

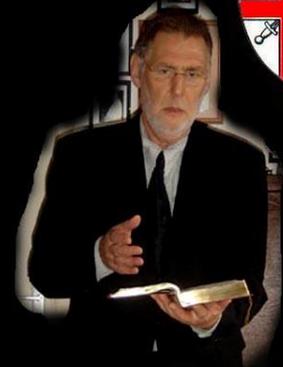


The Berea School of Theology and Ministries on Internet

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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119: 105**



ds. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.

Evangelical House Churches

Church History Abbreviated

arranged by

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Introduction and Meditation on Early Christian History



Church History, on the surface, seems irrelevant to twenty-first century Christianity. However, Christianity, unlike any other religion, is deeply rooted in history. Central to the Christian faith is the fact that God came to earth as a man – Jesus of Nazareth, called “the Christ”. He lived, loved and taught among humanity about 2000 years ago. The historical reality of His sacrifice, burial and resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. The Bible is not a fairy tale, but a divinely inspired historical record of God's plan of redemption for a hurting world. To study church history is to see the hand of God at work amidst the

strife, transgression and glory of man's ways.

"No one can serve two masters," declared Jesus to his disciples (Matt. 6:24). However, Christians have spent the greater portion of the past two millennia apparently trying to prove Jesus wrong. We have told ourselves that we can indeed have both-the things of God and the things of this world. Many of us live our lives no differently than do conservative non-Christians, except for the fact that we attend church regularly each week. We watch the same entertainment. We share the same concerns about the problems of this world. And we are frequently just as involved in the world's commercial and materialistic pursuits. Often, our being "not of this world" exists in theory more than in practice.

But the church was not originally like that. The first Christians lived under a completely different set of principles and values than the rest of mankind. They rejected the world's entertainment, honours, and riches. They were already citizens of another kingdom, and they listened to the voice of a different Master. This was as true of the second century church as it was of the first.

The Letter to Diognetus, the work of an unknown author, written in about 130, describes Christians to the Romans as follows: "They dwell in their own countries simply as sojourners.... They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time, they surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men but are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned. They are put to death, but [will be] restored to life. They are poor, yet they make many rich. They possess few things; yet, they abound in all. They are dishonoured, but in their very dishonour are glorified.... And those who hate them are unable to give any reason for their hatred." The Letter to Diognetus can be found in the Ante-Nicene Fathers.

Because the earth wasn't their home, the early Christians could say without reservation, like Paul, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Justin Martyr explained to the Romans, "Since our thoughts are not fixed on the present, we are not concerned when men put us to death. Death is a debt we must all pay anyway."

A second-century elder exhorted his congregation, "Brothers, let us willingly leave our sojourn in this present world so we can do the will of Him who called us. And let us not fear to depart out of this world,... deeming the things of this world as not belonging to us, and not fixing our desires upon them.... The Lord declares, 'No servant can serve two masters.' If we desire, then, to serve both God and Money, it will be unprofitable for us. 'For what will it profit if a man gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?' This world and the next are two enemies.... We cannot therefore be the friends of both."

Cyprian, the respected overseer of the church in Carthage, stressed a similar theme in a letter he wrote to a Christian friend: "The one peaceful and trustworthy tranquillity, the one security that is solid, firm, and never changing, is this: for a man to withdraw from the distractions of this world, anchor himself to the firm ground of salvation, and lift his eyes from earth to heaven.... He who is actually greater than the world can crave nothing, can desire nothing, from this world. How stable, how unshakable is that safeguard, how heavenly is the protection in its never-ending blessings-to be free from the snares of this entangling world, to be purged from the dregs of earth, and fitted for the light of eternal immortality."

The same themes run throughout all the writings of the early Christians, from Europe to North Africa: we can't have both Christ and the world. Lest we think that the early Christians were describing a lifestyle they didn't really practice, we have the testimony of the Romans themselves. One pagan antagonist of the Christians remarked:

They despise the temples as houses of the dead. They reject the gods. They laugh at sacred things. Wretched, they pity our priests. Half-naked themselves, they despise honours and purple robes. What incredible audacity and foolishness! They are not afraid of present torments, but they fear those that are uncertain and future. While they do not fear to die for the present, they fear to die after death....

At least learn from your present situation, you wretched people, what actually awaits you after death. See, many of you-in fact, by your own admission, the majority of you-are in want, are cold, are hungry, and are laboring in hard work. Yet, your god allows it. He is either unwilling or unable to assist his people. So he is either weak or unjust.... Take notice! For you there are threats, punishments, tortures, and crosses.... Where is the god who is supposed to help you when you come back from the dead? He cannot even help you in this life! Do not the Romans, without any help from your god, govern, rule over, and have the enjoyment of the whole world, including dominion over you yourselves?

In the meantime, living in suspense and anxiety, you abstain from respectable pleasures. You do not attend sporting events. You have no interest in public amusements. You reject the public banquets, and abhor the sacred games.... Thus, wretched as you are, you will neither rise from the dead, nor enjoy life in the meanwhile. So, if you have any wisdom or sense, stop prying into the

heavens and the destinies and secrets of the world.... Persons who are unable to understand civil matters are certainly unable to discuss divine ones.

When one first reads the criticisms that the Romans levelled against the Christians, I painfully realized that no one would accuse Christians today of those same charges. We aren't criticized for being totally absorbed in the interests of a heavenly kingdom, ignoring the things the world has to offer. In fact, Christians today are accused of just the opposite. We are accused of being money hungry and hypocritical in our devotion to God.

At no other time in the history of Christianity did love so characterize the entire church as it did in the first three centuries. And Roman society took note. Tertullian reported that the Romans would exclaim, "See how they love one another!"

Justin Martyr sketched Christian love this way: "We who used to value the acquisition of wealth and possessions more than anything else now bring what we have into a common fund and share it with anyone who needs it. We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for our enemies."

Clement, describing the person who has come to know God, wrote, "He impoverishes himself out of love, so that he is certain he may never overlook a brother in need, especially if he knows he can bear poverty better than his brother. He likewise considers the pain of another as his own pain. And if he suffers any hardship because of having given out of his own poverty, he does not complain."

When a devastating plague swept across the ancient world in the third century, Christians were the only ones who cared for the sick, which they did at the risk of contracting the plague themselves. Meanwhile, pagans were throwing infected members of their own families into the streets even before they died, in order to protect themselves from the disease.

Another example illustrates both the brotherly love of Christians and their uncompromising commitment to Jesus as Lord. A pagan actor became a Christian, but he realized he had to change his employment because most plays encouraged immorality and were steeped in pagan idolatry. Furthermore, the theatre sometimes purposefully turned boys into homosexuals so they could better play the roles of women on stage. Since this newly-converted actor had no other job skills, he considered establishing an acting school to teach drama to

non-Christian students. However, he first submitted his idea to the leaders of his church for their counsel.

The leaders told him that if acting was an immoral profession then it would be wrong to train others in it. Nevertheless, since this was a rather novel question, they wrote to Cyprian in nearby Carthage for his thoughts. Cyprian agreed that a profession unfit for a Christian to practice was also unfit for him to teach, even if this was his sole means of support.

How many of us would be so concerned about righteousness that we would submit our employment decisions to our body of elders or board of deacons? How many church leaders today would be so concerned about offending God that they would take such an uncompromising position?

But that isn't the end of the story. Cyprian also told this neighbouring church that they should be willing to support the actor if he had no other means of earning a living—just as they supported orphans, widows, and other needy persons. Going further, he wrote, “If your church is financially unable to support him, he may move over to us and here receive whatever he needs for food and clothing.” Cyprian and his church didn't even know this actor, yet they were willing to support him because he was a fellow believer. As one Christian told the Romans, “We love one another with a mutual love because we do not know how to hate.” If Christians today made such a statement to the world, would the world believe it?

The love of the early Christians wasn't limited simply to their fellow believers. Christians also lovingly helped non-believers: the poor, the orphans, the elderly, the sick, the shipwrecked—even their persecutors. Jesus had said, “Love your enemies ... and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). The early Christians accepted this statement as a command from their Lord, rather than as an ideal that couldn't be actually practiced in real life.

Lactantius wrote, “If we all derive our origin from one man, whom God created, we are plainly all of one family. Therefore it must be considered an abomination to hate another human, no matter how guilty he may be. For this reason, God has decreed that we should hate no one, but that we should eliminate hatred. So we can comfort our enemies by reminding them of our mutual relationship. For if we have all been given life from the same God, what else are we but brothers? ... Because we are all brothers, God teaches us to never do evil to one another, but only good—giving aid to those who are oppressed and experiencing hardship, and giving food to the hungry.”

The Scriptures teach that a Christian shouldn't take his brother to court. Rather, he should suffer fraud at the hands of his brother, if need be. (1 Cor. 6:7) However, as an attorney, I've seen that Christians today don't hesitate to sue their brothers and sisters in Christ. A particularly disturbing case happened recently in the town where I live. A student at a local Christian school worked on campus in his spare time to help pay his tuition. One day he was overcome from the fumes of some insecticide he was spraying in the school building, and he was briefly hospitalized. The school's method of applying the insecticide was apparently improper. The result? The parents sued the Christian school for more than half a million dollars. In contrast, early Christians not only refused to take their fellow Christians to court, most of them refused to take *anyone* to court, since they viewed every human as their brother or sister.

It's no wonder that Christianity spread rapidly throughout the ancient world, even though there were few organized missionary or evangelism programs. The love they practiced drew the attention of the world, just as Jesus said it would.

To the early Christian, trusting God meant more than a teary-eyed testimony about “the time I came to trust the Lord.” It meant believing that even if obedience to God entailed great suffering, God was trustworthy to bring a person through it.

“A person who does not do what God has commanded shows he really does not believe God,” Clement declared. To the early Christians, to claim to trust God while refusing to obey Him was a contradiction (1 John 2:4). Their Christianity was more than verbal. As one early Christian expressed it, “We don't speak great things—we live them!”

One distinguishing mark of the early Christians was their childlike, literal obedience to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. They didn't feel they had to understand the reason for a commandment before they would obey it. They just trusted that God's way was always the best way. Clement asked, “Who then is so irreverent as to disbelieve God, and to demand explanations from God as from men?”

They trusted God because they lived in awe of His majesty and wisdom. Felix, a Christian lawyer in Rome and a contemporary of Tertullian, put it this way: “God is greater than all our perceptions—He is infinite, immense. Only He truly understands His true greatness; our hearts are too limited to really understand Him. We are making a worthy estimation of Him when we say that He is beyond estimation.... Anyone who thinks he knows the magnitude of God, diminishes His greatness.”

The supreme example of their absolute trust in God was their acceptance of persecution. From the time of the Emperor Trajan (around A.D. 100) until the Edict of Milan was issued in 313, the practice of Christianity was illegal within the boundaries of the Roman Empire. Being a Christian was a crime punishable by death. But the Roman officials didn't generally hunt out Christians. They ignored them unless someone formally accused a person of being a Christian. As a result, persecution was intermittent. Christians in one town would suffer horrible tortures and death while Christians in a nearby area would be untouched. It was totally unpredictable. Yet, every Christian lived daily with a death sentence hanging over his head.

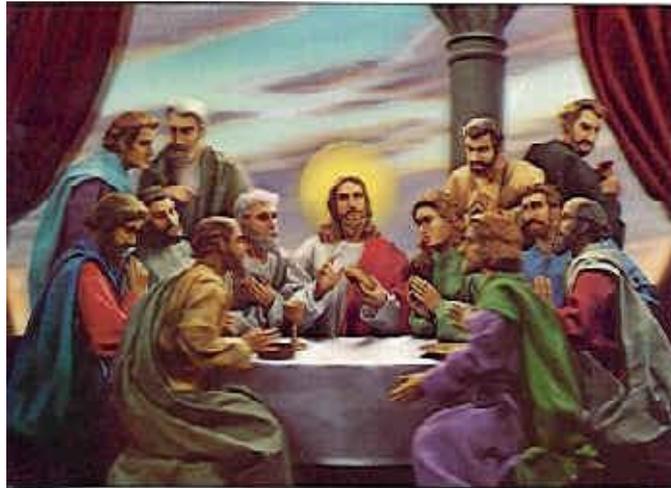
The very fact that Christians were willing to suffer unspeakable horrors and to die rather than disown their God was, next to their lifestyle, their single most effective evangelistic tool. Few, if any, Romans would die for their gods. There had to be some substance to Christianity if it meant so much to those who practiced it. In fact, the Greek word for "witness" is martyr. Not surprisingly, this is also the Greek word for "martyr." In many places where our Bibles use the word "witness," the early Christians were reading "martyr." For example, in our Bibles, Revelation 2:13 refers to "Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city." The early Christians were understanding the passage to say, "Antipas, my faithful martyr." Although most Christians tried to flee local persecution when possible, they rejected any mass exodus from the Roman Empire. Like little children, they believed their Master when He said His Church would be built on a rock and that the gates of Hades could not overpower it (Matthew 16:18).

They realized that thousands of them might die monstrous deaths, experience excruciating tortures, and suffer imprisonment. But they were absolutely convinced that their Father wouldn't let the church be annihilated. Christians stood before the Romans with naked hands, letting them know that Christians would not use human means to try to preserve the church. They trusted God, and God alone, as their protector.

As Origen told the Romans: "When God gives the Tempter permission to persecute us, we suffer persecution. And when God wishes us to be free from suffering, even though surrounded by a world that hates us, we enjoy a wonderful peace. We trust in the protection of the One who said, 'Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.' And truly He has overcome the world. Therefore, the world prevails only as long as it is permitted to by Him who received power from the Father to overcome the world. From His victory we take courage. Even if He should again wish us to suffer and contend for our

faith, let the enemy come against us. We will say to them, ‘I can do all things through Christ Jesus our Lord who strengthens me.’”

Origen had lost his father to persecution when he was a teenager, and he himself eventually died from torture and imprisonment at the hands of the Romans. Yet, with unshakable confidence he told the Romans, “Eventually, every form of worship will be destroyed except the religion of Christ, which alone will stand. In fact, it will one day triumph, for its teachings take hold of men's minds more and more each day.”



Church History: A Simple Chronology

Church history is rather complex, but an understanding of the basics is very worthwhile. The following is a simple chronology of church history adapted from Bruce Shelley's Church History in Plain Language:

(30-70 AD) The Time of Jesus and the Apostles

- The death and resurrection of Christ.
- The Christian faith is birthed and the gospel of grace is preached.

(70-312) The Age of “Catholic” Christianity and its multiple branches

- The spread of the Christian faith; martyrdom of the early believers.
- Early heresies sprouted; first church councils and the canonizing of scripture.

