Europe — a people rising up and killing their own king, and then ruling themselves. It was unheard of, the most ghastly thing since the fall of Rome. People couldn’t imagine it. Yet it was fanned on by some of the Puritans, like Samuel Rutherford in Scotland. He wrote in his book *Lex Rex*, “the law is king.” He said that the law finally, and not a man, is king. We see in this the seeds of our own American Revolution.

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Thomas Macaulay, who wrote the bit about bear-baiting, also wrote, “The Puritan really is two different men – the one all self-abasement, penitence, gratitude, passion, the other proud, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He prostrated himself in the dust before his Maker, but he set his foot on the neck of his king.” Well, that’s true. Many academic careers have been made by showing that American democracy comes from Puritanism, from the impulse that we finally answer to God and God alone. Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector of England; he ruled until 1658 when he died. He was succeeded by one of his sons, Richard, who quickly lost control of things. So the Parliament invited Charles II to be king. He began his own process of trying to harry the Puritans (who’d grown like mushrooms under Cromwell) out of the land again.

Charles II was publicly Protestant, but probably secretly Roman Catholic. When the monarchy was restored, Parliament was quite harsh, passing laws that said that every minister must agree to the Book of Common Prayer – newly adapted to Catholic worship – or you must resign your pulpit by St. Bartholomew’s Day 1662. It was payback for the Puritans’ opposition to Charles I. On that day in August, 2000 pastors out of 6000 in England were forced to resign from their positions – fully one third of the pastors. They did this at great risk and personal cost to themselves and their families. They had no welfare program. They were forbidden to be within five miles of anywhere they’d pastored, they couldn’t be around the people who knew them. The legislation was very cruel and very effective.

But overnight, this “Great Ejection” created three denominations – what are called “the three old denominations” – Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians. Many of those ejected ministers, though they had been in parish churches, actually had Baptist, Presbyterian, or Congregational convictions. They now became the seeds of those illegal denominational churches being planted throughout England in the 1660s-1680s.

After Charles II died, James II came to the throne. But being openly Roman Catholic, Parliament was afraid James II would bring England back to Rome. So they invited William and Mary of Orange, from the Netherlands, to take the throne in what was called the Glorious Revolution; it was bloodless conquest. Once there, they declared religious toleration for everybody, in the English Bill of Rights of 1688.

J.I. Packer once wondered why Puritanism ceased. He suggested it was because they didn’t have control of the universities. Since the 1660’s, people who objected to the Book of Common Prayer could not be educated at Cambridge or Oxford. That was true until the 1870’s. So Spurgeon, for example, couldn’t have a college education. As a reform movement in England, Puritanism ceased in 1662 because they were all kicked out of the church. However, as a ministerial and church movement, it lived on in America for many decades more.

By the early 1600s, many Puritans in England came to realize that not only were their hopes to reform the English church being thwarted, but their movement faced serious threats to its very existence. They saw only one good alternative. They would retreat from the corruptions of England, and establish their own model Christian community elsewhere. It would serve as an example to their English brethren of how the church ought to function. But where could this new community be built? Where could it be far enough removed from England to enjoy real freedom, and yet be near enough that their curious fellow Englishmen could observe and learn from their model commonwealth? The answer, of course, was America. And so began the “Great Migration,” the settlement of the New World. John Winthrop, the hardy leader of one of the earliest groups of Puritans, preached a landmark sermon to his people while they sailed on board their ship, the *Arbella*, to America. Winthrop described himself and his people as “a company professing ourselves fellow members of Christ.” He believed that “the Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways.” Yet Winthrop also invoked divine judgment on himself and his fellow Christians should they break their covenant with God.

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...we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.⁶²

Winthrop and the other Puritans did not intend to found an entirely new nation. They still considered themselves loyal Englishmen. They only sought to found a new Christian community as a model, first to their fellow Englishmen, and then to the rest of the world. Contrary to popular belief, they also did not smugly see themselves as assured of divine blessing and worldly success. Skeptics and cynics today like to yank the “city upon a hill” phrase out of context, and caricature these Puritans (and sometimes all Americans) as self-righteously assuming their own superiority. But note that immediately after describing their mission as a “city upon a hill,” Winthrop warned his people that if they were unfaithful to God, He would remove His blessing and cause their errand to fail. The whole world would still be watching the “city upon a hill,” but all the world would see the city collapsing miserably under God’s wrathful judgment. Such were the promises and peril that attended the first Puritan settlements in Massachusetts.

In 1620 the Pilgrims aboard the *Mayflower* landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts and settled there. The Pilgrims were not Puritans seeking reform. They were Separatists who had broken completely away from the Church of England. John Winthrop and his band of Puritans on the *Arbella* landed at Massachusetts Bay in 1630, settled there, and led the way for the other Puritans escaping England and spreading throughout New England. In 1636, a group of Massachusetts Bay colonists led by Thomas Hooker founded Hartford and Connecticut, south of the original settlement. Two years later, in 1638, another band led by John Davenport moved even farther south to found New Haven, Connecticut.

The English Civil War (1642-1651) and the Interregnum under Cromwell (1649-1660) actually saw something of a reverse migration back to England. But those days were soon over. The difficult Restoration, with its cruel and repressive laws, invigorated Puritan migration to the Colonies.

On the blank slate of American soil, the Puritans were able to pursue their vision for the church and the Christian life. Central to this vision was the covenant, the driving concept behind almost all of Puritan life. Churches, families, government, and society as a whole, were organized around the idea of the COVENANT. Their special covenant with God meant that God had specially blessed them and providentially guided them to create a Christian society. The Puritans preached often about the covenant, and used it to exhort their congregations. If disaster struck, it was a warning that the people were not living up to their covenant obligations. A fast day would be quickly declared, and the people would be exhorted to return and ask God’s forgiveness for their sin. And such trials were hardly rare – life in early New England was more severe than we can imagine. Disease, hunger, natural disaster, and Indian attacks were constant threats.

At first, this vision of the covenant people of God, setting up a city on a hill, was pursued with both vigor and faithfulness. After all, the vast majority of those early immigrants were converted, and fleeing religious persecution. But as one generation succeeded the next, as prosperity replaced adversity, and as the practice of infant baptism, which incorporated the children of believers into the community on the basis of their parents’ faith, worked itself out, *compromise with the world infected this grand experiment*.

Perhaps the best example of such compromise is the controversy known as the “Halfway Covenant” in which not just the children, but the grandchildren of church members were baptized and brought into the church, even though their parents had never been converted. Another example of this liberalizing tendency can be seen in America’s first universities. In 1636, the American Puritans founded Harvard, in order to educate their ministers and provide for the next

⁶² John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity,” in Mark Noll and Roger Lundin, eds., *Voices From the Heart: Four Centuries of American Piety* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1987), 4-6.

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generation of churches and believers. By 1701, Harvard had drifted so far from its puritan foundation, that a group of Puritans in Connecticut got together to found Yale, as a conservative and orthodox alternative. And it's a product of this college whom we will consider next week: Jonathan Edwards, the last of the puritans.

Well, if Puritanism as a reform and ministerial movement, had all but died by 1700, it lived on as a movement of distinctly evangelical piety. And it continues to live on through Puritan writings and theology.

Puritan Writings

If you've read anything by the Puritans, you know that they can be difficult to read. The fact that we like the Puritans doesn't mean that I think they are the easiest thing out there to read, and that within two minutes of opening one their books you'll be enchanted by them. No, that's not true. The Puritans wrote exhaustingly, as well as exhaustively, about various situations. When they wrote about a subject, you might think after reading a couple pages, "Gosh, he must be about finished with this idea." And then he begins again, but looking at the same subject from just a slightly different perspective. They do this again and again. You might find five or ten pages of meditating on what it means for Christ to be our priest. What they're doing, if you are patient with them, is taking an idea like a gem, and seeing the sunlight coming through it refracted. And after they've looked at it as long as you think they can, they turn it ever so slightly, and continue to look at it.⁶³ So reading the Puritans is very meditative. If you're used to looking at something quickly and putting it down, you'll hate Puritan books. But if you're the kind of person who might hate them, then you *need* to read them — because it shows that you probably have a life that's too intent on quantity and not enough on quality. It means you probably haven't thought enough about what it means for you to be alive, and draw breath and take up space and try to live for the glory of God. Many of the Puritan things you'd read were originally written as sermons. So one way to overcome the barrier of the words, is to read them out loud. People have found this very helpful. If you just read them aloud, you'll begin to understand things that may have seemed a little obscure before.

Not all Puritan writings are sermons, commentaries, or theological discourses, of course. Certainly the most famous Puritan book is a story: *Pilgrim's Progress*. It was written by John Bunyan, who went to neither Cambridge nor Oxford. He was a Baptist; he was also a tinker; he repaired pots. He wrote his great works in prison. Charles II once heard Bunyan preaching, looked at John Owen, and asked why everyone went to hear a tinker preach. Owen replied, "Sire, I would give all my learning to be able to preach one sermon like that man." Bunyan was a gifted preacher. He also wrote *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* and *The Holy War*.

Puritan Spirituality And Theology

J.I. Packer has suggested several areas where the Puritans can instruct Christians today, and these reasons are grounded in Puritan theology.

First, he points to the "integration of their daily lives," in which everything they thought, said, and did was seen in a sense as *sacred*, and to be done to the glory of God.

Second, he highlights "the quality of their spiritual experience." Puritans meditated constantly on Scripture and on the Lord, and engaged in intense self-examination in light of these truths.

Third, "their passion for effective action... They were men of action in the pure Reformed mold — crusading activists without a jot of self-reliance; workers for God who depended utterly on God to work in and through them, and who always gave God the praise for anything they did that, in retrospect, seemed to them to have been right."

⁶³ For example, William Gurnall's, *The Christian in Complete Armor*.

9. The Puritans of the 17th Century

Fourth, he admires their “program for family stability,” pointing to the love and commitment they emphasized between husband and wife, the passion and devotion to the spiritual nurture of their children.

Fifth, the Puritan “sense of human worth,” of humanity’s dignity from creation in the image of God.

And *sixth*, their “ideal of church renewal,” in which they sought God’s reforming and reviving work through the local church.

Packer sums up many of these points, and Puritanism itself, with this:

“Puritanism was essentially a movement for church reform, pastoral renewal and evangelism, and spiritual revival; and in addition...it was a world-view, a total Christian philosophy.”⁶⁴

Puritans are often associated with the sovereignty of God, and that’s fair. They’re quite certain about who God is. But even those opposed to them believed that. It was very much a Puritan view of the world. You have dueling battles between Presbyterian Puritans and the Archbishop of Canterbury, both of whom believe in double predestination – they’re both as Calvinistic as you can get – they simply disagree over church *government*. It’s not until the next century that we see the beginning of Arminianism, which says that we’re not quite as bad as the reformers are saying, and that we can cooperate with the grace of God. Another phrase is “covenant theology,” the idea that God makes a covenant with us, not in the sense of a contract that either side can break, but that God unilaterally sets down in His grace; He takes a person and covenants with him. There’s much to go into there, but it’s also a theme in Puritan theology.

One of the great things to find in the Puritans was the warm way they encompassed the Christian life, but very thoughtfully. Very often we think of the head and heart as being quite separate. But I have to say that in my experience it’s not often the case. It sometimes is, but the people I would take as models are the people whose head and heart have fed each other in their entire devotion to God. That’s what you see in the Puritans. The Puritans seem to have been a race of such people.

D. Martyn Lloyd Jones is not a Puritan, but he is like them. Spurgeon is called the last of the Puritans. Also Edwards, who we can just barely call a Puritan – but he’s in the 1700’s and he’s in New England. If you want to see something of the wonderful pastoral ministry that a Puritan can have, get a copy of Richard Sibbes’ *The Bruised Reed and the Smoking Flax*. It’s a series of sermons he preached in London in 1613 or 1614. He preached to a bunch of lawyers at Gray’s Inn, the most prominent law school/condominium in London. His sermons were wonderfully pastoral, helping us to understand justification, and what that means in our own life and experience with God. That would be a good example of the affective nature of much of Puritan preaching.

They were also doctors of the soul in this matter of assurance. They were good at raising the question, “Are you really a Christian?” That had never been asked a hundred years earlier; if you were baptized, you were Christian. There were Christian nations – France, England, Germany. The Reformation and Puritan theology undermined that. It said that you could be baptized and be a hypocrite. It’s nothing external. You have to look in your own heart to see “signs of grace revealed,” to use some of their own language. How can you tell if God’s Holy Spirit is actually at work in your life? The Puritans were masters at this. They preached very severely, and they preached very tenderly. William Perkins, one of the most prolific and profound of the Puritans, in his book *The Art of Prophecy*, writes that the preacher should always keep in mind the different kinds of hearers that he has. He lays out sixteen different kinds of people – including old saints, those who need encouragement, hypocrites, and backslidden Christians. He has a wonderful psychology. A Puritan pastor had to know, like a golfer, what to hit the ball with. You

⁶⁴ J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 23-28.

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give different kinds of Christians different things to read. It's a matter of knowing where someone is, and sizing them up.

What we know is that these men, with all their faults, were good models for us in their zeal for Scripture, their understanding of the Gospel, and their commitment to thoroughly reforming their own lives and the life of the church — all to the glory of God. I'll close with a description of the Puritans tendered by one of their contemporaries, John Gere, in his work, *The Character of an Old English Puritan, or Nonconformist*:

“He was...[a man foursquare], immoveable in all times, so that they who in the midst of many opinions have lost the view of true religion, may return to him and there find it.”

PURITAN VIEW OF A CIVIL MAN:

"There was a type of man whom the Puritans never tired of denouncing. He was a good citizen, a man who obeyed the laws, carried out his social obligation, never injured others. The Puritans called him a "civil man," and admitted that he was "outwardly just, temperate, chaste, careful to follow his worldly business, will not hurt so much as his neighbor's dog, pays every man his own, and lives of his own; no drunkard, adulterer, or quarreller; loves to leave peaceably and quietly among his neighbors." This man, this paragon of social virtue, the Puritans said, was on his way to Hell, and their preachers continually reminded him of it."

— Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, pp.1

The Puritans are distinguished by their absolute passion for Scripture, their singular devotion to the study of it, and their submission to its every truth. Just one example of this is Matthew Henry's massive commentary on the entire Bible — still in print, and still one of the very best Scripture commentaries you will find.

10. Wide Awake in Colonial America

Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Revivalism

“Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” Psalm 85:6

The first settlers in America were not just devout Christians in Massachusetts. These same decades also saw English settlers founding new colonies further south, in Virginia. These first Virginians were motivated not by piety but by profits – while almost all of them were Anglican, and some were no doubt genuine believers, they were more interested in planting tobacco farms than in planting churches. So two separate and quite distinct communities began to emerge in the new world during the 17th century – the godly Puritans of Massachusetts and Connecticut, and the greedy Anglicans of Virginia [a caricature, of course, but one containing much truth]. Over time, these two separate religious communities, and others in the middle colonies, underwent dramatic changes through a series of revivals known as THE GREAT AWAKENING. It helped birth a more common American religious identity, and profoundly shaped modern evangelicalism.

Before church communities can be “awakened,” they first fall “asleep,” or at least decline in piety and devotion. Over time, this was the case with the Puritan experiment. In New England, the Puritans practiced infant baptism as a sign of initiation into the covenant community. Only the children of converted church members were to be baptized. While for the first generation or two, this posed no problem, it eventually led to a profound crisis in Puritan religious life, and life in New England in general. The Puritans who came across the Atlantic were almost all converted; and so there was no question about baptizing their children. When those children grew up, most of them still became members of the church; and so their children, too, were baptized. By the third generation, though, many of those baptized children had failed to become members of the church – they were never converted. But they themselves had been baptized, they argued, and were members of the covenant. Why should their children not be baptized? Some of the Puritans, trying to balance the need to keep the church a pure body of Christians with their desire to bring as many people as possible under the influence and authority of the church, proposed a solution that became known as the “Halfway Covenant.” Now, all those people who had been baptized as the children of believing parents, could present their *own* children for baptism – even though they themselves had never been converted, and were neither believers nor members of the church. This compromise caused a storm of controversy in New England. In 1662, a Synod sanctioned the Halfway Covenant, and the practice became widespread. This unfortunate compromise tended to blur rather than sharpen the distinction between the church and the world.

