

The background of the book cover is a reproduction of Michelangelo's famous fresco, "The Creation of Adam," from the Sistine Chapel. It depicts the hand of God reaching towards the hand of Adam, with a small gap between their fingers. The background is a textured, aged, light brown color with visible cracks.

*Church  
History for  
The Curious*

**A Story of Trial and Triumph**

**Dan Beaty**

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my wife Brenda, without whose support it could not have been written, and to my mother Julia, who brought me up to love the Lord, and instilled in me the confidence to pursue His service.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Fred and Kathy Spears, David and Carolynn Anderson, and Roger Legg for their encouragement and help in proof-reading and offering suggestions in this my first major book.

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# Forward

Having been in ministry for almost 25 years and the pastor of one church for the better part of twenty years, I have made many contacts and built relationships with people from all walks of life. One relationship that I value greatly is the friendship I have with Dan Beaty. I have known Dan most of my life and have been blessed to work with him on this project and together in ministry for several years now. When he asked me to write the forward to this book, I was deeply honored.

As I have studied and read many books on church history and I am always amazed at the legacy we have been left as Christ's followers. The faith that we have today was not simply handed to us on a golden plate, but was painstakingly developed over hundreds and even thousands of years. The Scriptures have been closely studied for centuries and the church has grown in a pattern of incremental steps forward and often large steps backwards. A few times God has allowed a giant leap forward, as in the days of the Reformation or the times of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the turn of the 20th Century, but more often than not the church has slowly and deliberately moved forward with sound doctrine.

So lets answer the big question you are asking yourself about now. Why should I read this book? Do I really need to understand church history? Well... I could go on at length about why you SHOULD read this book, but let me give you one simple reason why.

God wants you to.

In the Bible He continually exhorts believers to search out and remember the past. The Old Testament is filled with references of God commanding the Israelites to remember the deeds of the past. He instituted ceremony after ceremony, festival after festival that caused His people to look back at what had happened in the past. Often veiled in these events were glimpses of things that would occur in the future. Therefore, when we study the past, we might just get a view of what God promises for the future.



"Please inquire of past generations, and consider the things searched out by their fathers. For we are only of yesterday and know nothing, because our days on earth are as a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you, and bring forth words from their minds?" (Job 8:8-10 NASB)

The pillars and monuments throughout church history serve as a constant reminder of God's faithfulness. They increase our faith and reassure us that as God has acted in the past, He will act in the future. *Church History for the Curious* is a great resource that I highly recommend for those beginning their journey into the Churches past.

Roger Legg  
Pastor, Emmanuel Church of Etna

# Preface

In our day, there seems to be a renewed interest in things historical. Speculations abound regarding incidents in both recent and ancient history, suggesting that the “real, untold story” has finally been uncovered.

Many conspiracy theories have become the basis for best-selling novels and big-budget movies. Television archeologists regularly fascinate the public with new theories based on new discoveries from the dirt. While it is understandable that sensational and entertaining ideas help to generate interest and financing for scientific studies, there is a definite downside to this phenomenon.

Behind the wild revisions of history that are so popular today, motives exist that go even beyond crass desires for wealth and fame. Some representations of history are actually designed to damage the faith of believers and to confuse unbelievers. Often, even in the Christian's zeal to get to the bottom of myths, legends, and ecclesiastical traditions, errors can be generated and circulated as well.

What drove me to writing this book and attempting to get it into the hands of today's Christians, is the desire to counter some of the more harmful errors that threaten us today. Many of these errors result from an unfair judgment against people and events of the past. They can even be found maligning the character of God. One does not have to be an authority in church history, but to simply invest some time in research and study before becoming aware that many of the sensational exposés being thrust upon Christians today are clearly distortions of the truth.

My challenge to the reader would be this: Do your own detective work. Investigate for yourself to determine if what you are reading here or hearing from any other source is reasonably accurate. This book will not include many technical details. It attempts mainly to give you as close and fair overview of the story of Christianity as possible, and a starting point for your own research. More than that it hopes to inspire clear thinking regarding the life and death issues that are dealt with in the Christian Faith.



## Introduction

The purpose of this writing is to help the modern Christian better understand how the Christian movement became what it is today. In attempting to make the story I am about to tell as accessible to as many as is possible, a lot of time must be compressed into a very small space. Many people and events will be left out that deserve attention. It is therefore my hope that this brief introduction will stimulate further research on the part of the reader to gain additional understanding and perspectives other than my own. You may find the resource list near the end of this book to be helpful in this pursuit.

At the outset let me point out that to understand does not necessarily mean to agree with or condone the actions of individuals. Some actions might be judged to be wrong or immoral while others might be praised. In either case events transpired as they have. Today we have the privilege of looking back and attempting to learn something from the past that hopefully will help us in pleasing our Lord and Savior.

The perspective of this writing, which was the perspective of those whom God used in recording the history and teachings of the Scripture, is one that views God as sovereign. That is, nothing in this universe escapes His authority.

His infinite wisdom allows for things that are difficult to understand but which in turn accomplish His great purpose. Of all Biblical stories, the greatest example of course is the Crucifixion of Christ. Peter explained in Acts 2:23-24 how God permitted wicked men to crucify Jesus in order that He could triumph in His resurrection. Elsewhere in the New Testament, it is told again and again of how that horrible event set in motion the transformation of the world. That transformation began with simple trust in the hearts of His children whom He has liberated from sin, darkness and death!

This is the mysterious wisdom of God, to which Paul exclaims in Romans 11:33-36:

***O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!***

*For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Or who has first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?*

*For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.*

In spite of all the failures of people on all sides of the disagreements and conflicts of Christian History up to the present, the words of the apostle Paul remain true, that Christ will present to himself a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. She will be found holy and blameless before Him. (Ephesians 5:27).

May that same afore mentioned trust abide in us as we undertake this overview of the history of His workings in His Church.

# 1

## THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

### *From Despair to Hope*\_\_\_\_\_

The first century (as we mark time today) began for the people of God in Israel much like several of the previous centuries. While being allowed to live in the land of their forefathers, they were not free as before. They had already been subjugated by the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and now by the Romans.

The magnificent Temple in Jerusalem built by King Herod the Great still stood, but their spiritual life had long been stifled by political and religious authorities. Yet, deep within the consciousness of the nation the words of the prophets from Moses to Malachi had kept alive the promise of the greatest deliverer of all time—their Messiah.

So when a man appeared on the scene wearing the garments of the desert prophets, many took notice. This man, John the Baptist had a simple message: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!” Things were about to drastically change, and they were not ready, therefore he called them to come into the Jordan for a great ceremonial cleansing. His preaching bore the marks of a true Old Testament prophet, for here was one who was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb! The fire of his passion and the truth of his words were highly effective on the multitudes, much to the chagrin of the status quo.

He also told them that his work was a preparatory one. A greater one was to come, who he came to recognize as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus soon took up where John left off, preaching repentance, faith, and the nearness of the Kingdom of God. But not only did He teach them how to prepare for and to live in the Kingdom, He also demonstrated its power to liberate them from all sorts of bondage. His miracles of power over nature and deliverance from sin, sickness, demon oppression, and even death brought their hopes to an all-time high.

This hope was to be mightily crushed. Religious and political authorities seeing Jesus as a threat to their order had Him put to death by crucifixion.

But you know the rest of the story.....

As He had promised, Jesus did rise from the dead. Then He appeared to His closest followers, and set them up for the plan of the ages – His Church – that the gates of Hades would not prevail against! All that remained after giving them His Word was for them to receive His Spirit within. Acts chapter 2 records the manner in which the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit exploded in their midst, sweeping thousands into the Kingdom of God!

## ***The Early Church***

---

The best record we have of the early decades of Christianity is of course the New Testament book, the Acts of the Apostles. There the physician Luke, who was the apostle Paul's traveling companion and with him during his trial and execution, recorded many events of that time in exciting and amazing detail.

From Acts, and several of Paul's letters to the churches we can get a general picture of what the early Christians believed and practiced. Admittedly, the Gospels give us little of Jesus' concept of church organization. Certainly we can trust, however that He made sure the leaders He had chosen possessed some idea of what He had in mind.

Jesus revealed no disapproval of the synagogue system of that day; in fact He used it to promote His message of the Kingdom. This system had developed when they were captive in foreign lands. Having no temple or official priesthood while in Babylon, they kept in touch with their heritage and the faith of their fathers by these familial gatherings. In the synagogue prayers were offered, the

Scriptures were read, hymns were sung and the needs of the congregation were considered. It was natural that the early Jewish Christians would build on and modify that pattern as directed by the Holy Spirit.

Later we will look at this simple form of worship that God so beautifully used as a testimony to the presence of His Kingdom in this world.

### *The Gospel Expands*

In the Providence of God, Christian missionaries in the first century would be aided by the political and cultural conditions of that day. Centuries earlier, Alexander the Great conquered most of the then known world, and spread the Greek culture throughout those areas. Eventually Greek became the common language of the Mediterranean world. Later, the Romans were able to consolidate the empire, making travel safer than ever before, and on the best road system in the world. Earlier conditions would have not allowed for this easier travel and communication. Truly, the times were ripe for the Gospel in more ways than one.

In a few years, the Church in Jerusalem was well established. The next major center of Christianity would be in Antioch of Syria, some 325 miles north of Jerusalem. But instead of being predominantly of Jewish descent, many in this assembly were Gentiles. Generations earlier, when Israel was scattered across Europe and Asia, they took the synagogue system with them. Eventually synagogues were established in every major city.

This may seem coincidental to you, but it looks like God had a plan in this. These groups of people who were basing their lives on the God-breathed Scriptures were a testimony to their Gentile neighbors of a better lifestyle. Realizing this, the Jews allowed those interested to either be circumcised and become full Jews (proselytes), or simply sit in the meetings to learn about the Hebrew God. The latter were known as the God-fearers.

It was these God-fearers, like Cornelius in Acts chapter 10 that were the first Gentile converts and who made up many of the churches started by Paul. You see, they were already primed and prepared for the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, by the teachings they heard in the synagogues! As time progressed, things became more difficult when more uninitiated



Gentiles began to fill the churches. As can be seen in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, more lifestyle issues had to be dealt with than before.

The third major Christian community would be in Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey. During a season of fasting and prayer in Antioch, the Holy Spirit spoke through one of the prophets that Paul (then known by his Hebrew name Saul) along with Barnabas should be separated and sent forth as missionaries. Over a period of about 10 years they covered Greece, Macedonia, Galatia and Asia Minor. Their pattern was to locate the local synagogues, which were open to visiting Rabbi's. When Jesus was preached, the controversy most often led to the Gentile God-fearers becoming interested in the Gospel. These later became the core of the church in that city.

Whether by design or out of necessity, the time they spent in each city was short. Often they were driven out of the cities by their religious persecutors. Later when the heat died down, they returned to check on the new converts and appoint elders in every city.

It was in Ephesus, a large and important city at the time, that Paul was able to invest the most time. The two years he was there could be part of the reason that this church eventually became prominent. Early church historians also recorded that the apostle John became later connected to Ephesus and the churches in Asia, which he addressed in the prophetic book, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. One could imagine the memories the believers in that region shared of their quality time with these two devoted servants of the Lord.

If we attempt to look at the Acts of the Apostles and the other New Testament epistles without reading in the concepts of the later centuries, we would likely get a clearer picture of New Testament Christianity. There seems to be a wealth of spontaneity in the ministry and worship. The Holy Spirit was relied upon for direction and for the power to live up to their glorious calling as sons and daughters of God. The Word of God was found in what we now call the Old Testament Scriptures, but also in the oral teachings of Jesus and the apostles. As these teachings became written down, copied and circulated, they were eventually combined with the Old Testament canon of Scripture.

Supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit were the qualifications for ministry, and godly character for positions of responsibility in

leadership. Freedom was characteristic in their worship of God, and sacrifice was an ordinary part of their community life.

### ***The Didache and the Kerygma***

What, you may ask, are the Didache and the Kerygma? Well, these two Greek words embody two of the foundations of first century Christianity. The Didache is the body of Christ's teachings, and the Kerygma is the proclamation of His Good News. The apostles made it their business to preach repentance from sin, faith towards God, and believing the Good News of God's Kingdom as revealed in Jesus. But they also made it a priority to fulfill Jesus' command to teach His principles and to build the believers' faith.

With the authority given to them by Jesus, from whom all authority in heaven and earth proceeds, the apostles gladly, and at great personal risk, told the world that Jesus was in the process of taking over the planet!... But in a good way, of course! First, He would deliver from the bondage of sin those who submitted themselves to Him. Then He would instruct them in His wisdom and use them to manifest His righteousness to others.

This is the very heart of the Church that Jesus is building to crash down the gates of hell! The Gospel of Jesus Christ is “the power of God unto salvation to them that believe, to the Jew first but also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16). If you want to know the secret of the success of the early Church, here it is! Yes, love is pre-eminent, and by which all would know that we are His disciples, but the power to love comes from receiving the very Word of God contained in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### ***“I Never Promised You a Rose Garden”***\_\_\_\_\_

In the time Jesus spent with His disciples, they witnessed many wonderful things and heard many wonderful words. One could imagine the state of euphoria which they experienced in those days, and even later when the Holy Spirit was poured out on all the “servants and handmaidens” of the Lord at Pentecost. But Jesus did not neglect to warn them of the downside of His ministry, and of their participation in it.

While infused with grace, love, and power, the Church of Jesus Christ was not void of conflict. Neither was it always basking in

material peace and prosperity. (Its riches were to be found in His abiding presence, which is promised to all those who love Him). Previously He both plainly warned that divisions would arise because of Him, and that those who hated Him would hate them as well. He also warned of the danger of false prophets arising and claiming to represent Him.

***All of these elements will be found in the next 2000 years of Church History.***

There would be times of relative peace, and of course great effort should be made to preserve that peace. But two kingdoms have been at war with each other from the beginning. Christ had won the final victory in the heavens, but the Church, His Body must now accomplish the same in the earth.

After His resurrection, during His last days on the earth with His disciples, He challenged Peter specifically to the purpose for which he was chosen. Peter, whose name means, “Rock,” was one of those chosen to shepherd the Lord's flock. The former fisherman evidently shrunk at first from this task, because he knew the implications. This is not a relaxing pastime, but one requiring extreme diligence.

The duty of the common shepherd was not only to see that the sheep are fed, but also protected from diseases, wild animals, accidents or any other danger. All Christians have a spiritual enemy whose soul objective is to steal, kill and destroy—and to in any way possible thwart God's good intentions for them. Therefore He has provided shepherds, whom He Himself has prepared and equipped for this task.

***Not so among you!***

In his first New Testament letter, Peter challenged others in the same manner that Christ had challenged him. As a fellow elder/shepherd/overseer, He charged the mature believing men in the churches to likewise selflessly take on this responsibility. This echoed the earlier words of Christ when He told His disciples to become the servants of all, rather than Lords over His flock.

The darkest days of Christianity would come, not because of persecution from the religious and civil authorities, but when those

given the responsibility to protect and care for the people of God became users who sought their own gain and power instead. In Matthew 20:25-28, Jesus instructed the future leaders of the church concerning the way in which the worldly authorities wielded their power. He commanded that it would *not* be so among them, but that the greatest among them would be those who were the servants of all. For the first several hundred years, thankfully the leaders, though not perfect, were for the most part devoted to Christ and His Bride. Their task was not easy. The spiritual forces of wickedness fought from both within their ranks and from the worldly systems of that day. The persecution Jesus promised came first from their rivals, the Jewish religious aristocracy who accused them of heresy. While Jesus and His apostles were accused of betraying God, in fact they were only exposing the traditions that were piled upon the Truth of the Word of God. In fact, they were more loyal to the essence of the Holy Scriptures, which taught them to love and please the Heavenly Father, while benefiting mankind.

### *When in Rome.....*

As Gentiles began to fill their ranks, the Christian community was less and less seen as a sect from within Judaism, which happened to be protected by Roman law. Now as Christians began to be on their own from Rome's point of view, they were required to offer tokens of worship to the gods of the empire, namely the emperors. This they could not in good conscience do, as they only knew of One God worthy of worship. However, their Lord expected them to be model citizens in every other way.

The *Pax Romana*, or the peace of Rome was a highly valued possession for its inhabitants, and many saw the Christians as subverting that peace and security. Their private gatherings and their resistance to emperor worship led to many false accusations, which in turn led to persecutions by the authorities. As previously mentioned, there were relative periods of peace and security, but when the persecutions did come, they were extremely severe.

Christianity would not become fully legal in the empire until the fourth century, when Constantine became emperor. Until then, the pressures of persecution would offer the true and mature believers in Christ their greatest opportunities to demonstrate unshakable faith in their triumphant God.

## *Wolves in Sheep's Clothing*

While pressure was bearing upon the Church from without, other problems were arising from within. This danger to the health and well being of the congregations was that of false prophets and teachers. Already in the first decades, we see in Acts, and in the letters of Paul and John that internal battles were fomenting. The first crisis in doctrine came when teachers from Jerusalem came to Antioch to see that the Gentiles were conforming to the laws and traditions of the nation of Israel. Peter and Paul both knew that a New Covenant had come, and they were in the process of working out what that actually meant.

While it was okay for Jewish Christians to continue in the lifestyle they always knew, it was to always be understood that Christ had fully and completely satisfied the need for atonement of sins. The Gentiles had received the very same atonement from the Cross of Christ to which nothing could be added.

The root of the problem is known today as *legalism*. There will always be the tendency to think we can satisfy God by some religious act or practice in place of pure and simple trust in what He has done and is doing for us and through us in Christ. Paul foresaw what would eventually be the loss of spiritual vitality in the Church if they began to trust more in forms and rituals than in the very power of Christ Himself working within them.

To settle this issue of requiring the Gentiles to keep the Law of Moses, Paul and Barnabas met with the other apostles in Jerusalem. After a very heated discussion, Peter stood with Paul and convinced James and the others that circumcision and the Law of Moses would not be required of the Gentile believers. They did, however, give a short list of things to avoid. (Acts 15:1-31).

Ironically, another danger to the faith tended to drive the emphasis away from the simplicity of Christ alone and further in the direction of forms, rituals, and legalism. That danger was also from within and was known as *Gnosticism*.

## *In the Know*

The Hebrews were taught that God created the heavens and earth, and that He saw His creation was good. Yes, evil did enter in and bring great calamity and suffering, but the creation itself was the result of a good and loving God.

Other religions and philosophies in the first century saw it differently. These saw only the non-material as good. The rest was brought about by an evil and lesser god. Some began to bring these ideas into Christianity with little difficulty. Remember how even Paul contrasted the flesh with the Spirit. Yet, he saw the human body as becoming eventually restored to its glorious incorruptible state. The Gnostic Christians, as do many today, saw the body as an enemy, a prison house from which they longed to be released.

The material body became so repulsive to them that they came to deny that Jesus indeed did come in the flesh (John 1:14, 1 John 4:3). They proposed that He only appeared to have a human body. Both Paul and the Apostle John countered this error, each understanding the implications of such an idea. Why concern ourselves with praying for God's Kingdom to come, for His will to be done IN EARTH as in heaven, if the entire material world is evil and to be destroyed? This could lead to escapism. The goal then would be just to become internally focussed, gaining that secret knowledge that was for the predestined alone and separating ourselves from the lower humans.

The exact opposite of what Christ commanded His people to do.

## *God meant it for Good*

The Gnostics (Greek for “those who know”) were so eloquent and intelligent that many were persuaded to their views. This forced the Christian thinkers of the early centuries to think more deeply about the past, present and future workings of God in the earth. They began to probe more deeply into the Old Testament to find the promise of Christ, and also began collecting the writings of the first generation of Christians to build on their legacy. By now, however, there was a fairly large chasm between the Jewish people from whom Christ came, and the Gentiles who now claimed Christ as their own.

Paul explains in Romans how the majority of Jews could not understand the concept of the suffering Messiah. Outwardly, life did

not change for them since Christ's appearance. In fact, it became even worse. After some zealots rebelled against Rome and fought for their independence, the Roman general Titus was sent to crush the rebellion, fulfilling predictions made by Jesus in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. With the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. came the end of an era. However, Paul remained committed to his fellow Israelites, believing that ultimately God would wake them from their spiritual slumber, revealing Christ to them more fully—in his words, “life from the dead!” (Romans 11:15).

Over the course of time, Gentile Christianity began to move further and further from its Jewish roots. For better or worse, Greek and Roman influence gradually began to creep into the thinking of the people. It is this writers opinion that influences from Greek, Roman and even Jewish philosophies over time did weaken the Church. Not only that, but influences from our modern cultures tend to do the same.

This is part of why we study history – to observe and learn what God would teach us. From Adam and Eve in the garden, to David and Saul, to Mary and Martha to Martin Luther, to Billy Graham – God would reveal to us His wisdom through all the triumphs *and* failures of the past. And most wonderful, is that we still have the pattern shown to us in the Gospels, Acts and the New Testament writings to keep us centered on the foundation of Christ – the Christ Who transcends history, and yet entered history to transform it.

No matter how far off course Christianity has come, every renewal, revival, or reform movement has always come from returning to that firm foundation!

### ***Has the Glory departed?***\_\_\_\_\_

Even before the New Testament writings were completed, evidence arose that indicated the beginnings of spiritual decline among the followers of Jesus. The persecution, the heresies, and the struggles against the temptations of the flesh all were taking a heavy toll. The original apostles were gradually dying off. However great faith was still found everywhere, and great sacrifices were still being made for Jesus Christ, the lover of their souls. In addition, their numbers were increasing all over the then known world. Yet, the original glow seems to have worn off. It is at this point that attitudes among observers of history begin to vary widely over the manner in

which the succeeding generations of leaders handled the problems of their day.