(312-590) The Age of the Christian Empire of great misery and killing

- Emperor Constantine declares Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire; Age of great councils.
- Christianity became a faith for the masses; start of Monasticism.

(590-1517) The Middle Ages

- The fall of Rome and the Byzantine empire.
- Benedictine monks deployed as missionaries; the pope becomes the "ruler" of the church.
- The crusades: The church gains the world but loses its soul.

(1517-1648) The Age of Reformation

- Martin Luther and the protestant movement.
- The start of denominationalism - Examples: Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist and Anglican.
- The papacy loses its power and influence.

(1648-1789) The Age of Reason and Revival

- Secularism -- The mind becomes god; people begin to ask, "Who needs God?"
- Revivals such as Pietism, Methodism and the Great Awakening seek to restore God to public life.

(1789-1914) The Age of Progress

- The message of Christ is carried to distant lands, but the faith continues to leave public life.
- Pluralistic and totalitarian societies see no relevance for Christianity.

(1912-current) The Age of Ideologies... Where are we now?

Christianity is not really a religion; it is a relationship with God. It is trusting in Jesus and what He did on the cross for you (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), not on what you can do for yourself (Ephesians 2:8-9). Christianity is not about ornate buildings, flamboyant preachers, or traditional rituals. Christianity is about truly accepting Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. Today in 2014, while established churches decrease in number of clergy, believers, and church buildings, the home gatherings, better known as "house churches" are very much popular and increase rapidly in number.

House church or **home church** (*see last chapter*) is a label used to describe an independent assembly of Christians who gather for worship in a home. Sometimes these groups meet because the membership is small, and a home is the most appropriate place to gather, as in the beginning phase of the British New Church Movement. Sometimes this meeting style is preferred because the group is a member of an underground Christian movement, which is otherwise banned from meeting, as in China. Some recent Christian writers have supported the view that the Christian Church should meet in houses, and have based the operation of their communities around multiple small home meetings. They claim that this approach is preferable to public meetings in dedicated buildings because it is a more effective way of building community and personal relationships, and it helps the group to engage in outreach more naturally. Some believe small churches were a deliberate apostolic pattern in the first century, and they were intended by Christ. Cell churches are usually associated with larger churches: they also meet in homes and share some characteristics of house churches, but they are not normally considered to be house churches, as they are not self-governing.

God, Time and History – Some Major Facts

Grasping the idea of unqualified freedom requires a vigorous effort of the mind. We are not psychologically conditioned to understand freedom except in its imperfect forms. Our concepts of it have been shaped in a world where no absolute freedom exists. Here each natural object is dependent upon many other objects, and that dependence limits its freedom.”

“God is said to be absolutely free because no one and nothing can hinder Him or compel Him or stop Him. He is able to do as He pleases always, everywhere, forever. To be thus free means also that He must possess universal authority. That He has unlimited power we know from the Holy Scriptures and may deduce from certain other of His attributes.”

“God’s supremacy over the works of His hands is vividly depicted in the Holy Scripture. Inanimate matter, irrational creatures, all perform their Maker’s bidding. In the mythical story, at His pleasure the Red Sea divided and its waters stood up as walls (Exodus 14); and the earth opened her mouth and guilty rebels went down alive into the pit (Numbers 14). When He so ordered, the sun stood still (Joshua 10); and on another occasion went *backward* ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz (Isaiah 38:8). To exemplify His supremacy, He made ravens carry food to Elijah (I Kings 17), iron to swim on top of the waters (II Kings 6:5), lions to be tame when Daniel was cast into their den, fire to burn not when the three

Hebrews were flung into its flames. Thus ‘Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places’ (Psalm 135:6).”

In a world reluctant to acknowledge the existence of God, one should not expect the unbeliever to embrace the doctrine of God’s sovereignty: “The ‘god’ of this twentieth century no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The ‘god’ who is now talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday School, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible Conferences is the figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality.... A ‘god’ whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object of worship, merits naught but contempt.”

In the churches, one can expect the Christian to embrace the doctrine of the sovereignty of God as both biblical and true. This may be done in principle but not necessarily in practice. Our problems with God’s sovereignty most often come where the “rubber meets the road: “God is truly and perfectly sovereign. That means He is the highest and greatest being there is, He controls everything, His will is absolute, and He does whatever He pleases. When we hear that stated, we can understand it reasonably well, and we can usually handle it until God allows something that we do not like. Then our normal reaction is to resist the doctrine of His sovereignty. Rather than finding comfort in it, we find that it gets us upset with God. If He can do whatever He pleases, why does He allow us to suffer? Our problem is a misunderstanding of the doctrine and an inadequate knowledge of God.”

It is vitally important for every Christian to understand the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. I have chosen to consider the subject in two lessons. The first lesson considers the sovereignty of God over the nations of the world in history, and the next reflects on the sovereignty of God in salvation. The attribute of God’s sovereignty troubles many people; it troubles many Christians. *But the sovereignty of God is crucial because it is taught in the Bible and because it is the basis for godly living.* We must look to the Word of God and the Spirit of God to teach us what we need to know about God’s sovereignty.

How God loves to reveal His sovereignty against the backdrop of man’s weaknesses and limitations! The king did not know the meaning of his dream, and the wise men of the land knew it was humanly impossible for them to know what the king had dreamed. He was asking of mere men that which only the “**gods**” could perform. This was a task for the “**gods.**” The king was pressing his

sovereignty too far by asking mere men to do what only “**gods**” could do. But Daniel was a servant of the Most High God, the sovereign God of the universe. His God could reveal the dream and its meaning.

Daniel was placed in a situation where he must act, for all the wise men were condemned to die. Daniel and his three friends first prayed that God would reveal the dream and its meaning. All of this is directly related to verses 17-21 in chapter 1. Daniel prayed to the sovereign God and then praised Him for the revelation of the dream.

The sovereignty of God is a truth not quickly or easily learned. God’s sovereignty is clearly revealed in the Scriptures, but it often takes a sequence of adverse circumstances before it becomes a part of the fabric of our thinking and behaviour.

The Beginning

This is what the apostles' churches believed and practiced directly from early Christian literature. Many people believe that we either know very little about early Christianity, or they think it all Roman Catholic. Not true! The early Christian literature gives us a clear picture, at least in general, of what the beginning of Christianity was like.

The following is what the apostles' churches said about themselves.

From A.D. 185

The Church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith:

The Trinity

In one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, earth, the sea, and everything in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit,

The Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of Christ

Who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations and the advents, the birth from a virgin, the suffering, the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord;

The Return of Christ

[The Spirit] also [proclaimed] his manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father to gather all things in one and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus—our Lord, God, Saviour, King—according to the will of the invisible Father, every knee should bow—of things in heaven, things in earth, and things under the earth—and that every tongue should confess to him;

The Judgment

That he should execute just judgment towards all; that he may send spiritual wickednesses and the angels who transgressed and became apostates—together with the ungodly, unrighteous, wicked, and profane among men—into everlasting fire; that he may, in the exercise of his grace, confer immortality on the righteous, holy, and those who have kept his commandments and have persevered in his love—some from the beginning and others from their repentance—and may surround them with everlasting glory.

(Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I:10:1)

Irenaeus learned his doctrine sitting at the feet of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, one of the two churches that received only praise from our Lord in his letters of Revelation 2 and 3. He went from Smyrna in modern Turkey all the way across southern Europe to form churches among the Celtic Gauls of modern France. Everywhere he went, he said, even among the Barbarians, the churches of God had clung to the traditions [*that's not a cuss word—1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15*] they had received from the apostles:

The Christian Church believes these points as if she had but one soul and one and the same heart. She proclaims them, teaches them, and hands them down with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth. For although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the meaning of the tradition is one and the same. For the Churches which have been planted in Germany do not believe or hand down anything different. Nor do those in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt, nor those in Libya, nor those which have been established in the central regions of the world.

And just as he tells us what all Christians believe, he also lists things that not *essential* at the beginning of Christianity. Instead, the gifted among them were granted to explore these subjects for the benefit of others.

It does not follow that because men are endowed with greater and lesser degrees of intelligence, they should therefore change the subject matter [of the faith] itself ... but ... one may bring out the meaning of those things which have been spoken in parables and accommodate them to the general scheme of the faith. He may explain the operation and dispensation of God connected with human salvation.

He may show that God showed patience regarding the apostasy of the angels who transgressed and also concerning the disobedience of men. ... He may show why it was that more covenants than one were given to mankind and teach the special character of each of these covenants. He may search out why God hath included everyone in unbelief so that he may have mercy upon all. He may gratefully describe for what purpose the Word of God became flesh and suffered and explain why the coming of the Son of God took place in these last times—that is, in the end rather than in the beginning. He may unfold what is contained in the Scriptures concerning the end and things to come. ...

In reference to these points, and others like them, the apostle exclaims, "Oh, the depth of the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Gatherings, Meetings and Services at the beginning of Christianity from A.D. 150

The wealthy among us help the needy, and we always keep together. For all things with which we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through his Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit

On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has ceased, the president [*I think this means whichever brother is presiding, but no one knows for sure*] verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.

Then we all rise together and pray, and ... when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen. There is a distribution to each and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.

They who are well to do and willing give what each thinks fit, and what is collected is deposited with the president. He helps the orphans, widows, and

those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in need. [He helps] those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us. In a word [he] takes care of all who are in need.

But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having made a change in darkness and matter, made the world. On the same day Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead. For he was crucified on the day before that of Saturn [*Saturday*], and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them these things.

(Justin Martyr, *First Apology* ch. 67)

From A.D. 210

We meet together as an assembly and congregation so that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with him in our supplications. This violence God delights in. We pray, too, for the emperors, their ministers and all in authority; for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, and for the delay of the final consummation.

We assemble to read our sacred writings, if any peculiarity of the times makes either forewarning or reminiscence needful. Either way, with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, and we make our confidence more steadfast.

By nothing less than indoctrination in God's precepts we confirm good habits. In the same place also exhortations are made; rebukes and sacred censures are administered.

With great gravity the work of judging is carried on among us, as is fitting for those who feel assured that they are in the sight of God. And you have the most notable example of judgment to come when any one has sinned so grievously as to require his severance from us in prayer, in the congregation and in all sacred intercourse.

The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honor not by purchase, but by established character. There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God. Though we have our treasure chest, it is not made up of purchase money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure and only if he be able. There is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund

They are not taken from there and spent on feasts, drinking bouts, and eating houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the needs of boys and girls destitute of means and parents; of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons for nothing but their faithfulness to the cause of God's Church. These become the nurslings of their confession.

(Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 39)

Fellowship at the Beginning of Christianity

From A.D. 100

You shall seek out the faces of the saints every day so that you may rest upon their words. You shall not long for division, but shall bring those who contend to peace ... You shall not turn away from him that is in need, but you shall share all things with your brother and shall not say that they are your own. For if you share what is immortal, how much more things which are temporary?

(*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, ch. 4, A.D. 80 - 120)

From A.D. 150

Since our persuasion by the Word, we stand aloof from [the demons involved in idolatry] and follow the only unbegotten God through His Son.

We who formerly delighted in fornication now embrace chastity alone. We who formerly used magical arts dedicate ourselves to the good and unbegotten God. We who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions now bring what we have into a common stock and share with every one in need. We who hated and destroyed one another and would not live with men of a different tribe because of their different customs now, since the coming of Christ, share the same fire with them.

We pray for our enemies and attempt to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live according to the good precepts of Christ. This is so that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God, the Ruler of all.

(Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, ch. 14)

From A.D. 210

It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to label us. "See," they say, "How they love one another!" For themselves are animated by mutual hatred. "How they are ready even to die for one another!" For they themselves will sooner put to death.

They are angry with us, too, because we call each other brethren. There is no other reason for this, I think, than because among them names of consanguinity are given in mere pretence of affection. ...

How much more fittingly they are called and counted brothers who have been led to the knowledge of God as their common Father? Who have drunk in one Spirit of holiness? Who from the same womb of a common ignorance have agonized into the same light of truth?

But perhaps the very reason we are regarded as having less right to be considered true brothers is that no tragedy causes dissension in our brotherhood. Or maybe it is that the family possessions, which generally destroy brotherhood among you, create fraternal bonds among us. One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. All things are common among us but our wives.

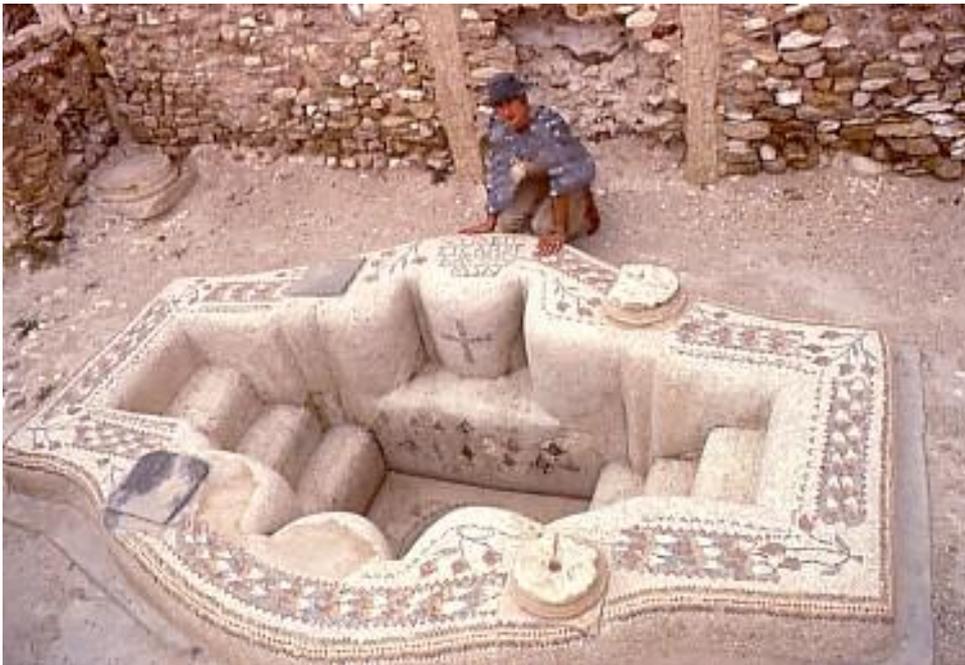
(Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 39, c. A.D. 210)

Baptism at the Beginning of Christianity

From A.D. 100

Concerning baptism, baptize in this way: Having first said all these things [*i.e., the commands contained in the Way of Life and Death contained in first 6 chapters of the Didache*], baptize into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in running water. But if you have no running water, baptize into other water. If you cannot baptize in cold, then in warm. But if you have neither, pour water three times upon the head in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, before baptism, let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whoever else can. Either way, you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before.