Brief mention should be given to the Salem witch trials of 1692, if only because this is often the only thing that many people know about Puritan America, and it leads to gross distortions of the Puritan image. The most important thing to emphasize about the Salem episode is what an aberration it was – such things rarely happened in Puritan New England. Executions for witchcraft were much more common in western Europe, a fact often forgotten today. Nevertheless, in 1692, a potent combination of factors led to the execution of 20 town residents for suspected witchcraft. These factors included political tension between village and town residents, fears of attack from nearby Indians and their French Catholic allies, communal suspicion of a few older women and a few adolescent girls, and overzealous town magistrates. This episode should not be glossed over, but neither should it be taken to represent Puritanism. Some Puritan leaders, disturbed at the Salem episode, denounced the spiritual “visions” that those who accused witches claimed to have, and trials for witchcraft soon died out.

Another cornerstone of Puritan America was education. Because of the great primacy they gave to the Word of God, Puritans had one of the highest literacy rates of any society on earth, then or now. They also saw the great need for educational institutions to train their ministers, and founded colleges almost as soon as they founded towns. Thus Harvard College was founded in

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1636, modeled on the charter of Cambridge's Immanuel College. Some decades after Harvard's founding, many Puritan leaders began to fear that Harvard was drifting into theological liberalism, and a new college was needed. In response to Harvard's near apostasy, some Connecticut Puritan leaders came together in 1701 to found Yale College. The student rules adopted for Yale College give some idea of the early character of this noble institution:

All scholars shall live religious, godly, and blameless lives according to the rules of God's word, diligently reading the holy scriptures the fountain of light and truth; and constantly attend upon all the duties of religion both in public and secret... Every student of this college shall in words and behavior show all due honor, respect, and reverence towards all their superiors... and shall in no case use any reproachful, reviling, disrespectful, or contumacious language...⁶⁵

Jonathan Edwards

One of Yale's earliest students was a precocious 13-year-old named Jonathan Edwards – soon to become perhaps the greatest mind America has ever produced. Edwards certainly reigns as America's premier theologian, one of our most innovative philosophers, and a stunningly advanced psychologist and natural scientist as well. His life and thought well illustrate much of the character of 18th century American Christianity.

He was born in 1703 in East Windsor, Connecticut, the son and grandson of pastors. Jonathan was a gifted young boy who spent much of his time wandering about in the fields outside the town and pondering the wonders of creation and its Creator. In 1716, Edwards entered Yale College, and graduated at the top of his class four years later. He stayed for his master's degree, and eventually returned for another year as a tutor. His student years at Yale were very fruitful intellectually and spiritually, as he immersed himself in studying Christian theology and Scripture, the ancient classics of Latin and Greek, the new Enlightenment science and philosophy of figures such as Sir Isaac Newton and John Locke. Edwards quickly understood some of the challenges that Enlightenment rationalism posed to historic Christian truth, and he endeavored – in many ways, successfully – to answer these challenges. He even adapted some of the positive insights of the Enlightenment to a defense of Christian orthodoxy. Also during these college years, Edwards continued to struggle with a conviction of his own sin, and doubts about God's grace and sovereignty in salvation. During his 18th year, he finally had a breakthrough. God impressed upon him emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, the assurance that he could have of salvation, and of God's perfect sovereignty in it. He read 1Timothy 1:17: "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen." It led Edwards to a profound new comprehension. After reading this passage, he wrote, "there came into my soul, as if it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine being – a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before." In some ways, Edwards would spend the rest of his life meditating, reflecting, and expanding on this sweet sense of the majesty, supremacy, and glory of God.

As intellectually and spiritually fruitful as Edwards' years at Yale were, they were impoverished relationally, as he failed to develop close friendships. Edwards' discipline, intensity, sternness and social awkwardness seem to have distanced him from his fellow students, as did the relative laxity and even rebellion of many young Yale men. In one letter to his father, an appalled Edwards reported on,

some monstrous impieties, and acts of immorality lately committed in the College, particularly stealing of hens, geese, turkeys, pigs, meat, wood, etc., unseasonable night-walking, breaking

⁶⁵ Quoted in Edwin Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America to the Civil War*, 204-205.

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people's windows, playing at cards, cursing, swearing, and damning, and using all manner of ill language, which never were at such a pitch in the College as they are now.⁶⁶

It seems many of the Yale students had not embraced the spirit of the regulations read earlier.

In 1726, Edwards was invited by the church at Northampton to be the associate pastor to the aging senior pastor – Edwards' grandfather – Solomon Stoddard. Stoddard was the unquestioned authority and most revered pastor of the Connecticut Valley. Outside Boston, the church at Northampton was the most prestigious in New England. Edwards served under his grandfather for three years, until Stoddard died in 1729. The young Edwards assumed the pastorate.

Edwards immersed himself in his pastoral duties with abandon. He would rise regularly at 4 or 5 in the morning, and spend 13 hours a day in his study – reading, writing numerous letters and essays, and above all, preparing his sermons – for he regarded the preaching of the Word as his most important duty to his congregation. His fame spread as his writings circulated and he gave the occasional guest sermon. He continued to be frustrated with his own town, however, as the young people of Northampton in particular seemed cold and indifferent to the things of the Lord. By 1731, however, he began to notice flickerings of spiritual interest. By 1734 it grew into a roaring fire of revival. Edwards wrote a letter to a friend describing the revival, which was soon published under the title *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. As Edwards described it:

A great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees and all ages; the noise amongst the dry bones waxed louder and louder. All other talk about spiritual and eternal things was soon thrown by; all the conversation in all companies and upon all occasions, was upon these things only, except so much as was necessary for people to carry on their ordinary secular business. Other discourse than about the things of religion would scarcely be tolerated in any company. The minds of people were wonderfully taken off from the world, which was treated amongst us as a thing of very little consequence.

Edwards also published one of his most important sermons during this time, titled *A Divine and Supernatural Light*. It reveals one of his primary concerns: to distill the essence of true Christian experience, and distinguish it from either mere knowledge or mere emotionalism. Here, Edwards explained that God communicates to people in an immediate way, beyond the reach of reason alone. The truly converted are given an entirely new sense to apprehend the things of God, a power to appreciate the beauty and excellency of Christ. This sense is not available to the unregenerate. In Edwards' famous illustration, it is the "difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness." Likewise, the "spiritually enlightened" person does not "merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart."⁶⁷ Under the faithful preaching of the Word, this new sense seemed to overtake many of the residents of Northampton and the surrounding towns, and many either came to faith for the first time, or else had their stagnant faith renewed.

Edwards saw life on earth as a colossal, cosmic struggle between God and the Devil. While assured of Christ's ultimate triumph, Edwards was also acutely aware of Satan's constant malevolence, and knew that the Evil One would resist any advances of the Gospel. It came as a shock (but not a surprise) then, when the revival came to an abrupt and tragic end. In June 1735, Joseph Hawley, Edwards' uncle and a prominent town member, became so distressed by his own sin, that driven to despair with doubts about his salvation, he cut his own throat and died. "*The news of this extraordinarily affected the minds of the people here,*" Edwards wrote. It also stunned and troubled the young pastor, who struggled to comprehend what he described as this "awful

⁶⁶ Quoted in George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 38-39.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Marsden, 156-157.

providence.” While Hawley’s suicide effectively ended the revival, Edwards kept on faithfully in his pastoral labors. Yet this tragic death always served as a reminder – and a warning – of the danger of godly revivals veering into ungodly excess and hysteria.

The Great Awakening(s)

The revival that Edwards saw among his congregation in Northampton anticipated an entire series of revivals that swept through the American colonies over the next decade. Though Edwards and his friend, the English evangelist George Whitefield, endure as the most famous of the Great Awakening preachers, they stood in the company of many others. The Tennent brothers – Gilbert, John, and William – and Samuel Davies, for example, were Presbyterian ministers whose preaching tours took them all over the colonies, in Gilbert Tennent’s case, leading as far north as Maine and as far south as Virginia. Tennent achieved great renown – or notoriety, depending on one’s perspective – for his 1740 sermon titled “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry,” in which he warned church members against sitting under pastors who had not experienced regeneration. Davies, for his part, focused much of his ministry on reaching black slaves with the Gospel. In an age that was sadly characterized by widespread racial prejudice, Davies was willing to treat blacks as equals, through such potent gestures as inviting them to share the communion table with whites; this testified to the unifying power of the Gospel.

Many of the Awakening preachers sought to bring their audiences to an unavoidable conviction of their own sin by describing in vivid detail, the terrors of hell. This often had the desired effect. Nathan Cole, a Connecticut farmer, wrote that after one revival, “hell-fire was almost always on my mind. And I have hundreds of times put my finger into my pipe when I have been smoking to feel how fire felt; and to see how my Body could bear to lie in Hell fire forever and ever.” And yet we should not caricature most of these sermons as offering only judgment and not grace, or only Law and no Gospel. Gilbert Tennent, for example, once reportedly interrupted an overly-harsh fellow preacher with these words of Gospel solace to the guilt-wracked and terrified audience: “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician?”⁶⁸

The revivals had certain things in common: itinerant preachers, rather simple messages based on the basic Gospel, appeals to human emotion as well as reason. Most importantly, substantial evidence exists that the revivals often brought strong increases in membership in local churches – surely one of the most important signs of true revival. Yet the revivals also produced somewhat different effects in different regions. In New England, the revivals broke apart the general dominance of the Congregational denomination, as many Congregational churches and pastors differed sharply over whether these fervent mass gatherings were good or bad things. This discord created room for new denominations such as Baptists, who in turn began to blossom in the previously staid pastures of New England church life. Unlike the fragmentation experienced in New England, churches in the mid-Atlantic colonies actually developed greater unity in the wake of the revivals. Previously divergent denominations came to find common ground around the common experience of revival and regeneration. And in the South, which until this time had been characterized by a formal, hierarchical, Anglican establishment, the revivals brought a more popular, more immediate religious experience for many people – leading them to question or even reject what they saw as the stifling stagnancy of the Anglican order. Finally, for many Christians throughout the colonies, the revivals produced the beginnings of a common national identity, based on a shared religious experience.

George Whitefield

There soon appeared in America another preacher who would eclipse Davies, the Tennents, and even Edwards in international prominence. He would come to be the most influential voice in the

⁶⁸ Both anecdotes quoted in James Hutson, *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic*, 27.

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Great Awakening. George Whitefield, the young Anglican evangelist, had been stirring vast multitudes in his native England to repent of their sins and trust in Christ alone for their salvation. Though educated at Oxford, where he was a good friend of fellow students John and Charles Wesley, Whitefield never approached Edwards in brilliance or in scholarship. What Whitefield did possess was an exceptional voice, a stunningly effective gift for dramatic presentation, and a tireless passion for proclaiming the Gospel to lost sinners. His early ministry in England had attracted much controversy. He repeatedly – and most often rightly – attacked many of England’s established Anglican ministers for being unconverted. Unregenerate ministers cannot be relied on to present the Gospel to their congregations. And so Whitefield caused further consternation by preaching to vast multitudes *not* in churches, but in the fields, public squares, and open markets all over England. He preached from a portable, folding stand that he would set up wherever he preached. Literally thousands of people at a time would flock to Whitefield’s sermons – on some occasions, as many as twenty or even thirty thousand people at once gathered to hear him. His great voice carried well in an era before amplification. While some came from curiosity, and most came out of spiritual hunger, at least a few came to cause trouble. One time, when he preached to a great multitude at a park in England, hecklers bombarded Whitefield with “stones, rotten eggs, and pieces of dead cat.”⁶⁹ Undaunted, he finished his sermon and saw many come to faith.

Whitefield first came to the New World in 1738 to found an orphanage in Georgia, a ministry that he supported to great fruitfulness throughout his life. He returned to America the next year and began a wildly successful preaching tour from Philadelphia down through the southern colonies. Whitefield emerged, without exaggeration, as America’s first celebrity. People traveled from miles and miles away to come hear him. Newspapers far and wide reported on his comings and goings, and carried regular entries from his journals. The evangelist made astute use of this publicity, desperate as he was to see as many people as possible hear the Gospel.

Among the many who read with excitement of Whitefield’s evangelistic tour, was Edwards. In 1740 he wrote to the young Englishman and invited him to preach in Northampton during his New England tour. Whitefield, who had read Edwards’ account of the Northampton revivals five years earlier, eagerly accepted. Arriving in Northampton later that year, Whitefield stayed as a guest in the Edwards’ home. Besides enjoying extensive conversation on spiritual matters, Whitefield was very impressed with the Edwards’ family. Sarah Edwards, Jonathan’s wife, was a singular woman in her own right – a model of learning, piety, and devotion to family. She reared eleven children and served as a treasured companion to her husband throughout his ministry. This struck the 25-year-old unmarried Whitefield, who wrote this of Jonathan and Sarah:

A sweeter couple I have not seen. Mrs. Edwards is adorned with a meek and quiet spirit; she talked solidly of the things of God, and seemed to be such a helpmeet for her husband, that she caused me to renew those prayers, which for some months, I have put up to God, that He would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife.⁷⁰

Whitefield’s journey to Northampton and throughout New England in 1740 and 1741 marked the height of the Great Awakening revivals. Wherever he preached, thousands gathered eagerly to hear the message, and great numbers responded with deep emotion. Convicted of their sin, they would wail and cry out to God for salvation. Many turned to Christ, and church memberships swelled in towns swept by the revival. The aforementioned Connecticut farmer, Nathan Cole, recorded his impressions of hearing Whitefield preach in 1740:

...he looked as if he was clothed with authority from the Great God; and a sweet solemnity sat upon his brow. And my hearing him preach, gave me a heart-wound. By God’s blessing: my old

⁶⁹ Quoted in James Hutson, *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic*, 28.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Marsden, 208.

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Foundation was broken up, and I saw that my righteousness would not save me; then I was convinced of the doctrine of Election.⁷¹

Though Whitefield and Edwards shared much, there were also important differences between the two. While Edwards would on occasion preach elsewhere, he always based his ministry in his local church. Whitefield, on the other hand, spent most of his life as an itinerant evangelist, and when he did preach, it was more often in public spaces than in church buildings. And while Edwards' sermons and writings covered the most comprehensive array of topics imaginable, Whitefield almost always focused his preaching on the basic Gospel message.

As Whitefield's fame grew, he attracted the attention of another eminent American, Benjamin Franklin. The two began corresponding, and soon developed a deep and abiding friendship that would last until Whitefield's death in 1770. Each saw in the other a genius and advancement ahead of their times. Whitefield would stay with Franklin whenever in Philadelphia, and encouraged Franklin's efforts in helping found the University of Pennsylvania. Franklin in turn became an enthusiastic publicist for Whitefield's preaching tours, and a financial supporter of the Georgia orphanage. However, the skeptical Franklin, who doubted the deity of Christ, always resisted Whitefield's encouragements towards the Christian faith. Whitefield never gave up his entreaties. After Franklin wrote his own epitaph, comparing his life to an old book that, following Franklin's death, would be revised "in a new and more perfect edition, corrected and amended by the Author," Whitefield responded that "I have seen your Epitaph. Believe on Jesus, and get a feeling possession of God in you, and you cannot possibly be disappointed of your expected second edition, finely corrected, and infinitely amended." While such pleas failed to sway Franklin, he never flagged in his affection for the evangelist. Later, as Whitefield approached death, Franklin wrote of his friend, "He is a good man and I love him."⁷²

If Whitefield provided the *voice* for the Great Awakening, Edwards provided the *mind*. In many places throughout New England, the revivals burned out of control. Screaming, laughing, trances, visions, and convulsions, were fairly common; and some ministers deliberately manipulated these responses. Some of the ministers of the more established churches in Boston began sounding off against these excesses and against the revivals in general. Against these attacks, Edwards proved to be the revivals' greatest theological defender. He was also their most penetrating critic. In 1741, he delivered a commencement address at Yale entitled "Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God." The sermon was later expanded to his *Treatise on Religious Affections*. In that treatise, Edwards discusses 12 things that one *cannot* hold to be evidence of a work of the Spirit – such as supernatural manifestations, excessive talking about religion, even the impression of Scriptures upon the mind. In the second half of the book, he gives 12 signs that *can* in fact be taken as evidence of a work of the Spirit of God – a love for God, honor for Christ, and above all, a righteous life.