What had started out as the very simple proclamation that the Kingdom of God had come in the Person of God's Son Jesus Christ, was becoming more and more complicated. First of all His crucifixion had to be understood. And why the delay for the transformation of the world? It was to be through Christ, Abraham's Seed that all the families of the earth would be blessed! Again, we must be reminded that Jesus had already given us the basic plan.

Jesus explained in Matthew 13 how the Good News of the Kingdom was like seed being sown in all sorts of places. Depending on the condition of the soil and the surrounding environment, some of the seed would produce, and some of the good growth would not survive and come to maturity. But the healthy growth would reproduce itself some 30, some 60, some 100 times again! This all takes time.

Just like the yeast "hidden" in three measures of flour, the Kingdom of Heaven must for a time be hidden in the world, secretly growing and expanding its influence from pole to pole. (Matthew 13:33). By the end of the first century A.D., the Gospel had been presented in countries as far east as India and Syria, as far north as Asia Minor, south into Egypt and as far west as Rome, today's France and possibly Spain and the British Isles. The details of the last third of this century may be sketchy, but as the second century begins, we can see the result of those last 30 years. What had been "hidden" was about to be given greater notice than ever before.

### *First Century Time Line*

(Many early dates are approximate)

**5 BC** The Birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem.

**29 AD** Jesus crucified, resurrected, and ascended.

On the day of the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends on 120 disciples in Jerusalem. 3,000 people are added to the Church.



- 41** Gentiles are converted and accepted into the Church. They are first called “Christians” at Antioch. (Acts 11:26).
- 47-49** The Council at Jerusalem described in Acts 15 rules that circumcision should not be required of Gentile believers.
- 49** Paul writes to the Galatians, and later his other New Testament letters.
- 64** Nero persecutes the Christians in Rome.
- 65-69** Mark writes his Gospel, followed by Matthew and Luke.
- 68** Peter and Paul martyred in Rome.
- 70** Titus crushes the Jewish revolt and destroys the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish Christians flee and are spared, having heeded the warnings of Jesus.
- 80-90** The rest of the New Testament writings are completed, the last probably being the writings of John.
- 81** Persecution under the Roman Emperor Domitian. John sent to Patmos.
- 85-150** The early church fathers, Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp write to the churches.
- 90** The rise of the Gnostics.
- 100** After returning to Ephesus, the apostle John dies of natural causes. It is generally believed that the other original apostles died as martyrs.

# 2

## THE SECOND CENTURY TO CONSTANTINE

### *The Anti-Nicene Fathers* \_\_\_\_\_

In period 1, The First Century, we saw the Church in its infancy. It began with a simple message and a simple form of worship centering on the Person of Jesus Christ and His advancing Kingdom. Due to pressures from without and within, a gradual change took place. As stated earlier, some people today see the changes as advances, others as withdrawals. In fact, Jesus Himself predicted many changes, all the while challenging us to be true to His core teachings of love, forgiveness, faithfulness and to the spread of these teachings.

Growth inevitably brings change. And the Christian community did grow. Things necessarily did become more complicated, but not overly – yet. From the beginning Jesus and the apostles emphasized unity. When it is shown how many diverse cultures were absorbed into the faith it seems a major miracle that a sense of unity in any measure was maintained in this period. The desire to preserve the unity among believers is a godly and noble one, but many in hindsight believe that some of the methods used were actually harmful in the end.

What I am referring to is the concept of *Orthodoxy*. Hold on now, don't jump to conclusions! We all want to be orthodox, or correct in our understanding of the Truth. But over time, we will see how the over-emphasis on correct doctrine led to the neglect of other important Christian attributes. To Paul, having all knowledge and wisdom would still be nothing without the Love of God. At the same time, he very effectively used his knowledge of the Scriptures, different languages, and powers of reason to both promote the Gospel and solve problems in the churches. There is a proper balance between the supernatural and the practical, the intellectual and emotional. What a difficult balancing act that is to this day!

Competition from the Gnostics who came up with their own spin on the Gospel story brought pressure upon the Christian leaders to clarify what this new faith was all about. One thing they did was to establish continuity between God's work in Creation and the nation of Israel, and the already written Old Testament Scriptures, all for which the Gnostics had no admiration. The next thing was to establish continuity with the leadership of the earliest times, the apostles. Later we will read how many of the leaders living in the earliest days of the second century could trace a sort of lineage back to the apostles. For instance, we will read of Iranaeus, the Bishop of Lyons who knew Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, who when younger knew the apostle John, a personal associate and disciple of Jesus Himself. Clement of Rome was a disciple of Peter who spent the latter days of his life in Rome. Ignatius the leader of the Church in Antioch had roots in that area which received the Gospel very early on, and probably also knew John and Polycarp.

All this is very reasonable and in agreement with Paul in His second letter to Timothy 2:2: "And the things which you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also."

It was not until much later that this principle was corrupted into the doctrine of *Apostolic Succession*, which the Popes of Rome would use to claim absolute authority over all believers in Christ. They put forth that an unbroken line of popes began with Peter, upon whom Jesus said He would build His Church. One has to wonder what Peter, who identified himself as one among fellow elders would have thought of that. Remember Jesus: "the kings of the earth lord it over the people, but it shall *not* be so among you!"

While neither Peter nor Paul had founded the Church at Rome, there is ample evidence that they each did make their mark on that congregation, both by ministry and martyrdom there. By the beginning of the second century, the congregation at Rome had grown to a place of prominence along with Antioch and Ephesus. After the war in 70 A.D., the influence of the Jerusalem Church had greatly diminished. As the Gentile churches grew in numbers, the original spontaneity was slipping away. The leadership gradually began to shift from the older men and the spiritually gifted preachers, healers and teachers to a structure that more resembled the political structures of that day. This revolved around the office of the single Bishop. In the New Testament, the office of the bishop or *overseer* was another way of describing each pastor or elder as part of a group. Now the Bishop held more authority than did the local elders of each congregation. If the city was a large one, he served a very large area. This move, which was a step in the direction of the Pope's of Rome possessing absolute power, is deemed by many observers of church history as a disastrous one. At the time, however, it seemed a very safe and necessary one to preserve the unity of the Church at large, and at the same time ward off the threat of heresy.

**This was the period of the Anti-Nicene Fathers.** This designation was given to them because they lived in the time before the Emperor Constantine called the Counsel of Nicea, which we will later discuss. While their writings may not necessarily give a complete portrait of Christian life in the second and third centuries, much can be learned from them. The thinking of these men would later influence the many generations that built on their teachings. They can also reveal the sources of some of the controversies we face in the churches today.

### *Who's Who in the Post Apostolic Age...*

Clement, Polycarp, Iranaeus, Ignatius, Tertullian, Cyprian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen were some very interesting fellows. More detailed studies of their lives and ministry can be easily found elsewhere. For now, these brief sketches will hopefully provide you with an introduction that should help demonstrate the changes in the landscape of Christianity that were about to take place.

Near the end of the first century, **Clement**, an elder in the Church at Rome wrote a letter to the saints at Corinth that almost made it into the New Testament. His concern was for preserving the unity of the Church. To this end, he encouraged submission to the elders there. He also mentions the deacons. The deacons were usually younger men who were responsible for the practical needs of the congregation, and were held to the same high standard of conduct as were the elders. (Acts 6:1-6, I Timothy 3:1-10). No reference was made to the single Bishop who would appear later on. In his writings, we see the early use of referencing Paul's writings as Scripture to make his point. No real contradictions with other New Testament canonical writings can be found in his letter, but some feel a lack of power and inspiration can be detected in his emphasis on human authority.

**Ignatius** was appointed bishop at Antioch around 69 A.D. until his death around 108 A.D. He may have, along with Polycarp, been disciples by or at least had acquaintance with John of the original 12 apostles. Most of what we know of him is found in seven letters that are attributed to him that were addressed to various churches and were written while en route to his trial and execution in Rome. Here is where we begin to find the developments that are interpreted differently by those of later times. While his devotion to Christ is evident in both his words and his martyrdom, his emphasis on the authority of the local bishop raises a flag for some. He is also one of the first we know of to refer to the Catholic Church, that is the *Universal Church*.

Again, this is a response to heresy, meaning *disunity*, that was brought about by first the Judaizers and later the Gnostics. It may have been that the original plurality of leadership, which characterized the first generation of believers, could not respond as quickly to these and other day-to-day problems. As in the organizations of the world, the chain-of-command, or hierarchical form of leadership seems to work more efficiently. Those committed to the New Testament pattern would answer that the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in the community of believers and college of proven, godly leaders would have been more effective in the long run.

And yet, the concept of the single bishop over several churches or a region has not materialized at this time.

**Polycarp** of Smyrna was a disciple of the apostle John who served as bishop there in the first half of the second century. He met with Ignatius in his stop in Smyrna on the way to his martyrdom. Polycarp is most known for his heroic testimony in the arena before the governor who was loath to put the aged, saintly man to death. "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty," he told him, "Reproach Christ!" To which Polycarp declared, "Eighty-and-six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" When the flames did not appear to be consuming him, the executioner finished him with a dagger. His disciple Iranaeus later described in tender words the godly character of Polycarp and of how he would relate to him of the conversations he had with John and the others who had known Jesus.

**Iranaeus** was born in Asia Minor around 135 A.D., and was discipled by Polycarp. He eventually relocated to Gaul (modern day France) and served as bishop of Lyons until his death around 200 A.D. He is most known for his 5-volume work *Against Heresies* and his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. Coming from an area that was saturated with apostolic ministry – Jewish born apostles, he was eager to preserve that connection. He showed in his writings that Christianity was not a new religion born out of that time, but it was a faith with a history. The work of God is in time and space, beginning with His creation of the universe and humanity, whose purpose is to reflect the image of God as demonstrated in Jesus Christ, in whom all things in heaven and earth are to be consummated. (Ephesians 1:10). In his pastoral concern, he was compelled to lead others in... "following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."

Like Nehemiah of old, he helped to build the wall that divided the true Christian faith from multitudes of distortions by showing the validity of both the prophets and Jesus. The former because they foretold of His coming in great yet shadowy detail, and the latter because of the manner in which He fulfilled their prophecies. This also anchored his conviction that those prophecies of a world ruled by righteousness, peace and joy through Christ would also be fulfilled in history.

While Iranaeus brought the historical perspective of the Asia Minor and Syria churches to the table, **Tertullian** and **Cyprian** of the West brought their great legal minds into the battle with the Gnostic heresies. Born around 150 A.D. in Carthage of North Africa, Tertullian converted to Christianity in his forties, joining the Catholic Church to which he came to serve as a presbyter. While defending the doctrines of the Catholic Church against the heretics, he came to dissatisfaction with the moral condition of the leadership of that day. This led to his joining a charismatic group known as Montanists who also emphasized a stricter code of conduct. Some of them would even agree with him that celibacy was part of the deeper Christian life for the “end-times” in which they were living. It is interesting to note that while he criticized the formative Catholic Church of the West in his time, his legalistic thinking would later become highly influential in the institutionalized Church that it was to become. Today he is considered to be the Father of the Latin theology of the Western Church.

**Cyprian** (200 A.D.-258 A.D.) was also of Carthage, and was strongly influenced by the writings of Tertullian. By today's understanding of the Gospel, he too would be counted a legalist in many ways. But we must keep in mind the dangerous times in which he lived and ministered as Bishop of Carthage. His concern over the many lapses of faith during persecution led him to hold a very hard line on some of those who lapsed. He was eventually afforded the opportunity to prove his faith before the Roman authorities who beheaded him.

This brings us to the next great center of Christianity of this era. Alexandria in Egypt is where Greek philosophical influence became very powerful in the Church. **Clement of Alexandria** (150-220 A.D.) and his student **Origen** (185-254 A.D.) represent the schools of thought in this part of the world. Alexandria – after Alexander the Great – was an important cultural center of that day. Both Jews and Christians sought to compete with the Greek philosophies in vogue at the time, particularly that of Neo-Platonism. Remember the Gnostics, who considered the material world as a mistake and their bodies as prison houses of the eternal soul? That view was also a part of Plato's philosophy, which was resisted when linked with Gnosticism, but subtly connected with Christianity later on.

## THE SECOND CENTURY TO CONSTANTINE



The Greek philosophers had long enjoyed Homer and their other ancient writers by allegorizing them to fit the cultural norms of that day. Those who entertained the public with their oratory and allegorical skills were known cynically by some as the Sophists, for their pretense of wisdom (Sophia). By now this practice had gained greater respectability among Greeks, Jews and now the Christians. Clement began and Origen elevated to a science this system of allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures. The normal reading was considered for the less spiritual Christians, while the allegorical, or “spiritual” interpretation was for the more advanced. This free and abstract thinking allows for almost any meaning to be extracted from the Biblical text. Origen and other Christians like him were, however, careful to be consistent with the moral values of Christ. Later, the Greek philosophical approach would preoccupy huge portions of the Church as debates raged over the definition of the Trinity, the human and divine nature of Christ, life after death etc.

In this period we now know of six important centers of Christian activity. Jerusalem, which from the wars had somewhat diminished, left Antioch, Ephesus, Rome, Carthage, and Alexandria. From them, we can see 3 basic streams of thought into which the Christian faith



was being shaped, the **Historical**, from Syria and Asia Minor, the **Legal**, from the West in Carthage and Rome, and the **Philosophical** from the East in Alexandria, Egypt. We should be sure to point out that the apostle Paul in his effort to become “all things to all men” also made use of the historical, legal, and allegorical approaches in his writings. But underlying all these was his understanding of the reality of the transforming power of Christ in the lives of the believers, and the pre-eminence of His Love. Our interest for now is simply to show how these different branches of theology were developed and continue to influence Christian thought in even our day.

### *The Canon of Scripture* \_\_\_\_\_

Around 144 A.D., Marcion was a teacher who began incorporating Christian beliefs and Gnostic teachings in his own unique way. He was the first to endorse a single collection of writings of that day which would be used to shape the thinking of his followers. First, he rejected the entire Jewish Scriptures, which Christians know as the Old Testament because it was about the lesser God Yahweh, who created this decaying material world. He did not equate the Creator with the Heavenly Father of Jesus, who to him was only about the spirit world. Then, rejecting the Gospels except Luke, from which he removed or explained away all references to Judaism, and including only the letters of Paul, he compiled his Bible. His major difficulty was reconciling the Love of God with the Judgment of God, and this was part of his solution.

This pressed the orthodox believers into gathering together those literary works that were compatible with the original apostolic message. The works of course of the apostles themselves were included along with the tested, tried and true Old Testament. The writings of those who had direct association with the apostles were also to hold weight in the Church. Most of the books that we have in our modern day Protestant Bibles were already in common use in the congregations of that day. It took some time for the various churches to share among themselves the most highly regarded as inspired writings. By about 200 A.D. the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John along with Acts, I and II Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Galatians, I and II Thessalonians, Romans, Philemon, Titus, I and II Timothy, Jude, I and II John, Revelation and the Apocalypse of Peter were included in the canon, or “*measuring*”

*stick*” of the Western churches. (Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1943 p.35.)

Another important development was that of the statement of faith known as the **Apostles Creed**. The original statement of faith used in a baptismal confession was simply “Jesus is Lord!” (I Corinthians 12:3, Philippians 2:11). Other simple statements of faith were also known in the First Century Church. (I Timothy 3:16) Because of the subtle threat of Gnosticism, a more specific statement was needed to point out the sharp differences between the Orthodox and the Gnostics. By the middle of the second century, the western churches were using the earliest form of today's Apostles Creed in their baptismal formulas:

“Do you believe in God the Father almighty?

I believe.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ the son of God, who was born of the of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and died, and rose the third day living from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?

I believe.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Church, and the resurrection of the flesh?

I believe.”

(Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th Edition, Scribner, New York 1985)

So far, orthodoxy was the honest and sincere attempt to preserve the unity of “the faith that was once and for all delivered unto the saints” during times of great controversy and opposition (Jude 1:3). It would not be until later times that it would be used against others as a tool for oppression.

Some commentators have lamented the fact of the dissimilarity between this creed and Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Could it be

that the practical Hebrew concepts of godly character and holy living have given way to an intellectual faith? At the same time, this test of orthodoxy was not nearly as stringent as we will later see, when severe judgments will be made against other believers for disagreements over the great mystery of the Godhead, predestination, the end of the world, life after death, etc.

## ***The Periods of Persecution***

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As previously mentioned, Christianity eventually lost its “umbrella” of protection from within Judaism as an officially legal religion in the Roman Empire. This did not mean there would be an all-out attack against the faith. It did mean that Christians were highly vulnerable to violent trends whenever they arose. The first great wave of Roman persecution came during the reign of Nero (54-68 A.D.), who is credited for the deaths of both Peter and Paul. He is and was viewed pretty much as a madman who was suspected of setting fire to Rome himself so that he could redesign it. He blamed the Christians who we are told were burned as human torches in his garden parties for the amusement of his guests.

It was during the reign of Domitian (81-96 A.D.) that many historians believe John wrote the book of the Revelation. The persecution in Rome and Asia Minor under Domitian abated for a time after his death. The Emperor Trajan (98-117) renewed the persecution during which Ignatius of Antioch was thrown to wild beasts in the Colosseum at Rome. Trajan's policy was not that Christians should be actively sought out, but when discovered he gave them a chance to recant or else executed. This policy was still in effect in the reign of Emperor Antonius Pios, when Polycarp, John's disciple was brought before the governor for his famous testimony and martyrdom.

Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.) was more aggressive in his persecution of Christians in that he saw them as a threat to the stability of the empire, where Christians were being blamed for the troubles of his time. It is apparent that they were being greatly misunderstood in their being called atheists for not honoring the traditional gods. This prompted writings of the defenders of the faith like Justin Martyr, who was so named by his execution in this period.

At the beginning of the third century, in 202 A.D. Septimius Severus stepped up the persecution of both Christians and Jews. It is

during his reign that Iranaeus may have been killed for his faith. A most famous story of that period is recorded in the *Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitus*. In it, we learn of the five young recent converts who were sacrificed in the arena before the crowd as wild animals feasted upon them. For the next forty years, persecution began letting up, and the Church continued to grow. During this period of relative peace, the converts were less prepared for the next wave of persecution.

Decius in 249 began his efforts to revive the old Roman religion. For the next few years, there was an empire-wide effort to force all citizens to offer sacrifices to the gods. Since a certificate could be bought to show compliance with the law from someone acting on their behalf, many Christians saw this as a “loophole” to escape torture and death without actually having done the act. This led to a controversy over the legal question of how to deal with those who compromised their faith when this period of persecution had ended.

After a prolonged period of relative peace, the last and greatest period of persecution against the early Church began under Diocletian early in the fourth century. It finally ended in the reign of Galerius who on his deathbed requested the prayers of the Christians and signed the Edict of Toleration on 311 A.D. After many bloody power struggles and much political intrigue, Constantine took the Emperor's throne. By 313, the Edict of Milan declared the official end of the persecution, and Constantine by embracing Christianity would begin a new era for Christianity, which would later become the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Truly, the fact of persecution is one painful subject to address in Christian history. It is not only difficult to read about but even more difficult to research and record. Yet I am convinced more and more that all believers should at least have an introduction to the story of our Christian forefathers and their sufferings, endurance, patience and faith that is our heritage. To this end, I challenge all of us to read *Foxe's Book of the Martyrs* and similar great literature for more details relating to what has been outlined here.

- 107** The Martyrdom of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch.
- 132-135** The Second Jewish rebellion. Jerusalem destroyed.
- 144** Marcion leads a heretical movement.
- 155** Justin Martyr becomes one of the early Christian apologists.
- Polycarp of Smyrna is burned at the stake.
- 156** Montanus preaches the “New Prophecy” and claims to be the “Paraclete” promised by Christ for the End-Times.
- 180** Irenaeus of Lyons takes a stand in his writings *Against Heresies*. He also contributes to the formation of the “canon” (measuring rule) of the Scripture.
- 200** Most of the New Testament books recognized as authoritative.
- 202** Persecution under Septimius Severus begins.
- 203** Tertullian joins the Montanists in North Africa.
- 220** The Death of Clement of Alexandria.
- His student, Origen founds a theological school in Caesarea.
- 249** Persecution under Decius.
- 258** Cyprian of Carthage beheaded.
- 260-303** Persecution relaxed.
- 303** Persecution resumed under Diocletian.
- 311** The Edict of Toleration signed by Galerius on his death bed.
- 313** The Edict of Milan signed by Constantine (Emperor of the West) and Licinius (Emperor of the East) to end the persecution of Christians.

# 3

## CHURCH AND STATE: The Fourth and Fifth Centuries

### *The Emperor Constantine* \_\_\_\_\_

Over the years, the general opinion turned gradually more and more in favor of the Christians. The public spectacles that were often made of the deaths of those who refused to deny Christ were beginning to impact the unbelieving observers, some of whom converted to faith in Him. As the Church grew, the populace began to realize the true value of Christianity. People eventually saw through the lies about the faith, and the persecutions became increasingly unpopular.

By 324 A.D., Flavius Valerius Constantinus had gained control of the entire Roman Empire. He would be afterwards known as the Emperor Constantine. While not as yet converted, he respected Christ and His Church to the extent that his reign brought about monumental changes in the Christian world. Almost overnight, it moved from the position of an illicit religion under persecution towards becoming the official religion of the entire Roman Empire. The organized network that had already been developed for the preservation of the Christian Church as one made up of many local congregations would now facilitate Constantine's plans for consolidating his power. Whereas the homes of believers had become the prevalent setting for worship, now great buildings would be built to house the worshippers.

The dramatic impact of this transformation could not be measured. Of course, who would not welcome the end of the government's oppression against those whose consciences had been purified by the sacrifice and love of Christ? Who would not rejoice at the new found freedom that had been secured for them after all these centuries of persecution? Whether or not the followers of Christ were comfortable with this alliance of Church and State, most were willing to make the best of it.