(*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, ch. 7)



From A.D. 150

I will also tell you how we dedicated ourselves to God once we had been made new through Christ. ... As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true—and who determine to live accordingly—are instructed to pray and entreat God with fasting for the remission of their sins of the past. We pray and fast with them.

Then they are brought by us where there is water, and they are regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves were regenerated. For in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, "Unless you are born again, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" [John 3:3]. ...

How those who have sinned and repent shall escape their sins is declared by Isaiah the prophet, as I said earlier. He speaks in this way: "'Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean. Put away the evil of your doings from your souls. Learn to do good. Judge the fatherless, and plead for the widow. Then come, let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'and though your sins are as scarlet, I will make them white like wool ... '"

We have learned from the apostles the following reason for all this: at our birth we were born without our knowledge or choice—by our parents coming together—and we were brought up in bad habits and wicked training.

So that we would not remain the children of necessity and ignorance but become the children of choice and knowledge, and so that we may obtain in the water the forgiveness of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over the the person who chooses to be born again and who has repented of their sins, the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe.

He who leads the person that is to be washed to the laver calls God by this name alone ... And this washing is called illumination because those who learn these things are illuminated in their understanding.

The one who is illuminated is also washed in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets foretold all things about Jesus. (*First Apology* 61)

Ordination of Leaders at the Beginning of Christianity

From A.D. 210

The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honor not by purchase, but by established character. There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God.

(Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 39, c. A.D. 210)

From AD 250

Nor let the people flatter themselves that they can be free from the contagion of sin, while communicating with an elder who is a sinner, and yielding their consent to the unjust and unlawful episcopacy of their overseer ...

On which account a people obedient to the Lord's precepts, and fearing God, ought to separate themselves from a sinful prelate, and not to associate themselves with the sacrifices of a sacrilegious priest, especially since they themselves have the power either of choosing worthy elders, or of rejecting unworthy ones. ("To the Clergy and People Abiding in Spain," par. 3, from the *Epistles of Cyprian* 67, as numbered in:

The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. V)

God commands an elder to be appointed in the presence of all the assembly; that is, He instructs and shows that the ordination of elders ought not to be solemnized except with the knowledge of the people standing near, that in the presence of the people either the crimes of the wicked may be disclosed, or the merits of the good may be declared, and the ordination, which shall have been examined by the vote and judgment of all, may be just and legitimate. ("To the Clergy and People Abiding in Spain," par. 4, from the *Epistles of Cyprian* 67, as numbered in:

The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. V)

For which reason you must diligently observe and keep the practice delivered from divine tradition and apostolic observance, which is also maintained among us, and almost throughout all the provinces; that for the proper celebration of ordinations all the neighbouring bishops of the same province should assemble with that people for which a prelate is ordained. And the bishop should be chosen in the presence of the people, who have most fully known the life of each one, and have looked into the doings of each one as respects his habitual conduct. ("To the Clergy and People Abiding in Spain," par. 5, from the *Epistles of Cyprian* 67, as numbered in:

The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. V)

As there are many other and grave crimes in which Basilides and Martialis are held to be implicated; such persons attempt to claim for themselves the episcopate [*office of bishop*] in vain; since it is evident that men of that kind may neither rule over the Church of Christ, nor ought to offer sacrifices to God ... men of this sort might indeed be admitted to repentance, but were prohibited

from the ordination of the clergy, and from the priestly honor. ("To the Clergy and People Abiding in Spain," par. 5, from the *Epistles of Cyprian* 67, as numbered in:

The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. V)

Early Christianity: The Pre-Nicene Era

Early Christianity is easily the most important and exciting area of Christian history. The Church was young, on fire for God, and confident they would change the world.

Battles raged with both heretics and Roman persecutors. The Christians loved it:

It's a beautiful thing to God when a Christian does battle with pain.

When he faces threats, punishments and tortures by mocking death and treading underfoot the horror of the executioner; when he raises up his freedom in Christ as a standard before kings and princes; when he yields to God alone, and triumphant and victorious—he tramples upon the very man who has pronounced the sentence upon him. God finds all these things beautiful.

(Minucius Felix, *The Octavius* 37)

The Scriptures say, "The righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1). The early Christians must have been righteous because they were most certainly bold.

How many of our people have borne that not their right hand only, but their whole body, should be burned ... without any cries of pain. ... Do I compare men with [your Roman heroes]? Boys and young women among us treat with contempt crosses and tortures, wild beasts, and all the bugbears of punishment with the inspired patience of suffering. But it was not just boys and young women

The Bold Martyrdom of Polycarp of Smyrna, an example

Polycarp was 86 years old when he stood before a Roman proconsul, condemned to die. The proconsul felt sorry for him. He gave him repeated instructions on how to avoid the punishment in store for him. Polycarp was unimpressed.

Since you keep wasting your time urging me on ... and pretend not to know who and what I am, listen to me announce with boldness: "I am a Christian." "But if

you want to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and you shall hear them." This irritated the proconsul. He decided to put a little pressure on the old man.

"I have wild beasts at hand. I will throw you to them if you don't repent." But, no effect on Polycarp.

He replied: "Call them, then. We're not used to repenting of what is good in order to adopt what is evil."

That was enough for the proconsul, and replied: "If you won't repent, I'll have you burned with fire, since you have no regard for the wild beasts!"

No better. The 86-year-old Polycarp was up to a face-to-face confrontation.

"You threaten me with fire that burns for an hour, then goes out after a little while. You're ignorant, however, of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. What are you waiting for? Bring out whatever you want."

The Martyrdom of Polycarp, from which I've gotten this story, adds: When he spoke these things, and many others like them, he was filled with confidence and joy. His face was so full of grace that not only did it seem like he wasn't troubled by anything said to him, but the proconsul was astonished.

The proconsul really couldn't take any more, and he turned Polycarp over to the stadium crowd, which Polycarp had insulted minutes earlier. He had called the people atheists and told the proconsul that they weren't worthy to hear the doctrines of Christianity. The crowd, in a fevered rage, brought enough wood to build a bonfire, and Polycarp was burned alive at the stake.

Did you think early Christianity was boring? Were you thinking of liturgies, boys choirs, and old men in robes and mitres? Far from it!

Early Church History up to the Nicaea Council

This early church history timeline addresses issues that ought to be of concern to all Christians, and especially them that form the modern days house churches. We are told to "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). How are we to do that if we don't know what that faith is?

Most Protestants will claim that the historic Christian faith can be determined from the Bible, but a simple comparison of the multitude of doctrines taught by Protestants makes it clear this is not quite true.

The terrible result of this is that early church history is left far too often to the revisionist history of the Roman Catholics. The world is in desperate need of a testimony like that of the apostles and their churches!

Fortunately, numerous writings have been left to us from all periods of the church, even the earliest, and it is not difficult to determine what was important to the churches the apostles started. Further, as we see doctrines introduced at later periods into the teaching of the churches, we can conclude that those doctrines are not apostolic.

After the reign of Constantine and the first general council of the church at Nicea, two very significant events occurred.

Firstly, the churches now had an official means to decree doctrine. Doctrines that were universal in the church before that time were very likely to have come from a common source, the apostles, because there was no hierarchy to establish new doctrines universally.

Secondly, most of the citizens of the Roman empire became Christians, making it almost impossible after Nicea to find anything resembling the churches before Nicaea. No longer were the churches gatherings of those who had chosen the Christian faith against what was accepted in society. Now, the churches consisted mostly of those who were just doing what everyone else was doing. (This is evidenced by the awful behaviour of the churches and their leaders after Nicaea up to this day).

Jesus said that prophets were to be judged by their fruit. In early church history it is possible not just to see the apostolic or non-apostolic origin of doctrines; it's also possible to see the fruit of new doctrines as they arrived on the scene.

The First Century A.D. 1 - 100

10 to 3 B.C.: Jesus is born in Bethlehem

It may seem strange that Jesus was born at least three years "Before Christ," (*before himself?*), but it's easily explained. The method for counting years that we use today was not developed until A.D. 525, by a monk named Dionysius Exegus. Using unknown calculations, Dionysius stated it had been 525 years since Jesus was born.

He was wrong, but we've never stopped using his calculations.

We know he was wrong. King Herod almost certainly died in 4 BC, for which there is strong evidence. Since Josephus tied Herod's death to an eclipse, it might also have been 1 BC, but other evidence makes the 1 BC date less likely. Most scholars are settled on 4 BC for Herod's death.

This means Jesus could not have been born later than this.

Herod ordered the death of all children under 2 years old in Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary narrowly escaped this, and they went to Egypt until Herod died (Matthew 2:15). How long this was, we don't know. Generally, I've heard that Jesus was born in 6 BC at the latest to allow time for these events.

Luke does offer a clue to Jesus' age. He says that John began to baptize in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. That year was from Sept., A.D. 28 to Sept., A.D. 29. He adds that Jesus was "about" 30 years old (Luke 3:1,23).

Thirty years runs us back to 3 BC. The problem is that Luke was writing (by the most conservative estimates) decades after the events he describes, and he says Jesus was "about" 30. That's not very precise dating.

I have chosen to list Jesus' birth as happening between 10 and 3 BC to encompass two extremes. At one extreme I'm using Luke's dating as exact and assuming Herod died in 1 BC. At the other extreme I'm using Irenaeus' (writing A.D. 185) suggestion that Jesus lived to be over 40 (based on John. 8:57). Jesus would then have been 6 years old when Herod died and Joseph returned from Egypt.

Irenaeus argues that the Jews told Jesus he was "not yet 50" in John 8:57. Why wouldn't they have said "not yet 40," if Jesus had been only 32 or 33 at the

time? Interesting point, in my opinion, but I've never found anyone who agrees with him, although he claims (*Against Heresies* II:22: 5) that he was told Jesus broke 40 years of age by elders who knew the apostles.

A.D. 30 or 33: Jesus is crucified and rises from the dead

It is likely that Nisan 14 (Passover) occurred on a Thursday evening, Friday day in A.D. 30 or 33, making one of those years the death of Christ. If it was A.D. 30, then Jesus' ministry was less than two years (counting from the beginning of Tiberius' 15th year to Spring of A.D. 30). If it was A.D. 33, then his ministry was 4 years, plus or minus six months.

There is no Scripture that says Jesus' ministry was 3 years, as commonly supposed.

As in the case of many points of early history, there's a lot of room for argument here.

33 to 44: The Gospel reaches the Samaritans and Gentiles; Saul is converted, and after A.D. 44, on his first missionary journey, takes the name Paul.

33 to 44: Simon Magus is falsely converted in Samaria, rejected by Peter, and founds the Gnostics.

This is an extremely significant event. According to early church apologists, Simon went to Rome and claimed that the spirit of Christ had left Jesus and come to him after the crucifixion. All the elaborate and unusual versions of Gnosticism then spread from that source.

Gnostic teachings would make their way into the early church, and it would take nearly a century for Christians to drive them out. As late as the second half of the second century, Tatian—a disciple of Justin Martyr—fell away to Gnosticism, and Irenaeus had to rescue a Roman bishop from Gnostic Valentinian influence.

Year 44: Herod Agrippa dies, and Barnabas and Paul begin travelling soon after (Acts 12:21-13:1).

This is another very important date because it's a certain one.

Year 49: Paul writes his first letter, either Galatians or 1 Thessalonians.

Historians are just guessing here.

Years 51 or 52: Paul appears before the Proconsul Gallio in Corinth after spending 18 months in the city (Acts 18:11-12). This is of significance because it's the most firmly dated event in Paul's life. Gallio would only have been proconsul for a year, and there are fragments extant of a letter written by Claudius Caesar dating his proconsulate to A.D. 51 or 52.

Year 54: 1 Corinthians is written, containing the first reference to gnostic teachings in the early church (1 Cor. 15:12)

Years 64 to 67: Paul and Peter put to death by Nero (probably).

There's a lot of later tradition about the death of Paul and Peter, but no 1st century testimonies. Tacitus does say that Nero persecuted Christians after the great fire of A.D. 64. Some give a date as early as A.D. 60, but we are convinced that Paul's captivity at the end of the Book of Acts ended in his release. There is much early church testimony that Paul went west to Spain and possibly England and was only later put to death.

Year 70: Jerusalem is destroyed by the Roman general and future emperor, Titus.

Year 96: Clement of Rome (Church Father) writes a letter to the Corinthians. Chances are, this is the earliest Christian letter outside the New Testament (NT). *The Didache*, *The Letter of Barnabas*, and the anonymous *Letter to Diognetus* could all be earlier, but their dates are uncertain. *First Clement*, as this letter from Rome to Corinth is known, has the earliest certain date for Christian writing outside the NT. The letter is from the church at Rome, not Clement himself, but it has always been attributed to Clement specifically.

Year 98: First year of the emperor Trajan; John dies soon after. The Church Father Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* II:22:5, c. A.D. 185) says that John lived until the times of Trajan. Irenaeus sat at the feet of Polycarp, and Polycarp was appointed bishop of Smyrna by John. Thus, Irenaeus' testimony on this matter carries some weight. Clement of Alexandria says the same in his *Who Is the Rich Man Who Will Be Saved*. It is a long standing tradition that John lived to be a hundred years old.

Year 99: All New Testament writings are finished. John, who according to early church testimony was the last of the four evangelists to write his Gospel, lived

into the times of Trajan. Thus, it is possible that his Gospel and even his letters were not written until around this time.

The Book of Revelation was completed much earlier, and is usually dated to before A.D. 70. There is some question as to whether the apostle wrote it, and some suggest it was written by an elder from Ephesus that was also named John. Dionysius, a 3rd century bishop from Alexandria, writes:

That this person was called John, therefore, and that this was the writing of a John, I do not deny. And I admit further, that it was also the work of some holy and inspired man. But I could not so easily admit that this was the apostle, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, and the same person with him who wrote the Gospel which bears the title according to John, and the catholic epistle.

But from the character of both, and the forms of expression, and the whole disposition and execution of the book, I draw the conclusion that the authorship is not his. For the evangelist nowhere else subjoins his name, and he never proclaims himself either in the Gospel or in the epistle. ...

And furthermore, on the ground of difference in diction, it is possible to prove a distinction between the Gospel and the Epistle on the one hand, and the Revelation on the other. For the former are written not only without actual error as regards the Greek language, but also with the greatest elegance, both in their expressions and in their reasoning's, and in the whole structure of their style. They are very far indeed from betraying any barbarism or solecism [*i.e.*, *nonstandard or ungrammatical usage*], or any sort of vulgarism, in their diction.