Meanwhile, all was not well in Northampton. A theological dispute finalized what had been a growing rift between Edwards and his congregation. His grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, had taught that communion was a converting ordinance. The bread and the wine themselves could communicate the truth of the gospel and so they should be given even to the unconverted. Edwards, in contrast, believed that communion should be reserved only for those who credibly professed faith in Christ. When he made a move to change the practice, many in the congregation rebelled. After lengthy disputations, in 1750 the congregation voted 230-23 to dismiss their pastor. This is a good reminder not to measure faithfulness by success or popularity.

The next year, Edwards became the pastor of the mission church for the Native American community at Stockbridge, Massachusetts. It was during this time as a missionary to the Indians,

⁷¹ Quoted in Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 93.

⁷² Quoted in Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, 233.

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that Edwards also wrote most of his major treatises – *Original Sin*, *Freedom of the Will*, *The End for Which God Created the World*, and *The Nature of True Virtue*. He continued work on his magisterial yet never finished, *A History of the Work of Redemption*. In January of 1758, Edwards became president of the College of New Jersey (later to become Princeton University). Always interested in scientific inquiry, Edwards in March of that same year allowed himself to be inoculated with a new smallpox vaccine. The experiment failed, and Edwards died of smallpox on March 22, 1758.

We conclude with Edwards' greatest concern, and most persistent theme. In a letter to Deborah Hatheway, a teenage girl converted during the revivals, Edwards encouraged her that

Though we are exceeding sinful, yet we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, the preciousness of whose blood, and the merit of whose righteousness, and the greatness of whose love and faithfulness, infinitely overtops the highest mountains of our sins.⁷³

⁷³ Quoted in Marsden, 225.

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11. The Church and the Changing World, 1750-1850

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” Col 2:8-9

Christ rules over the world, and gave His people a mandate to change the world. Yet Christians have frequently encountered a world that changed without them, that even changed against them. If one theme defines our class today, it is the tension between the world’s efforts to control or conquer the church, and the church’s attempt to redeem the world. The 18th and 19th centuries in particular, witnessed a bewildering array of changes and conflicts, as the world encroached on the church in unprecedented new areas; and the church in turn advanced around the world in ways not seen since the earliest centuries of the faith. The first centuries of Christianity come to mind in another way as well. For in some ways, and in some areas at least, the church found itself for the first time in 1500 years, losing the favor of the culture and governments of the world. Christians had begun as outsiders, and now they were becoming outsiders again.

Picking up from last week, we will begin in America, with what one historian has described as the “Puritan dilemma”: how to live faithfully in the world without becoming corrupted by the world? Sadly, over time the new world came to answer this question for the Puritans, and it answered in the negative. The Great Awakening notwithstanding, by the 1760s, the Puritan vision of a new, holy society had largely disappeared, as most Americans concerned themselves more with commerce and culture than with the Christian faith. What had become of the Puritan dream? In one sense, the Puritans failed. Not only did the English Church eventually stop paying attention to the efforts of their brethren to establish a model Christian society in the new world, but the American Puritans themselves over time lost much of their Christian devotion and doctrine — until Puritanism as a movement had ceased. Their descendants still had their new land, however, and decided to make it a new nation. Perhaps the 20th century’s greatest scholar of Puritan thought, the late Perry Miller of Harvard, famously described the Puritan legacy: *“having failed to rivet the eyes of the world upon their city on a hill, they were left alone with America.”*⁷⁴

Did the founding of the United States represent a *failure* of Christianity, or a *triumph* of Christianity? The question of the relationship of Christianity to the American founding continues to vex us today. Though it is not directly a part of church history, I think it important to spend a few minutes considering, to put it most provocatively, whether or not the United States was founded as a “Christian nation.”

The founding of America would have been inconceivable without Christianity. Yet faith alone hardly accounts for the new nation. The Founding Fathers drew on three principle sources in conceiving the ideals and institutions of the United States: classical Greco-Roman thought, Enlightenment rationalism, and a biblical worldview. This last factor, the biblical worldview, determined several vital principles in the decision to rebel against England and form a new nation and a new government.

First, a skepticism about the sinfulness of fallen human nature animated the first Americans: it made them resistant to the abuses of power they felt from the British crown, and it informed their separation of powers and checks and balances in the Constitution.

Second, a strong sense of God’s providence pervaded colonial thought. Virtually all Americans, common and elite, Christian and non-Christian, shared the conviction that divine providence guided, protected, and sustained their land.

⁷⁴ Perry Miller, “Errand into the Wilderness,” in Jon Butler and Harry Stout, eds., *Religion in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press), 41.

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Third, a belief that God had endowed human beings with their rights, freedoms, and responsibilities, and that these rights, freedoms, and responsibilities could not be taken away by the tyrannical whimsy of any earthly ruler – especially, King George III.

Fourth, the founders affirmed the importance, even the necessity, of religion in keeping the American people moral and virtuous citizens – religion, in short, would equip the people to handle their new freedoms responsibly.

Fifth, the Puritan emphasis on the covenant remained, though in a modified form. Though Puritanism had died out, Americans still believed that God maintained a covenant with their new nation. And God, in turn, would bless and sustain the United States if the people remained faithful; but He would withdraw his protection and even punish the new nation if the people turned away from Him (as in Winthrop's covenant, chapter 9).

Consider the following examples. Most obviously, Thomas Jefferson's confession in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal... [and] are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..." shows the conviction that our rights come ultimately from God, not government or man. Less well known are the resolutions adopted by the Continental Congress throughout the Revolutionary War, setting aside particular days for "Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer." One such resolution, issued in 1777 and distributed throughout the churches of the land, called on all Americans to "*join the penitent confession of their manifold sins...and their humble and earnest supplication that it may please God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, mercifully to forgive and blot them out of remembrance.*"⁷⁵

See the several themes here: awareness of sin, dependence on God's providence, urging Americans to stay faithful, belief that God had a special relationship with America, and even the explicit invocation of Christ. And the first Congress seems to have practiced what it preached. After convening in 1774, the Continental Congress immediately selected a Chaplain to open its sessions in prayer. The Rev. Jacob Duche, an Anglican priest from Philadelphia, faithfully served as the first Congressional chaplain from 1774 until 1777 – when he defected to the British! A final example: after declaring independence in 1776, Congress solicited ideas for a national seal. Both Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson suggested a depiction of God drowning Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea and rescuing the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt – showing the clear connection between God's granting liberty to his chosen people, whether the Old Testament Israelites or the New world Americans.

Yet America was not founded as a Christian nation in the strict sense. The American founders used a *natural* theology rather than a *revealed* theology to establish the intellectual foundations of their new land. "Natural theology" refers to those truths about God and man that can be known through human reason and observation, and that do not depend on God's special revelation in the Bible. Just look again at the language of the Declaration of Independence: "we hold these truths to be self-evident." In other words, any one can just look at the world and see how God designed it. While many of the Founders read and even revered the Bible, most did not think God's SPECIAL REVELATION in His Word was necessary to establish their new nation.

Furthermore, very few of the most prominent Founding Fathers were evangelical Christians. Ben Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton –certainly would not have been able to join a church like ours (not just because they weren't Baptist). Most of them were skeptical about Christ's divinity and miracles, and concentrated instead on His ethical teachings. Few believed in, let alone focused on, Christ's atoning death and resurrection, and the need for rebellious sinners to repent and trust in Christ for their salvation. They knew that many other Americans were Christians, of course, which

⁷⁵ Quoted in James Hutson, *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic* (Washington DC: Library of Congress 1998), 54.

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accounts in part for the occasional Christian language found in some of the early congressional resolutions. Still, just about all of the founders believed in God, but more a God of nature than the God of the Bible – hence their frequent references to “providence,” the “creator,” and “nature’s God.” Some of the founders were even Deists, believing that while God existed and had created the world, He did not actively govern or intervene in the world, but instead let the world run itself by the natural laws He had created. In short, the God that most of the founders believed in epitomized reason, virtue, order, and liberty – though not necessarily perfect holiness, wrath, love, and grace. As one scholar put it, most of the founders found in God what they most admired in humanity.⁷⁶

Moreover, much as the founders hoped and even urged that the American people maintain their religious faith, the founders also took the unprecedented, even revolutionary step, of establishing religious freedom instead of a national church. This is one reason why the Constitution does not even mention “God” – the framers resisted any coercion of belief or favoring of a particular faith. Freedom was their supreme article of faith, and while the founders affirmed that God granted Americans their liberty, they refused to require anyone to believe that.

So while we can certainly see the Christian origins of much of our country, in a strict sense, we cannot call the United States an officially Christian nation, then or now. Nor should we – for it seems clear in the New Testament that God’s only new covenant people are those in the universal church, not any particular nation state.

Meanwhile, what of Christianity during this time? The church in America actually came out of the revolution in rather poor shape. Besides the damage and division wrought in many churches by the fighting, many Americans in the 1790s seemed more interested in focusing on their new country than on their old faith. By the 1790s, only 5-10% of Americans were church members, and regular church attendance was perhaps 40% of that.⁷⁷ Moreover, new intellectual, political, and social developments in Europe and America posed serious new threats to Christianity – exemplified by events in France in 1789.

Social Changes and Intellectual Challenges

Historian Mark Noll describes a remarkable event:

On November 10, 1793, France’s greatest church, the Cathedral of Notre Dame, witnessed an unprecedented spectacle. For over six hundred years, from the time this magnificent gothic structure began to be constructed in the mid-twelfth century, it had served as a symbol for the Christian identity of the nation. But now in the enthusiasm of revolution, the cathedral had been renamed the Temple of Reason. A paper-mache mountain with Greco-Roman motifs stood in the nave. Historian Simon Schama describes what happened next: “Liberty (played by a singer from the Opera), dressed in white, wearing the Phrygian bonnet and holding a pike, bowed to the flame of Reason and seated herself next to a bank of flowers and plants.” This inverted “worship service” was a high point in the French Revolution’s program of dechristianization, whereby leaders of the Revolution attempted to throw off what they felt to be the heavy, dead hand of the church.⁷⁸

What was going on here? The French Revolution both coalesced and symbolized many momentous changes of the “Age of Reason” of the 18th Century. Intellectually, the philosophers of the ENLIGHTENMENT had for one hundred years been seeking to elevate human reason over divine revelation. Christianity, premised on God revealing himself through Christ and through the

⁷⁶ Cited in Mark Noll, *The History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1992), 136.

⁷⁷ Noll, 163.

⁷⁸ Noll, *Turning Points*, 246. – Remember, France was a Catholic nation that exterminated the Protestant Huguenots.

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Scriptures, was thought by many Enlightenment rationalists to be at best inadequate, and at worst injurious to humanity. Voltaire, Rousseau, John Locke, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and many others tried to develop philosophies of knowing and living, that either improved upon or even replaced Christianity. In the process, they hoped to demonstrate that man could perfect himself and his world, without God's assistance or sometimes even His involvement.

While such Enlightenment optimism certainly influenced many of the American founders, they at least retained a sense of human fallibility and dependence on God. Not so the French Revolutionaries, who sought to exterminate religion and deify man. And in the process, they reaped unspeakable carnage, as thousands of people died at the guillotine, and France descended into chaos.⁷⁹ Momentous as the French Revolution was just for France, it also marked a decisive turning point in church history. As one scholar puts it, the Revolution marked the end of CHRISTENDOM, or "the end of that lengthy period of European history when the interests of church and society were thought to be the same, and where it was almost universally assumed that Christian spiritual realities were more fundamental than realities of the temporal world."⁸⁰

The Enlightenment also laid the foundation for other intellectual challenges to Christianity throughout the 19th century. By the late 18th century, some scholars were beginning to doubt the authority or even reliability of the Bible, leading in the 19th century to the development of "higher criticism," which sought to treat the Bible as any other historical text, not inspired by God, and in many ways, not even true. In science, Charles Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859, challenging the belief that God had designed the different forms of life in the world – some even used Darwin to question if God had created the world itself. In social philosophy, Karl Marx dismissed religion as a mere fiction invented by the upper classes to control and pacify the working class. Marx believed that economic cycles, and not God, governed history itself.

Meanwhile, tremendous social changes also shook the landscapes of Europe and America. Technological advances in transportation and communications brought much more interaction between peoples across oceans and continents – and in turn undermined old certainties about what to believe and how the world worked. The Industrial Revolution brought dramatic increases in productivity and prosperity – but also left many workers poor, destitute, and oppressed; and it dislocated organic communities of village and family. By the early 19th century, a bewildering array of changes confronted the average person. To many, Christianity seemed at best irrelevant, and at worst untrue, or even oppressive. How was the church to respond?

The Christian Response

Sadly, some professing Christians responded by surrendering great areas of the faith. For example, Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German theologian from the late 18th and early 19th century, troubled by the Enlightenment charge that Christian doctrines were not "rational," essentially conceded the victory to the rationalists. Schleiermacher instead argued that doctrine and historical evidence mattered little, and the true essence of Christianity was a "feeling" of "absolute dependence" on God. Reducing *faith* to *feeling* leaves us with little faith at all. Unfortunately, Schleiermacher's legacy persists in some areas of the church today, which emphasize emotion and experience over the knowledge of the living God. While our feelings are a gift from God and an important part of who we are, they must always submit to the objective work of Christ on the cross, and the objective truth of God in our lives.

Another response to the Enlightenment challenge came from the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. A melancholic, brooding soul, Kierkegaard grew troubled by both the rationalistic

⁷⁹ In Edmund Burke's book, "Reflections on the French Revolution," he attempts to explain the depravities, so different from the Glorious Revolution of England. He concluded it was their lack of Protestantism, a biblical moral compass.

⁸⁰ Noll, *Turning Points*, 253.

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philosophy and the stagnant church of his day. Downplaying both doctrine and morality, he held radical free will and radical faith to be the essence of the Gospel. Kierkegaard pioneered the development of EXISTENTIALISM, or the emphasis on each individual's own subjective search for meaning. Each person needed to make a "leap of faith" towards God, he argued, even – or especially – when that leap seemed to have no basis in fact or objective truth. Though not as harmful as Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard's thought still conceded too much to rationalism, left too little to the church, and risked leaving too many people wallowing in their own angst.

Not all was so bleak, however. A number of Christian thinkers, many centered at Princeton, held fast to the true faith in the face of these challenges. In the 18th century, John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister who served as President of Princeton University (and the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence), imported from Scotland, and helped plant in America, the system of philosophy known as Scottish COMMON SENSE REALISM. Though it shared some of the Enlightenment's confidence in human reason, Common Sense Realism appealed to universal experience to reinforce the truth of Christianity, rather than undermine the faith. Witherspoon and others contended that a plain look at the world would reveal the existence of God and a universal moral code, and a plain reading of the Bible would demonstrate the truth of Christ and the need for salvation.

In the 19th century, two other theologians at Princeton Seminary eagerly and ably defended historic Christianity from the assault of rationalism. Archibald Alexander, the Seminary's first professor, and then his student Charles Hodge, who went on to teach at Princeton for half a century, balanced a fervent commitment to the Reformed faith, with an active engagement with the intellectual challenges to Christianity. Hodge saw clearly that nothing less than the very supremacy of God was at stake in the competing theologies of the day:

From an early period in the history of the Church, there have been two great systems of doctrine in perpetual conflict. The one begins with *God*, the other with *man*. The one has for its object, the vindication of the Divine supremacy and sovereignty in the salvation of men; the other has for its characteristic aim, the assertion of the rights of human nature... The latter is characteristically rational. It seeks to explain every thing so as to be intelligible to the speculative understanding. The former is confessedly mysterious. The Apostle pronounces the judgment of God to be unsearchable and his ways past finding out... [The whole tendency of the New Testament] is to exalt God and to humble men. It does not make the latter feel that he is the great end of all things, or that he has his destiny in his hands... God [himself is] the end of all his works both in creation and in redemption ⁸¹

At the end of the day, however, it was not just what Christians *said*, but what they *did* and how they *lived* that provided the most compelling testimony. While intellectuals criticized and contended, faithful Christians worked to reform society, to fight injustice, and to spread the Gospel.