The downside would be that conversion to the faith would not only be easy now but also a choice possibly motivated by material gain. Who would not want to show the Emperor their loyalty by embracing this faith which he now favored? In a state that purported freedom of religion, it had always been considered an act of patriotism to honor the state religion as well as one's own. Positions of leadership, which before could make one a target for persecution could now represent a place of great prestige and even power.

At this time Christianity was not yet the official religion of the Empire, and the pagan religions continued to be tolerated as well. Constantine would continue to head up his previous religion of Sun worshipers, and was not to be baptized into Christianity until on his deathbed. But his belief that Christ had given him a military victory over his enemies certainly motivated him to seek the Savior's good will. Therefore he established Sun-day, the day Christians celebrated the Resurrection, as a day of rest. He also constructed elaborate places of worship for the Christians with his own money, particularly in Jerusalem, on locations that his mother Helena determined were holy sites in the history of Christianity.

Of great historical impact would be his moving the capital from Rome to Byzantium, which is the site of modern day Istanbul in Turkey. This center of Greek culture was to be his "New Rome," later to be named Constantinople. He both expanded the borders of the city and built buildings for Christian worship, but here temples to pagan gods were not to be found. Constantinople would come to represent the glory of the Eastern Empire, and the center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. If you remember the earlier discussion on the three main streams of orthodox Christianity, we are coming to their intersection with world history. The Syrian branch with its vision of a kingdom providing justice for all would not fit into an empire that offered favor and political power to certain ones, even if they were Christians. What remained was for the Greek philosophical, and the

Latin legal perspective to compete for allegiance among those of influence in the new church-state condition. The Latin Church in Rome would now face off the Greek speaking Church in Constantinople for prominence.

This brings us to one of the goals of this book, to trace the formations of our modern day denominations. It should become obvious that we have already been seeing the foundation of modern Roman Catholicism in the end of the third century and beginning of the fourth. This Latin-speaking Church first centered in the Northern African cities of Carthage and Rome on the Italian peninsula. Now from the reign of Constantine and the new city of Constantinople, we see the beginnings of her rival the Greek Orthodox Church. The Greek Orthodox Church, which later in Russia would be known as the Russian Orthodox Church did not however begin in Constantinople. It claims roots in Asia Minor through the ministries of Paul and John, through Antioch to Jerusalem. At the same time, as previously mentioned, Rome claims to be the true leading Church from having Paul and Peter from early on.



In the following centuries, Roman theology would continue to be characterized by legal concerns, while Constantinople and the Eastern branch would take the philosophical approach to the faith. For a thousand years there would still be only one Christian Church, gradually leading to the official break in 1054 A.D. known as the East-West schism. Until the Protestant Reformation in the 1500's there would co-exist these two witnesses to the Christian faith, after which it would begin to divide again and again. We must keep in mind that the Lord knows those who are His in every area, in every group, in every nation, tribe and language. His hand will continue to



work throughout history, breaking down the gates of hell, and carrying His Gospel to the ends of the earth!

## *Changes in Worship*

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The center of Christian worship had always been on the first day of the week, where in a common meal the Lord's death and resurrection were remembered, and His promised Coming anticipated. This was primarily for believers, however there seems to be portions of the gathering that were opened to the unbaptized and unbelieving. It was common for prayers, the reading of Scripture, and the manifestation of supernatural gifts from various members to be a part of each gathering. The singing of psalms and hymns was also included. While miraculous events became less common in the life of the Church over time, there are reliable testimonies of healings, miracles, prophecies, dreams and visions throughout the first centuries preserved for us today. Above all, this was to be a joyous occasion, a celebration of the freedom Christ has won for us.

Leadership was always important, but participation by each one according to his or her gift was encouraged with respect for decency and order. Over time, the distinction between the clergy (priesthood) and the laity (common people) developed. Previously we looked at the rise of competing heretical teachers, which necessitated a system for affirming those “approved” and legitimate spiritual descendants, much like we have today the licensing of doctors, lawyers, building contractors etc. There are arguments today both for and against this development. The New Testament has prominent leaders, specially gifted individuals given for protection, instruction and training the next generation for service, of course. But God's original offer to Israel of becoming a “kingdom of priests” has now been extended to the New Covenant people. Unto them Peter declares: “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (Exodus 19:6, I Peter 2:9). Any attempt to undermine that glorious truth can only be understood as originating from an enemy of the Gospel, whose subtlety has misled many sincere and godly people.

When congregations became too large for the usual family-style gatherings, participation came to be more concentrated in fewer individuals. The gap between the clergy and laity thus increased to

the point that the priesthood was understood to be a separate class of Christians. The larger gatherings in Constantine's new buildings lent themselves more to the ministry of a separate class and for the masses to become more like spectators than participants. It is interesting to note here that the very Greek word for "communion" in the New Testament implies participation, which eventually became reduced to eating a cracker and sipping a thimble of wine. Now for hundreds of years following, salvation, instead of resulting from trusting in the work of Christ on the Cross on our behalf, would be centered on receiving these *sacraments* from an authorized priest.

While Christianity might have not been living up to its full potential, as we would say today, "hitting on all cylinders," many were still preaching Christ under varying circumstances. These varying circumstances would not have discouraged Paul, who rejoiced for whatever reasons Christ was preached. The result was that many were hearing about Him, and no doubt the root of Christianity not only survived, but also thrived. It could be argued that the Church has never been completely immune to conditions of the current culture, so we would do well not to look down too harshly on those of earlier times. Only we will pray to God that He will keep us from the evil one as we face current temptations.

### ***Water Baptism***

From the time of John the Baptist and Jesus and throughout the Acts of the Apostles, the act of repentance and baptism in water was an important part of making things right with God. Jesus commanded His disciples to go into the entire world, preaching the Good News to all creation and that those who believe and were baptized would be saved. (Mark 16:15-16). It is understandable that baptism would be an important practice in Christianity. There would, however be practical considerations surrounding it. In Acts 8:35-39 Philip the evangelist had been speaking to an Ethiopian, an officer of his queen's treasury and convinced him that Christ was the subject of a passage in Isaiah. As they traveled, they came upon some water in which the man wanted to be baptized. Philip agreed upon one condition, that the Ethiopian Eunuch believed with all of his heart. His response was that he believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, after which they both went down into the water for his baptism.

Every other place in Acts demonstrates that baptism or immersion in water would always immediately follow repentance and faith in Christ. How then did the practice of infant baptism arrive? Why do some sprinkle instead of fully immersing the converts in water? Why did later generations delay baptism for one to three years, and some waited until on their deathbeds? The significance that was placed upon water baptism had a large part in the reasoning of those times.

For the Jewish believers, the ritual of water baptism was highly symbolic. Both Peter and Paul knew that the rituals they had engaged in their entire lives had not brought about an inner transformation. However, they also knew what Christ had commanded and that the inner transformation that He had accomplished within them should be outwardly and publicly demonstrated. Paul likened our baptism in the water and Holy Spirit to Moses taking the Israelites through the Red Sea under the pillar of fire to be separated from the bondage of Egypt. The rite of baptism consciously separates us from our sinful past in the world, bringing us into a holy community. He also equated it with the sign of circumcision that signified Abraham and his descendents were God's chosen people of faith. Peter used the analogy of Noah and his family who were saved by the waters of the flood for the new world they were to inherit. He explained that the cleansing of the body by water actually represented the answer of a good conscience towards God. What really saved Abraham, Israel and Noah was the fact that they trusted in the power of God who actually used these elements which brought about their deliverance.

On the question of infant baptism there are a few references in Scripture that could apply. Previously we noted how the Old Testament concept of a priesthood that was separate from the congregation was eventually adapted to the Christian Church. Now we will observe that the practice of infant baptism could be compared to the circumcision of the Israelite males on the eighth day from birth. It could be argued that the conversions of first generation of Christianity were necessarily adults. The converts could claim their children as did the Israelites, who would naturally require some sort of confirmation when they came of age. One possible example of this is found in Acts 16:31 where the Philippian jailer believed for the salvation of his entire family who were baptized with him. We do not know the ages of his children if he had any, but we do know that all heard the Gospel and believed it along with him.

Probably the strongest motivation for baptizing infants of that time was their understanding of original sin and the part that baptism played in salvation. This is the sin committed by Adam and Eve and passed on to all their descendents. (Romans 5:12) Because of original sin, people actually feared that unbaptized children would not be saved from hell if they died. This is not the only concept that seems strange to us today. There were also parties that did not believe a baptized person could be saved after committing certain grave sins, or denying the Lord under persecution. How could they have forgotten Peter, (their supposed first Pope), who was received by the Lord after denying Him three times? It was for this reason that some, like Constantine, would delay baptism until near death. In one sense this could be risky proposal such as in the case of an accidental death or unexpected heart attack. On the other hand, perhaps they thought the risk of falling from grace after baptism was greater.

Another consequence of this thinking was the practice of delaying baptism for one to three years. The conversions in Acts were immediate because most people there had a basic understanding going in. When they became convinced of Christ and His Kingdom they could move ahead more quickly. The ignorance of the times and the various backgrounds of heathenism later required a period of instruction, known as the *catechumenate*. Such training hopefully decreased the chances of failure after baptism. Again, this leads one to wonder about the lack of confidence in the power of the Gospel to save. Paul insisted that the Church's faith should stand not on the wisdom of even godly men, but on the power of God Himself. (I Corinthians 2:5). On the other hand, our modern day presentation of the Gospel as a quick fix has its own drawbacks. There should be enough time given to be certain the message was understood. Jesus challenged His hearers to also count the cost of discipleship before joining up, and the basic pattern in Acts shows a clear and understandable presentation of the pros and cons of faith in Christ. They were, however, willing to risk baptizing even men like Simon the sorcerer, whose impure motives were found out later.

### ***The Mode of Baptism***

Throughout the New Testament we can see examples after examples of people going down into the water for baptism. The Greek word from which baptism has been translated means *immersion*,

and is in other places translated *washing*. The context alone is enough to confirm that large enough amounts of water were required, at least enough to get the candidate really wet. Paul used the phrase “buried with Him (Christ) in baptism” which gives the picture of going down into the ground or a tomb. But what if rivers or pools of water are not available? How can someone in this situation be saved?

There was the case of the thief on the cross next to Christ. There was absolutely no chance for him to be baptized. Since the necessary conditions of repentance and faith were evident, Jesus promised him a place in paradise just the same. This is the practical side of the issue. In chapter seven of a document that was probably written around 150 A.D., entitled, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, we find a number of practical issues discussed, including water baptism:

#### **“CONCERNING BAPTISM**

And concerning baptism, thus baptize ye: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if thou have not living water, baptize into other water; and if thou canst not in cold, in warm. But if thou have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whatever others can; but thou shalt order the baptized to fast one or two days before.”

Here is an example of an attempt to be as true as possible to the original apostolic practices and I believe, intentions. The apostles would not likely put off something this important until the circumstances could be perfect. Therefor if someone was about to die, and it was possible, even a few cups of water would be better than what the thief on the cross received.

The practice of sprinkling with water is not mentioned here, but we can see that this was not a great step from pouring over the head when full immersion was not practical. By the ninth century in parts of Western Europe and the thirteenth century in Italy, the practice of simply dabbing the head with water became common. It would not be until the sixteenth century in a major return to Scriptural patterns that some began insisting again on total immersion in water of those clearly confessing their faith in Christ.

## *The Kingdom of God, or Babylon?*\_\_\_\_\_

The first great church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea saw Constantine as a hero in the battle of good against evil, and this new order as the victory of Christ over heathenism. Not all believers, however, were happy to see Christianity become the “politically correct” belief system of most of the world as they knew it. There had long been developing an “us against them” attitude especially in the more severely persecuted areas in North Africa. In men like Tertullian, almost any identification with the society of that day could be seen as a betrayal of Christ.

Now with the influx of people who were Christians in name only, this negative influence became palpable to a significant number. There were separate protest groups in the past, like the Montanists, who bemoaned the loss of Pentecostal power seen in the New Testament, but some folks saw the situation in their time as even more desperate.

They were called the *desert monks*, or *solitary ones*. Even before the time of Constantine, two men, Paul and Anthony were famous for retreating from the world to seek aloneness with God. The ironic thing is that others followed them to their desert hideouts, which eventually became monasteries. Some of them commanded great respect as did the rough-hewn prophets Elijah and John the Baptist. While the monastic movement was at first a reaction against the organized church, its existence often worked as a challenge inspiring greater spirituality in the organized church.

Over the centuries, these separated groups of men and also of women began to impact civilization in unexpected and maybe even unintended ways. The monasteries were sometimes used as retreat centers where people could come for rest, meditation, and re-connection with the land. Over time they also became centers of learning and discipline for people from all walks of life. Believe it or not, they even became instruments for evangelizing out lying areas of the empire. The inhabitants of places like Scotland and Ireland were drawn to the educational opportunities for reading, writing as well as practical things like farming they provided. Music also became a part of monastic life. When the Renaissance of the fourteenth century began, the monasteries were important sources for ancient documents such as the Bible and the classical Greek and Roman literature scholars required. One of the daily disciplines of some of

the monks was to copy these documents which might have otherwise been lost to the ages.

At the same time, the monastic idea of *asceticism* (the denial of the ordinary pleasures of life including marriage) served to reinforce the influence of earlier philosophies. While Jesus and Paul both were unmarried for reasons that served their missions, they did not set this up as a standard for all Christian leaders. In fact for local leaders, marriage was expected. As celibacy moved from being an option to a requirement for what was to become the Roman Catholic priesthood, the gap between the leadership and the ordinary believers widened. This happened in the concept of ministry also. Where Paul insisted that every member in the Church had a function, as in the members of the human body, the more important areas of service were eventually relegated to the special group known as the clergy. That division exists, even if only unconsciously in the minds of many Christians to this day.

As a side note to this subject, the division between sacred time and space and the every day experience of most Christians widened as well. Now one could witness beautiful and awe inspiring ceremonies in highly ornamental basilicas on sacred days. The rest of the week was considered earthy and secular, not a place to expect the presence of God. From the days of Abraham, Moses, down to Jesus and the apostles, the home was an important center of learning about and worshipping God. The early Church saw no problem with gathering in homes for the first three centuries, because they knew the Most High God did not dwell in temples made by men, but in the hearts of those who loved Him. For them worship was more closely related to everyday life, and this division was not so strong.

To counteract this later condition, the Christian calendar was established. History would be marked by the years before Christ, B.C., and counting forward from His birth, A.D., abbreviating *Anno Domini*, or *the Year of Our Lord*. Besides Sunday, Easter, and later Christmas, various other special days were marked in remembrance of special events and days to honor heroes in the faith that had been canonized as saints. Some dates, such as those for Christmas and All Saints Day, were chosen to bring Christian significance to days originally set aside for pagan worship. (They did find some Biblical evidence, however, that Christ might actually have been born some time in December). While the meaning behind the days could

possibly be forgotten over time, this was one method for helping to keep sincere believers conscious of the things of God.

As another side note, B.C. has now become BCE, *Before the Common Era*, and A.D. is now CE, for *Common Era*. For myself, I am sticking with B.C. and A.D.

(When the sixth century monk, Dionysius Exiguus established the starting date for the Gregorian calendar, he was off about 5 years in his dating the birth of Christ)

## ***The Council at Nicea*** \_\_\_\_\_

Now we come to the part of this period that becomes fairly complicated. Doctrinal controversy was not new to the Church before Constantine. However, some things would change now that the civil authorities were becoming involved. The Emperor sought unity in all aspects of Roman life, including church life. The issue that was troubling the Bishop of Alexandria at that time was concerning the Trinity, a word invented by Tertullian to describe how God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit were One God. The apostles in the New Testament simply affirmed that the Father was God, the Son was also God, and the Holy Spirit was also divine. There did not seem to be any debate on this issue.

By now there had been much intense discussion and a serious desire to demonstrate this truth in the philosophical terms of that day. The Greek concept of the divine “Logos” was used to describe the pre-incarnate Christ. A popular elder in Alexandria of that time was Arius, who in attempting to preserve *monotheism*, belief in only one God, suggested that the Logos had a beginning. Alexander his bishop could not allow the divinity of Christ to be questioned or diminished, so the controversy grew. The Eastern part of the Church was shaken to the extent that Constantine intervened. In 325 this led to the first of seven great councils – all in the East – to represent the entire Church of that day. The most important thing that resulted from this council would be known in its final form as the *Nicene Creed*. The following version is recognized by Roman Catholic, Greek and Russian Orthodox, and most Protestant churches to this day.



“We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.”

This confession of faith stands today, but the political intrigue surrounding it continued for generations. At times the Arians found favor with the emperor and those who followed him. Motivations were not always concerned with the truth, as it is today. 24 years after the death of Constantine, paganism saw a short revival when Julian took the throne. After his death the Nicean stand was championed by Athanasius, who spent much of his life in exile. At one point in his career he reckoned his life as “Athanasius against the world!” Near the end, however, he saw his cause gaining ground and being carried forth by the next generation of Eastern Christians.

## *Augustine of Hippo*

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Other important figures in this era include the monk and fiery preacher John Chrysostom, and Jerome. Also a monk, Jerome translated the Bible into the Latin Vulgate, which became the Catholic standard for a millennium. Eusebius, the early church historian has already been mentioned, and a number of other fascinating characters and their stories could also be added. But no

theologian-teacher would help to shape both Catholic and Protestant theology as did Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo.

Born in 354 A.D. in North Africa, he was raised by a Christian mother who taught him that Christianity was the true faith. In his younger years he rejected that faith in favor of Manichaeism and later Neo-Platonism before he returned to Christianity. During his return to Christian life he continued to struggle with his fleshly desires. His cry to God was, "Lord make me holy, but not yet!" Then on one fateful day while in a garden in Milan he heard some children playing and repeating the phrase, "Take and read, take and read." This prompted him to pick up a copy of Paul's letter to the Romans where he read, "Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, in regard to its lusts." (Romans 13:13-14 NASB)

The Holy Spirit evidently used these words to affect a true change in Augustine's heart. This and other personal experiences are recorded in his autobiography, *Confessions*. Here in most intimate detail he explored human nature and our absolute need for God's grace, which became the central theme of his theology. When the Church in Hippo, North Africa required his gifts, he was ordained as presbyter and later their bishop. Now his attention would be turned to the practical issues of his congregation and the believers in that part of the world.

Early in the fifth century he became involved in a controversy that has not completely been settled in the Church to this day. A British monk, Pelagius had come to Rome and gathered unto himself a following by preaching an ascetic, stricter Christianity than had become normative there. He apparently believed Augustine's emphasis on grace was being used as an excuse for a lower moral standard in the Church. His slogan might have been, "Be all you can be!" For he saw no problem of original sin standing in the way of just doing what God said—period.

Augustine's experiences proved to him what Paul expressed when he wrote: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." (Romans 7:18). He realized that by merely strength of his own will he was helpless against his own sinful desires. The change he experienced was totally accomplished by the

intervention of God's grace in his life. He, like Paul, was apprehended by God. To him, Pelagius seemed to be implying that man could please God by his own efforts.

Before Augustine's revelation of the grace of God, Pelagius might not have seemed so outrageous. Now his clear and logical explanation did not leave any room for the thinking of Pelagius and his associates. Many, however, were concerned that Augustine took his position further than any of the great teachers before him. While counsels and the authorities essentially silenced the teachings of Pelagius, Augustine's beliefs on predestination and irresistible grace would not at that time become mainstream doctrines. Even when the great reformers of the sixteenth century integrated these concepts into their systems, there were always those who sought a middle position which allowed for more responsibility and ability on the part of fallen humans to respond – or not – to the grace of God. Perhaps the mystery of how God's sovereignty interacts with man's choices has not been fully revealed and we best should confess with David of old, “LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.” (Psalms 131:1)

Like many others of his time, Augustine was committed to the concept of the one Catholic, that is *universal* Church. But we should point out that the concept of the universal Church in the New Testament writings was more about a relationship between believers who were born of the Spirit of God – joined together by their common experience in Christ. Their common faith was more than an agreement on theological issues, but a specific faith in a certain person, Jesus Christ. Four hundred years have now passed, and the effort to deal with vital issues had brought about an ecclesiastical structure that took to itself responsibilities never envisioned by the apostles.

That ecclesiastical system, with its layers of authority, or hierarchy, its rituals, its beautifully adorned edifices and its approved doctrines was itself now considered The Church. Where Paul and the others were passionate to persuade others to love and obey Christ, unquestioned obedience to the majority in power was now required. Augustine, being loyal to the Church of his time even came to advocate using the civil authorities to “compel” various dissenting groups to conformity. This principle would later be carried to dreadful extremes as recorded in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*.

- 313** The Edict of Milan is signed by Constantine (Emperor of the West) and Licinius (Emperor of the East), ending the official persecution of Christians
- 320** The Arian controversy over the divinity of Christ.
- 324** Eusebius writes his *History of the Church*.
- 325** The Council of Nicea condemns Arianism and defines the Doctrine of The Trinity.
- 330** Byzantium becomes Constantinople, Constantine's new capital of the Roman Empire.
- 336** December 25 becomes Christmas, the day when Christ's birth is celebrated.
- 361** The Emperor Julian attempts to break Christianity and revive the old Roman religion. His plan fails.
- 376** The Barbarian invasions from the North begin.
- 391** Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire.
- 400** Augustine contends with Pelagius, who denies original sin.
- 404** Jerome completes his translation of the Bible into the Latin Vulgate, which becomes the standard Bible in the Roman Catholic Church for over one thousand years.
- 410** Visigoths sack the city of Rome.
- 417** Pelagius is excommunicated.
- 428** Nestorius is troubled over Mary's title, "The Mother of God," and emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. He prefers that she be titled, "Mother of the Christ."

**431** The Council of Ephesus condemns the teachings of both Nestorius and Pelagius. It maintains the reference of Mary as the “Mother of God,” to affirm the one nature of Christ which is both human and divine.