... That the author of the latter, however, saw a revelation, and received knowledge and prophecy, I do not deny. Only I perceive that his dialect and language are not of the exact Greek type, and that he employs barbarous idioms, and in some places also solecisms. (Fragments from the two books on the promises; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VI)

Year 100: The Jewish canon is limited to the 39 books of the Masoretic Text. No one knows exactly how or when this happened, but scholars seem certain the Jewish canon was set by A.D. 100. This is significant because it means the early churches had no set canon, even for the Old Testament. Even Augustine, near A.D. 400, says there are books accepted by some churches but rejected by others.

Second Century: A.D. 101 - 200

Years 107 to 116: Saint Ignatius (said second pope) is martyred and writes seven letters. There is controversy about all of this. Not much is known of Ignatius except what is contained in his letters and *The Martyrdom of Ignatius*. Generally, though, most scholars accept Ignatius' seven letters, in their shorter version, as genuine.

Some, though, give 116 as the year of his martyrdom in Rome, and others say that the description of the travels in *The Martyrdom of Ignatius* are impossible. Personally, I think most of the "that's impossible" statements about history are unreliable. We don't have enough knowledge of ancient times to be declaring something impossible that a contemporary witness says happened.

Years 107 to 155: Polycarp is bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp is an interesting character who wrote a beautiful letter to the Philippians sometime during this period. We have a minimum start and end date for Polycarp's ministry as bishop. He is said to have been appointed by John, and he is addressed as bishop in two letters by Ignatius (A.D. 107 or 116). His martyrdom took place around A.D. 155 (Maybe read 165).

The story of his martyrdom is preserved by Eusebius in his *Church History*, a history of the early church through 323. It lets us know that the text we have is reasonably accurate, though there have been several interpolations of miraculous events that did not happen. [*Don't write me an email about that. I believe in miracles. In this case, there's evidence that these extreme miracles were just later stories.*]

A.D. 125: Aristides writes the first early church "Apology," a defence of the faith presented to the emperor Hadrian.

Years 132 to 136 – Jewish Insurrection [Bar-Kokhba] against Hadrian. This insurrection is significant for several reasons. Though the temple and Jerusalem had fallen to Titus in A.D. 70, it was the Bar-Kokhba rebellion that ended all Jewish claim to Israel and Jerusalem for many centuries. It was a difficult war, and an angry Hadrian had Jerusalem plowed with oxen; deported many Jews or sold them into slavery; built a new city in Jerusalem's place; and he renamed Israel as Syria Palestina. He then began to persecute Jews, forbidding Sabbath observance, circumcision, and numerous other uniquely Jewish rituals. The insurrection under Hadrian is useful for dating some early church writings. *The Letter of Barnabas*, for example, deals in great length with the Law of Moses. It

mentions the destruction of the temple (ch. 16), thus dating it after A.D. 70, but it seems unlikely he knew of the destruction and persecution under Hadrian, else he would have mentioned it. The result is that we can date *The Letter of Barnabas* before 130.

Year 155: Justin Martyr writes his first apology. Justin was a prolific writer, and I personally believe his *Dialogue with Trypho* preserves much of Jesus' teaching on the road to Emmaus, where Jesus expounded "the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). Justin inaugurates the age of the apologists, and he is ably followed by Theophilus (168), Athenagoras (177), Irenaeus (c. 185), and Tertullian (200 - 220), as well as by his eventually apostate disciple Tatian (c. 165).

Years 155 to 165: Polycarp is martyred.

Year 168: Theophilus dates the creation of Adam and thus predicts the fall of Rome 300 years in advance.

Year 177: Athenagoras' A plea for the Christians contains a description of the Trinity that mentions the "same substance" of the Father and Son. "Homousios," or same substance, would eventually be the main issue at the Council of Nicea in 325, a major early church controversy. "We employ language which makes a distinction between God and matter, and the natures of the two. For, as we acknowledge a God, and a Son his Logos (Word), and a Holy Spirit, united in essence." (ch. 24)

Years 183 to 186: Irenaeus writes "Against Heresies", the most thorough book on Gnosticism ever written. Irenaeus' tome is a terrific glimpse of early church theology. It pulls back the curtains like no other writing of its time. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who knew John, so he's the strongest witness to the apostolic age of his time period.

Years 190 to 200: Clement of Alexandria teaches new Christians in Alexandria and leaves us copious writings. Clement wrote on EVERYTHING. He talks about exercise—men should strip and wrestle, and women should clean house—clothing, drinking alcohol, music, manners, and anything else you could possibly think of. These are covered in *Miscellanies* and *The Instructor*.

Third Century, A.D. 201 – 300

Years 200 to 220: Tertullian, a Christian lawyer from Carthage in north Africa, wrote several books and numerous tracts. Tertullian was bothered by a lack of separation from the world in some Christians, so he wrote tracts on numerous subjects. He wrote on avoiding the Roman games, not wearing a crown, and other issues. He also wrote against the Roman religion, against various gnostics, and against heretics in general. His *Apology* is a terrific description of the early church as it entered the 3rd century. His *Against Praxeas* is the most thorough description of the Trinity in the early Christian writings, and he's the first to use the term "Trinity". Tertullian was extremely caustic and sarcastic. He pulled no punches, and he didn't try to be nice. It makes his writings very interesting, but we are not sure how effective they were. He got so frustrated with what he considered a lack of holiness that he joined the Montanist sect, which emphasized prophecy and had some very strict rules. Eventually he repented and returned to the catholic churches. (*Catholic, in this context, just means the united early churches started by the apostles, not the Roman Catholic Church, which did not yet exist.*)

Years 220 to 303: (*This section to be expanded later*) The early church grew larger and more organized during this period. During times of peace, they brought in a large number of members, not all of whom were fully active or committed, like the smaller, 2nd century churches were. Thus, when periods of persecution arose, a lot of Christians fell away, either sacrificing to the Roman gods or purchasing a certificate saying that they had. Later, when the persecution ended, many of them asked to be readmitted to the church. This caused a lot of strife, and a new set of churches, believing all the same things as the Catholics, arose under a Roman teacher named Novatian. The Novatianist churches refused to admit those that had lapsed during persecution. After 325, when all persecution stopped, Novatianist churches slowly melded back into the catholic churches.

Fourth Century: A.D. 301 - 400

Years 303 to 311: The Great Persecution. An emperor named Diocletian ordered an empire-wide persecution of the early church in 303. In 305, he retired, the only Roman emperor ever to do so, and Galerius continued his policy of persecution for 6 more years. There were up to 4 emperors during this time, and the emperors in the west didn't always carry out the policy of persecution, but Galerius did in the east. In 311, Galerius issued the Edict of Toleration, and the persecution ended.

Year 312: Constantine the Great has a vision of a cross.

In year 312, one of the emperors, Constantine the Great, on his way to fight his co-emperor Maxentius, had a vision of a cross with the words, "In this sign conquer," written under it. He won the battle and attributed his victory to the Christian God. Becoming a supporter of the early church, in 313, he and his co-emperor Licinius issued the Edict of Milan, restoring Christianity to favour. Constantine and Licinius then rebuilt the destroyed church buildings of the early church and restored all possessions confiscated during the persecution.

Years 313 to 337: Emperor Constantine's reign brings favour to the early churches. Constantine was received with great joy by the early churches, which were grateful that he had not only ended persecution but granted them favor. Roman citizens flocked into the churches, even though Constantine remained the head of the Roman pagan religion as well.

Years 318 to 325: The Arian controversy. In 318 an elder by the name of Arius came up with a slightly different explanation of Jesus' divinity and his relationship with God the Father. When he was corrected he refused to back down, so he was excommunicated by his church in Alexandria, Egypt in 321. This did no good. A Middle Eastern bishop by the name of Eusebius, from Nicomedia, took Arius in and promoted his doctrines. Arius began writing jingles and teaching them to children, tradesman, and sailors. His doctrines began to spread, threatening to cause a split in the church. Emperor Constantine was involved in a civil war with Licinius at the time. In 324 he was victorious, uniting the empire. He was terrified, however, that the Arian controversy would split not only the church but his newly united empire, so he called all the bishops of the early churches to Nicaea, in modern Turkey, to resolve the dispute.

Year 323: Eusebius of Caesarea writes *Ecclesiastical History*. The *Ecclesiastical History* by Eusebius of Caesarea, a different Eusebius than the one from Nicomedia, is perhaps the most important book in Christian history. It quotes extensively from earlier writings, preserving some and helping us identify others that we would otherwise know nothing about. It is to this day the best overview of the first three centuries of Christianity.

Year 325: "The Council of Nicaea". Almost as important as the council itself is the fact that Constantine sat as a moderator. This intimate interaction between emperor and early churches would carry on into the middle ages without cessation. The Council of Nicaea issued an official creed, based on the early church's rule of faith. It also directly condemned the tenets of Arianism, though

the Arian controversy would not be fully resolved until the Council of Constantinople in 381.

Another important issue at the Council of Nicea was the official approval of "patriarchs." These were the bishops of Alexandria, Rome, and Antioch, who were given authority over very large provinces. This would lead eventually to the bishop of Rome becoming pope of the Roman Catholic Church in the west. The other patriarchs—several have been added since—are still leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which is basically the Catholic Church of the east.

Years 325 to 381: The fall of the Church, the resolution of the Arian controversy, and the rise of monasticism. Unfortunately, the Council of Nicea did almost nothing to resolve the Arian controversy. Arius was banished from the empire, but he eventually appealed to Constantine. Constantine ordered the church in Alexandria to begin reconciling with him, but when Arius went to Alexandria he died under unknown, and thus suspicious, circumstances.

Histories of Christianity written in the 5th century (400 to 499) let us know that murdering Arius would not have been outside what early churches would do in the 4th century. The difference between Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (323) and later histories is marked. Violence, political intrigue, warfare, deceit, and murder happened regularly after the emperors became involved in Christianity.

The problem was that now almost everyone was a "Christian," but it was still the few that really wanted to follow Christ. Those that did want to follow Christ often formed communities of committed disciples, the first monks. Others simply left the cities to live alone in the desert. These were the first Christian hermits, and there are many legends of miraculous powers among the hermits. (Those are probably just legends.)

During the fourth century and throughout the Middle Ages there was great political power in being a bishop. Thus, it was common for ambitious and unholy men to push their way into that position, or even to pay some important government official or bishop for the position. This led to great corruption in the church. In fact, it would be fair to say the Church fell during this period, and the holy testimony of the pre-Nicene churches has never been known since.

During this entire time there continued to be "Nicene" and "Arian" bishops, depending on whether they supported Arius or the Council of Nicea. Most of the political intrigue and even violence during the 4th century was over this issue.

A man named Athanasius took up the cause of the Nicene doctrine after the Council of Nicaea. He was banished from the eastern empire by the emperor for his efforts no less than 5 times. He stuck it out, however, and he can be credited with the triumph of the Nicene doctrine. He can also be credited with changing it over the decades after Nicaea. From a Nicene doctrine teaching that there was one God, the Father, with a divine Son of the same essence, he helped create a Triune God consisting of three co-equal persons. While the Orthodox churches of the east continues to believe in a Trinity much like that taught in Nicaea, most western Christians, Catholic or Protestant, have never even heard the Nicene doctrine, and they have no idea that the Council of Nicaea taught something different than they believe.

All of this was finally put to rest at the Council of Constantinople in the year 381. That Council declared all general church councils to be authoritative, requiring all Christians to agree with whatever such a council decided. That decision stuck, and the Arian controversy was put to rest (except that barbarian Germanic tribes continued to be Arian until the 6th century when they started fully submitting to the pope).

The (First) Fall of the Church was Inevitable

The Christian Church founded anciently by Christ not only didn't survive intact but probably couldn't have. Ancient means of communication weren't up to the task. Within a remarkably short time, Christianity had expanded beyond Palestine — to Anatolia and Greece, to Rome and Italy, to Spain, eastward into Armenia and Mesopotamia and across Egypt and North Africa. It had covered vast distances, largely due to the “Pax Romana,” the “Roman peace,” and the impressive system of Roman roads that had been constructed to ease the movement of the Roman legions across the empire. So secure were the Romans that what we now call the Mediterranean they typically called “Mare Nostrum,” “Our Sea.”

But travel and communications were still, by our standards, extremely slow. The “supply lines” of ancient Christianity were long, fragile, corruptible and dangerously exposed to persecution, human sin and ambition, misunderstanding, forgetfulness and a host of other threats.

To make things still worse, for at least the first century of Christianity (and, in sense, for much longer than that), there was no New Testament. It was still being written over the initial 30 to 70 years after the ascension of Christ, and, even when they were complete, individual gospels and epistles circulated separately; the “New Testament” hadn't yet been gathered together, and the canon hadn't yet been defined.

Even after they had been written and put into circulation, copies of scriptural texts, expensive and hand-produced, were extremely rare. Ordinary Christians wouldn't have had their own private copies of scripture, let alone several of them, as we often do today. (Many of them likely couldn't read, anyhow.)

In fact, most branches of the church, even whole regions, would probably have had little or nothing in the way of scriptural manuscripts. And those privileged church congregations that possessed, say, part of a gospel or one of Paul's epistles, might have had nothing else.

Thus, local leaders, who perhaps joined the church after only the briefest of missionary instruction — commonly at the hands of preachers who, themselves, had received no more than a brief oral introduction to the basic Christian story and a few fundamental doctrines — would have had no scriptures to consult, let alone anything like a “general handbook of instructions” when difficult questions arose. And teachers and class members were unable to simply flip through their personal copies of the Bible in order to learn Christian doctrine and practice. It's literally a miracle that Christianity survived as well as it did.

But what did leaders do when a crisis or a dilemma arose? While the apostles lived, inquiries or requests for help could perhaps be sent to them. But at any given time, it might be almost impossible to know where they were. Rome? Athens? Prison? Dead? Unlike the government of Rome, the ancient apostles had no permanent fixed headquarters. And how long would it take to get a response from one of them?

A local problem might fester for weeks, months or perhaps even years before local leadership sought apostolic advice. (Let's leave out of consideration the many cases in which the local leadership, or perhaps an entire branch or region, was itself the problem.) Then, even when the apostle's location was known, it might require several weeks or months getting an inquiry to him. He would, of course, need time to prayerfully consider the matter and then several weeks or months would be needed for his response to reach those who had inquired.

Turnaround time, in other words, likely would have run into months, and perhaps many of them. That allows plenty of opportunity for problems to become insuperable.

But even if an apostle visited an area, how were local people to know that he really was who and what he claimed to be? There were no two-page general authority photo charts in any ancient equivalent of the Ensign magazine, and Paul lamented the damage caused by “false apostles.” (See, for instance, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.) Apostolic faces weren't familiar to people who had never met them before.