The Second Great Awakening

Here's an aside on the relative importance of intellectual life. I want to be careful not to downplay too much the importance of ideas and intellectual endeavors – after all, many heroes of the faith have devoted a good portion of their lives to such pursuits. And in 2Corinthians 10:5, Paul proclaims “we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” But the Bible also tells us “Do not be wise in your own eyes” (Proverbs 3:7); and “the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God” (1Corinthians 3:19). There is no substitute for the witness of a life transformed by

⁸¹ Hodge, cited in Edwin Gaustad, ed. *A Documentary History of Religion in America to the Civil War* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1993), 420-422.

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Christ. Christ says, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Some intellectuals may quibble and cavil against the Gospel, but the most effective rebuttal is often living a faithful and loving life. We can sort out the rest of the intellectual questions when we get to heaven.

This was in some ways how many American Christians responded to the doubts of the Enlightenment and the spiritual depression after the Revolution. They just charged out and began preaching the Gospel in every corner of the new nation – and beyond.

From about 1795 into the first decades of the 1800s, a tremendous series of revivals known as the Second Great Awakening swept through America, and forever changed the infant nation. The Second Great Awakening is thought by many to have begun under the leadership of Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards and president of Yale University. When he became president in 1795, Dwight found very few Christians among the students; most of them espoused the intellectual fashions of the Enlightenment. He worked to restore confidence in the truth of the Bible, and began preaching a four-year cycle of sermons on the basic doctrines of the faith. Even more remarkably, President Dwight also began going from room to room at the college, knocking on the door, and discussing Christianity with each of his students. Though he saw little fruit at first, by 1802 a tremendous revival broke out on campus, so that around one third of Yale’s 225 students were converted. After graduating, many of these young Christians began ministering all over New England, New York, and even the frontier, spreading the Gospel in the growing awakening. And the revivals continued. By one count, Yale experienced fifteen revivals between 1800 and 1840.

Yale notwithstanding, most of the Second Great Awakening took place in the towns, villages, and camps of America, particularly the frontier. Denominational distinctives also began to blur, as Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists all joined together to preach huge outdoor revivals. Cane Ridge, Kentucky provided the site of one such legendary “camp meeting” in 1801, as up to 25,000 people converged in the fields of the town over a period of weeks to hear numerous preachers proclaim the good news. Many were converted; yet by some measures, the enthusiasm became excessive, as bodily convulsions, laughing, and hysterical noises took over some of the participants, including the “barking exercise,” in which new converts, like hunting dogs, would “bark” until they scared the Devil up a tree. For better or for worse, Cane Ridge marked the beginning of decades of revival camp meetings in the new country – some of the Spirit, others more suspect.

The theology of the Second Great Awakening differed quite a bit from the First Great Awakening. Whereas the preaching of Edwards and Whitefield in the First had been thoroughly Calvinistic, focusing on God’s sovereign grace in saving helpless sinners, the revivalists of the Second Awakening much more emphasized human free will, individual decision, and personal experience. The two men who came to most dominate in the Second Awakening, the Methodist Francis Asbury, and the Presbyterian-turned-Congregationalist Charles Finney. Both believed that humans could choose to either accept or reject God’s offer of grace, and that after conversion, Christians needed to strive for “perfection,” or an end to willful sin. Because of such theological errors and excesses, the Second Great Awakening should be approached with some caution. However, it left an important and permanent mark on American evangelicalism and American society, and certainly was used by the Lord to accomplish much good.

Asbury displayed a heroic dedication to the cause. Born in England, he eagerly responded to John Wesley’s call for missionaries to the new world, and spent the next 45 years of his life preaching throughout America. Asbury did much of his traveling alone, on horseback. During his lifetime he covered nearly 300,000 miles in America, crossing the Appalachians alone over 60 times to bring the Gospel to unreached settlers on the frontier. He probably knew more of the American

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wilderness than anyone else of his generation – and all of this for the calling of the Gospel. His journeys were not easy. One journal entry notes,

“The water froze as it ran from the horse’s nostrils...I have suffered a little by lodging in open houses this cold weather; but this is a very small thing when compared to what the dear Redeemer suffered for the salvation of precious souls.”⁸²

Charles Finney was the most eminent revivalist in America in the first half of the 1800s. And he did much more than revivals. One historian claims Charles Finney “may have had a greater impact on the public life of antebellum America than any of the nation’s politicians.”⁸³ Finney linked evangelism with social reform, and either formed or inspired the creation of numerous organizations focused on abolishing slavery, promoting temperance, caring for the poor and mentally handicapped, and promoting education. In the course of his revivals, Finney encouraged countless Americans to work to make their country a more just, equitable, and virtuous society.

Finney’s evangelistic methods and theology had some serious problems, however. Theologically, he had a low view of sin and of the Cross; he believed we could freely choose God wholly on our own, that Christ’s death on the cross did not pay for sins, but rather, it just demonstrated God’s willingness to forgive, and that humans could achieve moral perfection here on earth. To these errors in doctrine, Finney added some sketchy evangelistic practices, most notoriously the “anxious bench,” a chair or special area near the front of the stage where Finney rather manipulatively would have certain attendees sit as a demonstration of their intention to convert – sometimes making salvation more an act of man than a work of God.

Despite some of these errors and excesses, the first decades of the 1800s saw churches grow in America at a breathtaking pace. Countless other faithful pastors and itinerant evangelists labored to preach the Word near and far, and the Lord drew many new souls into the Kingdom. Alongside the many new churches, American Christians formed a stunning array of organizations to assist in spreading the Gospel. By 1827, the six largest of these were the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, the American Tract Society, the American Home Missionary Society, the American Education Society, and the American Board of Foreign Missions – all focused on spreading the Gospel.

The face of American Christianity had changed as well. Whereas in the 1700s Anglicans and Congregationalists had been the two largest denominations, by the early 1800s Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians claimed the most members. Despite the many challenges it had faced, the Christian faith seemed secure and growing in the young country. Now many American Christians, and their British counterparts, began to turn their eyes to the many nations of the world that had yet to hear the Gospel.

⁸² Quoted in Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 173.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 170.

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“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:18-19

Introduction

Today’s class is somewhat unusual in that it addresses two topics: Baptist history, and the rise of the world missions movement in the 19th century. As we see from the Great Commission and from history itself, however, these two topics are closely related — theologically, in the Great Commission’s command to “baptize” disciples; and historically, in the leadership that Baptists displayed in the early missions movement.

I do not want to be too parochial in focusing on Baptist history. After all, we are first and foremost a *Christian* church, and we can enjoy Christian fellowship with believers of other traditions who might differ with us on baptism or church governance, but who share our fidelity to the biblical Gospel. But there is no escaping it: we are a Baptist church, and we stand in a fascinating stream of history.

Though we trace our immediate lineage to the English Baptists of the early 1600s, we have a longer family tree. As we saw in our very first class, most Christians in the first two or three centuries of the church seem to have practiced believer baptism. Going back even earlier, we might claim one of the first New Testament figures as an ancestor. After all, as I always tell my Presbyterian friends, the man we meet at the beginning of the Gospels is John the *Baptist* – not John the *Presbyterian*.

Baptists: When Were They Born?

More recently, we can locate at least four possible origins of the Baptist story – though I believe only the latter two form part of our authentic, organic history. Keep in mind that none of the following leaders or movements planned to create a “Baptist denomination.” The Baptists as a cohesive group evolved over time; and only when we look back can we trace the outlines of our origins.

First, the ANABAPTISTS in Europe during the 16th century Reformation (we touched on them briefly a few weeks ago). “Anabaptist” means “re-baptize,” and was a term of derision coined by other Reformers for the radical splinter groups who, besides giving baptism only to believers, sought to form a radically pure church by withdrawing completely from the world, promoting pacifism, not holding any government office, questioning original sin, and striving for moral purity and religious perfection. Today’s descendants of the Anabaptists include the Mennonites and the Amish. Though we share their convictions on believer baptism, Baptists today are not considered historical descendants of the Anabaptists.

Second, and slightly closer in our history, are the GENERAL BAPTISTS of the early 1600s. This group of English Christians, led by the charismatic but somewhat imbalanced JOHN SMYTH, fled to the Netherlands in 1607 to escape persecution in England and to form what they considered a pure church. Because Smyth wanted only true Christians as members of his church, he seems to have moved rather logically to the position that only believers should be baptized. Thus, in Holland in 1609, he formed the first Baptist church, which he marked by baptizing himself and then baptizing 40 of his followers. Within several months, the erratic Smyth reversed course, repudiated his own baptism, and called on his followers to reject their baptisms, and follow him in continuing to search for an authentic and true church. His quest failed. Smyth became ill and died just a couple of years later, not belonging to any church. Some of his previous followers, meanwhile, had ignored his last call to leave their Baptist church, and had instead followed Smyth’s erstwhile disciple THOMAS HELWYS back to England, where in 1611 they established the first Baptist church on English soil. This group became known as “General Baptists,” because they held that Christ’s

death applied *generally* to all people, that people could freely accept or reject the offer of salvation, and that they could in turn lose their salvation as easily as they gained it. This theological error soon led to many others; so that, even as General Baptist churches grew a bit in the 17th century, their doctrinal standards soon disappeared, and they fell into disarray and heresy. In fact, by 1697, the General Baptists could not convince their churches to commit to a plain statement on the Trinity. Some became Unitarians, and others died out altogether.

The *third* source, and our direct ancestors, are the PARTICULAR BAPTISTS, who arose in England some thirty years after the General Baptists, and quite independent of them. So called because they believed in the Calvinist – and arguably biblical – doctrine that Christ’s atonement applied particularly to those whom God saved, and thus guaranteed their salvation, the Particular Baptists grew directly out of English Puritanism. They seem to have founded their first church in 1638.

Before looking more closely at the Particular Baptists, I will mention briefly the *fourth* beginning of Baptist history, which occurred just one year after, but 4000 miles away from the founding of first Particular Baptist church in England. This is the founding of the first Baptist church in AMERICA, by ROGER WILLIAMS in Rhode Island in 1639, of whom more will be said soon.

Now back to the Particular Baptists in England. Though these intrepid Christians had come to the conviction that the Bible commanded baptism for believers, they did not part ways with their Puritan friends on many other matters, but rather shared a confessional, reformed understanding of the faith. So in 1644, during the same time that the Westminster divines were meeting to draft their confession, seven Baptist churches met together and issued a strongly Calvinistic statement of faith. The Particular Baptists continued to grow in England. Thirty-three years later, in 1677, another group met and published a more detailed confession modeled almost entirely on the Westminster Confession. Only a few articles were changed to reflect the Baptists’ views on baptism and a few other particulars like church government. The Prologue to the statement said that it followed closely the language of the Westminster Confession to “convince all that we have no itch to clog religion with new words, but readily acquiesce in that form of sound words which has been in consent with the Holy Scriptures, used by others before us.”⁸⁴ This reflects a wise and godly sense of balance, of striving for unity with other believers wherever possible, while holding charitably, yet firmly, to personal conviction on matters of biblical distinctives. Because of the persecution that the ministers faced, the 1677 confession was not signed. In 1689, however, it was re-published and signed by over 100 representatives, and is known today as the Second London Confession — or more simply, the 1689 Confession.

These Particular Baptists are true heirs of the Reformation, and provide a vital link between our church today and the recovery of the Gospel in the 16th century. Many of the greatest figures in church history come from this tradition, including John Bunyan, Andrew Fuller, and Charles Spurgeon.

John Bunyan – Born in 1628, after a lengthy period of doubt, struggle, and conviction of sin, Bunyan found freedom through trusting Christ for his salvation, and was baptized in 1653. In 1660, the authorities imprisoned him for preaching without permission from the magistrate, and he spent the next 12 years behind bars for holding steadfast to his convictions and his conscience. While imprisoned, he wrote many of his greatest writings, including *Pilgrim’s Progress*, one of the most well-known and influential books in Christian history.

In the next century, Andrew Fuller emerged as perhaps the greatest theologian ever to come from the ranks of English Baptists. During Fuller’s day, a few churches had begun to adopt what some scholars call “hyper-Calvinism,” characterized by the over-determined beliefs that since God had ordained every last event, people could not be held responsible for their own sin, and

⁸⁴ Hulse, p.26.

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preachers had no business proclaiming the Gospel to all hearers, but only to those they determined to be elect. Against these excesses and misunderstandings, Fuller held firm to God's complete sovereignty in salvation while still urging Christians to resist sin and preach the Gospel to everyone – let God sort out who would be saved. Fuller helped spark a great revival in England during the last years of the 18th century.

Finally, in the 19th century Charles Spurgeon, pastor of London's Metropolitan Tabernacle, stands as the greatest preacher of his day, and perhaps any day. For an intro to Spurgeon, check out *Mornings and Evenings*...

Besides their fidelity to Scripture and zeal for God, the early Baptists stand out in another respect. They pioneered the development of religious liberty as a modern idea and ideal. One thing that unites the Anabaptists, General Baptists, Particular Baptists, and especially Baptists in America, is the conviction that only God can govern the human conscience in matters of faith. Because so many of these groups were persecuted for their faith, and because they sought to distinguish the church from the world, they all advocated tirelessly for religious freedom, to remove the church from under the control of the state. This became particularly paramount in the New World, to which we now turn.

Baptists In America

Roger Williams is often regarded as the first Baptist in America, and in some sense this is true. He did help found and pastor the first Baptist church on these shores, in Providence, Rhode Island in March of 1639. But Williams only served as pastor for a few months, before leaving the church and leaving the Baptist faith altogether. Those who had followed his life thus far were hardly surprised. As a leading Puritan scholar describes him, Williams was “a charming, sweet-tempered, winning man, courageous, selfless, God-intoxicated – and stubborn – the very soul of separation... [he] would separate not only from erroneous churches but also from everyone who would not denounce erroneous churches as confidently as he did... he could follow a belief to its conclusion with a passionate literalness that bordered on the ridiculous.”⁸⁵

A Cambridge graduate ordained as an Anglican minister, Williams became fed up with the errors of Anglicanism and sought refuge in New England. Arriving in Boston in 1631, he soon began attracting many followers – and attracting the displeasure of the Puritan authorities – with his then-unusual views. He held that civil authorities had no authority in religious matters, and so could not require church attendance on the Sabbath or punish citizens for violating any of the first four commandments. In this respect, Williams pioneered our modern ideals of religious liberty and freedom of conscience. For a Puritan society founded on the conviction that they had a national covenant with God, and that He would bless and provide for them only so long as the society stayed united and pure, such views were not only unsettling – they were seditious. After being rebuked by the Massachusetts Bay Colony authorities, Williams became more radical. He soon began teaching that the King of England had no authority to grant the colony its charter in the first place, and charged the King with blasphemy for usurping the prerogatives of God. Not surprisingly, this upset the Puritan leaders even more. When they denounced Williams again, he responded by declaring all of their churches apostate. At their wits end, the Puritan authorities banished Williams from the province. He headed south in the dead of winter, depending on the care of Indians whom he had befriended previously, until he arrived in present-day Rhode Island, and founded Providence.

Williams by this time had come to embrace believer's baptism. In March of 1639, a man named Ezekiel Hollyman baptized Williams, who in turn baptized Hollyman and ten others to form the first Baptist church in America. Like his English counterpart, John Smyth, Williams' baptistic

⁸⁵ Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (New York: Longman 1999), 103, 104, 107.

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convictions lasted just a few months. He soon renounced his church and all other churches as false, and said that only when God would raise a new apostolic authority, could the true church be restored. At this point, Williams refused to take communion with anyone but his wife. Finally, he reversed course completely, deciding that because it was so hard to distinguish the church from the world, he would just preach and pray with any and all. From that point to his death, Williams was not a member of any particular church. Eccentric and hyper-schismatic though he was, Williams' distinction between civil and religious authority, his progressive relations with the Native Americans, and his resolute commitment to freedom of conscience, all stand as admirable legacies.

Despite this inauspicious beginning, Baptists in America soon took more stable root. Particular Baptists emigrating from England continued to add to their ranks. Some other American Puritans, through their own study of the Scriptures, came to baptistic convictions, including the president of Harvard College, Henry Dunster. He had to resign his office in 1654 when he went public with his renunciation of infant baptism. Still, Baptists remained a fledgling minority in the new world until the Great Awakening revivals of the mid-1700s. Baptists made spectacular gains in these years, especially in more southern areas like North Carolina, Virginia, and Kentucky, as new converts swelled the ranks of existing Baptist churches, and as many Congregational churches changed their affiliation to Baptist. As Baptists grew in number and zeal, they saw the need to maintain their unity and theological orthodoxy through a confession of faith. In 1742, the Baptist Association of Philadelphia adopted the 1689 London Confession with only slight revisions. This Philadelphia Confession was published by a local printer named Benjamin Franklin, and was soon embraced by the vast majority of Baptists throughout the colonies. From their earliest American beginnings, most Baptists were both reformed and confessional, notwithstanding their later caricatures.