**432** Patrick evangelizes Ireland.

**440** Leo the Great becomes pope.

**476** The fall of the Western Roman Empire.

**496** Clovis, King of France converts to Christianity.

# 4

## THE MIDDLE AGES

500–1300 A.D

### *The Rise of the Papacy*\_\_\_\_\_

Towards the end of Augustine's life he saw the Roman Empire progressively conquered by the Germanic tribes of the North, who were themselves being pushed Southward and Westward by the Huns from the East. First, the City of Rome itself was plundered by the Visigoths in 410. By 476, the emperor was deposed and the fall of the Western Empire was complete. Various tribes classified as *Barbarians* now ruled Western Europe and North Africa. The Eastern Empire would continue to maintain some power and prestige until the military conquests of Mohammed's followers in the seventh century.

Some of the Barbarian tribes had already been introduced to Christianity in its Arian form. In time they began to merge their customs and beliefs with Christianity and embrace orthodoxy according to the Nicene Creed. Like Constantine, their rulers took advantage of the structure of the Roman Church, which was an important form of order in the midst of the chaotic changes of that time. The Church would also help maintain the memory of the rich culture that was lost in the destruction of war. So while the great empire that helped to build Christianity as an institution was disintegrating, the Roman Church increased in power and influence.

It was in this time that the Bishops of Rome came to be known as Popes. The situation of the times would now require the role as spiritual head of the Church to expand into the political arena. Gregory the Great (590) was one whose skill as an administrator, politician, negotiator and teacher helped to establish the role of the Pope in medieval Europe. His Augustinian perspective also helped to cement the great theologian's tenets into the thinking of the following centuries and his missionary programs brought England, Spain, France and Africa under the influence of the Roman Catholic system.

The sad outcome of these changes would be the progressive power and opportunity for corruption in this office. The seat of the Pope would in the following millennium be one that claimed not only the power of life and death, but also over one's eternal destination! Inspired by these opportunities for power, the practice of buying and selling offices in the Church became common. This was known as *simony*, named after Simon the Sorcerer, who in Acts chapter 8 sought to buy from Peter the power of God. Peter of course sternly rebuked him, condemning this request as did many who protested the sin of Simony in their day.

## ***Medieval Practices***\_\_\_\_\_

As mentioned earlier, the heroes of the faith were honored on special days in the Christian calendar. They were the *Martyrs*, who died for their faith, and the *Confessors*, who stood up under persecution and torture. By now the admiration of the Martyrs and Confessors had turned into the “veneration of the saints,” and depiction of saints in art as Icons degenerated to what some feared was the worship of idols. As the priesthood, which was for all Christians had now become concentrated in the clergy, Paul's view of all believers as saints would be lost also. Now only the Martyrs, the Confessors, and those so ruled by the counsels were considered to be holy. The rest were left in an insecure place as to their eternal destination. From this the idea of a *purgatory*, or *place of cleansing developed*. At death, the professed Christian who had a less than perfect testimony would stop over before heaven for the fires of purgatory, to purge them of what remaining sin had not been dealt with in their lifetime.

The Germanic tribes and their focus on objects in worship likely encouraged the veneration of relics. Pieces of wood that were supposedly from the Cross of Christ were carried from Israel to all areas of Christendom. Bones, hair, and teeth that were said to have belonged to apostles and other holy people were considered valuable and as possessing powers. Not everyone consented to these beliefs of course, but it became extremely difficult to counteract them in those days, which would later be called the “Dark Ages.”

The phrase, “Mother of God,” has a more interesting background than one would imagine. In 431, the Third Council at Ephesus was convened to settle a controversy concerning the nature of Christ. Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople had objected to this phrase and stated that Mary could only be the mother of the human nature of Jesus, not his divinity. Until that time, the phrase was used to affirm the divinity of Christ, and there was great concern that Nestorius would undermine it with his separation of the humanity from his divinity. In the end the council ruled against Nestorius and affirmed that in Christ the two natures were completely united. “Mother of God,” would continue to reference Mary. This ultimately led to the establishment of the Nestorian Church in Persia, who later sent missions to Arabia, India, Turkestan and China. When Moslems came to rule these areas, they were more tolerant to the Nestorians who now held no allegiance to the Eastern Empire in Constantinople. Their story would be nearly forgotten after the Mongols eventually invaded and virtually wiped them out.

The council at Ephesus would not likely have approved of what became common in the following centuries. People would begin worshipping Mary and praying to her and the legends about her would become church doctrine. Truly, she was highly favored among women when chosen to give birth to Jesus, God's Son. In many ways she is a wonderful example of womanhood, and her response to the message of Gabriel should teach us all the importance of absolute surrender to the will of God. Nevertheless, our worship and prayers are reserved for God alone.

### ***The Prophet Mohammed***\_\_\_\_\_

Christianity in Arabia at the time of Mohammed must have given him a poor representation of Christ's Church. If he had been exposed to the primitive Christianity that Paul and Peter knew, he



might have taken a different course. In any event, his rejection of both Judaism and Christianity is clearly reflected in the Qur'an, which he claimed he had received directly from God. While he made reference to Abraham and to Jesus as a true prophet, he denied our Scriptures, which teach Jesus is the Son of God. The implication is that the text has been corrupted over time.

When his own town, Mecca rejected his message, he made his historic flight to the oasis in Medina in 622. There he established a following, with which he returned to Mecca and conquered it. Force was then a part of the spread of the Muslim religion, but with the positive values of the worship of one God and the word of the final prophet his followers felt justified. By 638, they took Damascus, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Soon afterward, Alexandria and Carthage fell under their swords. By 712 they had covered Northern Africa and crossed the Straight of Gibraltar into Spain. Their advance into France and the rest of Europe would have continued if not held off by Charles Martel at Tours in 732.

While Papal power was ultimately increased in the West, the Eastern Orthodox branch in Byzantium would now begin to diminish. That was in part due to the strength of the Caliphs or *successors* of Mohammed, but also to the simplicity of his new religion. In the coming centuries, Islamic scholars would become forerunners of the Renaissance, reviving Aristotle's writings and taking their faith to intellectual heights. For now, however, the bloody battles would continue.

## *Charlemagne*

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The partnership between the Church and the world governments met with many difficulties since the fall of Rome. Not only were there power struggles between would-be popes, but also between the popes and the local Monarchs. Near the close of the eighth century, Charles the Great, or Charlemagne would consolidate a large part of Europe under the banner of what would become the Holy Roman Empire. Symbolic of the rivalry between the Holy Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Empire was the crowning of Charlemagne on Christmas day, 800 A.D. in St. Peter's Church by Pope Leo III. This presents the question: where did the real power come from? In the proceeding centuries, the pope's would answer that theirs was the higher power. Claiming the keys of the kingdom of heaven as given

to Peter by Jesus in Matthew 16:19, they would justify all manner of injustices against those who opposed them.

Charlemagne expanded his empire and Christendom through conquest and forced Christian baptisms. The Holy Roman Empire eventually included modern day France, Belgium, Holland, much of Austria, Germany and Italy. In his desire to re-establish the glory of Rome he sponsored the building of monastic schools, libraries, and the preservation of ancient literary works. Possibly for these reasons, Christianity actually “took” in the lands he conquered. In any event, the kind of Christianity they understood would have a very different appearance than the one to which most modern believers have become accustomed.

### ***The Russian Orthodox Church***\_\_\_\_\_

Being hedged in by the Muslims in the South and East, the Eastern Orthodox Church would expand its influence and it's brand of Christianity northward into Eastern Europe. The greatest impact of this movement would be found in Russia, around 950, when Queen Olga was converted to Christianity, and her grandson Vladimir was baptized in 988. After that, Moscow became the capital of Russia and eventually the Russian Orthodox Church became the official religion of that part of the world. Centuries later, Constantinople would be taken by the Turks, and renamed Istanbul. Thereafter there would be two branches of Eastern Orthodoxy, the Greek and Russian, which exist to this day.

At this point in history the tension between the Pope at Rome and the Patriarch at Constantinople reached its climax. The Romans insisted that all clergy be celibate, and could not convince the Orthodox, who allowed marriage for their ministers, to yield. Other disagreements compounded the division until ultimately in 1054 the official Great East-West Schism was final. In today's situation, there is little evidence that at one time representatives of the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches were at least equal to the Roman Catholic in power and influence.

It would be a mistake, however to think that the only representatives of Christ in the earth during the Middle Ages were these great religious institutions and the imperial powers that embraced them. Throughout the history of Christianity there have always been those who hungered and thirsted for the righteous

character of God in their lives, and who by faith in Christ received it. Some of them have been falsely maligned by their persecutors, some of them were driven to extremes by the pagan culture that surrounded them; but in their testimonies, the flame of Christ's life and message was preserved.



## ***Reactionary Movements***

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Several groups responded to the times by returning to the teachings of Jesus found in the Scriptures. In their earnest desire to be like Jesus they taught poverty and chastity as prime Christian virtues. In their revulsion of the materialistic, authoritative Christianity of their day, they might have allowed some of the earlier Gnostic ideas such as the evil nature of matter to penetrate their ranks. There still exists, if only subconsciously in modern Christian minds the idea that the pleasures of married life, for example are tolerated, but not a part of the ideal. A balanced view of the Scriptural teachings as a whole would cure this error. On the issue of poverty, people today are living in the reaction of former convictions relating poverty to spirituality. We are seeing the opposite extreme in the current popular teaching that material gain is a demonstration of godliness.

On the other hand, Jesus did say that some were called to be eunuchs, or celibate for the Kingdom of God's sake, and that others

were called to abandon all earthly possessions. Among these groups who felt that call were the Waldensians and the Franciscans in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The founder of the Waldensians was Valdés of France. Feeling called to forsake all and preach the Gospel he sought permission from the Church to do so. Upon being refused, he chose to “obey God rather than man,” as did the first apostles of Christ. To the Waldensians the authoritative commands of God were found in the New Testament Scriptures, which they taught freely wherever they went. Understanding the Scriptures to the best of their ability they rejected Masses and prayers for the dead, but still held to the celibacy of any priest administering the sacraments. Along with some other sects, they were excommunicated by Pope Lucius III for heresy. To stem the tide of heresy, the decision was made to keep the Scriptures in the hands of the clergy alone. The ordinary believer was not deemed qualified to study and interpret the Scriptures for themselves. Therefore, translation from the ancient Latin, Hebrew and Greek into the common local languages was forbidden.

Francis of Assisi would have a different story. Born in a wealthy Italian family, he too had a dynamic experience of the grace of God and felt the call to poverty and celibacy. The difference is that his order was approved by the Church authorities of that time. The order of the Franciscans continues to this day in various forms. The stories that are circulated about him reveal a gentle soul who loved God, humanity and nature. One famous quote attributed to him is this: “Preach the Gospel always. Use words if necessary.”

## *The Crusades*

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Before leaving this period we should at least mention the Crusades. They began in 1096 with Pope Urban II calling for the recovery of Constantinople from the Turks and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The next two centuries would be filled with un-Christian activities being done in the name of Christ. The violence and bloodshed between the Christians and Muslims would leave scars in many memories to this day. Here is clear evidence to the error of mixing true believers with those whose only connection with Christ is either national or ethnic pride.

We can be certain, however that Christ has a Church that He will present unto Himself, holy and without blemish in His love, existing throughout the ages. He will continue to cleanse her with the

washing of water by His Word until she is revealed as His glorious Bride, beautifully adorned for Her Husband. (Ephesians 5:26-27, Revelation 21:2).

## *Thomas Aquinas*

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Nearing the end of this period we meet one of the greatest theologians and thinkers since Augustine: Thomas Aquinas. His era was the middle of the thirteenth century when Muslim philosophers were rediscovering Aristotle. Remember how earlier thinkers going back to the second century sought to find points of contact between Plato and their Christian faith? Plato believed that the invisible world of ideas was the real, while the material was more of an illusion or rather a poor imitation of the real. This seemed to reference the Christian belief in heaven, the spirit world, and the very nature of God as a higher and greater reality.

Plato's student Aristotle came to place more importance on what can be learned by the senses about the visible, tangible world, and what these could teach us of eternal realities. Men like Thomas Aquinas felt that Paul's statement in Romans 1:20 would agree with that aspect of Aristotle's teachings. Therefore, Thomas set out to show that the faith of Christianity did not contradict observable reality, and as far as the human endeavor of genuine science goes, it is in harmony with God's Truth. The truth that God reveals to us through nature is *Natural Revelation*, and the study of this revelation is *Natural Theology*. He did not however allow that science could prove Christianity wrong. God's highest Truth is given by revelation in the Scriptures, and in Thomas's mind the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. Scientific and philosophic speculation can point man to God, but only the Gospel can save him.

Near the end of his life he broke off from finishing his great *Summa Theologica*, an important systematic work on the faith. According to the statement of a friend, he saw things, or perhaps had a mystical experience that so dwarfed his theological writings that he said they were like "straw" in comparison. Perhaps he experienced something like the apostle Paul who was caught up into the third heaven, and heard things that could not be communicated! (II Corinthians 12:1-4). The Aristotelian impulse to organize the Christian faith into a orderly system would return, however, and with it the tendency of competing systems to clash with one another.

- 520** Irish monasteries train and send out missionaries
- 525** A monk, Dionysius Exiguus (Dennis the Small) establishes the dating system which marks time by the birth of Christ. The years are counted from before Christ (B.C.), and from the birth of Christ (A.D. for *Anno Domini*, Medieval Latin for “the year of our Lord.”)
- 529** Benedict becomes the father of western monasticism.
- 563** Columba, apostle of Scotland, founds a monastery on the Isle of Iona.
- 570** Mohammed was born in Mecca, Arabia.
- 589** King Reccared of Spain converts to Catholicism.
- 590** Gregory the Great becomes the first of the medieval popes.
- 610** Mohammed receives a vision and declares himself to be the “Prophet of Allah.”
- 622** Mohammed flees from Mecca to Medina, where he founds a Muslim community.
- 630** Mohammed's forces invade and capture Mecca. The Qur'an is first published. By 640, Islam dominates Egypt and North Africa, virtually wiping out Christianity in these areas.
- 688-681** The Dome of the Rock is built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.
- 718** Constantinople besieged by the Arabs.
- 726** Controversy between the Emperor and the Pope over icons (images). The Emperor condemns the veneration of icons as image worship.
- 732** Charles Martel stops the Muslim advance into France.

- 787** The Council of Nicea II endorses the use of icons and condemns iconoclasm (the destruction of sacred images).
- 800** Charlemagne, the grandson of Charles Martel is crowned emperor of the Rome, incorporating most of France, Germany, and Italy.
- 950** Queen Olga of Kiev converts to Christianity.
- 962** Otto I is crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, which lasts for over 800 years.
- 988** Vladimir, Grandson of Queen Olga in Kiev, converts to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Moscow becomes the capital of the Russian Empire and the Russian Orthodox Church becomes the national religion.
- 1054** The Great Schism between the Roman Catholics in the West and the Eastern Orthodox in Constantinople.
- 1097** The beginning of the First Crusade to reclaim Constantinople from the Turks and Jerusalem from the Moslems.
- 1174** Valdés begins the Waldensian movement which is condemned by the Third Lateran Council.
- 1209** Francis of Assisi gives away his wealth and starts the Order of the Franciscans.
- 1266** Thomas Aquinas writes his *Summa Theologica*.

# 5

## RENEWAL AND REFORMATION

1300–1600 A.D

### *Prelude to the Reformation*

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Finally we come to some of my favorite parts! In this period we will begin to see the Light of the Gospel begin to break through the centuries of men's traditions. In conjunction with the spiritual upheaval there will be great political struggles and change as well. While our focus is on the Church, the history of Europe must be outlined to a certain degree. The progress of the Gospel and specifically the various spiritual heritages that exist today can only be completely understood as we see this unfolding.

Two significant events set the stage for what was to come in the sixteenth century. The first was the great bubonic plague (1348-1351) that took the lives of one third of the population. This would alter the economy by increasing the importance of the skilled workers who were now in short supply. A middle class of merchants and tradesmen would come to be recognized besides the nobles, monarchs and religious leaders. More were becoming educated and consequently more were thinking for themselves.

The instability of the times encouraged people to return to the classical wisdom, knowledge and culture of ancient Greece and Rome. This was the **Renaissance**. “Back to the sources” was the cry of those who were losing trust in their leaders and their petty rivalries. Not only were they desiring to get better acquainted with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero from the original writings; they wanted to know the Scriptures for themselves as well.



## *John Wycliffe*

An important forerunner of this period would be John Wycliffe in England. England, Ireland and Scotland had been impacted by the Gospel from very early on, and the Christian communities there developed for some time independently from the Roman Mother Church. So it would not be surprising if the larger institution did not command the same respect and influence that it did elsewhere. Even Saint Patrick's Ireland, which would remain mostly loyal to Rome throughout, had a sense of its own identity in Christianity. Patrick, whose zeal and devotion to God and those for whom Christ had died was reminiscent of our beloved apostle Paul. No doubt his purity of heart and purpose made a greater mark on the island than did the Popes of later times.

John Wycliffe, a priest and student of Oxford, would be one of the first highly educated men to think outside the confines of the Roman system. He would also be one of the first in another way. His higher view of Scripture over that of the ecclesiastical authorities was accompanied with an excellent and clear understanding of the Scriptures themselves. In them he saw the power of the Gospel to inform and transform. This understanding was passed on to a welcome audience in his local congregations and at Oxford as well. While at first he did not deny the legitimacy of organized Christianity, he claimed that any authority could only be based upon the godliness of the leaders themselves.

His views were condemned as heresy by the pope in 1378, but no action could be taken against him because of his popularity with the people and England's royalty. We will see later how this desire in many to break from Rome's control worked at times in favor of England's Protestant Reformers. The success of Wycliffe's movement was encouraged by numbers of itinerant preachers who were equipped with sermons prepared by him. Under Wycliffe's leadership and inspiration, his disciples commenced the first translation of the Bible into English. Completed after his death, it was translated not from the original Hebrew and Greek, but from Jerome's Latin Vulgate. It became known as the Wycliffe Bible.

This was dangerous business in a time when even reading the Bible in English was illegal. The Lollards, whom his followers were called, were persecuted to near extinction, but not before this "virus" was spread to the continent.

## *Jan Hus*

Meanwhile in Bohemia (Czechoslovakia) both religious and political unrest had already been fermenting. Reform had long been the topic of conversations concerning the priesthood, and tensions had been mounting between the Czechs and the Germans who were over them. The time was ripe for a self-made man like Jan Hus. He worked his way up through the ranks from poverty to become dean of the faculty of philosophy at the university at Prague.

Some Bohemian students who studied at Oxford where exposed to John Wycliffe's teachings. Upon returning home, their sharing of these ideas created quite a stir. In the midst of the controversy Jan Hus defended not all of Wycliffe's propositions, but certainly the right to examine them. Again, the biggest issue was that of authority. In a conflict of opinion or practice, whose was the greater authority, the Pope, church councils, or the Scripture, and whose right is it to interpret Scripture? Like Wycliffe, Hus believed that only those in authority whose life was consistent with the Gospel had any right to rule others. But he also believed in the individual's responsibility to obey the Lord's commands from the Scripture according to the dictates of one's own sanctified conscience.

The religious authorities of course could not tolerate this. At the same time it was becoming obvious that papal authority was in question as three different popes each claimed to be Christ's one absolute representative in the earth! (1378-1417). Neither Wycliffe nor Hus wanted to abandon the Church of that day, but to reform it. They wanted the clergy to return to their highest ideals and to lead by example as well as by word. The more pressure that was brought against Hus, however, the more controversial his words became. What seemed to be the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back for Hus was the sale of indulgences for Pope John XXIII to finance a war against other Christians!

Earlier we discussed the subject of purgatory, the place of cleansing for unperfected souls after death. By now it was being taught that Christ, His apostles, and all the Martyrs and saints in heaven had accumulated what was called the **treasury of merit**. This was sort of a bank account of excess good deeds done by the righteous ones who already had done enough good deeds to earn their right to heaven. This bank account could be tapped into by donating sums of money to the Church on behalf of deceased loved

ones. Depending on how much was given, time for them in purgatory could be reduced or they could be even released immediately to heaven.

By now Hus knew that forgiveness could only be acquired from God by repentance and confession of sin from which we are released by the atoning work of Christ on the Cross alone. When he refused to stop preaching against this means to raise money for warring against other Christians, John XXIII excommunicated him for the second time.

Hus was lured out of reclusion by what he hoped would be an important opportunity for reforming the Church. A council was called to deal with the controversies of that day, to which he was summoned. The promise of his guaranteed safe conduct was retracted, and instead of participation in the council, he ended up in captivity and chains. Instead of hearing him out, they attempted to force him to recant, without even specific issues defined. He could not honestly confess to heresies that he did not commit, so he and later an associate, Jerome of Prague were burned at the stake.

The national rivalries mixing with outrage over the injustice against this respected priest brought things to a boiling point. No amount of negotiations could head off the 10 years of wars with the German emperor who attempted to bring the Bohemians under submission. Finally an agreement was made that brought the region back into union with Catholicism, but a few had already tasted a freedom in Christ that they could not abandon.

They became known as the *Unitas Fratrum* or Unity of Brethren. Some migrated to nearby Moravia and some would later become connected with the Protestant Reformation. Others would go on in their pursuit of primitive Christianity and later become known as the Moravians.

Other grave injustices in the fifteenth century are remembered in the stories of **Joan of Arc**, and **Savonarola** of Italy. In 1431 young Joan, who previously led a successful military campaign for France, was burned as a witch for hearing voices she claimed to be from heaven. It would be 20 years before the Church's admission that this judgment and action against her was wrong.