The Council of Nicaea drew up a creed based on the Rule of Faith of the church in Caesarea. The Nicene Creed not only confirmed the ancient view of the

Trinity held by the Church, but it specifically refuted and condemned Aryanism. [*The Apostles Creed is a similar modern version of the Nicene Creed.*]

The biggest controversy of Nicaea concerned the word “homo-ousios” or “one substance,” the one addition—besides the anathemas—that the council made to Caesarea's rule of faith. The “anathemas”, is a word that means condemnation or curse, were added to the end of the Creed to specifically put an end to Aryanism.

The fall of the church—which it is preferred to call “The Great Judo Controversy”—was a great fall. At one point, "Christians" in Constantinople, still arguing over Aryanisms even after the Council of Nicaea, beat each other to death until the well overflowed with blood and ran into the streets. Perhaps Christians were just bored with their new-found comfort under Constantine. It is apparent that when the majority of the Roman empire turned to Christianity, they did not also turn to Christ and become Christians. Christians possess the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9). Prior to Constantine, early church bishops were not paid. They were supported with the widows. After Constantine, not only did they receive a salary, but there was much prestige and power associated with the office of bishop. Obviously, the men who filled the role before Nicaea were different sort of men than those that would fill the role afterwards. There is no doubting how thorough the fall of the Church was. The histories before and after the Nicene Era cannot be compared to one another.

Eusebius wrote a history in A.D. 323, two years prior to Nicaea, that spoke of the expansion of the churches, great men of God, defending the faith against heresies, and the righteousness of the saints. In A.D. 440, Socrates, Scholasticus took up his history where Eusebius left off, reporting controversies, intrigues, suspicions, and even violence and murder.

Eusebius of Nicomedia and Athanasius

Eusebius of Nicomedia (*not* the historian, though from the same time period), having been readmitted to the empire upon his repentance, nonetheless maintained an ongoing battle with Athanasius of Alexandria over the subject of the Trinity. You would think this would merely result in arguments, but during the fall of the Church the bishops were too involved in government for that to be the case. During the time that Constantine was trying to restore Arius to the fellowship of the Alexandrian church, Athanasius, then bishop of Alexandria, refused Arius re-admittance, as Arius had not repented. This frustrated Eusebius of Nicomedia, who apparently saw this as a way to return to the Arian ways that he had rejected after Nicaea. Socrates testifies that Eusebius and others made

numerous attempts to defame Athanasius and have him removed from leadership.

The Magick of Arsenius

Eusebius' faction gained hold, somehow, of a human hand. They declared publicly that this was the hand of one Arsenius, a Melitian bishop, and that Athanasius had been using it to perform magic rites. The fall of the church was in full swing. When Emperor Constantine heard of this he ordered Athanasius brought before him. He also declared that Eusebius and his friend Theognis, the other bishop who refused to sign the Nicene Creed, should be present at the trial. When Athanasius heard about this, he sent scouts all over Egypt to find the mysterious Arsenius, whom he had supposedly murdered. He was able to find that he existed and was alive, but he was not able to have him brought to Antioch, where the trial was to be held.

Arsenius appears in Tyre and is caught. When, due to his travels, Constantine ordered the trial moved to Tyre, Arsenius could not resist. He went to Tyre to see what would happen. Socrates called this "the special providence of God." The servants of Archelaus, the governor of that province, heard some rumours from a nearby inn that Arsenius was not only alive, but present in the area, and they informed the governor. He immediately arranged for a careful search and found and captured Arsenius. Rather than expose the fraud immediately, the governor decided to have some fun.

The Trial of Athanasius

Athanasius was brought before synod to be tried, and they quickly produced the hand and pressed their charges. Athanasius was ready. He repeatedly asked his questioners whether they actually knew this Arsenius. When several said they did, Athanasius had him brought in. It was an act of great drama. Arsenius was brought in with his hands covered by a cloak. Athanasius asked, "Is this the man who has lost a hand?" As it turns out, very few of those present actually knew this was a setup. The rest assumed the accusation was quite true, and they were astonished that Athanasius was bringing his victim into the courtroom. Athanasius played the drama perfectly. First he lifted the cloak from one hand.

Then he waited. Some in the room were still quite certain that Arsenius' other hand was the missing one. Athanasius let the tension build. Finally, completing his drama, he exposed Arsenius second hand and announced, "Arsenius, as you can see, has two hands. Let my accusers show us the place from which the third

was cut off!"This is a delightful story—if rather grotesque—but it unfortunately illustrates the fall of the church after Nicaea. Constantine's "deliverance" of Christians from persecution was perhaps not a deliverance but an overthrow of Christianity.

The Council of Nicaea Itself

When Emperor Constantine became the first Christian leader of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, his vast territory was populated by a hodgepodge of beliefs and religions. Within his own young religion, there was also dissent, with one major question threatening to cleave the popular cult — as it was at the time — into warring factions: Was Jesus divine, and how?

The Christianity we know today is a result of what those men agreed upon over that sticky month, including the timing of the religion's most important holiday, Easter, which celebrates Jesus rising from the dead.

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Christianity was young and still working out the kinks when Emperor Constantine took power over the Roman Empire in A.D. 306. Christian doctrine at the time was muddled and inconsistent, especially when it came to the central question of Jesus' relationship to God.

Jesus was as eternally divine as the Father, said one camp led by the Archbishop Alexander of Alexandria. Another group, named the Arians after their leader Arius the preacher, saw Jesus as a remarkable leader, but inferior to the Father and lacking in absolute divinity.

Supporters on both sides scrawled graffiti on town walls in defiance while bishops from across the empire entered into a war of words as the controversy simmered to a head in 324. Fearing unrest in his otherwise peaceful territory, Constantine summoned the bishops to his lake house in Nicea on June 19, 325.

In a move that would put today's shrewd politicians to shame, the compromise proffered by Constantine was vague, but blandly pleasing: Jesus and God were of the same "substance," he suggested, without delving too much into the nature of that relationship. A majority of the bishops agreed on the compromise and voted to pass the language into doctrine.

Their statement of compromise, which would come to be known as "The Nicene Creed," formed the basis for Christian ideology. The bishops also used the Council of Nicaea to set in stone some church rules that needed clarification, and those canons were the reference point after which all future laws were modelled.

As a final order of business, the bishops decided upon a date for the holiest of Christian celebrations, Easter, which was being observed at different times around the empire. Previously linked with the timing of Passover, the council settled on a moveable day that would never coincide again with the Jewish holiday — the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the vernal equinox.

This is the agreement of faith that the great council of Nicaea, assented to with a loud acclamation:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, of the substance of the Father; God of God and Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not made, of the same substance as the Father, by whom all things were made, in heaven and on earth: who for the sake of us men and our salvation, descended, became incarnate, and was made man, suffered, arose again on the third day, and ascended into the heavens, from where he will come again to judge the living and the dead;

And in the Holy Spirit.

But the Holy Catholic and Apostolic church anathematizes those [i.e. the Arians] who say "There was a time when he was not," and "Before he was begotten, he did not exist" and "He was made from that which did not exist." The same goes for those who assert that he is of a different substance or essence from the Father, or that he was created, or can be changed.

This creed was recognized and agreed to by 318 members of council, who being, as Eusebius says, unanimously signed up to it. There only five who refused to sign, objecting to the term homoousios, "of the same substance." They were Eusebius bishop of Nicomedia, Theognis of Nice, Maris of Chalcedon, Theonas of Marmarica, and Secundus of Ptolemaïs. "Of the same substance," they insisted, "means coming from something in one of three way: by germination, as a shoot comes from the roots; by derivation as children come

from their parents; or by division, as two bowls come from one lump of gold. But the Son does not come from the Father in any of these ways. For this reason, we cannot agree to this creed.” Having scorned the term “of the same substance,” they would not sign to the deposing of Arius either. So the council anathematized Arius, and all who adhered to his opinions, banning him from ever returning to Alexandria.

The Emperor Constantine sent Arius into exile, along with Eusebius and Theognis and their followers. Eusebius and Theognis, however, soon after their banishment, wrote a declaration that they had changed their opinion, and now agreed in the belief that the Son and the Father are of the same substance. Going back to the time of the council, Eusebius Pamphilus, bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, spent a while on his own deliberating over whether he could agree with the definition of the faith given in the creed.

In the end, he acquiesced and signed it along with the rest. He sent a copy of the creed back to his church, with a letter to explain the term “of the same substance” so that no one would misinterpret his motives in agreeing to it after his previous hesitation. This is what he wrote:

You have probably heard rumours, my loved ones, about what has been happening at the great council of Nicaea, in connection with the faith of the Church. So that you will be properly informed, I will tell you about (1) the creed I proposed myself, and (2) the other creed which has been published, consisting of ours with certain additions.

1. The declaration of faith I proposed was read before our most pious Emperor, and seemed to meet with universal approval. “This is the declaration of faith passed on to me by the bishops who preceded me, used in instruction and in baptism. It is the truth I have learned from the sacred scriptures, and what I have believed and taught as an elder and bishop: “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord, Jesus Christ. the Word of God, God of God, Light of light, Life of life, the only-begotten Son, born before all creation, begotten by God the Father before all ages, by whom all things were made; who for our salvation became incarnate, and lived among us; and who suffered and rose again on the third day, and ascended to the Father, and shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. We believe also in one Holy Spirit. ...”
2. No one opposed this creed. In fact our most pious Emperor himself was the first to admit that it was perfectly correct, and reflected his

own belief. He called on all present to agree, and sign up to the creed, but also called for the addition of that one word “homousios” [“of the same substance”]. He himself explained that the term does not describe a bodily state or physical properties, and so it is not saying that the Son comes from the Father as a division of his being or as a cutting off from it. God’s nature, he said, is not a physical or bodily thing, and so cannot possibly be in a physical state. Therefore, we can only understand such things in divine and mysterious terms.

3. The bishops, drew up this formula of faith, to include the term “of the same substance”: [The Nicene Creed, see above] When they put this definition forward, we discussed at length what the expression “of the same substance as the Father” meant, and came to a clear agreement. We agreed that *ousias* (“of the substance”) simply means that the Son is truly of the Father, but does not exist as a part of the Father. ...

“Of the same substance as the Father,” we agreed, is not meant in a physical sense, or in any way like mortal creatures. It does not suggest that the Father’s substance is divided, nor that it is subtracted from, nor in any changed, because the nature of the Father is not derived from anything. That the Son is of the same substance as the Father, then, simply implies that the Son of God has no resemblance to created things, but is in every respect like nothing but the Father who begot him, and that he is of no other substance but the Father’s. Explained in this way, it seemed right for me to assent to the doctrine, especially since some great theologians in the past used the term “of the same substance” in their writings. ...

I also had no objections to the anathema added at the end, because it prohibits the use of illegitimate terms which caused almost all the present commotion in the churches. And, since no divinely inspired scripture contains the expressions, “made from that which did not exist,” and “there was a time when he was not,” etc. it seemed unacceptable to say or to teach them. Moreover, I have not been in the habit of using such terms myself. I thought it my duty, my loved ones, to let you know how cautious I have been in considering and agreeing to these things. On justifiable grounds, I resisted some objectionable expressions to the last moment, as long as they were unacceptable, but when on mature deliberation the meaning of these words seemed in harmony with the sound creed I had originally proposed, I agreed to them without dispute. And, so it was all made....

Having said this, we can now jump on the “Reformation”, in spite of the rise of the Orthodox Churches in East Europ and Russia in the years 310, persecutions and requisition in 314.

The Reformation - Protestantism

If you're an Evangelical, the Protestant Reformation probably represents the redemption of Christianity—its salvation from the Roman Catholic hierarchy and restoration to apostolic and Biblical truth. If you live in the west, then the Protestant Reformation—the inevitable outcome of the Renaissance—ought to represent freedom from tyrannical governments to you. But, was that so?

It is true that Reformation leaders still believed in theocracy. Protestant leaders ruled with as much of an iron fist as Roman Catholic leaders had before them. Nonetheless, it is the Protestant Reformation that paved the way for the freedoms and secular governments we enjoy today.

What prompted the Protestant Reformation?

It is also true that theology was *involved*. The love for learning stirred up by the Renaissance (new birth, beginning and end of Roman Catholic rule) led both to changes in theology and to the Protestant Reformation. However, the Protestant Reformation was not prompted by theology. It was prompted, like most things in our modern world, namely money.

Indulgences

Many historians mark the start of the Protestant Reformation with Luther's ninety-five theses. On October 31, 1517, a monk named Martin Luther marched to the cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany and nailed his 95 theses to the door. Almost every thesis concerned the Roman Catholic practice of selling indulgences.

Indulgences are, in Roman Catholic theology, "remission of the temporal punishment due to sin". Roman Catholics believe that there is temporary punishment for sins, even if those sins have been forgiven. The forgiveness given in their sacrament of penance removes only "the eternal punishment due to mortal sin." If the temporary punishment for sins is not paid during a person's lifetime, then they are sent to purgatory to endure that punishment. After they have been punished sufficiently, then they are released to go to heaven.

The Inventions of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the Ages

All that the Roman Catholic Church has taught throughout the Ages are certainly not divinely inspired. The Papacy alone, aided by the temporal power,

imposed these “ideas”, to the clergy and the faithful, most of the time completely non-biblical. So:

The inventions of the Roman Catholic Church along the ages:

- Were introduced in the year 120 by the Roman Church: the penances.
- In year 200 the institution of ordination established the priesthood.
- The papacy in the year 220 creates as means of grace to obtain salvation: indulgences.
- In the year 325, the Council of Nicaea accepts the dogma of the 'Holy Trinity' which was introduced by the Council of Constantinople.
- In the year 364 was the “Sunday” introduced, already celebrated by Emperor Constantine.
- In the year 378, Gratien, Emperor of the Western Roman Empire from 375. It prohibited the pagan worship in Rome and forbade the wear the insignia of 'Pontifex Maximus'. Damascus Christian bishop, used the title for himself (year 378).
- In the year 381, the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople meets to define the dogma of the "Holy Trinity". Nectarius was appointed Patriarch of Constantinople and assigned to occupy the second rank after Rome.
- The worship of relics was allowed in the year 397.
- In the year 431, Mary was recognised as the ‘Mother of God’.
- In year 440, Leo I becomes Pope in Rome. He was the first to consider himself, as the “Vicar of Christ”, by creating a new theocracy and decided to wear a tiara rather than a diadem, considering it as a symbol of universal sovereignty.
- In the 449 years, the authority of the Popes as superior to other bishops was recognised.
- In the year 476, Pope Felix III excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople. The crisis between the churches of East and West grew worse!
- In the year 595, Gregory the Great introduced in the Catholic Church, a new dogma: the purgatory.
- In the year 600, incense was admitted.
- In the year 815, the invocation of Mary and the Saints was elevated to ecclesiastical tradition.
- In the year 726, Emperor Leo III of Constantinople prohibits the worship of images and orders to destroy them all. The war of the iconoclasts began. Pope Gregory II in Rome excommunicated the Emperor.