With this growth came persecution as well, however. In states like Massachusetts and Virginia, which enshrined Congregationalism and Anglicanism as their respective state churches, Baptists were harassed, imprisoned, and sometimes even whipped for refusing to attend the established church or support it with their tax dollars. One especially gripping case came in Massachusetts. Elizabeth Backus, a devout Baptist and an impoverished, elderly widow, fell behind on her tax payments for the state Congregational church. Officers arrived at her home one night in 1752 to arrest her. Finding her quite sick, wrapped in quilts, sitting in front of the fire reading her Bible, these heartless police hauled her off to jail. Mrs. Backus described her ordeal in a moving letter to her son Isaac:

“We lay in prison thirteen days... though I was bound when I was cast into this furnace, yet was I loosed, and found Jesus in the midst of the furnace with me. O, then could I give up my name, estate, family, life and breath, freely to God. Now the prison looked like a palace to me. I could bless God for all the laughs and scoffs made at me.”⁸⁶

The Massachusetts authorities imprisoned the wrong woman. Besides the general negative publicity her case generated, Elizabeth Backus was the mother of Isaac Backus, a Baptist minister who became one of the most instrumental figures in American history in the struggle for religious liberty. He was a learned philosopher and historian schooled in the thought of reformed theology, Jonathan Edwards, and John Locke's enlightenment philosophy. At the time of his mother's imprisonment, Backus had just become a Baptist pastor. Over the next fifty years, Backus served as an articulate and indefatigable spokesman for religious freedom. He linked the principles of the American Revolution with the need for religious tolerance, contending that it made no sense

⁸⁶ Quoted in H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman 1987), 258-259.

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for a nation to protest against “taxation without representation” while forcing some of its own citizens to support state churches which they neither belonged to nor believed.

Backus’ counterpart in Virginia was John Leland, a fellow Baptist minister and leading religious freedom advocate. Though not formally educated, Leland taught himself well in theology and philosophy through his own reading, and held that establishments of religion harm both state and church. He wrote an influential treatise on religious liberty with the memorable title, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable, and Therefore, Religious Opinions not Cognizable by Law; or, the High-Flying Churchman, Stripped of His Legal Robe, Appears a Yahoo*.⁸⁷ During the debates over the Constitution and Bill of Rights, Leland either corresponded with or met with George Washington and James Madison, and seems to have been quite influential in developing the First Amendment’s guarantee of religious freedom. Disestablishment of state religion was not the same as “separation of church and state.” The phrase “wall of separation” comes from a letter that Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802 to a Baptist congregation in Connecticut concerned about their taxes supporting a state church. Notably, these Connecticut Baptists did not circulate Jefferson’s letter. They seemed concerned that the “wall of separation” he proposed would go too far in preventing any religious people from even practicing their faith in the public square. Only in the late 19th and early 20th centuries would the “wall of separation” idea be resurrected as an excuse to restrict the religious freedom of Catholics, and later all religious Americans. It was not what early Baptists or the Founding Fathers meant in enshrining religious freedom in the Constitution.

In the midst of this fight for religious liberty, Baptists continued to grow at an astonishing rate, particularly during the Second Great Awakening in the early 1800s, which we considered last week. Because of their emphasis on personal conversion, the simplicity of the Gospel, relatively informal worship services, individual conscience, and the egalitarianism of congregational church governance, Baptists had a particular appeal to people in the new democratic nation. Religious liberty did not mean religious anarchy, however. Most Baptists continued to hold to reformed confessional standards, exemplified by the widespread embrace of the 1833 New Hampshire Confession of Faith, used by our church today.

Besides trying to maintain doctrinal unity, early 19th century Baptists also joined in a united effort for world missions. Philadelphia in 1814 witnessed the formation of the “General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Missions.” It was a name soon mercifully shortened to the Triennial Convention, because it met every 3 years. This organization sent out almost 100 missionaries in its first 20 years, in the midst of the dramatic rise of the world missions movement. This particular chapter of Baptist history ends on a sad and bitter note, however. Despite their unity on matters of doctrine and evangelism, Baptists in the north and south experienced growing division over the question of slavery. Though most Baptists in the late 18th century had vocally opposed slavery, by the early 1800s many Baptists in the south came to defend it, while their northern brothers continued to denounce it. Matters came to a boil in 1845, when the national mission agency refused to endorse missionaries who owned slaves. In response, many southern Baptists split away to form the SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION. The support of these early Southern Baptists for slavery constitutes a shameful blight on Baptist history. Only in recent years have Southern Baptists corporately come to acknowledge and repent of slavery’s role in their early roots.

The Missions Movement

We considered last week the remarkable growth of Christianity in the United States from 1795-1830, known as the Second Great Awakening. This expansion was not confined to America, as these same decades saw the Gospel carried to some of the remote ends of the known world. The

⁸⁷ Quoted in McBeth, 274.

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international missions movement, led significantly though by no means exclusively by Baptists, dramatically changed the face of the church, and the world.

Some Protestant missionary efforts had begun as early as Calvin's sending of missionaries to Brazil in the 16th century. There were John Eliot, David Brainerd, and Jonathan Edwards' evangelistic efforts among Native Americans in the early and mid-1700s. But the real launching of the missionary enterprise began at the end of the 18th century. English and American evangelicals, inspired by the renewals of faith they experienced in their own countries, began to seriously consider Christ's command to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

On October 5, 1783, the English pastor John Ryland noted in his diary that he had "baptized today [a] poor journeyman shoe cobbler." Little did he realize that the man he baptized who would become one of the greatest missionaries the church or world had known. William Carey possessed a great burden for those who had not heard the Gospel. While working in his shoe shop, he would prop books next to his bench and teach himself languages, including Dutch, French, Latin, and several Indo-European languages – all to prepare him to take the Gospel overseas. In 1792, he and several colleagues organized the BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY, and Carey and his family soon sailed to India, never again to return to England. Carey and his family found their first few years in India excruciatingly difficult. Besides the heat, poverty, disease, and culture shock, they found the locals quite resistant to the Gospel. Carey's wife Dorothy, a kind and sensitive soul who had been apprehensive about traveling to India, soon fell into a severe depression. Following the death of one of their children she suffered a horrible breakdown, and spent the last 13 years of her life locked away in a lonely room with padded walls.

Despite these manifest hardships, Carey and his team pressed on with their ministry, settling near Calcutta. While there, they undertook an intensive study of the Hindu religion and the local dialects, and translated all or part of the Bible into several Indian and Eastern Asian languages. In addition, they founded a school for training young Indians to be Christian leaders. Carey's methods of holistic ministry, of learning the local religion, languages, and cultures, of translating the Scriptures and training indigenous Christian leaders, eventually proved both remarkably effective in India and tremendously influential in the emergence of cross-cultural missions.

Following Carey's lead, Christians in the United States, England, and other European countries soon formed several other missionary organizations. The most prominent in America was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), which had a rather unlikely beginning. In 1806, a group of Williams College students, including Samuel Mills, sought shelter from a rainstorm in a farmyard haystack. While there, they held a spontaneous prayer meeting, and resolved to spread the Gospel around the world. Over the next several years they held firm to their calling. Samuel Mills took the lead in founding the ABCFM, which appointed its first contingent of missionaries in 1812, and sent them to Asia. Two of those appointed were Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice (who later founded George Washington University). While on the boat to Asia, Judson and Rice studied the Scriptures and came to a Baptist understanding of baptism. Rather than continue under the auspices of the Congregationalist ABCFM (which believed in infant baptism), Rice returned home to America to try to drum up support among Baptist churches for Judson's mission in Burma. Judson, meanwhile, endured tremendous hardship in Burma, including the death of three successive wives. Yet after many years, he saw many Burmese come to know the Lord.

Though these pioneer missionaries were relatively few in number, the stirring reports and letters they sent to their churches back home – accounts of trial, suffering, frustration, adventure, wonder, and the conversions of many to Christ – inspired many other Christians to take up the missionary mantle. A leading missionary historian calls the 19th century the "Great Century" for its tremendous church growth. The proportion of the world's population affiliated with churches

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grew more quickly than any period since the 4th century. By 1900, Christianity had ceased to be a religion just of Europe and America.

One measure of a mission's success is how long its work lasts. In that regard, I want to conclude with the life of Dr. David Livingstone, the famous Scotch Presbyterian missionary to Africa. Arriving in 1841 at the age of 28, Livingstone dedicated the next 32 years of his life to Africa, exploring vast portions of the Continent while working to spread the Gospel, end the slave trade, and promote economic development in desperate areas. Livingstone left a remarkable legacy, testified by the outpouring of grief upon his death. His African friends carried his body 1500 miles from the spot where he died to the coast, so that it could be taken by ship back to England for burial in Westminster Abbey. Except his heart, which they buried under a nearby mvula tree.

Almost 100 years after Livingstone died, a remarkable event in Malawi, one of the lands where Livingstone had labored and which named one of its cities after him, testified to his legacy. According to one account:

In 1959, when the fight for independence was turning violent in some places, British administrators dispatched a plane to drop an empty tear gas canister to the white residents of Livingstonia. If you are safe, said the message inside, arrange stones in the shape of an "I." But if you feel threatened by the Africans around you, arrange the stones in a "V." The returning plane will see it and arrange evacuation. The next day, when the plane returned, the people of Livingstonia had arranged stones to read "Ephesians 2:14." Which reads: "For He is our peace who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us."⁸⁸

⁸⁸Karl Vick, "On Shores of Lake Malawi, A White Man's Legacy Lives," *Washington Post*, 2 August 1999, p.A13.

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“...He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6

The American Civil War, the most traumatic event in our nation’s history, caused great spiritual trials for many Christians as well. It was not for nothing that President Lincoln, though not an orthodox Christian himself, declared in the midst of the war, that God was “dealing with us in anger for our sins.” He observed the irony that the North and South “both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes his aid against the other.”⁸⁹ While the North’s victory may have solved the problem of national political unity, it also ushered in new problems of church disunity. Not only did Christians in the North and South feel alienated from each other and perplexed about God’s role in their country, but old denominations remained divided, and new denominations, sects, and movements continued to appear throughout the land.

In the midst of this confusion, tremendous social and economic changes began to unsettle the American people as well. From 1870 to 1930, the percentage of Americans living in cities more than doubled, and the overall population of cities multiplied 7 times over, as industrialization lured American families from rural areas to urban, and boatloads of European immigrants swelled the ranks of the new metropolises. On top of all this, a new set of intellectual threats to Christianity appeared, even more grave than those that had challenged orthodoxy in the 18th century. What would become of the Christian faith?

For one Christian, these trying times just presented a new urgency to evangelism. Dwight L. Moody, the most prominent evangelist of the late 19th century, reached multitudes in America and England with his simple Gospel message of the “3 R’s”: Ruin by Sin, Redemption by Christ, Regeneration by the Holy Ghost. Moody generally avoided social reform and theological disputes as distractions from his main calling. As he described his own personal mission statement: “I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, ‘Moody, save all you can.’”⁹⁰ Moody left an important institutional legacy as well, from summer missions conferences that inspired many young people to go overseas, to the founding of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

Moody’s ministry marked the closing of an era. By the time he died in 1899, Christians could no longer focus just on the simple Gospel message and avoid doctrinal controversy. Orthodox Christianity faced its greatest theological challenge since the Enlightenment, perhaps even since the Reformation. A new theology known as “MODERNISM” or “LIBERALISM,” which was really no theology at all but rather a wholesale repudiation of biblical Christianity, had infected many churches, and was leading many pastors and congregations astray.

Modernism had arisen in part from the challenges of Darwinism and so-called “higher criticism” of the Bible. Darwinism, of course, had in the popular mind begun to turn “science” against “religion” by undermining belief in a Creator God who designed the world and exercised sovereign care over it. Higher-criticism, in turn, was a method of scholarship that attacked the Bible’s claims to divine inspiration, theological truth, and even historical accuracy. So for some clergymen, an overconfidence in the claims of science and the power of human reason, a desire to be “relevant” in a changing culture, and a skepticism about the Bible and historic Christianity, all led to the embrace of liberalism.

These liberal clergy did not hide their new beliefs, but rather trumpeted them proudly. And they just as proudly rejected the basic tenets of orthodoxy. In the words of Shailer Matthews, dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School and a leading modernist, “The world needs new control

⁸⁹ From Lincoln’s 1863 Thanksgiving Proclamation, and Second Inaugural Address.

⁹⁰ Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1992), 289.

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of nature and society, and is told that the Bible is verbally inerrant. It needs a means of composing class strife, and is told to believe in the substitutionary atonement... It needs faith in the divine presence in human affairs and is told it must accept the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.”⁹¹ For modernists like Matthews, the historic doctrines of the faith were at best irrelevant, and at worst untrue.

In the midst of modernism came a related movement, the SOCIAL GOSPEL.⁹² Its most famous proponent was Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist minister in a very impoverished New York City neighborhood at the turn of the century. Moved by the suffering, poverty, and oppression around him, Rauschenbusch wrote *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, in which he argued that the true Gospel consisted of working against social injustice. Relatively indifferent to basic Christian doctrines, he held that “religious morality [is] the only thing God cares about.”⁹³ The Social Gospel soon came to have great influence in many Protestant churches. Though it should be commended for its concern for the poor and oppressed, this focus came at a terrible cost: the neglect and even denial of the biblical Gospel.

Modernism and liberalism soon captivated most of the faculties at many of America’s leading universities, including Harvard, Yale, and the University of Chicago, as well as some prominent seminaries. Having captured the centers of learning and ministry training, these insidious beliefs began making inroads into pulpits and churches across the country.

Without resolving the perennial debate over whether social change occurs from the “top down” or “bottom up” in society, we can at least observe in this case that the poisonous ideologies being taught in the universities soon enough began to filter down through the rest of America, with horrible consequences. Those of you who are students, teachers, or otherwise engaged in the life of the mind, realize that the ideas you work with, and the beliefs you promote or oppose, can have tremendous “real world” importance...

Thankfully, the Lord did not permit Modernism and Social Gospel Liberalism to go unopposed. Alarmed at these attacks on the Bible and on historic Christianity, a band of Christian scholars came together to make a stand for orthodoxy. In a series of essays written between 1910 and 1915 known as *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, leading pastors and theologians from an array of denominational backgrounds – including the venerable Princeton Presbyterian B.B. Warfield, the Southern Baptist leader E.Y. Mullins, the evangelist Reuben Torrey, and the dispensationalist C.I. Scofield – set aside their differences and united to make a vigilant, stirring defense of the faith. The cardinal doctrine they united around – against the assaults of modernism – was the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of the Bible. Based on this foundation, *The Fundamentals* defended other basics that modernists rejected, such as –

“Jesus Christ was God in human flesh, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for the salvation of men and women, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and would return at the end of the age in great glory; that sin is real and not the product of fevered imaginations; that God’s grace and not human effort is the source of salvation; and that the church is God’s institution designed to build up Christians and to spread the Gospel.”⁹⁴

Those who united around *The Fundamentals* soon came to be known as “fundamentalists.” The term then had a rather precise meaning of those who affirmed the foundation doctrines of orthodoxy. However, it soon came to be used more broadly and more disparagingly, as it is today,

⁹¹ Quoted in Noll, 375-376.

⁹² When political justice is substituted for social justice, it produces LIBERATION THEOLOGY – a Marxist religion.

⁹³ Quoted in George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press 1980), 91-92.

⁹⁴ Noll, 381.

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to refer to militancy, intolerance, and anti-intellectualism. The modernists seized on this caricature, inflated it, and counterattacked. Thus in 1922, the liberal Baptist minister HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK preached a sermon titled “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” Fosdick’s assault, reprinted and widely distributed throughout the nation through funding from the Rockefeller family, appealed for tolerance and enlightened thinking rather than what he disparaged as narrow dogmatism. A leading conservative Presbyterian minister, Clarence Macartney, responded with his own widely publicized sermon: “Shall Unbelief Win?”