In 1497 a Dominican Friar by the name of Savonarola led a reform movement in Florence, Italy. In this original “bonfire of the vanities,” people would pile numerous luxury items and set fire to them renouncing materialism. This revival under Savonarola clashed with the rich who plotted against him. The pope had him tortured and turned him and two of his associates over to the civil authorities to be hanged and burned, throwing their ashes into the river. No legitimate charges were brought against them either, only the blanket charge of heresy.

At this point it must be recognized that the magnitude of corruption in the high offices of the Catholic Church during this period in no way discredits the literally millions of faithful believers in that communion, both then and now. At the same time, it must also be stated that these deeds do call into question many papal claims that have been made over the centuries, including the title the Vicar (representative) of Christ on earth.

### *The Renaissance*

Beginning in the fourteenth century, and building in the fifteenth and sixteenth, Europe experienced what many considered to be a rebirth of culture. This was the Renaissance (French for rebirth). It was a time of renewed interest in the classical literature and culture of the past, but also of advances in painting, sculpture, music, architecture, science and world exploration. It was during this period that the Gutenberg printing press made knowledge affordable and available to the masses. It also encouraged the spread of Renaissance ideas as well as those of the Protestant reformers.

This was the era of Leonardo De Vinci and Michaelangelo, whose works of art continue to fascinate the world today. It was also a time of political intrigue among their rich and powerful patrons. The theme of this era was humanism, hence the afore mentioned areas of progress are categorized as *the humanities*. This is to be distinguished from modern atheistic humanism. While there was a sense of liberation from church traditions, most humanists of that time still believed in God.

## *Erasmus of Rotterdam*

An important Christian humanist of the Renaissance was Desiderius Erasmus. While Christopher Columbus was discovering America, Erasmus was being ordained as a priest of the Catholic Church. His interests were actually more in the realm of education than in the priesthood. To better understand the Bible as well as the early church fathers, he learned Greek, which he put to good use. One of his major contributions would be his publication of the New Testament and other early Christian writings in Greek. In subsequent printings this work became known as the *Textus Recepticus*, from which the King James Bible and other early English versions were translated. This work gave better contemporary access to the original message of Jesus and the apostles, and would contribute to some of the dramatic changes in Christianity that were to come.

Erasmus was a sharp critic of the clergy and what he considered the errors of his day. He believed that information and education could help bring about reform. His writings would certainly prepare the way for men like Martin Luther and John Calvin. He would not, however, make the break with the Catholic Church that Luther and Calvin did. In this way his influence would be felt in the later movements for reform from within his Church.

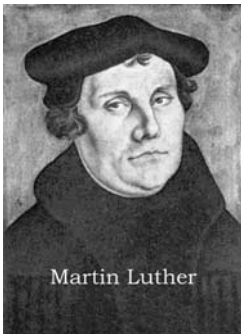
## *The Reformation*

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### *Martin Luther*

While circumstances leading up to the Protestant Reformation could not be credited to any one individual, there is one individual who more than any other stands out in this period. That would be the German born Martin Luther. Remembered today by the Lutheran Church that bears his name, that one branch of Christianity can in no way claim to be the sole heir of his legacy. His story reads like a Biblical tale, with enough drama and emotion to inspire at least three motion pictures and numerous stage plays.

Born in a hard-working middle class family in 1483, Martin was the second eldest of eight children. His father had plans for him to become a lawyer, so he was sent off to the University of Erfert in 1501. It was here that he came under the influence of humanism, from which he developed an appreciation for seeking out the sources of the Christian faith. The course of his life would be forever changed when he was out in a storm and nearly struck by lightning. Evidently, he believed his life was saved when he vowed to become a monk. Soon after that he fulfilled his vow and entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfert.



While he excelled in his learning and the disciplines of monastery life, he later recalled the struggles he had with his own sense of guilt before God. This would begin a long journey for him through studies in medieval and humanistic theology, the mystics, the early church fathers and finally in the letters of Paul in the New Testament. In 1512 he received his doctorate in theology at the prestigious Wittenberg University and became their professor of Biblical Studies.

In his early thirties, he was conducting several series of teachings on the Psalms, Romans and Galatians at Wittenberg that began to answer his many questions. By the time he came to the book of Romans, he had begun to understand the Gospel in perhaps a clearer light than even Augustine before him. His many years of laboring

under the current system were contrasted with Paul's exaltation of the grace of God in Christ towards us. It was only by grace, through faith – not works that we are made right before a holy God. It might be difficult for us in these modern times, having heard these words perhaps dozens of times to appreciate what this meant to young Luther. From now on, his entire life would be defined by this revelation. He knew by experience that he could never be good enough to deserve God's favor. Now through the Gospel he could fully trust that this same favor had been won for us by Christ, Who *is* the righteousness of God!

In the days and weeks to come, he would work out the implications of this revelation in his studies and his sermons. At Wittenberg, his work was well received and promoted. He might have been content to reform only the minds of his fellow teachers and students at Wittenberg. However, another event related to the Renaissance would attract his attention. The sale of indulgences to which Jan Hus had already protested was a thorny issue, which Luther also could not ignore. This time the money was needed to build St. Peter's Basilica at Rome, to be beautifully adorned with Renaissance art. Johann Tetzel, a Dominican monk had come to the area with his “fire and brimstone” preaching methods of convincing the common folk to give away their hard earned coin. His promise was that, “as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”

Luther did not at this time oppose the pope's right to issue indulgences, but the abuse of such. Not only were the poor in this case exploited, but also the people were being directed to the wrong source for securing their salvation. On this line he publicly preached and prepared his famous “95 Thesis.” Written in Latin, it was intended for the purpose of debate among his peers. When he nailed a copy of these 95 points to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg, he had no idea of the firestorm that it would create. This is where the new printing press had an integral part in the Reformation, for by its use, the German translation of this and his other writings were spread throughout the empire.

What began as a theological discussion would now threaten the financial resources of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther's confidence in his convictions grew stronger and bolder, but he continued to hope that those above him could be swayed. With his prince and protector Frederick the Wise of Saxony on Luther's side,

there was some motivation on the part of Pope Leo X to quell the storm. Luther's theological allies were more aggressive, however, forcing the need for a public debate. Only Luther himself could clearly state the issues at hand, but when they met, his opponent Johann Maier of Eck knew how to push Luther's buttons. He pressed him into publicly admitting that both the popes and the general councils could err. Only the Scriptures could be recognized as the final authority in matters of the faith. The line had been drawn.

Luther emerged from the debate at Leipzig University as a local hero, but the pope had no choice now (admit Luther was right? Not a chance!), but to excommunicate him. Finally, in 1521 Luther was summoned to appear before Charles V, the Emperor. At the Diet of Worms, he was again given a chance to turn from his previous statements and writings. Not being allowed to answer to specific points, he could not relent without being convinced by "the testimony of the Scriptures or clear reason." The meeting climaxed in his famous statement, "My conscience is held captive by the Word of God. I cannot, and will not recant, for to go against one's conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."

His life was spared only because Frederick the Wise had him spirited away to the castle at Wartburg. Here for almost a year he tirelessly worked on his excellent translation of the New Testament into German, as well as other compositions in his developing theology. Meanwhile at Wittenberg, his associate Andreas Karlstadt proceeded in his enthusiastic zeal to rid the churches of Germany of all trappings of Catholicism. This forced Luther out of hiding. He felt that Karlstadt was too radical, and the movement would soon lose the support of Frederick. The destruction of images was halted, and Luther restored order, somewhere between the Roman customs and the ideas of the more radical reformers.

The Reform movement for a time spread like wildfire, to the point that the peasantry saw the opportunity for social reform as well. Sadly, when their hopes were not fulfilled they resorted to violence, resulting in the deaths of some six thousand of them. By now the authorities saw the need to control the movement. Men like Thomas Muntzer, who held that the Spirit had superseded the written Word of God, was one who carried the people to these extremes. Herein lies the danger of ignoring the wonderful check and balance system that God has in place for us – the Word **and** the Spirit!



Things finally began to settle down when the Peace of Augsburg finally granted tolerance to both Catholics and Lutherans in 1555. Before this agreement was reached, those in Germany protested the results of the previous Diet of Speier. This is how they came to be called **Protestants**. The Peace of Augsburg maintained the union between church and state but on a smaller scale. Now the local religion would be determined by the nobles in power there. Those not in agreement could move to an area that accommodated their beliefs. The subsequent thirty years war, the many wars among rival faiths, the persecutions over the next centuries would prove the errors of this system. The founding fathers of the United States of America were well aware of these lessons in history. Therefore they would agree that the Federal Government could not prohibit or establish any one denomination over another, or prohibit the free exercise of anyone's faith. Faith is a persuasion, a matter of conscience, not to be determined by one's nationality, race, or location on a map.

To summarize, we now have three branches of Christianity. The Greek and Russian Orthodox communion, the Roman Catholic, and now the Lutherans. In broader categories the Greek, Russian and Roman would make up the Catholics. Those who would come out of the Reformation and after are included among the Protestants.

Later we will look at the origins of the Presbyterian and the Anglican Churches.

### *The Reformation in Switzerland*

Ulrich Zwingli was a contemporary of Luther who became the parish priest at Great Minster Church in German speaking Zurich, Switzerland. His background was very different from Luther's. Beginning with an interest in Erasmus and humanism, he progressed to learning the Scriptures from this new perspective. He sought to know the Scriptures as they stood, without imposing the centuries of church tradition over them. While Luther was centered on the experience of salvation by faith, Zwingli's focus was more on abandoning practices that were not found in the Scriptures and embracing those that are. This brought him to making more changes in the worship of the Church than did Luther.

Switzerland, while Catholic, was more independent than most countries and the Reformation met less resistance there. Zwingli's

sixty seven articles convinced the majority in a Zurich city meeting that salvation was by faith in Christ alone, that the sacraments and good works do not save, that the saints in heaven should not be prayed to, that priests could marry, and that purgatory did not exist. Christ, not the pope, was the Head of the Church. The plan was also made to gradually remove images from the churches.

Doctrinally, Luther and Zwingli could agree on everything but the Lord's supper. While Zwingli believed that the elements were symbolic of our fellowship with Christ, Luther insisted that the body and blood of Christ were substantially in the bread and wine at communion. The words of Christ, "This *is* my body" were to be taken literally according to Luther. This was no small point to these men, and the division between them justified to the Catholics that this movement was indeed sectarian.

As the Reformation spread to other cities in Switzerland, Catholic resistance became organized. The struggle eventually led to armed conflict, in which Zwingli was killed. Switzerland, like Germany, would be divided, with each district, or canton deciding its own religion. During these tumultuous days, Luther and Zwingli had prepared the way for another reformer whose name would become identified with an entire system of belief.

### *John Calvin*

John Calvin was born in France in 1509 in a well-respected, well-to-do family. He attended some of the best colleges and learned Greek, Hebrew, law and was saturated in the humanist thinking of his day. In his early 20's, he experienced a sudden conversion that changed the course of his life. Having become a part of the Reformation in France, he felt inclined to present a defense of the faith before those who saw this as a politically subversive movement. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which would later be greatly expanded, attempted to show that this was no new doctrine, but a return to the faith of the Early Church.

Calvin built on Luther's teachings and organized them in such a way that has influenced believers in many nations and across many time periods. Where Catholicism taught that salvation was God's gift to those who observed the seven sacraments, Calvin attributed all to God's initiative. Since salvation was entirely God's work, only those predestinated to salvation could be saved, and those not chosen

would be lost. Augustine had allies in both Luther and Calvin, who were quick to underscore this point of agreement. Theirs was the call to return to the “faith that was once delivered unto the saints.”

While this view of election robbed humans of any boasting on their part in salvation, it provided a sense of security, which more than compensated for the loss. If God alone does the saving, then that saving must be certain. Calvin, more than Luther would emphasize that the proof of that certainty must be manifested in godly character. This exaltation of the sovereign grace of God, security in one's salvation and the importance of godly character would appeal to Christians in France, the Netherlands, Scotland and England, and by the Puritans would be brought to the shores of New England in America.

The opposition in France would lead to Calvin's moving to Geneva, Switzerland. There he succeeded in establishing a Christian state, after the example of the Old Testament theocracy. While that concept is difficult for modern people to grasp today, it was logical then. What could be better than a society that was based upon Christian principles? The elders of the Church ruled in matters of the faith, while the civil authorities the laws of society. This also was in accord with Paul's teaching that the powers of government were ordained by God. In this case, however the problem of heresy would be dealt with in the medieval fashion. History regrets the fact of the banishments and executions in Geneva under Calvin over doctrinal disagreements, some of which seem minor today.

The Seven Sacraments according to Peter Lombard and later the Council of Florence in 1439:

**Baptism, Confirmation, The Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Ordination and Matrimony.**

According to Aquinas, without them there is no true union between Christ and His Body the Church.

## *The Anabaptists*

As Zwingli took the reformation further than Luther did, several groups wanted to go further than them both. From earlier times there were groups sometimes known as “Brethren,” and also “Anabaptists,” who chose to practice their faith from outside the organized camps. They were called Anabaptist, meaning to rebaptize, because those who were first baptized as infants wanted baptism again as believers. They believed that one was not a Christian from having been born in a Christian family, but only from personal trust in the work of Christ. The former belief led to the medieval church containing a mixture of both true and nominal Christians. This was not the case in the New Testament Church.

The Church to them was composed only of regenerate people who participate in Christ together as a family, not a political organization. Their leaders are recognized among them as those who lead by example and are gifted in expounding the Word of God to the flock. The Scriptures were the basis for doctrine and correction among them and the Holy Spirit would be the master Teacher. As in the past, various extremes did creep in and some fell into delusions of being God's “end-time” messengers, but the error of forbidding marriage did not seem to be common.

The extent of discipline was excommunication. Violence was not an option, for some of them even in self-defense. Nevertheless, radical elements brought violence and persecution to them from both Lutheran and Catholic authorities. Menno Simons (1496-1561) would emerge as a solid leader of the Anabaptists, who would settle in the Netherlands and Northern Germany and later migrate to North America. The Mennonites and Amish communities in Pennsylvania and Ohio have their ancestry in this movement.

## *The Spread of the Reformation*

In the fifteenth century the Lutherans expanded North into Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. Calvinism would spread into France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Scotland, Hungary, Spain and Italy. The Popes won most of France, Spain and Italy back in violence and through the torturing and murdering of the infamous **Inquisition**.

## *The Reformation in England*

Some of the main figures in the English Reformation would be Henry VIII, Sir Thomas More, William Tyndale, John Knox and Thomas Cranmer. The backdrop of the story is so full of political intrigue, sex scandal and murder that many plays and films have been made about it. However our concern is more about the hand of God upon His people and what we can learn about His divine purposes in these events.

### *William Tyndale*

Previously we looked at the life and ministry of John Wycliffe, who had a part in the first translation of the Bible into English. This was translated from the Latin Vulgate, which was the work of Jerome early in the fifth century and was the Catholic standard translation. Then we learned of Erasmus, the Dutch priest and scholar who was influenced by Wycliffe when at Oxford, and consequently did some writing and publishing as well. Erasmus and his Greek New Testament were well received at both Oxford and Cambridge, and all this was to have an impact on the young William Tyndale.

At Oxford, Tyndale was taken by the Greek New Testament so much so that others were drawn to studying it with him, eventually attracting the attention of the clergy. Upon entering Cambridge, he came upon more like-minded souls. By 1520, Luther's writings had made it into England. Tyndale and the young men who were passionate about the Reformation began to regularly gather at a pub that was nicknamed "Little Germany." Many of them went on to become leaders in the Reformation and several, including Tyndale, became martyrs for their beliefs.

Back home he came to be in the company of important nobles whose children he tutored. Sir John and Lady Walsh liked to entertain guests and in the course of events, Tyndale would engage them in conversation on the topics of the day. Many of the guests were clerics who surprised Tyndale with their ignorance of the Scriptures that he so loved. At one point he was provoked by a theologian to make his now famous statement, "If God spares my life, ere many years I will take care that a plough-boy shall know more of the Scriptures than you do!"

And this he did.

At about 30 years of age he left England to pursue his life's work of translating the Bible into English. Every attempt was made to destroy him and his work, but before he was caught, strangled and burned his New Testament and much of the Old was completed. His friend Miles Coverdale would go on to complete his work, and fulfill his hope of improving it. Amidst all of the goings on in the political and religious arenas, the Mighty Word of God was silently doing His work in the hearts of the common people of the land. There would come the day when no one from high offices could control what they thought and believed, thanks in part to men like Tyndale and Coverdale.

### *King Henry the VIII*

Probably the best well-known king of England in history, Henry VIII inherited the throne instead of his older brother who died before their father. His brother had married a daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, who are today well known for sponsoring Christopher Columbus and his discovery of the New World. To keep Emperor Charles V and her parents happy, Pope Julius II made a special dispensation for Henry to marry his late brother's wife Catherine.

The early sixteenth century was a time when Spain and England were friendly, and Scotland had ties with France. This was all to change.

While in the Old Testament, a man was actually expected to marry his brother's widow (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), Catholic laws stated the opposite. This was the reason a special dispensation from the Pope was necessary. But after 25 years, and five stillborn children later, no male heir had been produced. Only a daughter, Mary, who would later compete for the throne survived. This seemed like an expression of God's displeasure to Henry, a devout Catholic, who sought a way out of this marriage.

The Pope might have agreed to annul the marriage if not for Catherine's relationship with the Emperor, her nephew. After consultation with Henry's main adviser, the Protestant Thomas Cranmer, and the some of the prestigious European universities of that day, it was determined that Henry's first marriage was not valid. Henry, who earlier had persecuted the Protestants, now wanted their support in his break from Rome. He had Thomas Cranmer make the

archbishop of Canterbury (England's Rome). Parliament ruled that the king's marriage was not legitimate, and that the king of England was the head of the Church of England. Then he was free to marry his mistress, Ann Boleyn, who would give birth to the future Queen Elizabeth I.

His former friends would now become his enemies. Catholic hero Thomas More would be replaced as chancellor by Protestant Thomas Cromwell. Later because of his refusal to accept the secular power as head of the Church, More was executed. Henry would not receive a male heir from Ann, who was subsequently accused of adultery and also executed. Finally his third wife, Jane Seymour would give birth to Edward VI, who in his reign would continue to promote the Protestant cause.

After Edward's death, however, Mary Tudor, the daughter of Catherine would take the throne with the commitment to bring England back into the Catholic fold. Because of her severe persecution and execution of nearly 300 Protestant leaders, including Thomas Cranmer, she earned for herself the title of "Bloody Mary." It was logical that she would align herself with the Pope, who recognized her mother as the true Queen of England. After Mary's death, Elizabeth her half-sister, being the daughter of a marriage that was not recognized by the pope, would tend toward the Protestant cause, and England's independence from Rome.

Because of plots to bring England under the reign of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, Queen Elizabeth had to take a hard line against many Catholics in England. Over time, the Catholics agreed to respect the authority of their monarchs and they were permitted to continue as a minority group. At this time the Puritans, who would be prominent in North American history, became an important force in England. They were among those who wanted an England completely "purified" of Romanism, rather than accept the compromise that Elizabeth established.

Amidst the complexities of this turbulent time in England, it must be admitted that there were both heroes and martyrs on both sides. Even Henry VIII's motives were not entirely selfish. A legitimate male heir was important to preserve stability in the land. The Catholic Thomas More held to his convictions even as his own daughter pleaded with him to recant. The Protestant Thomas

Cranmer did recant, but afterwards repented, and deliberately held the hand with which he signed the confession into the fire to be burned first, publicly denouncing the Pope.

### ***The Reformation in Scotland***

At the same time, against the background of this top-down effort of reformation, a true work of the Holy Spirit was taking place in the hearts of many in the land. Much of this development would become a part of North America's heritage. As in England, the Reformation in Scotland was wrapped up in the mix of political power struggles. At the center of this transition was the fiery preacher John Knox. Knox had spent considerable time in Europe with John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli, and was powerfully persuasive in the Gospel as understood by the reformers.

His great opponent was Mary Stuart, the Queen of Scotland whose commitment to Catholic France and claims to the throne of England put her at odds with the so-called "Lords of the Congregation." She, however, weakened her position by being implicated in the murder of her husband, Lord Darnley and marrying the man suspected of killing him. Having lost the support of her brother and her own troops, she fled to England where continued attempts to claim that throne led to her execution.

England and Scotland would now find common ground in the Reformation, each taking a different and distinct approach. The Anglican Communion, or the Church of England would be retitled as the Episcopal Church in America after the Revolution. Scotland would become predominantly Presbyterian, a Church which became very strong in the early American colonies and an important influence in the forming of American culture and government.

### ***The King James Version of the Bible***

When Elizabeth died, the throne of England was passed on to the son of Mary Stuart, James VII, King of Scotland. As James I of England, he is most remembered by his only effort to appease some of the Puritan leaders. This effort would be a new Bible translation, which was already in his mind to initiate. The official Bible of the churches at that time, the Bishop's Bible, was in need of some corrections, and the popular Geneva Bible had certain marginal notes



that concerned him. The work of about 50 of the best scholars of the day, it became known as the King James Bible of 1611, or the Authorized Version. Based largely upon Tyndale's translation, it took 6 years to complete, and became the most common English translation for over 300 years. A major revision was made in 1885, but the original after a number of minor revisions held its popularity up to recent times, when the more modern forms of English used in the New American Standard, and the New International Version became available.

### ***The Counter-Reformation*** \_\_\_\_\_

To Martin Luther, the core of the Reformation was doctrinal. To him the Church could stand only on the issue of justification by faith. Of course the great need for moral reform among the clergy could not but help his cause. On the other hand, areas that took care of their own house cleaning did not sense the need for doctrinal reform in the same way.

This was the case in Spain, where Queen Isabella and her spiritual advisor the archbishop of Toledo, Gonzales Jimenez de Cisneros took the needs of the Church there to heart. Jimenez was a devout Franciscan monk who had kept himself free of the excesses of his fellow clergymen. He and Isabella were greatly concerned over the laxity of the monasteries and the ignorance of the clergy. Answering to this need Jimenez established a university and directed the production of a special Bible for their higher education.