- In the year 800, the Pope crowned Charlemagne, King of the Franks, as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire; and, in so doing not only places himself above every kingship (the sovereigns), but interferes even in political affairs. He totally ignored the existence of Empress Irene, who reigned in Constantinople.
- In the year 855, concerning the feminine Pope Joan (Jeanne), (known as John the Englishman), with two years reigning after the death of Pope Leo IV, no pope or clergyman had questioned her existence. The reformer John Huss referred to her at the Council of Constance in 1415, but nobody protested. All the bishops present believed in her existence. Only pope Pius II (1458-1464) first disputed the existence of Pope Joan. (True or fiction!)
- In the year 1000, the holy water made its appearance.
- In the year 1054, Pope Leo IX attempts to conquer the Eastern Church in Rome. He excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople Cerullus Michel. It is believed that this failure was the main cause in preaching the crusades preached against the pagans and the great schism.
- In the year 1074, the celibacy of the priests was decided.
- In the year 1200, the sacrament of extreme unction.
- In the year 1220, was introduced the worship of the host
- In the year 1311, it was decided that the tiara "crown of the Popes" will be without thorns but richly adorned with gold and diamonds.
- In the year 1349, Indulgences in 1349 began to be easily applied: Sobald des geld in der Kasse klinget, die Seele in den Himmel springt (Once the money in the fund sounds, the soul passes into heaven). Johann Tetzel, Expert Salesman, the best salesman of indulgences, and the one that aroused the ire of Martin Luther, was John Tetzel. It was his sales that were shut down by Luther's widely read attack on indulgences
- In the year 1545, it was decreed that the traditions of the Catholic Church have the same value as the Holy Scriptures.
- In the year 1549, was instituted the feast of the dead by the Council of Trent.
- In the year 1854, the Catholic view of the "Immaculate Conception" becomes a dogma.
- In the year 1870, the pontifical infallibility also becomes a dogma.
- In the year 1950, the Papacy created the doctrine of Assumption, solemnity on August 15, or the next Sunday in some countries.
- And, this is not finished, as we all know too well.

In the Middle Ages, and especially through the Protestant Reformation, indulgences were used for fundraising. In return for a contribution to the Catholic Church, the pope or priest would grant an indulgence, which would remit some or all of a person's temporal punishment. That indulgence could be applied to the person contributing money, or it could be applied to someone else on the giver's behalf. Superstition abounded during the Protestant Reformation era, so indulgences sold well for loved ones supposedly suffering in purgatory. The Roman Catholic Church filled their coffers with the sale of indulgences, and Luther's ninety-five theses dealt almost exclusively with indulgences.

Martin Luther



Martin Luther was the first of the Reformers, born in 1483 and beginning his role in the Protestant Reformation in 1517. John Calvin was not born until 1509, and his role in the Protestant Reformation did not begin until the 1530's.

Money always talks. Martin Luther became instantly popular with the nobles. No name is so tied to the Protestant Reformation as Martin Luther. When he hammered his 95 theses to the cathedral door at Wittenberg, the sound echoed for centuries.

Whether you agree with his theology or not, Martin Luther changed the world and paved the way for freedom.

Martin Luther's most famous doctrine is sole fide, the doctrine of salvation by faith alone.

What is not so well-known is that Luther taught a version of Calvinism, the doctrine of predestination that is ascribed to John Calvin. (Of course, he taught it before Calvin did, so it's not really "Calvinism.") He wrote a book called "The Bondage of the Will" in which he taught a version of predetermination every bit as strict as Calvin's.

you, who are here present, not to tolerate any longer these heresies and abuses. (Schaff, "History of the Christian Church", vol. VII, ch. 74)

John Calvin was a tireless preacher, and it is said that he preached over 2,000 sermons. At times he preached up to five times a week, and most of those sermons were over an hour long.

Calvin is most known for his "*Institutes of the Christian Religion*" and for his strong views on predestination. His predestination doctrine is best remembered now by the acronym TULIP and is generally referred to as Calvinism.

John Calvin was highly influential, and the "Reformed Church" continues to this day. Presbyterian churches are usually Calvinist in doctrine, as are some Baptists. Other Baptist churches refer to themselves as three-point Calvinists, in opposition to the 5 points represented by TULIP.

John Calvin and Martin Luther stayed independent of each other, Luther in Germany and Calvin in Switzerland. Much of their inability to work together hinged on Luther's disagreement with the third major Reformer, ...

Ulrich Zwingli



Ulrich Zwingli was born on the first of January the year after Luther was born. Also in Switzerland, he lived in Zurich. He died several years before Calvin's rise to prominence.

Zwingli claimed his break from the Catholic Church, and his role in the Protestant Reformation, was independent of Martin Luther's, which is very likely true.

While his doctrine was like Luther's and Calvin's in many respects, he is known for being the only leader of the Protestant Reformation to reject the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Zwingli was a careful theologian, and his break from the Catholic Church was gradual and was supported by the leaders of Zurich. Due to location, he had the most interaction with the Anabaptists, the radical wing of the Protestant

Reformation (and a favourite group of mine). All the Reformers persecuted the Anabaptists, and Zwingli, probably the least combative of the three, was no exception.

The English Reformation

The brightest star of the Protestant Reformation in England was William Tyndale, who devoted his life to producing an English translation of the New Testament, which he accomplished in 1526 with the help of Reformation printing presses in Germany.

The Waldensians

I mention the Waldensians here only because they are well-known. Really, they are a movement that belongs to the late Medieval period. Originally Roman Catholic until they were driven out by persecution in the 13th century, they were satisfied enough with the Protestants to basically become a part of the Protestant Reformation. In fact, the Waldensian Confession of 1655 is Calvinistic and based upon the Reformed churches' Gallican Confession of 1559 (Re: Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, bk. VIII, sec. 162). There are still Waldensian churches to this day, mostly in Switzerland and Italy.

Anabaptism: The Radical Reformation

Anabaptist means "rebaptizer." The "papists," as the anabaptists called the Roman Catholics, called them anabaptists because they baptized their adult converts, rejecting the infant baptism those converts had received in the Catholic or Protestant churches. None of the major Reformers—Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli—turned away from infant baptism. All of them continued the practice. Never mind that the current Amish and Mennonites are the physical descendants of the Radical Reformers. Like Paul said of the Jews, it is not the children of the flesh who are God's children. It's their spiritual descendants that matter, and we all have opportunity to be the spiritual descendants of the awesome Anabaptists.

You'll find me overflowing with praise for men like Felix Manz, Conrad Grebel, and Georg Blaurock. These guys were all persecuted by Ulrich Zwingli and the Zurich city council. Felix Manz was drowned by the Zurich city council. His brother and mother were there to shout encouragement to him to stand fast in the faith. Georg Blaurock, however, was not a citizen of Zurich, so they banished him from the canton instead. Before they did, they chased him out of town, beating him with sticks as he ran from them. When they reached the edge of

town, the people stopped. Georg, his back bleeding, stopped as well. Slowly, he took off his shoes, then dusted them off in front of all the people. Then he turned and headed down the road to bring the radical version of the Protestant Reformation to the next place he came to.

Georg Blaurock

Georg (no, that's not misspelled; it's German) was full of boldness. One time he attended a service, looking for an opportunity to preach the Gospel. When he saw the priest walking up to the pulpit, he jumped up, stopped him, and told him, "God has called me to preach today."

The startled priest gave up his pulpit to Georg, who proclaimed the Gospel of salvation by faith and complete commitment to Christ.

Georg was the noted bold and brave one. Felix Manz and Conrad Grebel were "the brains of the operation." Felix Manz especially was the careful and skilled theologian.

This didn't mean he lacked in bravery. It was Felix Manz, not Georg Blaurock, who was the first Anabaptist martyr, put to death by Protestants, not Catholics.

Felix Manz' martyrdom came directly after a debate with Ulrich Zwingli. Debates with Protestant Reformers could be dangerous. John Calvin, for example, had an opponent name Servetus put to death after a debate during the Protestant Reformation.

Servetus really was a heretic, rejecting the pre-existence of Christ. This doesn't change the fact that putting opponents to death has nothing at all to do with following Christ. If we are called to pray for those who persecute us, how can we become persecutors ourselves?

Some praises for the Anabaptists

The author has been baptized by immersion, and this is for him the only biblical baptism. That's why I excited about their faith. I believe God did, too. They were not just the *radical* Reformation; they were the *real* Reformation.

While the Protestant Reformation bore pitiful fruit in the area of holiness, Anabaptists were so transformed that one Anabaptist, Dirk Willems, actually stopped to save his Roman Catholic pursuer from drowning after he fell through the ice. He was taken captive anyway, then put to death. Very few movements have relived the majesty that belonged to the church from apostolic times through A.D. 250. The radical Reformation was among them.

Unfortunately, Menno Symons and other Anabaptist leaders would later instill an insatiable desire for division that became self-righteousness and legalism and ruined the movement, but in the 16th century they brought the glory and fire of the early church to life again for decades.

The Reformation and Modern Times

The fourteenth century as even today in this era (2014) saw major changes in many people's thinking. Society, politics, economics, art and Christianity were all undergoing major transformations as the feudal, Church dominated society was being buried or reinvented. Individualism and humanism were coming to the fore as citizens started looking towards themselves for answers, rather than to God or Religious institutions.

In Northern Europe these changes radically affected religious life. The Renaissance occurred simultaneously with the discovery of the New World and many scientific discoveries that seriously harmed the credibility of the Church and made many of her dogmas seem ridiculous. The Earth was no longer the center of the galaxy or flat and the Church was less and less the center of people's lives.

St. Francis of Assisi founded the Franciscans in Italy during his lifetime (1182-1226). The Franciscans promoted a more individualistic style of worship and relationship with God. Italy became the heart and soul of the Renaissance. In England, John Wycliffe (1325-1384) had also begun to challenge the teaching of the Roman Church. He taught against transubstantiation (the belief that the bread and wine turn into Christ's body and blood during the mass), proclaimed Christ the head of the Church instead of the Pope and claimed the Bible as the sole authority for believers instead of the Church. John Wycliffe translated the New Testament into English and made it available to the people.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Catholic Church had many problems with the low level of morality among its clergy. Many were living extravagantly, had illegitimate children and were more interested in secular power than church affairs. In 1305, Pope Clement V moved the papacy from Rome to Avignon, France. This move was more the result of the influence of the King of France than any religious reason. Pope Gregory XI moved the papal seat back to Rome in 1377 and when he died, two Popes were elected, one in France and the other in Rome.

The growing nations of Europe were simultaneously becoming more nationalistic and resenting the high taxation that they were required to pay to Rome. European political leaders embraced the Reformation as a way to break

away from Rome and the Church's taxation and ownership of vast tracts of land upon which they paid no tax.

By 1500, new markets were opening up around the world for merchants. The Church's prohibitions on charging interest and forming guilds (unions) was a limiting restriction on doing new business. Theologians, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, were translating the Bible from the original languages and challenging the Church on the differences between her and the New Testament Church of the Bible

Finally, the Protestant Reformation led to the thirty Years War, and other violent conflicts that destroyed some of the holdings of the Catholic Church in Germany, Holland and eventually even England. The theological philosophies of Luther and Calvin did not have much impact on the Church because these Catholic-educated egoists were only concerned with people who were literate, well-educated landowners. The Catholic Church was supported by widespread popular consent of the masses, many of them illiterate, uneducated rural people. Lutheranism and Calvinism only took hold in the cities, never in rural areas. There, Catholicism always remained strong because of the example of the vast numbers of devout, holy priests and nuns.

Remember, the Catholic Church became strong by word-of-mouth, starting with Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Eventually, it produced the Bible. But it never intended for God, the Son and the Holy Spirit to be replaced by words in a book. Scripture, the Word of God, was a tool to help ministries, not to spur intellectual debate or replace the Living Christ in the Eucharist. That in fact is what Jesus warned against when the Pharisees, Scribes and Saducees tried to use Jewish Law to put him down (which failed, which is why he was crucified as an outlaw).

By the time of the Reformation, intellectual traditions within the Catholic Church's universities came to a head in the persons of people like Erasmus, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others. All of them thrust aside the word-of-mouth strength of Catholicism and tried to recast Christianity based on their individual interpretations of Scripture and notions of how the Church should be run. Of course, we now see in 20/20 hindsight the result was a failed effort to unite Christians under different rules. What happens when you attack the Church is, you break apart into little bits. Hence 26,000 Protestant denominations today and billions of united Catholics. Worldwide (except Antarctica).

Contrary to what others may be telling you, Europe was not ruled by any theocracy. Not at all. The Church WAS popular because of the many devout priests and nuns giving good example of a Christlike life. Simple people are led

by example. It was only in universities and among learned landowners that theological debate was all the rage. It was pure intellectualism, not faith. The divide grew between the implicitly devout Catholics and the explicitly devout Catholics who wanted to support faith with reason. Hence Luther. Hence Calvin. Hence separation based on reason masquerading as faith. But the millions of implicitly devout, simple folks in the country, remained Catholic to the core. Didn't need no book. They trusted Jesus.

In England, during the 100 year period preceding Luther, donations to the more than 10,000 Catholic parish churches rose every single year. If it had been unpopular, the rich -- which is where the money came from -- would not have been willingly giving their money, land and wealth to the Catholic Church. Anti-clericalism was a problem in Germany and Holland (these were not countries at that time, but that's the general geography). And a lot of that was because of anti-Italian feelings, not just because the pockets of corruption based on the illegal sale of indulgences, simony and non-celibate priests were found in those countries. Spain had no issues at all to speak of, as did Italy. But again, the anti-clericalism against Catholicism was really veiled hatred of the power that Spain and Italy had within the Holy Roman Empire.

The Vatican, which was being built at this time, was never in control of the Holy Roman Empire. There was no theocracy. You need to study your history. Italy wasn't even Italy. It was a bunch of powerful city-states. The Netherlands and Belgium were created out of the 30 Years War, which was mostly a Calvinist rebellion (with actually a lot of Dutch Catholic support) against Spain's Phillip II. It was NOT rebellion against Catholicism, it was a desire for self rule and the desire to get the Spanish out of Holland (which happened since Spain found bigger fish to fry in the New World). In Germany and Holland, and much later in Wales and some parts of England, the Reformation led to violent conflict by feudal lords, barons, dukes, against Catholic property. These people didn't care one twit for any theology, though they used Luther and Calvin to drive a wedge between the educated, literate landowners and to entice them with the carrot of vast wealth. It was a massive property grab.