The battle lines were drawn, and into the fray came one of the intellectual giants of the day, J. GRESHAM MACHEN of Princeton Seminary. A valiant proponent of orthodoxy in the grand Princeton tradition of Alexander, Hodge, and Warfield, Machen brilliantly distilled the essence of the conflict. In his landmark book *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen argued that the fundamentalist-modernist dispute was not between two different emphases or interpretations of Christianity, but rather between *two entirely different religions*. In his words,

The great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity, is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called ‘modernism’ or ‘liberalism.’ ...the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism – that is, the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity.⁹⁵

Even those who disagreed with his Christian faith commented on the force and clarity of Machen’s argument, including admirers such as columnists Walter Lippman and H.L. Mencken.

Not that Mencken was an ally of fundamentalism. The signature event of the 1920s theological controversy was the so-called “Scopes Trial,” in which Tennessee schoolteacher John Scopes was arrested for teaching evolution in violation of state law. Mencken attended the trial and wrote a daily column syndicated throughout the nation, vituperatively ridiculing the fundamentalists for opposing Darwinism. The lead attorney for the prosecution was William Jennings Bryan, a fundamentalist in the twilight of his long public career. The three-time Democratic nominee for president, the Secretary of State under President Wilson until he resigned in protest against America’s entry into World War I, Bryan was a truly singular figure – a de facto pacifist, socialist, and a devout fundamentalist Christian. Bryan defined the case in cosmic terms: “[It] has assumed the proportions of a battle royal between unbelief that attempts to speak through so-called science and the defenders of the Christian faith... It is again a choice between God and Baal.”⁹⁶ Though Bryan disbelieved the theory of evolution, he was more concerned with the other issues at stake: the primacy of biblical revelation over human reason, defending the traditional values of common citizens, and exposing the dangerous social consequences of Darwinism, which he feared could threaten the poor, minorities, and other overlooked members of society. These distinctions were lost in the tumult of the trial, as a critical national media, led by Mencken, caricatured the fundamentalists as obscurantist, backwards, and bigoted.

Most historians argue that after the 1925 Scopes trial, fundamentalists retreated from public life in shame and resentment, and spent the next decades in the isolated comfort of their own churches and ministries. This is partly true, but it misses the more important development in the ongoing theological controversy: the DENOMINATIONAL BATTLES. In the 1920s and 30s, fundamentalists and modernists fought fiercely over the major denominations and seminaries, particularly the Baptists and Presbyterians. For the most part, the modernists won and seized effective control of the major denominations, seminaries, and mission boards. Even the valiant

⁹⁵ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1994 reprint), 3.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Edwin Gaustad, ed., *A Documentary History of Religion in America Since 1865* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1983), 355.

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Machen threw in the towel, resigning his post at Princeton Seminary to found Westminster Seminary, and leaving the Presbyterian Church to found a new denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).

Neo-Orthodoxy

Just as fundamentalists went into retreat and modernists celebrated their apparent triumph, a new group of theologians began to challenge liberalism. Known as NEO-ORTHODOXY, this new theology conceded somewhat to liberal criticisms of biblical authority, but still criticized liberalism for downplaying if not ignoring human sin and divine sovereignty. The three most prominent exponents of neo-orthodoxy were the Swiss theologian KARL BARTH, and the American brothers REINHOLD and H. RICHARD NIEBUHR. Barth had first achieved acclaim in 1918 with the publication of his commentary on Romans, followed over the next several decades by a massive systematic theology, *Church Dogmatics*. Barth's neo-orthodoxy emphasized our sinfulness and absolute need for God, the fullness of God in Christ, God's transcendent sovereignty over all of creation. Barth also focused on the individual person's subjective encounter with God more than God's objective work in history. He believed the Bible was not the absolute Word of God, but it only "contained" the Word of God, and in turn only "became" the Word of God when read in faith by the individual. Though Barth did much to preserve some semblance of orthodoxy from the ravages of liberalism, he still conceded too much to biblical criticism, and allowed too little for the importance of God's absolute, objective revelation in Christ and in history.

Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr both did their graduate work at Yale, where H. Richard also taught for the duration of his career; while Reinhold served on the faculty of Union Theological Seminary. Both shared Barth's disaffection with Protestant liberalism and sought to recover the reality of sin and divine judgment on the world. H. Richard delivered one of the most potent, pithy denunciations of liberalism ever: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."⁹⁷ Reinhold, for his part, by the 1940s emerged as the most prominent theologian in America. He appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, lectured widely across the country and around the globe, and engaged with the leading intellectuals and policymakers on the most pressing questions of the day. Many know him as the author of the "serenity prayer" used by Alcoholics Anonymous: "O God, give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, the courage to change what should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other." As a pioneer of "Christian realism," Reinhold spent his greatest energies urging the church to engage in social and political action and confront the crises of the day, whether they be racism, poverty, the Nazi threat in World War II, or the communist menace in the Cold War. He always cautioned against liberal utopianism, however, warning that all human action was tainted by self-interest, and that in a fallen, sinful world man could only achieve proximate justice while awaiting God's final justice.

Neo-Evangelicalism

Barth's neo-orthodoxy and Niebuhr's Christian realism may have corrected liberalism's worst excesses, but they still were not sufficient to fully recover and preserve biblical Christianity. While the hardest-core fundamentalists remained withdrawn from society in the protective cocoon of their church communities, a new movement began in the 1940s that sought to preserve fundamentalist orthodoxy while interacting with the broader world, intellectually and socially. NEO-EVANGELICALISM was led popularly in America by BILLY GRAHAM, and intellectually by Harold Ockenga, E.J. Carnell, and Carl F.H. Henry, and in England by the likes of John Stott and J.I. Packer. Neo-evangelicals came from a variety of denominational traditions, but united around a shared commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture, the necessity of being born again in Christ, the imperative to share the Gospel with others, and the importance of engaging with the culture.

⁹⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper and Row 1937), 193.

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They founded a variety of para-church organizations and ministries, including the National Association of Evangelicals, Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth for Christ, Fuller Theological Seminary, and *Christianity Today* magazine. Dr. Henry served as one of the original faculty members at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA, until he moved to Washington DC in 1956 to become the first editor of *Christianity Today*.

While appreciating the contributions of neo-orthodoxy, these early evangelicals rightly feared its pernicious influence on the church. Once, when Karl Barth came to Washington for a luncheon at George Washington University, Dr. Henry took the opportunity to probe his convictions. As he recalls in his autobiography:

Identifying myself as ‘Carl Henry, editor of *Christianity Today*,’ I continued: ‘The question, Dr. Barth, concerns the historical factuality of the resurrection of Jesus.’ I pointed to the press table and noted the presence of leading religion editors or reporters representing United Press, Religion News Service, *Washington Post*, *Washington Star* and other media. If these journalists had their present duties in the time of Jesus, I asked, was the resurrection of such a nature that covering some aspect of it would have fallen into their area of responsibility? ‘Was it news,’ I asked, ‘in the sense that the man in the street understands news?’ Barth became angry. Pointing at me, and recalling my identification, he asked: ‘Did you say *Christianity Today* or *Christianity Yesterday*?’ The audience – largely non-evangelical professors and clergy – roared with delight. When countered unexpectedly in this way, one often reaches for a Scripture verse. So I replied, assuredly out of biblical context, ‘*Yesterday, today and forever.*’ When further laughter subsided, Barth took up the challenge: ‘And what of the virgin birth? Would the photographers come and take pictures of it?’ he asked. Jesus, he continued, appeared only to believers and not to the world. Barth correlated the reality of the resurrection only with personal faith.⁹⁸

Reinhold Niebuhr and his “Christian realism” likewise came under the evangelical critique. As Billy Graham prepared to begin an evangelistic crusade in New York City in 1957, Niebuhr wrote an editorial sharply critical of Graham, concluding that he “dread[s] the prospect” of Graham’s arrival.⁹⁹ E.J. Carnell eagerly took up the gauntlet to defend Graham. Since Carnell had written his doctoral dissertation on Niebuhr, he knew well the strengths and vulnerabilities of Christian realism. And he saw a profound difference:

“Orthodoxy mediates problems of man and history from the perspective of Scripture, while realism mediates problems of Scripture from the perspective of man and history.”

To Carnell, this was not just academic trifling. “When it comes to the acid test” of personal faith, “realism is not very realistic after all. A concrete view of sin converts to an abstract view of salvation.” Niebuhr might speak of Christ’s cross and resurrection as “symbols” instead of literal realities, “but of what value are these symbols to an anxious New York cabby?” At the end of the day, Carnell suggested ironically, evangelical orthodoxy was more “realistic” than Christian realism.¹⁰⁰

Into the 1960s and 70s, the mainline Protestant denominations continued to decline. And in turn evangelicalism came to define “mainstream” Protestantism — so much so that *Newsweek* magazine declared 1976 to be the “year of the evangelical.” Thousands became Christians through the evangelism of Billy Graham and others like him, and evangelical Bible churches boomed. Evangelicalism also had significant influence within some denominations. Both the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church and the Southern Baptists were pulled back from liberalism to orthodoxy, in large part from evangelical pressures.

⁹⁸ Carl F.H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco, TX: Word 1986), 211.

⁹⁹ Niebuhr, “Editorial Notes,” *Christianity and Crisis*, 5 March 1956, 18-19

¹⁰⁰ Carnell, “Can Billy Graham Slay the Giant?”, *CT*, 13 May 1957, 3-5.

13. The Modern World

As a movement to preserve Christian orthodoxy, spread the Gospel, and engage with the culture, evangelicalism proved quite effective. Its strengths were many: conservative theology, passion and energy, thoughtful scholarship, and a unity among Christians from different traditions who shared a common experience of conversion. Evangelicalism was not without its weaknesses, however, which helps account for some of the confusions hindering the movement today. **First**, because it based itself in large part on a shared *experience* of conversion; and because it sought to bridge denominational divides, evangelicalism did not have much of a creedal foundation. It could not point to an objective, historical confession of faith that defined precisely what evangelicals believed, beyond the barest of bare essentials. Thus, problems would arise when non-evangelical traditions claimed a similar “born again” experience without affirming a shared theology – for example, there is even a small movement of “evangelical Mormons.” **Second**, evangelicalism never rooted itself enough in the local church. Because it focused so much on para-church ministries and unity across the denominations, evangelicalism in some ways neglected the primacy of the local church in God’s salvation plan. This has in some respects weakened local churches, as many Christians turn to other organizations for specialized ministries to students, men, women, athletes, and other particular groups. As it enters the 21st century, evangelicalism needs to reestablish its roots in the historic confessions of faith, and refocus itself on the local church. There are two organizations devoted to these purposes: the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (ACE), and the Nine Marks Ministries.

The Global Church: Expansion, and Persecution

I should comment quickly on another tremendous development in the twentieth century: the expansion of the church around the globe. The world missions movement of the 19th century continued in strength into the 20th. The efforts of these faithful missionaries began to bear enduring fruit, as indigenous church leaders arose in many nations which before did not even have churches. While in 1960, some two-thirds of all evangelicals in the world were in Europe or North America, by 2000, the ratio had reversed: about two-thirds of all evangelicals in the world are now in Asia, Africa, or Latin America. Some of the church’s most dramatic growth continues today in the developing world.

This expansion did not come without opposition. Many Christians throughout the 20th century suffered and died for their faith. By some estimates, more Christians were martyred in the 20th century than in all previous centuries combined. The persecutions unleashed by German Nazism, Soviet and Chinese communism, militant Islam, and many other oppressive regimes and intolerant cultures, sent perhaps millions of faithful saints to their deaths. Rarely does the Gospel go forth, or the church grow, without resistance from the world – and the 20th century was no exception.

Conclusion

We have spent the last 13 weeks looking to God’s redemptive work in history and His sovereign care for His church. I want to close with a voice from the past and a vision of the future. Augustine, 1600 years ago, surveyed God’s work in history in his masterpiece, *The City of God*. I take Augustine’s conclusion as my own:

[We look to] the eternal rest not only of the spirit but of the body also. There we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be, in the end, *without* end! For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?

And now, I think I have discharged my debt with the completion of this huge work, by God’s help. It may be too much for some, too little for others. Of both these groups I ask forgiveness. But of those for whom it is enough, I make this request: that they do not thank me, but join with me in rendering thanks to God. Amen. Amen.

Appendix - Chronology

64 Rome burns, Nero blames the Christians

- 64 1st General Persecution
- 65 “Q” is written (hypothetical Greek source text for both Luke and Mark)
- 66-70 Revolt in Judea, Vespasian sent to quell it
- 67 Peter and Paul martyred at Rome (~before 68)
- 68 Essene community destroyed (Dead Sea Scrolls)
- 68 New Testament is closed?** – Nero dies June 9.
- 69-79 Vespasian is emperor; Jochanan ben Zakkai seeks audience with Vespasian
- 70 Jerusalem destroyed; Temple is burned; *Great Diaspora* as Jews are deported
- 72 Jude crucified
- 73 Barnabas dies of unknown causes
- 73 Masada falls**
- 74 Simon the Zealot crucified in Britain
- 79 Mt. Vesuvius explodes burying Pompei
- 79-81 Titus is emperor
- 80 Paul’s letters are circulating as a group**
- 81-96 Domitian (Titus’ younger brother) is emperor
- 85 2nd General Persecution
- 96 Clement I sends letter supporting Apostolic succession
- 96-98 Nerva is emperor – frees John from Patmos.
- 97 Timothy beaten to death by mob

- 98-117 Trajan is emperor
- 108 3rd General Persecution
- 110 John dies of old age at Ephesus - End of Apostolic Era**
- 110 Sunday is Christian Sabbath at this time
- 113-117 Parthian War/Revolt of the Jews
- 115 2nd Jewish uprising against Rome
- 117-138 Hadrian is emperor (built wall in England)
- 132 Simon Bar Coheba declares himself Messiah
- 138-161 Antoninus Pius is emperor
- 139 Marcion splits church at Rome with heretical teachings
- 140 Justin Martyr’s description of Sabbath worship
- 140 Shepherd of Hermas published as guide to church order
- 150 Tertullian born; Worship service divided between true believers & others
- 156 Montanus’ “Phrygian” movement: revival of prophets/revelation
- 161-180 Marcus Aurelius (last great emperor of Rome)
- 163 4th General Persecution
- 163 Justin Martyr & Polycarpus martyred
- 180-192 Commodus is emperor
- 185 Irenaeus upholds incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection as fact
- 190 Clement of Alexandria takes over catechetical school at Alexandria**
- 190 Clement instructs young pupil named Origen

- 192 5th General Persecution
- 193 Pertinax is emperor
- 193-211 Severus is emperor
- 195 Tertullian becomes Christian
- 197 Tertullian’s Apology**
- c.199 Apostle’s Creed standardized

- 200 Muratorian NT Canon established
- 202 Clement of Alexandria trains Origen
- 206 Tertullian joins Montanists
- 211-217 Caracalla is emperor
- 218-222 Elagabalus is emperor
- 222-235 Severus Alexander is emperor
- 227 Zoroastrianism revived in Parthia
- 230 Origen ordained in Palestine
- 230 Origen finishes first Hexapla & Sys. Theology**
- 235-238 Maximinus is emperor
- 235 6th General persecution
- 238-244 Gordianus III is emperor
- 244-249 Philippus is emperor
- 248 Cyprian named Bishop of Carthage 1 yr. after conversion
- 249-251 Decius is emperor
- 249 7th General Persecution
- 250 Origen’s NT/Major period of church construction**
- 251-253 Gallus is emperor
- 251 Cyprian advocates Papism and episcopacy
- 251 Novatian schism and anti-pope
- 253-259 Valerian is emperor
- 257 8th General Persecution
- 257 St. Lawrence and Cyprian martyred
- 259-268 Gallien is emperor
- 268-270 Claudius II is emperor
- 270-275 Aurelian is emperor
- 270 9th General Persecution
- 270 St. Alban martyred
- 275-276 Tacitus is emperor
- 276-282 Probus is emperor
- 282-283 Carus is emperor
- 284-305 Diocletian is emperor
- 296 Pope Marcellinus offers pagan sacrifices