Under Isabella and Ferdinand the printing of books and the proliferation of printing presses helped to better educate the nation. The religious life of Spain became revitalized. Their return was not to the model of the New Testament Church, but to the best of Medieval Christianity. This included the purging of heresy, by force if necessary. Spain took the Inquisition to new levels of zeal and efficiency. Jews and Moslems who refused to be baptized were expelled in the hundreds of thousands. Those who did convert were watched with suspicion. The same level of intolerance was directed to those with Protestant leanings. Thus Spain would continue to be a solid stronghold for Catholicism.

Devout men like Jimenez whose fervent desire for reformation led them to such unjust and immoral treatment of others can scarcely be understood. But then we are reminded of our beloved apostle

Paul, whose zeal for God and what he perceived to be His will drove him to bloodshed. What a testimony to the marvelous grace of God we have in the story of his glorious conversion!

### *The Jesuits*

Ignatius Loyola was a soldier whose military career was cut short by a wound that permanently damaged one of his legs. In his struggle with both physical and spiritual pain he sought refuge in the devotional writings of men like Thomas à Kempis who penned, *The Imitation of Christ*. From now on he would don spiritual weapons as a knight in Christ's service and that of the Blessed Virgin.

A contemporary of Martin Luther, he experienced a similar breakthrough in which he felt the genuine grace of God to free his troubled soul. Unlike Luther, he would remain fervently loyal to his mother Catholic Church and would be one of her greatest champions against the threat of the Protestant Reformation. "The Society of Jesus" was originally established for missionary work, which eventually took the members to the Far East and America. But the Jesuits, as they later came to be called, gained such a reputation for engaging in political intrigue that the order was abolished in 1773 by the Pope for nearly forty years.

### *Mysticism*

What may not seem as common in retrospect, mystical experiences like the dreams and visions in the Bible were likely more common in these times than we know. In fact there were a number of mystics in the Catholic Church throughout its history. Some of those who did not stir up trouble were even greatly respected. One of these was Teresa of Avila, the daughter of Jewish parents who were forced to convert under the Inquisition.

Having joined a convent she gave herself to reading devotional books, some of which became forbidden. This left her to seeking God for herself, which in turn led to her having supernatural visions. From them she was led to start monastic orders with the help of the sainted John of the Cross. Her influence is still felt in the Church today through her inspirational writings. These have gone on to become widely read, classic devotional works.

### *The Council of Trent (1545-1563)*

The Protestant Reformation bore such an impact that a response became necessary. The Council of Trent would set the standard for Roman Catholicism for the next four hundred years. Many welcome reforms were instituted but the old standards were basically held. There it would be formally stated that church tradition was equal to the Scriptures in authority, and that the Latin Vulgate would continue to be the standard translation.

There would be no going back. The rift between the Catholic and Protestant churches would continue to the twentieth century, when a measure of dialog would begin again.

**1348-51** The Bubonic plague ravages Europe, killing one third of the people.

**1371** English priest John Wycliffe urges reform in the Church.

**1415** Jan Hus of Bohemia is burned at the stake for supporting Wycliffe's teachings.

**1418** Thomas à Kempis writes the devotional *Imitation of Christ*.

**1431** Joan of Arc leads French armies to victory, and afterwards is burned at the stake for witchcraft.

**1450** The Renaissance begins a "Rebirth" in the development of literature, art, science, religion and politics, with a passionate return to classical sources, including the Bible.

**1453** The Turks capture Constantinople. Scholars flee to the West with many important classical documents that contribute to the Renaissance.

**1456** The first book printed by the new Gutenberg Press is the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible.

**1479** The Spanish Inquisition begins under King Ferdinand V and Queen Isabella, where Jews and later Protestants are tortured into conversion to Catholicism.

**1492** Columbus Discovers America.

**1498** Savonarola preaches reform and revival in Florence, Italy and is executed for heresy.

**1516** Erasmus of Rotterdam publishes the Greek New Testament that became the basis for later translations into German by Martin Luther and English by William Tyndale and the translators of the Authorized Version under King James I.

- 1517** Martin Luther posts his *95 Thesis* to the door of the Church in Wittenberg, challenging the selling of indulgences. This set in motion the Protestant Reformation.
- 1519** Ulrich Zwingli leads a reform movement in Switzerland.
- 1525** William Tyndale illegally translates the New Testament into English and is burned at the stake.
- 1534** Henry VIII breaks from the Roman Catholic Church and establishes the Anglican Church as the official Church of England.
- 1536** John Calvin completes his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which become important in the Reformation.
- 1540** Ignatius Loyola establishes the evangelistic Society of Jesus in the Roman Catholic Church. They came to be known as the Jesuits.
- 1545-63** The Council of Trent institutes much needed reforms in the Catholic Church but rejects Protestantism.
- 1555** Mary Tudor becomes Queen of England and restores Catholicism. Her persecution of the Protestants earns her the title of “Bloody Mary.”
- 1558** Elizabeth I becomes Queen of England and restores a moderate Protestantism.
- 1598** Freedom of worship is granted in France to the Protestants, there known as Huguenots.

# 6

## WORKING OUT SALVATION

The Seventeenth Century

### *Controversy Among the Reformed*\_\_\_\_\_

Wycliffe, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin and others had been calling for closer attention to the Bible as the basis for the Christian life. From these energetic studies of the Scripture came the tendency to turn from Aquinas' use of Aristotelian principles for reconciling science and faith. Now faith stood high above reason as far as the Reformers were concerned. From this foundation John Calvin so masterly reconciled all the teachings of the Scriptures in his Systematic Theology that his writings became mainstream to the Reformation.

But reason could not be set aside for long. Certain concepts from Augustine that became foundational to the Reformers were difficult for some to accept. The controversy that started with Pelagius verses Augustine would be revived and reframed, and has been handed down to every generation since. It concerns the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. The big word at the center of it all is *predestination*.

Luther and Calvin insisted that the decision of whom would or would not be saved, was made by God alone from the foundation of the world, without any consideration for one's worthiness. No one is worthy. It is only by God's grace that anyone could be saved. The problem is that while predestination and election are both taught in the Bible, the responsibility that humans have to choose is found

there as well. To many, this was a mystery to be left with God, but theologians like Calvin found compelling answers to this problem.

Some of the conclusions of Calvin were not satisfying to the Dutch pastor, Jacobus Arminius of a later generation. Not to be associated with Pelagius, Arminius was basically in agreement with the orthodox of his day. His subtle distinction was concerning predestination. He taught that God predestinated those who would be saved, based upon His foreknowledge of those who would eventually agree to receive salvation. This was not a subtle distinction however to his opponents, who knew their whole system could unravel on this point.

After the death of Arminius, his followers issued a statement of their position, which prompted the Synod of Dort in 1618. The “Remonstrants,” as the Arminians were called, issued five statements. The response at Dort resulted in what today is called “Five Point Calvinism.”

### ***The Remonstrance***

*(Presentation of the Arminians argument)*

1) God determined before the foundation of the world to save through Christ, *those who through His grace shall* believe in Jesus, and continue in faith and obedience to the end. (This is a vague reference to Arminius' conditional election.)

2) Jesus died for all human beings. Only the believers, however, will receive the benefits of His sacrifice.

3) Humans can do nothing good on their own without the intervention of the grace of God. (Against Pelagius and in agreement with Augustine).

4) God's grace has and can be resisted.

5) While affirming that God provides by His Spirit the necessary power for believers to overcome temptations to sin, the 44 authors could not commit to the premise that it was impossible for some to turn from the faith.

This document was subsequently condemned as heresy. In response to the above, the Five Points of Calvinism were then listed. The acronym T-U-L-I-P, which by the way Holland is famous for, has been a helpful memorization tool.

- 1) **T** Total Depravity. Man is incapable of choosing God.
- 2) **U** Unconditional Election. God chooses on the basis of His Sovereign will, not because we deserve it.
- 3) **L** Limited Atonement. Christ died for the elect only.
- 4) **I** Irresistible Grace. The Elect cannot say “no” to God's call.
- 5) **P** Perseverance of the Saints. The predestinated will be saved in the end because it is God's work, not theirs. The elect cannot permanently “fall” from grace.

Usually a true Calvinist is expected to agree with all these five points. However, the situation as it is today allows for greater tolerance than in those days.

At the heart of this divide is the matter of perspective. Those with Arminian leanings tend to think that Calvinism presents a picture of an unfair God, Who lacks compassion for the non-elect.

The Calvinist might consider the Arminian perspective as closer to the Humanists with *their* opinion of fairness held higher than that in the revealed Scriptures and in turn God Himself. An unbiased observer and student of the Scripture, however, might admit that both sides have legitimate points.

Some commentators suggest that political issues of the times and the attempts of the Remonstrants to defend their positions served to press the followers of Calvin perhaps further than he himself had gone. If this were true, it would be reminiscent of the effect that the heretics of the first centuries had on the early, more simplistic Christianity of the Apostles. Probably the most unfortunate result of this debate is that John Calvin's name is to this day so identified with this controversy that the TULIP formulae is seen in many minds to be representative of the entire body of his work. Calvin had much to



say on many subjects relevant to the Christian life that people on both sides of this debate might appreciate.

At the same time, there exists the possibility that God has something to teach us in all these events. First, the attempts to keep the Kingdom of God as a Jewish movement failed. Secondly, the tendency toward Greek philosophy and culture could not monopolize the message of Christ. Afterwards the singlemost powerful attempt to keep the domain of Christ under the Roman influence was defied by the German, Swiss, British and Scottish Reformers. Now even the Augustinian Reformers could not contain the volatile, world changing message of Christ, who claims heaven and earth as His own!

Certainly there is a true and a false Christianity. But the true version of the Christian Gospel is for everyone, every kindred, tribe and tongue on the face of the earth. It is for the emotional and the intellectual. It is for the upper classes and the poor. It is for the thinkers and the feelers. It is for the working class and the aristocrat. It will find a way into every culture and every social class, without losing its substance. It is the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew and also to the Greek, the barbarian, the Asian, or the Modern. That is the scope of God's purpose in Christ, even if our little minds cannot see it!

If Christians divide into tens of thousands of sects, they all owe their life, their breath, their very existence and purpose for life to Him. He possesses them all, and He alone can divide the sheep from the goats, those that are His from the hypocrites. He alone will demonstrate to the principalities and powers in heavenly places the reality of His wisdom through His Church, His Body, which the fullness of the One who fills all in all! (Ephesians 1:23).

The very fact that you are reading this, and desiring to understand and empathize with the people of God from every generation and every land is a positive sign. We are realizing that we can all learn from each other and even from our differences. God's wisdom is manifold or many-sided. We are learning to see His wisdom from a side that is different from our own.

At this time the world is getting larger in terms of our comprehension of it. Christianity intends to become the world religion of that larger world in the same sense and perhaps in a greater sense than it has even been known so far.

## ***More Reactions***

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The history of Christianity seems to be a series of actions and reactions. Christ acted upon the world with His Gospel of the Kingdom. The Jewish and Roman authorities tried to snuff out the flame with persecution. The Church responded with even greater missionary zeal. Then distortions of the Gospel began to threaten the Church from within, which eventually led to tighter organizational structure and theological rigidity.

After the support of Constantine, Christianity began to become more like the unbelieving world in its goals and desires. This led to the ascetic monastery system of extreme separation from the world. With the fall of the Roman Empire, the popes became much more powerful, and corruption had spread through both the organization and the monastery system.

This led to need for the Protestant Reformation. Now in the midst of the doctrinal controversies among the Protestants in the seventeenth century, many felt the movement had gone cold. This condition, along with other historical events like the colonization of America, led to some of the most exciting times in Christianity since the days of the apostles. These times would become forever branded in the consciousness of modern Christians and things could never be the same.

### ***The Puritans, Separatists and Baptists***

While within the established Church of England the Puritans worked towards reform, there were those who concluded that this was a lost cause. Some of these separatists became convinced as the Anabaptists before them that baptism was for those who first believed, and that immersion in water was the proper method. Those among them who continued in the Calvinist's view of predestination were called "Particular Baptists," while those who believed that Christ died for all became the "General Baptists." A well known Baptist of the Calvinist stripe is John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, a popular devotional classic that was once one of the best selling books in the English language.

One of the groups of separatists left the oppression of England, only to find their vision unfulfilled in Holland. They are remembered in American History every year on Thanksgiving Day in November.

Having crossed the Atlantic in the Mayflower, these Pilgrims formed the first New England colony of Plymouth. This community was to be an expression of the Kingdom of God on earth. They would be followed by the more traditional Puritans, who were also significant in the forming of the nation. Later the Baptists would eventually become the larger segment of Christianity in the United States.

### *George Fox and the Quakers*

Also among the people in England who became dissatisfied with the religious tone of the mid-sixteen hundreds was George Fox. In 1646 he had a spiritual experience that transformed his life. He came to understand that everyone has an “inner light,” which if followed, would lead them to the true “Light of Life,” Jesus Christ. He believed that God speaks to us through the Scriptures, but also to us directly by His Spirit, empowering us to do His service.

His thinking and preaching was entirely “out of the box” of the Anglican Church. He came to reject almost all its forms, even those found in the New Testament, on the grounds that the true reality was found only in the Spirit. His fiery passion, like that of John the Baptist drew many from among the Puritans and Anabaptists. The derisive name “Quakers” was given to them because often in their meetings they trembled in the presence of God. They however would refer to themselves simply as “Friends.”

Fox and his followers were quite bold in their renunciation of the cold religious climate of their day, which renunciation won them serious persecution. By 1661, more than 3,000 of them had been imprisoned, where hundreds died. But their missionary zeal carried them as far as Jerusalem, Germany, Austria, Holland, and the West Indies. Sadly, they met with intolerance even in Puritan Massachusetts, where four of them were hanged for their stand.

Like the first Pentecostals of the early twentieth century, the Quakers placed great emphasis on the leading of the Holy Ghost. Often Fox would not preach because the Spirit did not so direct. In the meetings they would wait for the Spirit to move upon anyone, regardless of age or sex, to speak or pray aloud. The singing of songs and hymns was considered a part of the old formalism, so this is one area where Pentecostals would definitely not relate to the Quakers.

To check the inherent individualism typical of movements such as these, Fox emphasized the practical community of believers. Each

had a part and a say in the decisions, which were made by consensus. If a unanimous decision could not be made, the Spirit would be trusted to solve the problem at a later date. Eventually the movement was organized and stabilized into a form of its own.

Significant to American history is the conversion of William Penn to Quakerism. In response to the intolerance in the England of his day, he caught the vision of establishing a colony in America, where all could worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences. He acquired a land grant from the King of England, which canceled a debt owed to his father, Admiral Sir William Penn. The capital of this new state of Pennsylvania would be Philadelphia, which is Greek for "The City of Brotherly Love." Penn's concept of religious freedom would make its way into the Constitution of the United States of America, and his state would become the home of many other persecuted sects, including the Anabaptists, who would be known to us today by their descendants, the Mennonites and Amish.

### *The Pietists*

Meanwhile, in Continental Europe a movement was developing that was known as Pietism. This started basically within the German Lutheran communion, but would later expand into other areas through missionary efforts. Philipp Jakob Spener, a pastor in Frankfurt, was an important figure who sought to bring a more experiential element to Lutheranism. While not rejecting the Lutheran belief system, he challenged them to go beyond the objective reality of justification by faith to a personal experience of that reality.

His small Bible study and prayer groups were "colleges of piety," where the personal "born again" experience was not required but sought after. As noted before, the mystical side of Christianity, while rarely dominant, was never forgotten. From the Montanists in the second century, the desert monks in the third, the Zwickau prophets that troubled Luther and the Catholic mystics of the counter-reformation, there has always been minority groups who tended toward the supernatural and experiential.

With Spener and his successor, August Hermann Francke, the emphasis was not fanatical, but practical. Through these small groups, and for Francke, his professorship at Halle University, the

hunger for genuine Christian heart-felt experience was increased in Germany. The priesthood of all believers, which Luther proclaimed, was to be practically understood in the life of the Church. In these small groups, everyone participates, everyone takes responsibility, and everyone experiences the Lord.

This period would lay the groundwork for the greater evangelistic works of the eighteenth century.

**1603** Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius challenges John Calvin's theology of Predestination.

**1611** The King James Version is translated by 50 Scholars, with reference to the Bishop's Bible and Tyndale's translation. It eventually becomes the most popular English Bible for 300 years.

The General Baptist Church is formed in England.

**1616** Italian scientist Galileo is censored by the Catholic Church for supporting Copernicus' theory that the earth revolves around the sun.

**1618** The Dutch Synod of Dort rejects the views of Arminius and establishes the "Five Points of Calvinism."

**1620** Separatists sail to America and establish their own community in Massachusetts.

**1636** Roger Williams proclaims complete religious freedom and establishes Providence in Rhode Island.

**1647** The Quakers under George Fox generate controversy by seeking out their "Inner Light."

**1675** Philip Jacob Spener's book *Pia Desideria* launches Pietism within German Lutheranism.

**1678** John Bunyan writes the English Classic, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

**1681** Quaker William Penn establishes the Pennsylvania Colony.

**1683** Mennonites settle in Germantown, Pennsylvania.

# 7

## REASON, REVOLUTION, REVIVAL

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

### *The Moravians*

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By this time there seems to be three basic concepts of what constitutes the true Church. The first is the one that has been the dominant one for over a thousand years. In it the institution, which is recognized by the state, with its solid organizational structure and priesthood, is the Church. A second thought, which is found in Luther's writings, is that the true Church is made up of those truly saved individuals who reside within the institutional Church. The third, which will become increasingly common, is that the institution is not the Church at all, and that only those regenerated ones who meet outside of that form make up the true Church. In some cases, the last option was likely pressed upon those groups who had no choice because of persecution. Of course there were also those who rejected the idea of assembling altogether, and chose the individualistic approach to worshipping God.

These three main concepts of the Church mentioned can be found in Christianity today in various shades of intensity.

This point in our story brings us to the interaction between these three concepts of the Church. The players are the Lutheran Church in Germany, representing the institutional Church; a certain Count

Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, who envisioned Luther's "church within the Church," and a group we previously discussed known as the Moravians. The latter would understand the Church as specifically the community of believers.

Count Zinzendorf who had been educated under the Pietist influence at Halle under Francke was one who hoped to see more of his fellow Lutherans come to know Christ in a deeper, heart-felt fashion. His efforts were not meeting with much success when in 1722 he came upon the opportunity to help some religious refugees by allowing them the use of his lands. These we mentioned earlier as the followers of Jan Hus, who were being persecuted in Bohemia and Moravia. They called themselves the Unity of Brethren, but from here on in the story they will be known as the Moravians.

Over a period of five years some 200 of them had migrated to the community that they had established and named Herrnhut, meaning "watched by the Lord." By then other persecuted believers from Protestant, Separatist, Anabaptist and even Catholic backgrounds had joined them. The diverse goals and expectations brought to this mix a fair amount of tension. At this time Zinzendorf took the leadership and was fairly successful. His commitment to these many outcasts, his desire for unity in the Church, his organizational abilities and his ministry of the Scriptures helped to bring harmony among them.

It would be a major "outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the congregation" however, that would transform this community most of all. On the 13th day of August in 1727 during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the brothers and sisters at Herrnhut were overwhelmed with a renewed faith and love towards their Savior and one another. They embraced one another in tears, recalling the former days among the Moravian Brethren, only marveling all the more the miracle of how so many from diverse backgrounds had experienced this unity. Accompanying this love and unity were also miraculous healings and gifts of the Spirit, which Zinzendorf was careful not to sensationalize.

Even more amazing was the initiation of a 24/7 prayer vigil, where the participants took shifts in offering up prayers to God. Whether in groups or in individual prayer sessions, this "prayer meeting" lasted for over one hundred years! Another important element of the community was the small groups, organized by age, sex, marital status and so on. It is evident that while Zinzendorf had



a key role in the organization, he learned much from the Moravians who had been doing community in this fashion for many decades.

When Zinzendorf's missionary spirit was added to the situation, the flames could only spread. With the growth of the Kingdom of God in mind, they took the message of Christ's love for all and the vision of the Church as a community to many nations. They considered themselves as a part of the Church at large, which in reality benefited by their efforts in Greenland, Jamaica, the West Indies, Africa, India, England and North America. In Pennsylvania they founded Bethlehem and Nazareth, and in South Carolina the community of Salem. Today the Moravian Church is represented in 16 of the United States, the District of Columbia, and also in Canada.

For a time, Zinzendorf worked toward including the Moravians with the Lutherans in that area. It was not long before both groups realized that could not work. Religious tolerance was increasing to the point that groups like the Moravians could exist, yet not without some protest from the established denominations. Refusing to be antagonistic with other groups, Zinzendorf accepted that God had other methods of building His kingdom than theirs. He believed that even the Moravians would eventually be swallowed up in the larger, glorious Church of Jesus Christ as it comes to full unity and maturity.

## *John Wesley and Methodism*

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In October of 1735, a group of Moravians was sailing to America for a mission in the new colony of Georgia when they met up with two brothers from the Church of England with the same purpose in mind. This meeting would later impact the history of England and North America in ways only God could have foreseen.

John and Charles Wesley were the sons of the Anglican minister Samuel Wesley and his devout wife Susanna. John was born on June 17, 1703 and Charles on December 18, 1707. John was the fifteenth and Charles the eighteenth of nineteen children born to the Wesleys, eight of which died in infancy. Susanna took her responsibility to raise godly children seriously, home schooling, praying with them, and making certain that each of them had some quality time alone with her. When her husband was away for church duties, her regular gatherings in the kitchen with her children and the servants for Bible study and prayer grew in popularity, so much so that the local pastor became jealous. When her husband asked her to refrain, she replied

that she would only if he commanded, and in person, knowing that he would have to answer to the Lord for such a decision.