If anything, these Renaissance years taught the Church that politics was not the place to be. Eventually, the Popes relinquished political servitude and focused only on its own government in Vatican City (after the Italian disputes regarding the Papal States ended in the 1800s). Still today, the Vatican maintains diplomatic relations with almost 200 nations, including Muslim nations.

We already know from previous chapter, and as this is a course in Church History, we repeat ourselves. When I was a boy, my dear father used to say to me, “bene, bene respondere” as to memorise the multiplication tables.

The first Reformer was **Martin Luther**, born in 1483. His father had wanted him to study law but Martin chose to study for the ministry and became a monk. He taught theology at the University of Wittenburg, Germany but became increasingly troubled by the corruption within the Church. In 1516 he became convinced that salvation was available through faith in Christ only. One of the ways that the Church raised money was through the sale of indulgences (a reduction in time spent in purgatory, a place where sins were purged before you were admitted to heaven). Archbishop Albert controlled two provinces at the time. (Even though the Church officially limited these offices to one province) When he was campaigning to control a third, Pope Leo X offered it to him for a large sum of money. The Archbishop set about raising the funds by selling indulgences.

In 1517 Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenburg. He harshly criticized the abuses of the indulgence system and challenged the necessity of priests to administer sacraments, believing in the priesthood of the believer. In 1518 he was called before the Diet of Augsburg where he repeated his assertion that the scriptures were the sole authority for believers, not the Pope. Luther was eventually excommunicated and his books were burned but the German princes liked what he was doing and protected his life.

John Calvin (1509-64) was the other main figure in this new Protestant movement. By 1550 he had many followers in Holland, Switzerland, Scotland and France. Luther may have started the reformation but Calvin gave it a structure. Calvin, a French citizen, wrote the "Institutes of the Christian Religion" in an effort to win King Francis of France over to the new ideas of the Reformation. Calvin believed that the Holy Spirit irresistibly draws people to God. He asserted that the church and government were both agents of God and should cooperate.

England became a part of the reformation more through politics than theological debate. King Henry VIII (1509-47) needed an heir to the throne and with his wife was unable to produce one. The Pope would not grant a divorce and so Henry convinced Parliament to declare him head of the Church in England. Henry's daughter, Mary Tudor was a staunch Catholic and persecuted the Protestants. When Henry's other daughter, Elizabeth, inherited the throne, she tolerated the Protestants just enough so as not to irritate the Pope. When the English fleet defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, the Anglican Church permanently replaced the Catholic one in England.

Other reformers of historical note were the Puritans. They claimed that the Anglican Church was too close to the Catholic Church. They were called

Puritans because they wanted to purify the Church of England. They wanted a complete separation of church and state. The Puritans sailed to Plymouth and were influential in the New World.

Ulrich Zwingli was a Swiss priest who was converted after reading Luther's writing. He met Luther at one point but they were unable to agree on all theological matters. The Anabaptists, influenced by Zwingli's emphasis on the Bible, were another movement started in Switzerland. They were called Anabaptists because they taught and practiced adult baptism of the believer. The city council of Zurich expelled them. The Amish, Mennonites and Quakers came from this school.

The Counter-Reformation was an attempt by the Catholic Church to reform itself in the light of Reformation theology. The Jesuits were formed and became a force for good even through the excesses of the Spanish Inquisition. They helped to push the last vestiges of the Moslem influence out of Spain. It was the Jesuits who did much of the Church's mission work in the New World and the Far East.

The creative spirit of the Renaissance was severely curtailed by the growing religious infighting. The Thirty-Years War was essentially a struggle to determine which areas would be Catholic and which would be Protestant. The War officially ended with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Most of the current branches of Christianity were formed in Europe by then. Russia was the center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the other European Churches became involved in spreading their faith to the colonies.

The effects of the Reformation were significant and far-reaching. Religious individualism led to individualism of other types. Popular education was the result of new Christian's desire to read the Bible for themselves. The people of America and Europe became an educated workforce and electorate. Protestantism stimulated capitalism and a strong work ethic. Spiritual equality became political equality and democracies were established in the light of this new view citizens had of themselves.

Christianity Today

With the new Pope Franciscus has been talk for some time now that Catholic priests may soon be allowed to marry. It would be hoped that this will stop the priests who do molest children from doing so. Others suggest that tighter screening of applicants to the priesthood would be the real answer. In any event, priest are not as well protected against the laws in places such as Australia as they used to be.

There have also been stories out of places such as Ireland about cruelty to children by nuns. Well, if priests are allowed to marry in the Catholic Church then I suppose nuns will also be allowed to as well.

In the late 20th Century the King James version of the Bible has been watered down to make it easier to read. Unfortunately with this watering down some of the meaning has been lost. My cup is full, for example, is not the same as “my cup runneth over”. Such tampering brings up the question of what do the words actually mean to followers if they can be changed and in changing them distorted.

Misbehaviour, not only with representatives of the Catholic Church but also the Protestant Churches, has recently rocked the world. The idea of priests being celibate was questioned in the writings of “The Decameron” in the latter half of the Middle Ages. It was a case of widows being comforted too well. Apparently, the pope whose father was a pirate had a mistress. During the Middle Ages, there were also the story of one particular popes being a terrible paedophile, and getting away with it.

Since the second half of the Middle Ages onward, the Roman Catholic Church has had to contend with a great deal of change. Old ideas from the ancient Greeks and from the Romans resurfaced. Some of these ideas came into Europe via Southern Spain.

Moors and Jewish scholars had kept the writings of great men of medicine, architecture, mathematics, astrology and general science alive when their works were being condemned to flame elsewhere in Europe. The Moors and the Jews of the day also contributed personally from their own stock of wisdom. Jewish physicians were said to have great healing power and there is no reason to doubt this claim. They had the books and it was not unlawful for them to make a more thorough study of the dead than the Christian physician of the time. The man who painted the Mona Lisa, **Leonardo da Vinci**, risked imprisonment and possibly death when he studied anatomy. He could have been condemned by the Church as a heretic.

The Catholic Church tried to keep a lid on both old and new discoveries, especially in medicine. Women who practiced the healing arts were too often condemned to death as witches, especially if they actually knew what they were doing. For a long time medicine in Europe was a mixture of superstitious nonsense the Church sometimes tolerated or incorporated, together with cures that actually did work.

Often cause and effect were mistaken for one another. Bad smells are deadly whereas good smells might be used to counteract the bad and thus create a cure.

This was the logic that persisted well into the 19th Century. The microscope eventually put an end to this way of thinking. Bad smells became an indicator of something possibly being wrong rather than the cause. Even to this day flowers are put in hospital rooms in the hope that they might help the sick. Of course this is not to say that fresh flowers cannot lift the spirit of someone ill and thus do some good.

Galileo was not the first man to bump heads with the Church over the place of humans in the universe. He was lucky not to be tortured and condemned to the flame. He had been friends with the pope before the man had become pope. This may have saved Galileo's life. Even so, he had to recant and he was put under house arrest. The Vatican in recent times has apologized for what was done to Galileo. Apparently he was correct in his findings.

The moon is not perfect the way the Church wanted it to be in Galileo's day. It has pock marks we now understand to be craters. The heavenly bodies do not circle the Earth acknowledging Man as the supreme being of God's creation. The Earth actually circles the sun. Galileo came to his conclusions through observation making him, in my view, a scientist as well as the best astronomer of his century. An ancient Greek scholar also believed the Earth moved so not all of Galileo's ideas were original but they were original enough to get him into trouble. He did, however, push forward our knowledge of the universe.

Martin Luther came along and questioned the divinity of the pope and, among other things, the right of the Church officials, including the pope, to issue indulgences. Could salvation be bought off the Church? Luther believed that it could not. This led to a profound split in the Church. It was made profound by a new invention, the printing press. Luther might well have burned as a heretic but he was supported by the Holy Roman Emperor and by the people of Worms (Voems). Later on the English under Henry the 8th split from Catholicism. There were other splits resulting in a divided Europe. Some kingdoms, nationalities, etc threw their support behind the pope and others behind the new Protestant Churches.

There were holy wars fuelled by plague. Who was more in favor with God? Was it the Catholics or the Protestants? Who brought plague down upon the people as a punishment from God? Was it the old Church or the newer forms of Christianity? Torturing heretics was as popular among Protestants as it was among Catholics, Everyone wanted to get right with God.

Out of this mess came the age of enlightenment, the age of reason. The scientific method was applied more and more resulting in new discoveries with a concrete base in facts which could be proven over and over again. How to treat the sick

became formalized. Even so, old folk remedies were re-examined. Some turned out to have merit.

In 19th Century France a doctor was told of a village in the north where a white flower grew which could cure headaches and other pain. Naturally he was sceptical but he went to the village anyway and examined the flower. It did indeed live up to its reputation. Well, he found out what made the flower so special and gave it his name. Nowadays Aspirin can be found in many plants including common tea but it was first discovered in a little white flower which grows in Northern France.

Charles Darwin shook up the Victorian age with his Theory of Evolution. It horrified the Bible Belt in the USA and apparently continues to do so. No one has yet proven it to be scientifically incorrect despite what Creationists believe. Creationism, in fact, basically came into existence to challenge Darwin's ideas.

Some people think Darwin's theory is against the Bible. There are Christian scientists, however, who believe that Evolution and the Bible are not incompatible.

Just when the dust was beginning to settle, **Desmond Morris in 1967**, with his book *The Naked Ape*, upset the hardcore religious almost as much as the Theory of Evolution did when it first came out. Humans are not apes, naked or otherwise! was the great hue and cry from the faithful. *My Family and Other Animals* by Gerald Durrell, which came out in 1956, for some unknown reason didn't have quite that much impact. It is, however, a book well worth reading.

Some people feel that the **Big Bang theory** and now the String theory dealing with the creation of the universe somehow belittle the very nature of God and that of supreme creation. To many scientists, however, understanding something about how everything came about belittles absolutely nothing at all. From Francis Bacon in his Elizabethan musings in *New Atlantis* onwards people who cherish new discoveries have been in awe and wonder of creation. Certainly some have been in awe of their creator from what they have learned and continue to learn. And yes there have been atheists looking and learning as well.

History of the Bible Timeline

The Bible was once a cherished possession of a very select group in society. It was way too expensive for just anyone to possess. Thanks to Gutenberg and his 15th Century printing press, the Bible came to be available to more and more people. Nowadays it can be read by just about anyone who can read. Whether or not this is deemed good or bad one thing is certain, the printing press and other forms of communication, such as the computer, are here to stay. Also science

and humankind's knowledge of the universe and humankind's place in it will continue to be explored.

Creation - B.C. 2000 - Originally, the earliest Scriptures are handed down from generation to generation orally.

Circa B.C. 2000-1500 - The **book of Job**, perhaps the oldest book of the Bible, is written.

Circa B.C. 1500-1400 - The stone tablets of the Ten Commandments are given to Moses at Mount Sinai and later stored in the Ark of the Covenant.

Circa B.C. 1400–400 - The manuscripts comprising the original Hebrew Bible (39 Old Testament books) are completed. The Book of the Law is kept in the tabernacle and later in the Temple beside the Ark of the Covenant.

Circa B.C. 300 - All of the original Old Testament Hebrew books have been written, collected, and recognized as official, canonical books.

Circa B.C. 250–200 - The Septuagint, a popular Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (39 Old Testament books), is produced. The 14 books of the Aprocrypha are also included.

Circa A.D. 45–100 - Original 27 books of the Greek New Testament are written.

Circa A.D. 140-150 - Marcion of Sinope's heretical "New Testament" prompted Orthodox Christians to establish a New Testament canon.

Circa A.D. 200 - The Jewish Misnach , the Oral Torah, is first recorded.

Circa A.D. 305-310 - Lucian of Antioch's Greek New Testament text becomes the basis for the Textus Receptus.

Circa A.D. 312 - Codex Vaticanus is possibly among the original 50 copies of the Bible ordered by Emperor Constantine. It is eventually kept in the Vatican Library in Rome.

A.D. 367 – Athanasius of Alexandria identifies the complete New Testament canon (27 books) for the first time.

A.D. 382-384 – Saint Jerome translates the New Testament from original Greek into Latin. This translation becomes part of the Latin Vulgate manuscript.

A.D. 397 - Third Synod of Carthage approves the New Testament canon (27 books).

A.D. 390-405 - Saint Jerome translates the Hebrew Bible into Latin and completes the Latin Vulgate manuscript. It includes the 39 Old Testament books, 27 New Testament books, and 14 Apocrypha books.

A.D. 500 - By now the Scriptures have been translated into multiple languages, not limited to but including an Egyptian version (Codex Alexandrinus), a Coptic version, an Ethiopic translation, a Gothic version (Codex Argenteus), and an Armenian version. Some consider the Armenian to be the most beautiful and accurate of all ancient translations.

A.D. 600 - The Roman Catholic Church declares Latin as the only language for Scripture.

A.D. 680 - Caedmon, English poet and monk, renders Bible books and stories into Anglo Saxon poetry and song.

A.D. 735 - Bede, English historian and monk, translates the Gospels into Anglo Saxon.

A.D. 775 – The Book of Kells, a richly decorated manuscript containing the Gospels and other writings, is completed by Celtic monks in Ireland.

Circa A.D. 865 - Saints Cyril and Methodius begin translating the Bible into Old Church Slavonic.

A.D. 950 - The Lindisfarne Gospels manuscript is translated into Old English.

Circa A.D. 995-1010 - Aelfric, an English abbot, translates parts of Scripture into Old English.

A.D. 1205 - Stephen Langton, theology professor and later Archbishop of Canterbury, creates the first chapter divisions in the books of the Bible.

A.D. 1229 - Council of Toulouse strictly forbids and prohibits lay people from owning a Bible.

A.D. 1240 - French Cardinal Hugh of Saint Cher publishes the first Latin Bible with the chapter divisions that still exist today.

A.D. 1325 - English hermit and poet, Richard Rolle de Hampole, and English poet William Shoreham, translate the Psalms into metrical verse.

Circa A.D. 1330 - Rabbi Solomon Ben Ismael first places chapter divisions in the margins of the Hebrew Bible.

A.D. 1381-1382 - John Wycliffe and associates, in defiance of the organized Church, believing that people should be permitted to read the Bible in their own language, begin to translate and produce the first handwritten manuscripts of

A.D. 1388 - John Purvey revises Wycliffe's Bible.

A.D. 1415 - 31 years after Wycliffe's death, the Council of Constance charges him with more than 260 counts of heresy.

A.D. 1428 - 44 years after Wycliffe's death, church officials dig up his bones, burn them, and scatter the ashes on Swift River.

A.D. 1455 - After the invention of the printing press in Germany, Johannes Gutenberg produces the first printed Bible, the Gutenberg Bible.

A.D. 1516 - Desiderius Erasmus produces a Greek New Testament, forerunner to the Textus Receptus.