- 300 Eusebius’ NT** – 40 churches now in Rome
- 300 Anthony of Koma becomes 1st monk (friend of Athanasius)
- 301 Armenia first nation to adopt Christianity as state religion
- 303 10th General Persecution under Diocletian
- 303 St. Sebastian and St. George martyred
- 305 Galerius and Constantius are emperor
- 305 Meletian schism
- 306-337 Constantine the Great is emperor
- 310 Maximus deports Pope Eusebius and Heraclius

Chronology – 1st-20th centuries

312 Constantine's vision of Cross to conquer
313 Christianity legalized by Edict of Milan under Constantine
 314 Constantine calls Council of Ancyra against the Donatist Schism; formalizes discipline
 314-340 Eusebius is bishop of Caesarea
 318 Arian heresy denies true divinity of Christ
 321 Constantine declares Sunday day of rest
325 Council of Nicea called by Constantine
 325 Nicene Creed; Eusebius writes Ecclesiastical History; Ethiopia is second nation to adopt Christianity as state religion; Constantine orders Church of the Nativity built in Bethlehem.
 326 Pope Sylvester I consecrates basilica of St Peter in Rome, built over Peter's tomb.
 330 Constantine moves capital from Rome to Byzantium (Constantinople).
 335 Athanasius exiled, Arius declared orthodox
 335 December 25th is being celebrated as Christmas
 337 Mirian II of Georgia third to adopt Christianity as state religion. May 22 Constantine dies
 337-361 Rule by sons of Constantine
 341 Ulfilas becomes missionary to the Goths
 361-363 Julianus "The Apostate" (organized a pagan church) – last non-Christian emperor
 363-364 Jovianus (surrendered Mesopotamia to the Persians)
 364-375 Valentinus is emperor
 367 Bishop Athanasius' Easter letter lists 27 books of NT
 370-379 Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea
 372-394 Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa
 373 John Chrysostom becomes monk
 374-397 Ambrose, Bishop of Milan
 374 Augustine joins Manicheans
 375-383 Gratianus is emperor
 376 Visigoths cross the Danube
 379-395 Theodosius "The Great" is emperor
 379-381 Gregory Nazianzus, Bishop of Constantinople
 379 Basil creates Rule of Discipline for eastern monasteries
 380 Theodosius declares Christianity the official religion of Roman Empire (Feb 27th).
 380 Theodosius is baptized (Nov 24th)
 381 John Chrysostom ordained deacon; Nicene Creed updated at 2nd Ecumenical Council to declare Jesus had human soul.
382 Jerome Bible begun; Canon debated
 384 Bishop Ambrose' sermon leads to Augustine's conversion
 386 Augustine of Hippo becomes Christian
 386 John Chrysostom becomes elder
 387 Augustine baptized
 389 The great library of Alexandria intentionally destroyed by a Christian mob on Theodosius' orders.

DARK AGES - though Gibbon dated it 476 when Rome fell (the Germanic warrior Odoacer deposed and exiled the last Western emperor, Romulus Augustus).

390 Theodosius massacres 7000 people at Thessalonica to crush a rebellion there. Bishop Ambrose of Milan forces him to do penance.
 390 "descended into hell" added to Apostles' Creed.
 391 most Pagan rituals outlawed in Rome
391 Augustine ordained against his better judgment
 392 Augustine opposes Donatist teaching that efficacy of sacrament depends on administrator
 395-408 Arcadius- Emperor of the East
 395-423 Honorius- Emperor of the West
 396-430 Augustine, Bishop of Hippo
 398-404 John Chrysostom archbishop of Constantinople
 398 4th General Council at Carthage prohibits laymen from preaching without permission, and fixes NT for the west. OT at this time includes the apocrypha.

400 Jerome Bible completed; Ethiopic and Syriac bibles standardized with different canon.
 400 Augustine rejects Pelagian teachings which oppose predestination and imputed sin from Adam. He upholds irresistible grace.
 407 Roman Legions Evacuate Britain
 408-450 Theodosius II publishes the earliest collection of existing laws.
410 Aug 24th Rome is sacked
 410-450 Attila the Hun ravages the Empire.
 412 Cyril of Alexandria coins "hypostatic union"
 415 Coptic Christian mob murders Hypatia (famous woman philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer) allegedly over a dispute between Cyril and governor Orestes.
 419 Pelagians banished
 430 Augustine dies
 431 Council at Ephesus condemns Pelagianism
432 Patrick is missionary to Ireland
 436 Aetius defeats the Visigoths
 439 Vandals take Carthage
 440-461 Pope Leo the Great – "first" Pope
 447 Council of Toledo adds Filioque clause to the Nicene Creed of 381 ('and the Son')
 449 2nd Council of Ephesus – Monophysite (Jesus divine but not human)
 450-457 Marcian
 450 Attila the Hun moves into Gaul
 451 Council at Chalcedon renounces Arian teachings – Athanasian Creed; Affirms Hypostatic union (truly God, truly man); Leo rejects canons in 453, but affirms this union.
 451 Aetius defeats the Huns at Battle of Chalons with the help of the Visigoth king Theodoric I.
 452 Attila, warned by Pope Leo I, departs Italy

Chronology – 1st-20th centuries

Sep. 454 Valentinian murders Aetius
Mar. 455 Valentinian murdered by Aetius' guards
455 Eudoxia (Valentinian's widow) calls the Vandals from Africa to revenge her husband's death

Jun. 455 Rome is sacked by the Vandals

457-474 Leo I- Emperor of the East
474 Leo II-Emperor of the East
474-491 Zeno- Emperor of the East

FALL OF ROME

476 Sep 4th – Romulus Augustus, last Emperor of West, deposed.

(400-1033) The Burgundians rule in S.E. Gaul
(415-711) The Visigoths rule in Spain
(429-533) The Vandals rule in N. Africa
(443-485) The Jutes, Angles and Saxons rule in Britain
481 Clovis becomes first real king of the Franks
484-519 Acacian Schism splits Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) churches.
491 Armenian Orthodox split from other churches
493 Clovis becomes Catholic Christian
(486-752) The Franks ruled by the Merovingians
(493-554) The Ostrogoths rule in Italy

500 Incense introduced into worship; Vatican plans
525 Dionysius Exiguus establishes the Christian Calendar (B.C.-A.D.)

527 Justinian is emperor of Easter Empire
529 Council of Orange condemns Pelagianism
529 Benedictine Order founded
529 Justinian closes pagan philosophical school of Athens

543 Justinian condemns Origen; earthquakes hit
550 St. David converts Wales; crucifix introduced
553 Justinian calls 5th Ecumenical Council at Constantinople: outlaws the Monophysites who teach single human nature of Christ

(568-774) The Lombards rule in N. Italy

563 Columba missionary to Scotland

590 Gregory the Great becomes pope of Rome;
reforms church structure; introduces purgatory, Gregorian chant; seven deadly sins.

591 Columban missionary to Burgundians

596 Augustine of Canterbury becomes missionary to England

600 Mohammed founds Islam

604 St. Paul's Cathedral begun in London

607 Pope Boniface III, first bishop of Rome to be called "Pope"

613 Abbey of St. Gall in Switzerland

614 Khosrau II of Persia takes Damascus, Jerusalem, and holy cross of Christ

624 Battle of Badr, beginning of Islamic Empire

628-629 Battle of Mut'ah, Heraclius recovers cross of Christ and Jerusalem till 638

634-644 Umar, 2nd Sunni Islam Caliph with capital at Damascus conquers Syria in 635, defeats Heraclius at Yarmuk in 636, conquers Egypt and Armenia in 639, Persia in 642

640 Library of Alexandria destroyed by the Arabs, Center of Western Culture: 300,000 ancient texts

663 Wilfrid argues for Rome at Synod of Whitby

664 Synod of Whitby turns Britain Catholic

674-678 First Arab siege of Constantinople

687-691 **Dome of the Rock** built in Jerusalem

690 Willibrord becomes apostle to Frisia. Trains Boniface for 3 years.

698 Fall of Carthage to the Arabs – dark ages of Byzantine Empire; silences church in Africa.

714 Charles Martel rules the Franks

717 Second Arab siege of Constantinople

723 Boniface missionary to Germany (Thuringia)

730-787 First Iconoclasm – Leo III of Byzantium bans icons; Pope Gregory II excommunicates him.

732 Charles Martel stops the Moors at Battle of Tours

751 Pepin III, the Short rules the Franks

751 Boniface crowns Pepin

754 Pope Stephen III crowns Pepin

756 Pepin donates the Patrimony of St. Peter to church

774 Charlemagne defeats the Lombards

781 Christianity enters China

787 7th Ecumenical Council of Nicea ends First Iconoclasm

793 Viking raids begin on Christendom

MIDDLE AGES

800 Charlemagne becomes protector of the Pope, first Holy Roman Emperor under Leo III.

812 Charlemagne recognized by Constantinople

814 Charlemagne dies and his kingdom with him

829 Anskar 1st Bishop of Hamburg. Missionary to Scandinavia

860 Cyril and Methodius missionaries to Slavs; create alphabet, translate Bible into Slavonic

910 Cluny monastery founded: opposes simony & lay investiture

962 Otto the Great of Germany restores W. Empire

984 Antipope Boniface VII murders Pope John XIV, may have murdered Benedict VI in 974

997 Boniface VII deposed by Pope Gregory V and Holy Roman Emperor Otto III

1000 Scholasticism begins

1012 Antipope Gregory VI removed by Henry II

1022 Lay reformists burned at stake at Orleans, France

1045 Sigfrid of Sweden, Benedictine evangelist

1050 Anselm joins group at Bec

1054 East-West Schism formalized

Chronology – 1st-20th centuries

1059 College of Cardinals created

- 1065 Westminster Abbey consecrated
- 1066 William the Conqueror invades England
- 1071 Eastern emperor captured by Seljuk Turks
- 1073 Hildebrand elected as pope Gregory VII**
- 1075 Gregory VII prohibits lay investiture
- 1075 Gregory declares papal infallibility as basis for appointing bishops over king's preferences.
- 1077 Henry begs forgiveness from Gregory VII in the snow
- 1093 Anselm archbishop of Canterbury** writes *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man) on the Atonement: ransom paid to God not Satan.
- 1095 Eastern emperor Alexius I appeals for help against Turks
- 1095 1st Crusade called by pope Urban II to reconquer the Holy Land for Christendom
- 1098 Cistercian movement begun by Robert, a Benedictine monk

1115 Bernard founds monastery at Clairvaux

- 1118 Knights Templar founded
- 1121 Abelard charged with heresy
- 1122 Concordat of Worms acknowledges church's right to elect bishops
- 1122 Abelard arranges contradictory statements from church Fathers and the Bible for his students to reconcile.
- 1130 Peter of Bruys (**reformer**) burned at stake for his rejection of the doctrinal and disciplinary authority of the church; recognition of the Gospel freely interpreted as the sole rule of faith; condemnation of the baptism of infants, of the eucharist, of the sacrifice of the mass, of the communion of saints, and of prayers for the dead; and refusal to recognize any form of worship or liturgy.
- 1131 Tintern Abbey founded in Wales
- 1140 Abelard declared heretic by Bernard of Clairvaux
- 1149 2nd Crusade called by Bernard of Clairvaux
- 1155 Carmelites founded
- 1163 Cathedral at Notre Dame begun
- 1173 Waldensians founded: believed in vow of poverty, public lay preaching, and the literal interpretation of the scriptures – similar to Francis of Assisi.
- 1179 Peter Waldo (Waldenses) approaches 3rd Lateran Council for permission to preach to the common people in the vernacular
- 1184 Peter Waldo's movement condemned (Waldenses)**
- 1189 3rd Crusade starring Richard the Lion Heart
- 1198 Innocent III becomes pope; declares supremacy of papal throne

1209 Francis of Assisi becomes an itinerant preacher

- 1213 Innocent III deposes King John of England

- 1215 4th Lateran Council: Celibate clergy, laity denied communion, state punishment of heretics/supporters; special dress for Jews and Muslims
- 1220 Inquisition placed in hands of Dominicans
- 1220-1263 Alexander Nevsky holy patron of Russia
- 1229 Council of Toulouse decrees forceful suppression of Waldenses; entrusted to the Dominican Order.
- 1231 Charter of Univ of Paris under Gregory IX
- 1244 Thomas Aquinas becomes a Dominican monk**
- 1252 Pope Innocent IV authorizes torture for Inquisition
- 1260 Shroud of Turin dated
- 1265 Aquinas begins *Summa Theologiae*: prior reason leads to subsequent faith. Challenges Immaculate Conception of Mary but is willing to submit to papal stance.
- 1270 John Duns Scotus b.
- 1274 Aquinas finishes his systematic theology
- 1291 Holy Land falls to Islam
- 1296 Conflict between Pope Boniface and the kings of England and France

THE RENAISSANCE

- 1300 Pope Boniface VIII declares Jubilee year and himself emperor;
- 1300 Duns Scotus teaches at Oxford – defends Immaculate Conception of Mary.
- 1305 Clement V, a Frenchman, elected pope; begins 72 year Babylonian Captivity of papacy at Avignon
- 1308 Duns Scotus d.
- 1311 Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri
- 1314 Jacques de Molay, last Grandmaster of Knights of Templar, burned at stake as Philip VI of France and Pope Clement persecuted the Templars to steal their wealth and power for themselves. At the stake, Molay cursed the Pope and the King who both died within the year.
- 1330 William of Occam leads strong attack on Scholasticism
- 1377 Wyclif's teachings against abuses condemned by pope – Wyclif held anti-Catholic views of the sacraments of penance and communion, opposed relics and clerical celibacy.
- 1378 Great Schism of the papacy for next 39 years
- 1408 Council of Oxford forbids vernacular translation unless fully approved by Church
- 1415 Council of Constance condemns Hus & Wyclif; Hus burned at stake**
- 1425 Catholic University of Leuven
- 1431 Joan of Arc burned at stake
- 1432 Archbishop of Canterbury declares Wyclif a heretic
- 1439 Notre Dame tallest building in world till 1874
- 1453 Constantinople falls to the Turks
- Greek Orthodox Confession of Gennadius

Chronology – 1st-20th centuries

1455 Gutenberg Bible – Printing Press

1473-1481 Sistine Chapel built
 1478 Spanish Inquisition under Pope Sixtus IV
 1484 Pope Innocent VIII issues bull vs. witchcraft
 1486 Vasco de Gama rounds Cape of Good Hope
 1492 Columbus sails the “Ocean Blue”

1508-1512 Michaelangelo frescoes Sistine Chapel
 1515 Luther realizes salvation by grace

THE REFORMATION

1517 Luther posts 95 theses

1519 Zwingli begins reform in Zurich
 1520 Papal bull gives Luther 60 days to recant
 1521 Luther takes stand at Diet of Worms
 1521 Cortes destroys Aztec empire; Magellan claims Philippines for Spain.
 1522 Knights’ Revolt in Germany is precursor to the Peasants War; Luther’s NT; German NT
 1524 Peasants’ War in Germany; Luther opposes it
 1525 Anabaptist movement begins; finds radical support from those in the Peasants War.
1526 William Tyndale smuggles his bibles into England; banned by Henry VIII in 1546
 1527 Anabaptists call first synod of Protestant Reformation
 1529 Luther splits with Zwingli on nature of eucharist
 1529 Diet of Speir issues Anabaptist Protestatio
 1530 Diet of Augsburg develops Augsburg Confession

1531 Calvin converts to Protestantism

1533 Pizarro destroys Incas
 1534 King Henry VIII creates Anglican church
 1534 Jesuit Order founded to oppose Reformers
 1535 Luther pens the Articles of Smalkald
 1535 Thomas More executed for refusing to accept Henry VIII’s claim as head of Church of Eng
 1536 Erasmus’ Greek NT used for translations
 1536 Tyndale executed
 1536 1st edition of Calvin’s Institutes; Helvetic Confessions of Switzerland (Zwingli)
 1536-1540 Dissolution of monasteries in Britain
 1536-1541 Michaelangelo paints Last Judgment
 1537-1551 Matthew Bible by John Rogers
 1538 Calvin and Farel expelled from Geneva
 1539-1569 Cromwell Bible auth. for public use
 1540 Jesuit order sanctioned for counter Reformation
 1541 Calvin called back to Geneva to establish a theocracy
 1542 Roman Inquisition estab by Pope Paul III
 1543 Tyndale Bible banned by Eng. Parliament

THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

1543 Copernicus – *Revol. Heavenly Spheres*
1545-1563 Council of Trent; counter-Reformation
 1546 Luther dies

1547 Open warfare between Protestants and Catholics in Germany
 1549 Compromise of Zurich – Calvin & Bullinger
 1549 Cranmer’s Book of Common Prayer Eng.
 1552 John Knox objects to 2nd Book of Common Prayer in England
 1553 Servetus (Unitarian) executed at Geneva
 1553 Knox flees to Continent when Mary Queen of Scots takes throne
 1553-1558 Mary persecutes Reformers; burns 238 at the stake, including John Rodgers, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, Thomas Cranmer

1555 Peace of Augsburg makes Germany Lutheran

1556 John Knox minister of English refugee church in Geneva
 1556 Roman Catechism
 1558 Elizabeth takes throne of England
 1559 Last edition of Calvin’s Institutes
 1559 French Confession of Faith
 1560 Geneva Bible; Scottish Reformation
 1560-1598 French Wars of Religion
 1561 Belgic Confession
 1561 Mennonites formed (from Anabaptists)
 1563 Thirty-nine Articles of Church of England
 1563 Heidelberg Catechism of Reformed Churches
 1566 Roman Catechism
 1571 Dutch Reformed Church
 1571 Foxe’s Book of Martyrs
 1572 John Knox founds Scottish Presby Church;
 7,000+ Huguenots murdered in France
 1580 Book of Concord of Lutheranism
 1582 Teresa of Avila
 1582 Gregorian Calendar adopted
 1587 Jesuits expelled from Japan
 1588 Defeat of Spanish Armada by England
 1590 Michaelangelo completes Basilica dome
 1592 Shakespeare becomes playwright

1600 Giordano Bruno, Dominican priest, burned at the stake for Calvinist views, scientific studies
 1604 Socinianism (Unitarian & Pelagian)
 1607 Anglicans arrive in Jamestown Virginia
 1609 Baptist Church founded by John Smyth
 1609 Douay-Rheims Bible – 1st Catholic Eng bible
 1610 Galileo sees moons of Jupiter

1611 King James Bible

1614 Rosicrucian Manifesto
 1618-1648 Thirty Years War in Germany between Protestants and Catholics, but joined in by other nations – subject of book *Three Musketeers*.
 1618 Canons of Dordt – Five Points of Calvinism; Kepler – *Laws of Planetary Motion*
 1620 Plymouth Colony founded
 1621 Cardinal Robt Bellarmine (Socinian) takes Galileo to task for holding Copernican views.
 1630 John Winthrop writes *City Upon a Hill*

Chronology – 1st-20th centuries

1633 Galileo condemned by Catholic Church
1636 Harvard founded to train ministers

AGE OF REASON – *man's mind is the measure*

1637 Descartes – *Discourse on Method*
1638 Anne Hutchinson banished as heretic from Massachusetts
1641 John Cotton, advocate of theonomy, helps establish social constitution for Mass Bay
1642 Greek Orthodox Confession of Mogilas
1643 Westminster Assembly convened
1644 Oliver Cromwell defeats Royalists
1646 Westminster Confession of Faith
1648 George Fox founds Quakers
1650 Treaty of Westphalia ends 30 Years War
1650 James Ussher calculates day of creation as October 23, 4004 BC
1651 Thomas Hobbes – *Leviathan*
1658 Oliver Cromwell dies
1662 Great Ejection – Eng. Puritans removed from pulpits following the Act of Uniformity
1672 Greek Orthodox Synod of Jerusalem decrees biblical canon
1675 Helvetic Consensus (Confession)

AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT – EMPIRICISM

1677 Spinoza – *Ethics*
1684 Roger Wms (theologian) advocates separation of Church and State in America
1685 Edict of Fontainbleau outlaws Protestantism in France; Russian Orthodox Church introduces orthodoxy to Beijing.
1686 Liebnitz – *Metaphysics*
1687 Newton publishes *Mathematical Principles*
1689 Locke – *Essay on Human Understanding – Two Treatises on Government*
1692 Salem witch trials in Colonial America
1693 Jacob Amman founds Amish

1710 **Berkeley** – *Principals of Human Knowledge*
1725 Moravians established

1733 First Great Awakening in America to 1749

1735 Welsh Methodist Revival
1737 **Hume** – *Treatise of Human Nature*
1738 John Wesley visits Aldersgate - Methodism
1739 George Whitfield begins preaching
1741 Jonathan Edwards – *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*
1754 Isaac Newton writes *An Historical Account of Two Notable Corruptions of Scripture*
1765 Liebnitz *On Human Understanding* published
1767-1815 Suppression of the Jesuits in Portugal, France, Sicily and Spain by advocates of the Enlightenment (in the RC Church)
1768 New Smyrna FL Greek Orthodox colony

1768 Reimarus dies – wrote radical work separating historical Jesus from biblical Jesus (Liberalism)
1769 First California mission: San Diego de Alcala
1772 Swedenborgian cult founded
1774 Founding of Shakers by Ann Lee
1774 Reimarus' works published anonymously
1776-1788 Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of Rome* which is critical of Christianity
1776 Mission Delores founded in San Francisco

1776 American Revolution

1779 Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom – no coercion by the state regarding religion
1780 Robert Raikes begins Sunday Schools to reach poor & uneducated children in England
1781 **Kant** – Critique of Pure Reason
1784 Asbury and Coke – Methodist missionaries form American Methodist Episcopal Church

1787 Wilberforce begins anti-slavery campaign – this is just 2 years after his conversion.

1789 French Revolution – the de-Christianization of France
1789 John Carroll 1st U.S. Roman Catholic bishop at Baltimore
1791 First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution
1792 Second Great Awakening in Britain
William Carey – missions pamphlet
1793 Herman of Alaska brings orthodoxy to Alaska
1795 Thomas Paine – Age of Reason (deism)
1796 American Treaty with Tripoli states, "The Government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."
1797 Wilberforce writes *Practical View of Prevailing Religious Practices* which profoundly affects British culture.

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

1800 Schleiermacher begins Liberal Movement
1807 Hegel – *Phenomenology of Spirit*
1811 Campbells begin Restoration Movement
1815 Protestant Peter the Aleut tortured & martyred in Catholic San Francisco CA
1816 Bishop Richard Allen, former slave, founds the African Methodist Episcopal Church
1819 Schopenhauer – *The World as Will and Representation*
1819 Jefferson produces his Jefferson Bible
1820 F. Schleiermacher father of liberal Protestantism
1820 Joseph Smith's vision – Mormonism
1821 Charles Finney ordained
1824 Gesenius' Heb-Eng Lexicon published
1827 Plymouth Brethren founded – Darby et al
1830 Mormonism founded – Joseph Smith – Book of Mormon published
1830 Finney's revivals: 2nd Great Awakening
1832 Church of Christ (Disciples) founded, made of Presbyterians distressed over factionalism

Chronology – 1st-20th centuries

1833 Slavery Abolition Act – England

1833 John Darby formulates Dispensationalism
 1833 Keble's sermon 'Nat'l Apostasy' initiates the Oxford Movement in England (Church of Eng is direct descendant of Apostolic Church)
 1835 Finney teaches theology at Oberlin College
1836 Mahan - Holiness Movement
 1838-39 – Lutheran Church Mo Synod founded
 1838 – Schleiermacher's *Hermeneutics* - Higher Criticism and dawn of Liberalism.
 1840 Millerism – root of Seventh Day Adventists
 1843 Kierkegaard – Christian Existentialism
 1843 Schism in Church of Scotland
 1844 Millerite prediction of 2nd Coming fails
 1845 Southern Baptist Convention GA
 1846 Finney Systematic Theology
 1848 Karl Marx' Communist Manifesto
 1848 Perfectionist Movement Western NY
 1854 Hudson Taylor arrives in China
 1854 Immaculate Conception is Catholic dogma
 1855 d. Kierkegaard
 1857 Third Great Awakening Canada & U.S.
1859 Charles Darwin's Origin of Species
 1860 American Civil War
 1863 Seventh-Day Adventists – Ellen White
 1865 Wm Booth founds Salvation Army
 1865 Hudson Taylor founds China Inland Mission
 1869 First Vatican Council: Papal Infallibility
 1870 Italy declares war on papal states
 1871 German Kulturkampf against Catholicism
 1871 D.L. Moody "Endowed" with power
 1873 D.L. Moody and Ira Sankey begin ministry
 1875 Keswick Convention (Eng) "Higher Life"
 1879 C.T. Russell founds Watch Tower – later to be Jehovah's Witnesses under Rutherford 1931
 1879 Mary Baker Eddy founds Christian Scientists
 1881 Revised Version by Church of Eng
 1883 Nietzsche's *Superman* – "God is dead"
 1885 Baltimore Catechism – Catholic school text
 1886 Nietzsche – *Beyond Good and Evil*
 1887 Chicago Crusade – D.L. Moody
 1889 Moody Bible Institute founded as the Chicago Evangelization Society – R.A. Torrey presides
1889 Hull House – Social Gospel – Jane Addams
 1894 Christian anarchism – Leo Tolstoy
 1897 Christian flag conceived in Brooklyn NY
 1899 d. D.L. Moody
 1899 Gideon's Int'l founded

 1900 *What is Christianity* by Adolf Harnack reduces Christianity to the personality of Jesus and it promotes the Social Gospel
 1901 ASV translation
 1902 Madame Curie discovers radium
 1905 Einstein – *Special Theory of Relativity*
 1905 French law separates church and state

1906 Albert Schweitzer: Quest of Historical Jesus
 1906 Biblia Hebraica
 1906 American Pentecostalism – Asusa St Revival
 1907 Nicholas of Japan, Archbishop Orthodox Ch.
 1908 Rutherford discovers atomic half-life
 1909 **Scofield Reference Bible** – As the first study Bible, it resulted in a widespread dispensational interpretation of Scripture (Darbyism).
 1909 Rosicrucian Fellowship (Christian mysticism)
 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conf: modern missions
 1910 The Fundamentals – 12-volume collection of essays forming foundation of Fundamentalism
 1913 Our Lady of Fatima appears to 3 children
 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia
 1914 Welsh Church Act disestablishes Welsh Church and absorbs it under Church of England

DEATH OF ENLIGHTENMENT

1914 World War I
 1915-1917 Armenian genocide
 1915 Einstein – *General Theory of Relativity*
 Kafka - *Metamorphosis*
 1917 Russian Revolution
 1917 Independent *True Jesus Church* established in China without oversight (house churches)
 1918 Execution: Romanovs, Holy Martyrs - Russia
 1919 German Nazi Party founded
 1919 Karl Barth pub. Commentary on Romans that critiques Liberalism and begins neo-orthodoxy
1920 Fundamentalism spreads in America
 1921 d. B. B. Warfield
 1922 Niels Bohr discovers discrete electron orbits
 1922 "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" sermon by Harry Emerson Fosdick - Liberalism
 1923 *Christianity and Liberalism* by J. Gresham Machen
 1923 Aimee Semple McPherson builds Angelus Temple
 1924 H.L. Mencken declares Christian Faith laughable
 Dallas Theological Seminary formed
1925 Scope's Monkey Trial brings national attention to Fundamentalism
 1926 Father Chas. Coughlin's first radio broadcast
 1927 Heisenberg – *Uncertainty Principle*
 1927 Heidegger – *Being and Time*
 1927 Pope declares *Johannine Comma* debatable (textual support for Trinity)
 1928 John Dewey in Russia; admires Communism
 1929 Lateran Treaty signed between Italy and Pope recognizing Roman papacy as sovereign state
 1929 Machen and others found Westminster Seminary after Princeton is lost to the liberals
1929 Wall Street Stock Market Crash begins the Great Depression
 1930 Rastafarians founded

Chronology – 1st-20th centuries

1931 Jehovah's Witnesses organized under Joseph Rutherford
 1931 Christ the Redeemer statue, Rio de Janeiro
 1932 Earnest Rutherford discovers neutron
 1933 Catholic Worker Movement – Dorothy Day
 1933 Hitler Nazi Party in power; Heidegger joins
 1933 Dawson Trotman founds Navigators
 1934 Herbert W. Armstrong – Radio Church of God, Worldwide Church of God
 1934 Conversion of Billy Graham
 1934 Mao Tse Tung – Long March
 1935 Billy Sunday – radio evangelist
 1939 Southern and Northern Methodist Episcopal churches reunite after schism over slavery
 1939 World War II
 1940 World's Largest Cross erected at Madrid
 1940 Wycliffe Bible Translators founded
 1940 John Dewey redefines Am. public education
 1941 Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor
1942 National Association of Evangelicals
 1945 Roman Catholic sex abuse cases begin
 1945 Dietrich Bonhoeffer martyred in Germany
 1945 Atom Bomb dropped
 1945 suicide of Ludwig Müller– Nazi Christian
 1945 Nag Hammadi library discovered
 1947 Dead Sea Scrolls discovered
 1947 Carl F.H. Henry writes *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* distinguishing it from Evangelicalism
 1947 Oral Roberts founds Evangelistic Association
 1948 World Council of Churches
 1948 Israel declared sovereign
 1949 Billy Graham begins crusade in Los Angeles
 1950 Korean War
 1950 Pope decrees doctrine of the Assumption of Mary body and soul as with Christ's Ascension
 1950 Missionaries of Charity – Mother Teresa
 1951 *Last Temptation* published by Kazantzakis – fictional work widely banned
 1951 Bill Bright founds Campus Crusade for Christ
 1951 *Novum Testamentum Graece* critical Greek NT – basis of modern translations
 1952 *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
 1954 Unification Church – Moonies
 1954 U.S. Pledge of Allegiance modified to include "under God"
 1955 New Age Cults – Eastern Mysticism become popular
 1955 Schaeffer – *How Should We Then Live?* L'Abri
 1956 U.S. motto on coins: "In God We Trust"
 1956 Ten Commandments movie blockbuster
 1956 Billy Graham founds *Christianity Today*
 1957 United Church of Christ – Calvinist/Lutheran
 1958 Foundation of the Internet
 1961 Christian Broadcasting Network – Robertson

1962-1965 Vatican Council II

1962 Watson and Crick determine DNA structure
 1963 Madalyn Murray O'Hair – school prayer ends
 1963 Oral Roberts University
 1965 Vietnam War – Rushdoony founds Chalcedon Foundation – Christian Reconstruction, Dominionism, and the Home School movement
 1967 C.F. Henry – *Evangelicals at Brink of Crisis*
 1970's Jesus Movement
 1970 Hal Lindsey – *Late Great Planet Earth*
 1971 Liberty University – Jerry Falwell
 1973 Trinity Broadcasting N/W Crouch, Bakker
 1974 Jim Bakker founds PTL television ministry
 1974 Lausanne Covenant – International Congress on World Evangelization
 1975 Seeker Churches – Willow Creek estab.
 1977 Focus on the Family established
 1977 New Perspective on Paul
1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy
 1979 Moral Majority founded by Jerry Falwell
 1979 Chuck Colson founds Prison Fellowship
 1979 *Jesus Film* – most-watched film of all time

Information Revolution

1980 Personal Computers
1982 Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics
 1984 Schaeffer – *The Great Evangelical Disaster*
 1984 Italy ends Roman Catholicism as state religion
 1985 Internet expands to commercial interests
 1985 Jesus Seminar founded – critical review of the historicity of Jesus
1986 Chicago Statement on Biblical Application
 1989 Christian Coalition founded by Pat Robertson
 1989 Lausanne II – Manila Manifesto –
 1990 Desert Storm - American Ctr for Law and Justice
 1991 Megachurch Phenomenon
 1992 Catholic Catechism revised
1994 Declaration of Cooperation between Catholics and Evangelicals – ECT
 1994 Ken Ham *Answers in Genesis* – Creationism as a viable theory of origins
 1994 Porvoo Communion - Anglican churches unite in upholding Oxford Movement (Anglo-Catholicism)
 1995 Internet use becomes widespread
1996 Cambridge Declaration – Alliance of Conf. Evangelicals affirms Reformation doctrine
 1997 World Council of Churches – common date for Easter between East and West
 2001 World Trade Center destroyed
2002 Emerging Church Movement
 2005 Pope Benedict XVI – Latin Mass returns
 2007 Declaration that Roman Catholic Church is the only "authentic" Apostolic Church