Susanna believed a special call of God was on John's life. The sign to her for this was the fact that he almost perished when their house caught on fire. Everyone was soon accounted for except young John, who was trapped on the second floor, with no ladder in sight. While she and her children were kneeling in prayer to God, two men rescued him, one on the other's shoulder to pluck him from the flames! Susanna's conviction, his upbringing, and the pious example of both his parents no doubt instilled in him the desire to follow his father's footsteps as an ordained minister of the Anglican Church.

After his ordination at Christ Church Cathedral at Oxford, John served in his father's parish for about a year. Then he returned to Oxford. There his brother Charles had joined a group of young men who were committed to diligently seeking God in regular prayer meetings, Bible studies, fasting, visiting prisons, taking communion, helping the poor and other good works. John as an ordained priest was asked to lead this "holy club," as it was mockingly called, but he yet sensed something was missing in His Christian experience.

That sense would be heightened when he and Charles later met up with the Moravian Brethren on this boat to Georgia. During a terrible storm, when most of the passengers feared for their lives, including John, he witnessed the Moravians' peace and lack of fear in their singing of hymns throughout the ordeal. That experience would continue to haunt him to the point that he even questioned his salvation.

After a relatively fruitless time in America, he returned to England humbled and heavy-hearted. He wrote in his journal:

"I went to America, to convert the Indians; but O! who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near: But let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled.

Nor can I say, "To die is gain!"

I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun

My last thread, I shall perish on the shore!"

## CHURCH HISTORY FOR THE CURIOUS

(The Works of John Wesley, Volume 1, Journals, page 90,  
January 24, 1738)

In the providence of God, the Wesley brothers were to meet up again with the Moravians. Peter Bohler was a leader of the Moravians who was then in London while on his way to Georgia. Again, in Bohler they were confronted with a Christian joy and peace that they had long desired. That desire would be fulfilled for Charles on May 21, 1738 and for John on May 24.

Having been convinced by Bohler that salvation was a definite experience by which one could know he had become a new creation in Christ, they fervently sought to offer their full surrender to His righteousness. Charles, who had then been sick in body, was prayed for by the sister of a mechanic, Mr. Bray, in whose home he had been staying. As Mr. Bray read to him from the Psalms 32:1: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," he received the faith to be saved and healed. His life from that time forward would be forever changed.

John Wesley recorded in his journal the events that triggered the end of his great struggle.

"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there, what I now first felt in my heart."

(Wesley's Journal, Vol. 1 p 119-120 May 24, 1738)

A few weeks later John was in Germany to meet Zinzendorf and spend some time at Herrnhut with the Moravian community. Having much more in common with them than before, he greatly enjoyed the fellowship, and later reported that they were among the “best Christians in the world.” However, his was a different calling and a different direction. He did not join them, but collaborated with them at times and continued to respect the work of Christ among them.



John Wesley

The preaching of the Wesleys was not very well received among the Anglican churches, but they found an ally in one of their fellow “holy club” members, George Whitefield. Whitefield had his deep and pronounced experience of salvation before his ordination in 1736. At 22 years of age he began his dynamic preaching career which covered both England and the colonies in America.

Being very comfortable with “open air” preaching in America, Whitefield had no qualms preaching outdoors to the miners in Bristol, England. When he invited John to cover for him in Bristol so that he could return to America, John had doubts. However, when he saw the thousands being converted to Christ by the simple gospel he reconsidered, remembering that Christ Himself preached to the multitudes in the open air. For the next fifty years, John and his brother Charles would continue this practice, as well as the forming of “societies” of small groups like at Oxford. Add to that the thousands of miles on horseback that these men traveled to spread the Good News that had such an impact upon them.

Like Zinzendorf, Wesley hoped to stay with his mother Church, the Church of England, but with so little support he was forced to organize and ordain preachers on his own. After his death the Methodists, as they were called, became another denomination as well. In one short lifetime, these three men would mightily be used of God to transform the hearts of the people, and in turn the social conditions of their native land. Whitefield with his fiery, spell-binding preaching, John with his clear and enthusiastic message, and Charles with his thousands of inspiring hymns would lift England and instill an optimism in America that would endure for generations.

Among the well-known hymns of Charles Wesley are *O, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing*, and the Christmas classic, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*. Other famous hymns from this revival include *Amazing Grace*, by former slave trader John Newton, and *Rock of Ages* by Augustus Toplady. The fact that these are still sung around the world today testifies to the enduring message of the Gospel, and of Christ who inspired them.

An interesting chapter in this history is a return to the Calvinist-Arminian controversy. Both John Wesley and George Whitefield were ordained in the Church of England, but they sharply differed over the issue of predestination. Wesley came to believe that the Calvinist position on this doctrine tended towards fatalism, while Whitefield strongly defended it. There was a period of tension and debate between them over this, threatening their friendship. Their respect for one another, the bond between them in Christ, and their commitment to His cause proved to be greater than the disagreement in the end.

## ***The Age of Reason and Enlightenment***\_\_\_\_\_

The Enlightenment was an important secular movement that began in the seventeenth century and climaxed in the eighteenth and nineteenth. This subject may seem to be a bit off-topic but is nevertheless important to understanding this period and its effect on subsequent centuries. While momentous changes were taking place in the religious world of Europe, the scientific and philosophic communities were evolving as well. The modern era was approaching and the medieval times were coming to a close. The theory set forth by Copernicus, that the sun—not the earth was the center of our solar system was to be proven by Galileo and his telescope, and other advances in science and world exploration were opening up new horizons to the people.

After thirty years of religious wars, the world was becoming weary and new questions were beginning to be asked. The middle class was growing to compete with the rulers, nobles and the church hierarchy. As trade was being opened up, the merchants and the labor force were gaining in importance, and the education that they could now afford brought forth doctors, lawyers and teachers that in turn gained influence. Mathematicians found greater significance as their formulas were being used to plot the course of ships for trade and

exploration, and were also key to the creation of new technologies in microbiology and understanding the universe.

Religion was beginning to be looked upon with suspicion, and often seen as superstition. Now with man's new capabilities came the idea that human beings could think for themselves outside of the parameters of the ancient beliefs. This was the *Age of Reason*. As facts about the physical universe could be tested with microscopes and telescopes, the scientific method would now be applied to philosophy and religion. You might remember how Thomas Aquinas sought to show that true science and the Christian faith were totally compatible. Now some of the greatest minds in Europe thought to prove otherwise, or at least that some aspects of religion could be jettisoned.

Most at the beginning started with the assumption that God existed, in a similar way that Plato and Aristotle viewed Him. They proceeded from there to understand morality and its function in society. Rationalism, as an *ism*, spelled Reason with a capital R. That is, Reason is elevated as the judge of all things. To many of the Rationalists, God was still reasonable. However, everything is to be doubted, examined and accepted only after it met this test of human Reason. The most famous example of this concept is found in René Descartes', "I think, therefore I am."

By starting with doubt, he found that the only thing he could be certain of was his doubting. From there he progressed to establishing "self evident truths." This and other phrases like "unalienable rights" and "created equal by God," that found their way into the documents of American independence were widely circulated at that time. Deism was also for a short time popular in Europe and America. It tried to find a middle ground between dogmatic religion and the growing skepticism towards all things spiritual.

The basic doctrines of Deism were (1) that God exists, (2) we are to worship Him, (4) engage in virtuous service, (5) repent of wrong doing, and (6) that there are rewards and punishments after death. By today's cultural standards, these tenets almost seem orthodox! In any event, the Enlightenment would proceed to a point beyond reason and empirical evidence to even question whether truth could even be known at all. This sense of uncertainty in some areas unleashed a state of anarchy and rebellion that would bring devastation in France.

## *A Tale of Two Cities*

This part of the story should challenge all of us who trust in Christ to become truly the salt of the earth and a city on a hill that cannot be hid. All of the above Enlightenment beliefs were being filtered down from the philosophers to the ordinary people of Europe, where conditions were far from encouraging. Resentment against the upper classes and the clergy, some of whom were fighting the rising tide of immorality, came to a peak in the mobs and rioting of the French Revolution. Remembered in today's popular culture by the beheading of King Louie XVI and his beautiful Queen Marie Antoinette, this period is so marked by bloodshed, treachery, betrayal, and chaos that its culmination was to be known as "The Reign of Terror."

Many believe that the same black mark would have stained the history of England had it not been for the transforming power of the Gospel in the preaching of George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers. It was not the politically imposing and intimidating presence of institutional Christianity that saved England, but the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ. The nation was transformed from within, the Gospel touching the hearts of the people resulting in their corresponding godly actions. This message of a "heart warming" experience of assured salvation was not divorced from their participation with the world around them. The sermons these men preached were reminiscent of the Biblical prophets who struck at the core of injustice in their society. Orphanages, hospitals, better working conditions, prison reform and anti-slavery laws were all championed by these regenerated believers in Christ whose motivation was the love of God.

Thus we can see the stark contrast at this time between Paris, France and London, England as portrayed in Charles Dickens's classic novel, "A Tale of Two Cities."

## *The Great Awakening* \_\_\_\_\_

That same revival was carried to America where a different kind of revolution took place. This revolution did not attempt to overthrow all government and order, and destroy every link to Christian faith. In fact it defended a more just form of government that recognized the importance of the free exercise of faith in God.

At the center of this Great Awakening was the preaching of George Whitefield and his close friend Jonathan Edwards.

Jonathan Edwards was raised in a home that was saturated with reverence toward God. Like John and Charles Wesley, his father was a minister and his mother a woman devoted to prayer. The understanding of regeneration as a definite experience was common in these parts. Obviously, the hope of his parents was for their children to have this experience for themselves.

Jonathan was born in Windsor, Connecticut on 1703, and he died in 1758, shortly after his father. His mother outlived him. Being a middle child of eleven children, he was his parent's only son. In his years before attending Yale University, he had already experienced the workings of the Spirit of God during times of revival in his father's Church. These experiences seemed to have worn off, however, and for a time he struggled with the Calvinist view of predestination.

The thought that God would chose some to eternal life, leaving others to eternal torment in hell at that time seemed horrible to him. However, there came a time when his heart resigned itself to God and His will, after which the sovereign election of God became to him as something "exceedingly pleasant, bright and sweet." From that point he proceeded to become one of Calvinism's most celebrated theologians. His brilliant mind lent itself to philosophy as well, and to this day he is ranked among America's greatest intellectuals.

Edwards was not a dramatic, charismatic preacher like Whitefield. In fact he often read his sermons to the congregation. Perhaps God was proving a point that He made to Zechariah the prophet. It is "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts." (Zechariah 4:6) Or in this case rather, it is "not by eloquence, shouting, or force of personality, but by My Spirit, says the LORD!" After several years of preaching as pastor of the Church in Northhampton, Massachusetts, he began getting results that were quite unexpected.

The year of 1734 brought the first signs of the Great Awakening, when some of the members of Edwards' congregation began to weep out loud, fall on the floor and even faint during his sermons. More importantly to him was the fact that their lives were changed by the power of God. For the next 3 years, revival swept Massachusetts and



Connecticut. When it subsided, the hope persisted that it would happen again.

Later when George Whitefield came to New England and joined forces with Edwards, the revival came into full swing. It was during this time that he preached his most famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. Soon the Anglicans, Presbyterians and later Baptists and Methodists participated, and all of the thirteen colonies were affected. The Baptists and Methodists were sparked by the Awakening to take the Gospel westward to the settlers in the frontier, where revivalism became a standard part of American culture.

In these years before the American Revolution, a common thread that ran through all of them was this awareness that God Himself had visited them. An optimism was born or rather reborn among believers concerning the Kingdom of God on the earth. Jonathan Edwards and others anticipated more of these “times of refreshing coming from the presence of the Lord” up unto the time of Christ’s return. The Church would eventually advance forward until one nation after the other would bow before Christ’s Word. He urged that prayers be offered to God for more of these waves of revival to come until the enemies of God would be so threatened as to react in full force of their power. Then God would finally prove His superiority and great wisdom in putting them down.

“And there shall be a glorious pouring out of the Spirit with this clear and powerful preaching of the gospel, to make it successful for reviving those holy doctrines of religion which are now chiefly ridiculed in the world, and turning many from heresy, from popery, and from other false religions; and also for turning many from their vice and profaneness, and for bringing vast multitudes savingly home to Christ.

The work of conversion shall go on in a wonderful manner, and spread more and more. Many shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, one multitude after another continually, as in Isaiah 60:4, 5. “Lift up thine eyes round about, and see; all they gather themselves together, they come to thee; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see and flow together.”....

Having thus shown wherein this overthrow of Satan's kingdom will consist, I come now to observe its universal extent. The visible kingdom of Satan shall be overthrown, and the kingdom of Christ set up on the ruins of it, everywhere throughout the whole habitable clothe. Now shall the promise made to Abraham be fulfilled, That in him and his seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed and Christ now shall become the desire of all nations agreeable to Haggai 2:7. Now the kingdom of Christ shall in the most strict and literal sense be extended to all nations, and the whole earth. There are many passages of Scripture that can be understood in no other sense. What can be more universal than Isaiah 11:9. "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." As much as to say, As there is no part of the channel or cavity of the sea, but what is covered with water, so there shall be no part of the world of mankind but what shall be covered with the knowledge of God. So it is foretold in Isaiah 14:22. that all the ends of the earth shall look to Christ, and be saved. And to show that the words are to be understood in the most universal sense, it is said in the next verse, "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."-So the most universal expression is used,

'And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most high God.' (Daniel 7:27.)"

(Jonathan Edwards, *The Work of Redemption*, Period 3, Part 7)

This optimistic view of Christ and His Church will run throughout the next two hundred years, until a more pessimistic interpretation of prophecy will be born out of the current events of a later time.

Before the close of this century, we find the beginnings of the Second Great Awakening as well as the inauguration of a movement that has continued to the present, the Modern Missionary Movement.

**1722** Count Zinzendorf hosts the Moravian Brethren on his lands. This community known as Herrnhut sends missionaries to Africa, India, and the Americas.

**1729** Jonathan Edwards preaches in Northampton, Massachusetts and witnesses the beginnings of the First Great Awakening in 1733.

**1738** John and Charles Wesley experience personal salvation. Along with George Whitefield, they lead thousands to Christ in England, establishing Methodism.

**1740** The Great Awakening becomes widespread among Protestant churches in New England. Led by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, its effect is felt in other countries.

**1764** John Newton, former slave trader writes *Amazing Grace*.

**1776** The 13 colonies in America declare their independence from England.

**1789** The French Revolution leads to the execution of thousands of Catholic and Protestant Christians.

**1792** The Second Great Awakening in North America lasts for 30 years.

**1793** William and Dorothy Carey begin the modern mission movement by their work in India.

**1797** The Methodists break from the Church of England.

# 8

## EVANGELISM AND DENOMINATIONALISM

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### *The Second Great Awakening* \_\_\_\_\_

As the eighteenth century came to a close in North America, the population had increased and the lands claimed had about tripled in size. Church membership had not grown proportionately however, and included only about ten percent of the population. The desire in the churches for another awakening was answered, beginning at about 1792, and was in full momentum by the eighteen hundreds. Evangelistic preaching, that is preaching for the purpose of converting sinners, became the norm again, and many of the churches welcomed the revival.

The education and ordination of ministers could not keep up with demand, but the revivals in the frontier states of Kentucky and Tennessee could not wait. In these areas, great camp meetings were held for days and weeks in which thousands experienced a number of emotional responses to the power of the Holy Spirit that might appear strange and even repulsive to the more reserved believers. When this happened in their meetings, Edwards and Wesley tried to understand that people responded to the convicting of the Holy Spirit in different ways, but they by no means encouraged these outbursts. Now that there were fewer seminary-trained ministers on

hand, the back woods preachers capitalized on the primal nature of these religious experiences. The concept that “falling out under the power,” “dancing in the Spirit,” “holy laughter,” “weeping and crying aloud,” “shouting,” and other manifestations should be normative in a revival made its mark on those who hungered for a vital Christian church experience.

The concept of revivalism itself as the standard strategy for extending the Kingdom of God would also be a new development. Men like Charles G. Finney began to combine all the techniques that were effective at the time into a system designed to orchestrate a revival. Seeing the fruit of his methods, others embraced them as well, but none could assume that any souls could be won without the involvement of the Spirit of God. Finney himself was so touched by the Spirit upon conversion, that he abandoned his career as an attorney to become a Presbyterian preacher. Here is a portion of his testimony, and the result of his earnest seeking for God:

“There was no fire, and no light, in the room; nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. It did not occur to me then, nor did it for some time afterward, that it was wholly a mental state.

On the contrary it seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet. I have always since regarded this as a most remarkable state of mind; for it seemed to me a reality, that he stood before me, and I fell down at his feet and poured out my soul to him. I wept aloud like a child, and made such confessions as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed his feet with my tears; and yet I had no distinct impression that I touched him, that I recollect. I must have continued in this state for a good while; but my mind was too much absorbed with the interview to recollect anything that I said. But I know, as soon as my mind became calm enough to break off from the interview, I returned to the front office, and found that the fire that I had made of large wood was nearly burned out. But as I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire, I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing

mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love for I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me, like immense wings.

No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say, I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over me, and over me, and over me, one after the other, until I recollect I cried out, "I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me." I said, "Lord, I cannot bear any more;" yet I had no fear of death.

How long I continued in this state, with this baptism continuing to roll over me and go through me, I do not know. But I know it was late in the evening when a member of my choir — for I was the leader of the choir — came into the office to see me. He was a member of the church. He found me in this state of loud weeping, and said to me, "Mr. Finney, what ails you?" I could make him no answer for some time. He then said, "Are you in pain?" I gathered myself up as best I could, and replied, "No, but so happy that I cannot live."

(Charles G. Finney, *An Autobiography*, chapter 2)

The first of the great revivals under his preaching was in Rochester, New York in 1830-1831. After a gradual decline by the 1840's, an even farther-reaching revival broke out nationally in 1857-1858. Perhaps Finney went too far in his reaction to the staid Calvinism of his denomination at that time. He has since been accused of Pelagianism for his emphasis on the participation of individuals in their salvation. Certainly God knows whether or not he was in error and how genuine were the thousands of conversions under his preaching. We will learn of another maverick among the nineteenth century Calvinists in the next chapter concerning foreign missions.

## ***“Go into all the World!”***

### ***The Modern Mission Movement***\_\_\_\_\_

When William Carey, a young Baptist pastor in England read *The Last Voyage of Captain Cook*, he saw more than a story of world exploration and adventure. He saw the vast multitudes around the world that had never heard of Christ and His gospel. But when he presented what he felt was God's call to world missions in a minister's meeting, he was met with resistance. The consensus among his fellow preachers was that the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:18-20 was to the first generation of preachers only.

“Whether the command given to the apostles to teach all nations was not obligatory on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world, seeing that the accompanying promise was of equal extent,” Dr. Ryland shouted, “Young man, sit down: when God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine.”

Going against the indifference of the age, and motivated by the words of Christ alone, Carey persisted, and gained the reputation of becoming “The Father of Modern Missions.” He and many others responded to the great spiritual awakening of that generation with zeal and a passion to overcome whatever obstacles stood in the way of Christ's command. They took it upon themselves to raise the funds for carrying the message of the Good News of Christ to far away lands like India, China, and the Philippines.

These “missionary societies” would appeal to the church members rather than their denominations and build enthusiasm for the work of God by connecting them with these fascinating cultures and lands. Carey himself had a part in breaking the bondage of India's caste system by revealing to the lowest of the low, how important they are to Christ. He also helped to end the practice of burning the widows on their husband's funeral fires. Education was an important tool as well and this was accomplished through Carey's gifts in language skills, by which he translated the Bible into many languages.

Space does not permit to tell of the many men and women who made great sacrifices, some unto death, for the love of those who to them were strangers. Some of those whose names might be familiar are David Brainerd, Jonathan Edwards's son-in-law, Hudson Taylor, and Adoniram Judson. Though some of their efforts took years and

even generations to bear fruit, that fruit was precious to God. The world as we know it today has been made better in more ways than we could measure or imagine through their lives.

## *Eschatology – Escha who?*\_\_\_\_\_

Up to this point we have only touched on the eschatology of one teacher, namely Jonathan Edwards. This is definitely a subject for a separate book, but it cannot be avoided if one wants to better understand church history. Eschatology is the study of the Last Things, or Last Days. Its interest goes all the way back to the Old Testament prophets and builds up with the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. So much doubt and confusion has been generated by this topic that many try to avoid it. For this reason the Book of Revelation was not included in the canon of the New Testament by some for a time.

The focal point is the Second Coming of Christ and the timing of His coming. Also there is the debate surrounding the Kingdom of God, whether it is spiritual or literal, already here or yet to come. The Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed merely affirmed that Christ will come to judge the living and the dead, and that there will be a resurrection of the body. The Nicene Creed added that His Kingdom had no end and that there will be life in the world to come. No real controversy here.

Some of the most respected theologians of history have differed on the details of what the Biblical prophecies of the future mean, but the differences were tolerated. It would not be until the twentieth century that these differences amounted to heresies in some circles. Why am I bringing this up now? Well, this is the chapter where we will be introduced to John Nelson Darby of the Plymouth Brethren.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Plymouth Brethren were another non-conformist group of people in England who were disillusioned by organized Christianity in their day. They also sought to return to the simplicity of the priesthood of all believers and be led by the Spirit of God. Their goal was to avoid all forms and structures and come together as brothers and sisters in Christ. Their simplistic unity could not be contained, however, and they eventually divided into about six groups over different issues.

Their most notable legacy would be the doctrine known as Dispensationalism. One of their leaders, John Darby, developed a



system of Biblical interpretation that divided history into distinct periods of time. In each of these “dispensations” God dealt with His people differently. The system was very well thought out but not to be popularized until it was integrated into the C.I. Scofield Study Bible in the twentieth century. Pivotal was the sharp distinction between Israel and the Church, the Old Testament and the New.