A.D. 1517 - Daniel Bomberg's Rabbinic Bible contains the first printed Hebrew version (Masoretic text) with chapter divisions.

A.D. 1522 – Martin Luther translates and publishes the New Testament for the first time into German from the 1516 Erasmus version.

A.D. 1524 - Bomberg prints a second edition Masoretic text prepared by Jacob Ben Chayim.

A.D. 1525 – William Tyndale produces the first translation of the New Testament from Greek into English.

A.D. 1527 - Erasmus publishes a fourth edition Greek-Latin translation.

A.D. 1530 - Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples completes the first French language translation of the entire Bible.

A.D. 1535 - Myles Coverdale's Bible completes Tyndale's work, producing the first complete printed Bible in the English language. It includes the 39 Old Testament books, 27 New Testament books, and 14 Apocrypha books.

A.D. 1536 - Martin Luther translates the Old Testament into the commonly-spoken dialect of the German people, completing his translation of the entire Bible in German.

A.D. 1536 - Tyndale is condemned as a heretic, strangled, and burned at the stake.

A.D. 1537 - The Matthew Bible (commonly known as the Matthew-Tyndale Bible), a second complete printed English translation, is published, combining the works of Tyndale, Coverdale and John Rogers.

A.D. 1539 - The Great Bible, the first English Bible authorized for public use, is printed.

A.D. 1546 - Roman Catholic Council of Trent declares the Vulgate as the exclusive Latin authority for the Bible.

A.D. 1553 - Robert Estienne publishes a French Bible with chapter and verse divisions. This system of numbering becomes widely accepted and is still found in most Bible's today.

A.D. 1560 - The Geneva Bible is printed in Geneva, Switzerland. It is translated by English refugees and published by John Calvin's brother-in-law, William Whittingham. The Geneva Bible is the first English Bible to add numbered verses to the chapters. It becomes the Bible of the Protestant Reformation, more popular than the 1611 King James Version for decades after its original release.

A.D. 1568 - The Bishop's Bible, a revision of the Great Bible, is introduced in England to compete with the popular but "inflammatory toward the institutional Church" Geneva Bible.

A.D. 1582 - Dropping its 1,000-year-old Latin only policy, the Church of Rome produces the first English Catholic Bible, the Rheims New Testament, from the Latin Vulgate.

A.D. 1592 - The Clementine Vulgate (authorized by Pope Clementine VIII), a revised version of the Latin Vulgate, becomes the authoritative Bible of the Catholic Church.

A.D. 1609 - The Douay Old Testament is translated into English by the Church of Rome, to complete the combined Douay-Rheims Version.

A.D. 1611 – The King James Version (public domain today) , also called the "Authorized Version" of the Bible is published. It is said to be the most printed book in the history of the world, with more than one billion copies in print.

A.D. 1663 - John Eliot's Algonquin Bible is the first Bible printed in America, not in English, but in the native Algonquin Indian language.

A.D. 1782 - Robert Aitken's Bible is the first English language (KJV) Bible printed in America.

A.D. 1790 - Matthew Carey publishes a Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims Version English Bible in America.

A.D. 1790 - William Young prints the first pocket sized "school edition" King James Version Bible in America.

A.D. 1791 - The Isaac Collins Bible, the first family Bible (KJV), is printed in America.

A.D. 1791 - Isaiah Thomas prints the first illustrated Bible (KJV) in America.

A.D. 1808 - Jane Aitken (daughter of Robert Aitken), is the first woman to print a Bible.

A.D. 1833 - Noah Webster, after publishing his famous dictionary, releases his own revised edition of the King James Bible.

A.D. 1841 - The English Hexapla New Testament, a comparison of the original Greek language and six important English translations, is produced.

A.D. 1844 - The Codex Sinaiticus, a hand written Koine Greek manuscript of both Old and New Testament texts dating back to the fourth century, is rediscovered by German Bible scholar Konstantin Von Tischendorf in the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai.

A.D. 1881-1885 - The King James Bible is revised and published as the Revised Version (RV) in England.

A.D. 1901 - The American Standard Version, the first major American revision of the King James Version, is published.

A.D. 1946-1952 - The Revised Standard Version is published.

A.D. 1947-1956 - The Dead Sea Scrolls are discovered.

A.D. 1971 - The New American Standard Bible (NASB) is published.

A.D. 1973 - The New International Version (NIV) is published.

A.D. 1982 - The New King James Version (NKJV) is published.

A.D. 1986 - The discovery of the Silver Scrolls, believed to be the oldest Bible text ever, is announced. They were found three years earlier in the Old City of Jerusalem by Gabriel Barkay of Tel Aviv University.

A.D. 1996 - The New Living Translation (NLT) is published.

A.D. 2001 - The English Standard Version (ESV) is published.

The Reality of Christianity's Decline Today

Is Christianity in decline in America and Europe? When you examine the cold, hard numbers it is simply not possible to come to any other conclusion. Over the past few decades, the percentage of Christians in America has been steadily declining. This has especially been true among young people. As you will see later in this article, there has been a mass exodus of teens and young adults out of U.S. and EU churches. In addition, what "Christianity" means to American and Europe Christians today is often far different from what "Christianity" meant to their parents and their grandparents. Millions upon millions of Christians in the United States and the whole Western world simply do not believe many of the fundamental principles of the Christian faith any longer. Without a doubt, America is becoming a less "Christian" nation. This has staggering implications for the future of this country. The United States was founded primarily by Christians that were seeking to escape religious persecution. For those early settlers, the Christian faith was the very center of their lives, and it deeply affected the laws that they made and the governmental

structures that they established. So what is the future of America going to look like if we totally reject the principles that this nation was founded on?

Overall, Christianity is still the largest religion in the world by far. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, there are currently 2.2 billion Christians in the world. So Christianity is not in danger of disappearing any time soon. In fact, in some areas of the globe it is experiencing absolutely explosive growth. But in the United States, things are different. Churches are shrinking, scepticism is growing and apathy about spiritual matters seems to be at an all-time high.

Before we examine the data, let me disclose that I am a Christian. I am not bashing Christians or the Christian faith at all in this article. In fact, I consider the decline of Christianity in America to be a very bad thing. Not everyone is going to agree with me on that, but hopefully this article will help spark a debate on the role of religion in America that everyone can learn something from. Unfortunately, the reality is that most Americans spend very little time thinking about religion or spiritual matters these days.

Just consider the following quote from a recent USA Today article....

“The real dirty little secret of religiosity in America is that there are so many people for whom spiritual interest, thinking about ultimate questions, is minimal,” says Mark Silk, professor of religion and public life at Trinity College”

This is backed up by the numbers. For example, a survey taken last year by LifeWay Research found that 46 percent of all Americans never think about whether they will go to heaven or not.

To most Americans, faith is simply not a big deal. This is particularly true of our young people. Those under the age of 30 are leaving U.S. churches in droves. The following comes from a recent CNN article....

David Kinnaman, the 38-year-old president of the Barna Group, an evangelical research firm, is the latest to sound the alarm. In his new book, “You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith,” he says that 18- to 29-year-olds have fallen down a “black hole” of church attendance. There is a 43% drop in Christian church attendance between the teen and early adult years, he says.

But it isn't just young people that are leaving American churches. The proportion of Americans that consider themselves to be Christians has been steadily declining for many years. Back in 1990, 86 percent of all Americans considered themselves to be Christian. By 2008, that number had dropped to 76 percent.

Meanwhile, the number of Americans that reject religion entirely has absolutely soared. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of Americans with "no religion" more than doubled between 1990 and 2008. So what is going to happen if these trends continue?

Dave Olson, the director of church planting for the Evangelical Covenant Church, has made some really interesting projections regarding what is going to happen to church attendance in America if current trends continue.

According to Olson, only 18.7 percent of all Americans regularly attend church right now. If this number continues to decline at the current pace, Olson says that the percentage of Americans attending church in 2050 will be about half of what it is today. Other research has produced similar results.

According to a study done by Life Way Research, membership in Southern Baptist churches will fall nearly 50 percent by the year 2050 if current trends persist. If you are a Christian, you should be quite alarmed by these numbers. But what is happening to the faith of our young people should be even more alarming for Christians.

The American Religious Identification Survey by the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture at Trinity College is one of the most comprehensive studies on religion in America that has ever been done.

According to that study, 15 percent of all Americans say that they have "no religion". That is up from 8 percent in 1990. That is quite a change. But the move away from religion is particularly pronounced among our young people. One recent survey found that 25 percent of all Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 say that they have no religion.

Obviously the Christian faith is not winning the battle for the hearts and the minds of our young people. The cold, hard truth is that in America today, the younger you are, the less likely you are to consider yourself to be a Christian.

Large numbers of young Americans that went to church while they were growing up are now leaving U.S. churches entirely. A recent study by the Barna

Group discovered that nearly 60 percent of all Christians between the ages of 15 and 29 are no longer actively involved in any church.

But not only have they left the church, our young people have also abandoned just about all forms of Christian spirituality.

- 65% rarely or never pray with others, and 38% almost never pray by themselves either.
- 65% rarely or never attend worship services of any kind.
- 67% don't read the Bible or any other religious texts on a regular basis.

If this does not get turned around, churches all over America will be closing their doors. When the survey above first came out, the president of LifeWay Christian Resources stated that *“the Millennial generation will see churches closing as quickly as GM dealerships.”*

But it is not just church that our young people are rejecting. The reality is that they are also rejecting the fundamental principles of the Christian faith. One survey conducted by the Barna Group found that less than 1 percent of all Americans between the ages of 18 and 23 hold a Biblical worldview.

The Barna Group asked participants in the survey if they agreed with the following six statements....

- 1) Believing that absolute moral truth exists.
- 2) Believing that the Bible is completely accurate in all of the principles it teaches.
- 3) Believing that Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic.
- 4) Believing that a person cannot earn their way into Heaven by trying to be good or by doing good works.
- 5) Believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth.
- 6) Believing that God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today.

Less than 1 percent of the participants agreed with all of those statements. That is staggering. But it is not just young adults that are rejecting the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Even large numbers of “evangelical Christians” are rejecting the fundamental principles of the Christian faith. For example, one survey found that 52 percent of all American Christians believe that “at least some non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal life”.

Another survey found that 29 percent of all American Christians claim to have been in contact with the dead, 23 percent believe in astrology and 22 percent believe in reincarnation.

Without a doubt, the religious landscape of America and Europe is changing rapidly. Over the past several decades, church attendance has been steadily declining, the percentage of Americans that consider themselves to be Christians has been going down, and the number of people that hold traditional Christian beliefs has been dropping like a rock. So what does all of this mean for the future of America, Europe and the whole world, humanity?

Home Churches Anarchism Today Saving the Christian Humanity



Home churches are non-denominational and an effort is made to accommodate Christians of many backgrounds. The house church movement is an attempt to get away from the institutional church, seeking instead to return to the small gatherings of peoples that constituted all of the churches of the New Testament era.

The emphasis is not to criticize the institutional church, but rather to lift up its alternative. Many house churches start among people who first meet in an institutional setting, and regular attendance at a good institutional church is encouraged as a source of Christian teaching. But can one really *worship* at an institutional church? The fellowship pictured in Matthew 18:20 (the source of the house church doctrine of church) is "two or three gathered together." Even

"church growth" experts say that the "glue" that is necessary to unite worshippers cannot be achieved as a church grows beyond a limit of about forty people. Other experts point out that an assembly larger than a mere dozen people creates an environment in which some of the people often back away from full participation. And there is the concern so well articulated by that the institutional church tends toward viewing its members as an "audience" and the worship experience as a "show." It is better, he said, to view *God* as the audience and all the people equally accountable for the "performance" of worshipping in Spirit and in Truth.

Here are just a few of the reasons of valuing a New Testament House Church:

- ***Historical.*** The house church is the biblical church. All of the churches in the New Testament era were small assemblies that met in homes. While setting up institutional forms of "church" may or may not provide a way to honor God, the movement toward the institution and the human authority that tends to accompany hierarchical institutional structure are not theologically neutral.
- ***Growth.*** The most explosive growth of Christianity in our own time has taken place in the likes of the People's Republic of China where its only expression has been the illegal, underground house church (more recently the PRC has installed a government-licensed "Three Self" church in an effort to control a movement that decades of political repression has failed to contain). Historians studies have led to conclude that the house church is our best hope for the renewal in our times.
- ***Resisting the Culture.*** Our culture desperately wants to change our doctrines so that it might Christianity to conform to its notion of "civil religion" and "political correctness." The house church has always been for this reason, just as Jesus said that his disciples should be in the Sermon on the Mount. That sermon outlines how the powerless disciple can be salt and light in a dark world (Matthew 5:13-14), how to withstand evildoers (Matthew 5:39) by showing God's love to the world through suffering at the hands of persecution from bullies (Matthew 5:39), foreclosing landlords (Matthew 5:40), and occupying Roman authorities (Matthew 5:41). It speaks of giving and lending to the most hopeless credit risks (Matthew 5:42). It speaks of a praying community ("Our Father, who art in heaven ..." Matthew 6:9) that fasts (Matthew 6:16), gives of itself (Matthew 6: 21), and depends completely on God (Matthew 25ff). It speaks of the non-judgment of individuals (Matthew 7:1), just as it speaks of the need to judge those who would be authorities in spiritual matters (Matthew 7:15ff).

- **Mission.** There are several opportunities in our communities that are especially suited for the house church. An invitation offered to a work-place acquaintance to a home is much less threatening than one to a church, just as one example. Another is the unique value of the house church as a ministry to "the damaged" and the possibility of learning the joy of giving by elevating that practice to a personal level.

Of course there are objections to the independent house church that the reader will need to consider carefully:

- **Authority.** House church advocates reject any human authority other than the very real and present rule of Christ, who was inaugurated the king of his church at the first Pentecost (Acts 2). The house church assembles to know the will of its king through the Holy Spirit and to be obedient to that will. Many in the professional clergy, however, understand their role as a "priestly" one in which they are to be intermediaries between the Lord and His flock, being thus trusted through the process with a certain degree of authority. While they seek the benefits of the vibrant Christianity that manifests itself in small groups, and work hard to make small groups a part of the ministry of their churches, many harbor a concern that the groups might become a threat to their own relevance and livelihood.
- **Heresy.** Others argue that house churches, due to their lack of seminary trained clergy, might follow the examples of Jonestown and Waco. In this they have a point, as the New Testament is full of epistles that attempt to correct a legion of heresies in various churches--and all of the New Testament churches were, in fact, house churches. It is hoped that these pages can help house churches avoid this pitfall, taking over the seminary's role to the extent possible in a mere web site as the Berea School of Theology and Ministries on Internet for Evangelical House Churches.

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