The Old Testament was written to Israel and the New Testament to the Church – but the part of the New Testament before Pentecost was still for Israel, including Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This might sit right with those not inclined to “turn the other cheek,” but there is a down side to this system. During the next dispensation, being the “Church Age,” the deaths of the apostles marked the end of the miracles and gifts of the Spirit mentioned in Paul's letters. Now even that part of the New Testament is truncated for today's Christians!

His eschatology postponed the reign of Christ until after the Church was raptured up into heaven for seven years. Then after the world suffers untold agonies and horrors, Christ would return with His Church to reign for a thousand years, after which the earth is destroyed and the saints return to heaven with Him. This is very different from Jonathan Edwards, who acknowledged that the reign of Christ had already begun, and would continue until He has subdued all His enemies under His feet.

The important part about this chapter is not whether Darby and Scofield, or Edwards was right, but the fact that this new version of Eschatology had never been mainstream and would not be until it was later adopted by the Fundamentalists, Baptists and Pentecostals in the twentieth century.

It seems to this writer for now that God has not given to anyone of us a perfect understanding of Biblical prophecy and of the End-Times, but that He has given us what we need right now, “all things that pertain to life and godliness.” (2 Peter 1:3)

Before leaving this subject, there was another group in England at this time that did believe prophecy and the spiritual gifts were still operational. The Irvingites actually thought that they were the twelve tribes, with the new twelve apostles, who thought the Lord would come in their day. They are credited with originating the doctrine of the “pre-tribulation secret rapture,” which Darby incorporated into his scheme.

Another important figure, a contemporary and critic of John Darby, would be Charles Hadden Spurgeon. A Baptist pastor in England, his preaching was very powerful and inspirational, drawing great crowds. In fact, his sermons are still widely read today. His daily devotional, “Morning and Evening” continues in popularity and is included in several Bible study programs for computers.

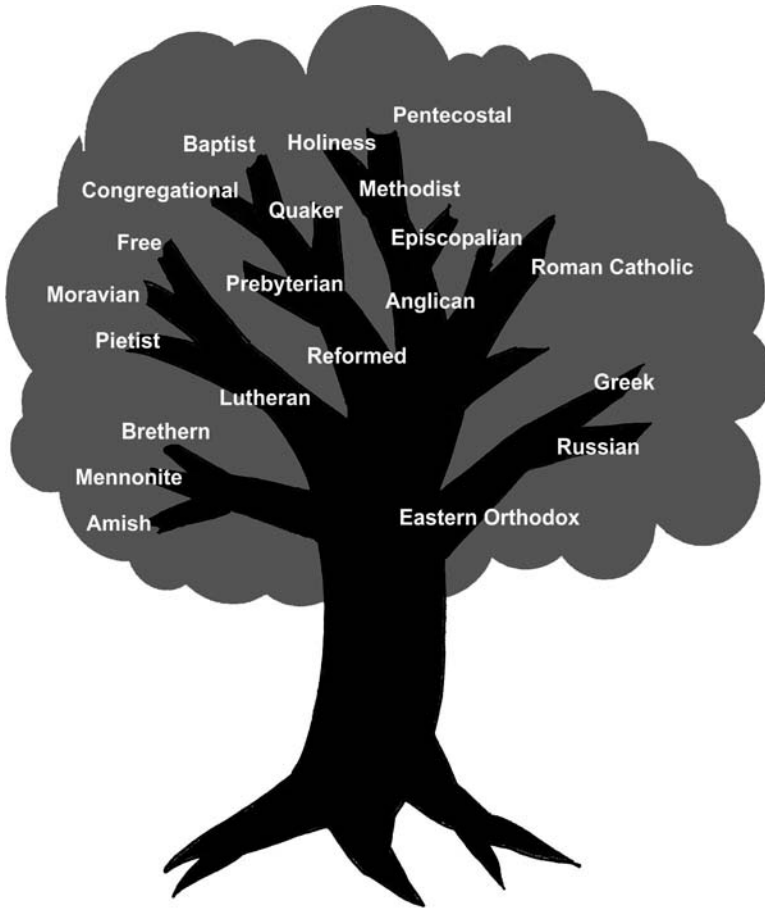
### ***Denominationalism in America***\_\_\_\_\_

By this period in history we find Catholicism strong in South and Central America due to the Spanish and Portuguese explorations, and in Canada and parts of North America through the Irish and French settlers and traders. The United States would become the home of all the Protestant groups of that day. The Presbyterians from Scotland and the Anglicans, Baptists, Quakers, the Puritans and Separatists (which combined to become the Congregationalists) from England were great in number. Also many Lutherans and Dutch Reformed churches were present in America by now.

At this point in the story it is beginning to be difficult to keep up with every single division and the many more groups that will be formed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But we will try to keep a basic outline going. We have already seen how differences in theology and worship as well as national loyalties have contributed to the denominational divisions of Christianity. Now we have some examples of how political viewpoints have entered into the story.

Already, because of the American Revolution those of the Anglican persuasion that remained in America had to separate from the Church of England and become the Episcopal Church. The Methodists of America likewise differed with the English Methodists over the war and organized themselves under Francis Asbury, a protégé of John Wesley.

Now, another war would divide Americans from Americans, and churches of the same denominational confessions. Even before the civil war, while the issue of slavery was heating up, the Methodist Episcopal Church in the South split from the Methodist General Conference. The Southern Baptist Convention was formed when the Baptists in the north condemned their slave-owning members. The Presbyterian Church was likewise split over this issue. It should be noted that the Catholics, Episcopalians and Quakers were not among the groups that split over slavery.



When we realize that none of these Southern denominations would condone slavery today, we are forced to face the fact that we Christians are more often influenced by the culture and the economics of the day than we would like to admit. The importance of slave labor in the economy of the South must have motivated the leaders in those churches to find justification in the Scriptures for this inhumane practice. “The curse of Ham,” was a doctrine that took the story of Noah's son and twisted it to imply that the Africans were suffering for the sins of their ancestor Ham. Other instances of slavery in the Bible were thought to show God's approval of this practice of the buying and selling of human beings who were kidnapped by members of their own race for profit.

The bright spot in this dark episode of American history is the story of the **Underground Railroad**, where many believers and lovers of humanity smuggled runaway slaves across state lines and into the northern states and Canada. Again we are challenged to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and follow Christ by these godly examples. The Light of Christ will never die out as long as this kind of heroism exists in the world.

Another factor that has had a powerful and positive impact on later times would be the deep Christian faith that germinated in the African slaves of the American South. Identifying themselves with the Israelites while enslaved in Egypt, they could understand salvation under Moses in a way that many could not. In this way, the Bible would offer them another kind of freedom. Christ, their Savior would inspire comfort and hope for a better future with Him in Heaven. The songs of worship and faith that were born out of their extreme sufferings have gone on to impact not only future generations of Christians in their worship but the whole of American culture.

The style of Gospel music that developed from this deep connection with the sufferings of Christ and His people has an emotional quality that is difficult to define. In any event its influence is felt in various forms of popular Christian and secular music around the world to this day.

### *The Restoration Movement*

Religious freedom in America would open the door to the forming of even more denominations and new religious movements. This gave rise to a desire in many to find common unity in the simplicity of the Gospel without focussing on all the issues that divided Christians. Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander joined with former Presbyterian Barton Stone in the first half of the nineteenth century in a quest for genuine New Testament Christianity. Their only creed would be the Holy Scriptures. What the Scriptures explicitly taught, they taught and practiced. Nothing would be added. For example, no musical instruments were mentioned in the New Testament worship, so all singing would be à cappella. Some of the groups did choose to have musical instruments, so another group within the movement was eventually formed. The effort to avoid becoming a denomination took on a form of its own,

however. The rules designed to prevent a denomination from forming actually resulted in not only one, but three denominations: the *Christian Church*, the *Churches of Christ*, and the *Disciples of Christ*.

### ***The Holiness Movement***

Toward the end of the century there was a stirring and a desire for more of what was experienced in the First and Second Great Awakenings. Some of the Methodists who felt that things were stagnating in their churches began calling themselves Wesleyans, seeking to restore the original vitality of the movement. Others participated in forming what would be called the Church of the Nazarene, and other Holiness Churches, with their “second definite work of grace.” Another Methodist minister in England, William Booth and his wife Catherine would organize the Salvation Army, with its community outreach and witness to the poor. Many of the homeless people in England, Europe and America would find purpose and meaning in joining this evangelistic ministry.

Another famous evangelist was Dwight L. Moody. He was raised in the Unitarian Church, which we have not yet mentioned. This group did not believe in the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus, and many other facets of Biblical Christianity. After his conversion to Christ in his uncle's Congregational Church, he became a part of the Sunday School movement. In the beginning, Sunday Schools in England and the U.S. were actual schools, where children with no future were taught basic grammar along with the Gospel.

Moody also came into contact with the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.), which at that time was a very effective Gospel ministry around the world. It would be his Sunday School work, however, that would prosper through his fervent evangelistic zeal, to the extent that it was even visited by President Abraham Lincoln. Eventually he relocated his ministry to Chicago and built the Chicago Avenue Church. His visits to England resulted in great revival meetings and many conversions to Christ, setting a pattern for many modern evangelists such as Billy and Franklin Graham, Oral Roberts and countless others.

## *Modern Challenges*

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Continuing from the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment would be fueled by an increasing optimism for what humans could achieve if they could only abandon the beliefs of the past. Strangely, that optimism would lead some to a very pessimistic outlook regarding our purpose for existence. At the same time, new technologies brought the industrial revolution, which would dramatically change the way people lived. By moving from the farms in the country to manufacturing plants in the cities, many families experienced a significant loss in the sense of community they once enjoyed. Individualism was becoming more pronounced than ever before.

Many of the philosophies and new scientific theories of this period would have a tremendous impact on the generations living in the twentieth century. In 1859 Charles Darwin published his book, *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of the Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. He observed the long series of technological advances in our history, and connected the dots in the area of animal life. His theory of evolution taught that all life began in the simplest form, and steadily advanced toward complexity. The principle was “survival of the fittest,” in which the inferior life forms would gradually die off, leaving the stronger ones to continue towards advancement. I wonder who this English student of nature thought was the “most favoured race” which *should* be preserved?

Carl Marx would develop previous theories concerning social evolution in his *Communist Manifesto*. His idea for liberating the poor and working class was to forcefully participate in the natural evolution of society towards his idea of Utopia – a classless and godless society. The consequences of this idea would play out in twentieth century Russia and China, resulting in the deaths of millions of Christians and those of other faiths. Likewise, Adolf Hitler would use Darwin's “survival of the fittest” principle to justify the Holocaust, in which millions of Jews, and others who he considered inferior were systematically massacred.

Now that man is understood as just another animal, Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist would study him as such. His work laid the foundations of modern psychoanalysis. Finally, we see Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who proclaimed the death of God. To him, as animals our lives have no essential purpose or meaning.

Since he concluded that our evolutionary progress demanded courage and the will to power, he rejected Christianity, which he believed tended towards weakness. His ideal of a race of “supermen,” by the way, added to Hitler's motivation for the elimination of the weak and inferior and for the selective breeding of humans.

Other new disciplines that find their beginnings in this period are the fields of sociology, economics, anthropology, and psychology. All of these sciences challenged the traditions of Christianity. The response that originated mainly in Europe became what today is called liberal theology. Instead of finding agreement between Biblical Christianity and the new scientific knowledge, the liberal theologians decided that this was unnecessary. The value of Christianity is in its moral values and higher consciousness, not in its historical facts. The stories of the Bible are just stories for our edification.

This of course prompted another response. Biblical Christianity was not about to roll over and play dead before the new modern era. Extensive research and archaeological evidence over time was continuing to mount up, proving the historical accuracy of the Bible again and again. Another scholarly movement in America, known as Fundamentalism, would powerfully reaffirm the basic tenets of the Christian faith. To the Apostles Creed was added the confession that the Scriptures in their original form were God breathed and without error. Unfortunately, the dispensationalism of those in this important stand for the historic faith would later clash with another movement that sought restoration and revival from another perspective.

## ***New Religious Movements***

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### ***The Mormons***

The innovative spirit in North America would eventually find its way into the area of religion. In this period a number of fascinating elements would be introduced that are flourishing to this day. In 1820, a fifteen-year-old boy in Manchester, New York had a vision, which he believed to be from God. In these “heavenly visitations,” Joseph Smith was told that all the churches of his day were wrong. Seven years later he claimed to have dug up some gold plates from which he supernaturally translated the Book of Mormon. This he

added to the Canon of Scripture since he believed it was “another testament of Jesus Christ.”

Because of persecution some of them migrated to Utah and established Salt Lake City under Smith's successor Brigham Young. How can the success of this off-beat movement be explained, with its polygamy, its strange obsession concerning genealogies, and its obvious doctrinal errors like that of the Native Americans being the descendents of ancient Israelites? Perhaps Joseph Smith did capitalize on at least one weakness he saw in the churches of his area. Perhaps they had lost their original pioneer spirit, which these early Mormons recaptured.

The temptation to think “we are the only true believers” and the pride in that belief are contributing factors which have bred many cult movements over the centuries. Another common element we will see in several of the groups in this chapter is that of a focus on the “End-Times.” The official name the Mormons took is the “Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints.” They believed themselves to be the true last day Church. Other factors should be considered in their strong community spirit and organizational skills. By identifying with the Early Church, with their apostles and prophets, and using other New Testament terminologies they also felt a special legitimacy in their pattern of organization.

### ***Back to the Future.....***

Already we have introduced the subject of Eschatology in the chapter on John Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. There is another aspect of Eschatology that the Irvingites of that same time period in England were excited about, and that would become even more prevalent in America. Not only would people become more preoccupied with Biblical prophecy, but they also would tend to relate the prophecies of the last days with the time in which they themselves lived. The first major movement of this kind was with the Montanists back in the middle of second century in Asia Minor.

The followers of Montanus bemoaned the stale spiritual state of Orthodox Christianity in their day and went perhaps to extremes in sensational prophetic utterances, visions, glossolalia (miraculously speaking in other languages) and expectations of the Second Coming of Christ to their generation. This phenomenon would reoccur



throughout the history of Christianity, particularly when the times were desperate and discouraging.

### ***The Seventh Day Adventists***

During the Second Great Awakening, William Miller, a Baptist minister in New York concluded from his studies in Biblical prophecy that 1844 would be the year of our Lord's Return. By 1844, over 100,000 Christians whose expectations of Christ's Return were dashed, experienced what would be known as the Great Disappointment. While many at that time left the movement, the whole experience greatly bonded many of them together, and they found ways to explain the event spiritually.

It should be noted that at that time, the belief similar to John Darby's, that Christ would take his Church to heaven, *before* the seven-year tribulation and the millennium, was the minority view. It would be the Millerites, and the major denomination that sprang out of that group, who would help to popularize this view, a view that is commonly held in Evangelical circles today.

Later, James and Ellen White would become influential in this movement, which began its practice of Sabbath (Saturday) worship and the observance of Old Testament dietary laws. This explains the name of the denomination. They observe the Seventh Day as a day of worship, and their focus on the Lord's Second Advent continues to impact Evangelical Christianity to this day. Unlike the Mormons, they have been welcomed into the Christian community because of their agreement on all the vital points of the faith, and their acknowledgment of the Church at large.

### ***Jehovah's Witnesses***

At the age of 18, Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) was exposed to an Adventist teaching that Christ's Second Coming would occur this time between 1873 and 1874. This sparked a renewed interest and zeal in him for Christianity and the Bible, the faith in which he was raised. After intensive studies with fellow Bible students and Millerites he came to the conclusion that mysteries of the Bible that were previously hidden were then being revealed.

When the rapture did not occur in 1874, he re-examined the Scriptures again. He then concluded that Christ came back invisibly

to the earth in 1874 and initiated the great advances in technology that were beginning around that time. From 1886 to 1904 he presented his beliefs in a series of books entitled, *Studies in the Scriptures*, beginning with *The Divine Plan of the Ages*. Then with the outbreak of World War I in 1914, he believed the battle of Armageddon, in which Christ would put down all other powers, had begun.

After his death in late 1916, Joseph F. Rutherford, the society's attorney, reorganized his Watch Tower Society. In 1931 the movement was renamed. The "Jehovah's Witnesses" are well known today for their door-to-door missionary work. Many of the original "Bible Students" were unhappy with the changes and the policy to discontinue the publishing of Russell's writings after 1927. Those who broke off continued in Russell's teachings and formed various study groups around the world.

His Arian view of Jesus Christ as the highest created being and his denial of the Trinity has placed him and his followers outside of Christian Orthodoxy, but his practice of exploring the numbers and chronology of the Bible for clues of end-time events is still very popular. Strangely enough, his failed predictions have not deterred others from attempting to predict end-time events.

### *The New Gnostics*

In our look at the first century we saw how Eastern philosophy penetrated Christianity through some folks who believed that theirs was a secret knowledge which would ultimately elevate them to higher planes of existence. They were identified as Gnostics, from the Greek word meaning, "to know." In the late nineteenth century, we will meet the modern Gnostics, only this time the Latin word for knowing – "science" will be used to express the same idea. The earlier Gnostics took matter as evil. The modern Gnostics would hold that matter is unreal, imaginary, or at least of lesser significance. One of these systems would be called *Christian Science*.

Mary Baker Eddy, who had during her lifetime suffered from much physical pain, found some temporary relief through hypnotic treatments by Phineas Quimby. Apparently, this started her thinking in the direction where she would later progress in the connection between the mind and health. Later when she was injured in a fall, her deliverance was found through reading of a healing by Jesus in

Matthew 9:1-8. Her next 3 years were spent studying the Bible and developing her concepts of what she would call “the Science of Mind.”

As opposed to the dualism of good versus evil, and matter versus spirit, she seemed to deny the very existence of evil and the reality of matter. In *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, she wrote: “All is infinite Mind and its infinite manifestation, for God is All-in-all. Spirit is immortal Truth; matter is mortal error.” To her this new revelation was the “kingdom of heaven on earth,” a personal and spiritual experience.

This seems to be a curious combination of mysticism and reason, using reason more or less to abandon reason and logic in the end.

There is no place in the thinking of the modern Gnostics for the acknowledgment of guilt and confession of sin. The grief that men like Job, King David, Peter and Paul felt for their failures are out of place in this environment of high, philosophical “realities.” The release that Christians experience with the joy of sins forgiven is to be replaced by mental disciplines designed to avoid pain at any cost. Given the resistance we all have to admitting we are wrong, it is easy to see how many would welcome this alternative approach to attaining peace of mind.

Not surprisingly, Mary Baker Eddy would come to proclaim that the divine inspiration behind her book was in fact the long-awaited Second Coming of Christ. Charles and Myrtle Fillmore in Kansas City, Missouri City established a similar movement in 1889. The *Unity School of Christianity* also sought healing and wellness through positive affirmations and ideas. The element of truth in these and other movements would eventually work its way into the public's general consciousness. Today it is commonly accepted in medical science that our mental and emotional states play a significant role in our health. Of course, Christians are always encouraged throughout the Scriptures to have their minds conditioned by healthy and pure thoughts from God's Word.

The Christian Science concept of God as divine Principle, Love, Mind, Spirit, Soul, Life and Truth rather than in personal terms will persist in the latter part of the following century in a number of other movements under the broad category known as the *New Age Movement*.

**1801** William Wilberforce leads Parliament to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire.

**1811** Thomas and Alexander Campbell begin a Restoration Movement that results in the formation of the Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ churches.

**1813** Adoniram and Ann Judson begin their missionary work in Burma.

**1827** John Nelson Darby of the Plymouth Brethren in England develop the Dispensational system of Biblical interpretation.

**1830** Joseph Smith Jr. founds Mormonism.

**1835** Charles Finney preaches revival in New York State.

**1844** Baptist minister William Miller predicts that Christ will return in 1844. His movement later becomes the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

**1854** Charles H. Spurgeon has a highly successful preaching ministry in England.

**1855** Dwight L. Moody works with the YMCA, holds large revival meetings and builds a church in Chicago.

**1859** Charles Darwin writes *Origin of the Species* explaining his Theory of Evolution.

**1861-65** The American Civil War.

**1870** The First Vatican Council declares the absolute authority of the pope in Rome and the infallibility of his decisions for the Church on matters of faith and morality.

**1870's** The beginnings of Christian Science and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

**1880's** The beginnings of the Holiness Movement.

**1895** The Fundamentalists affirm the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Jesus, his Virgin Birth, substitutionary atonement, physical resurrection and imminent return.

# 9

## THE HOLY GHOST AND FIRE!

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

### *The Sound of a Rushing Mighty Wind!*\_\_\_\_\_

At a time when it seemed that the modern world was about to finally put to rest the “myths” and “superstitions” of primitive Christianity, God, who seems to like working in unexpected ways and places, began to move again. The New Testament's supernatural power which the liberals viewed as a myth and the Dispensationalists believed had ceased in the Church, would return. Unlike the previous times of renewal or revival, this period would leave a permanent mark regarding the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Just as the early impulses for reformation in Europe were forced underground in the fifteenth century, but came to full bloom in the sixteenth, the seeds of what would come in the twentieth century were sown in the preceding one. As the technology of the movable type printing press greatly aided the Reformation in Luther's time, the new technologies in transportation and communication in the twentieth century would help establish this movement. This return to an element of Christianity found in the book of Acts would eventually become a worldwide phenomenon.

The same American love of religious freedom that allowed for cults and aberrations in religion would also provide an open environment for the next major transformation of the Christian

world. It should be noted that while many historians of Christian history in the mid-to-late twentieth century gave some space to this chapter, recent observers are forced to more reflection on it. Why? Because the Pentecostal/Charismatic community of Christians has become the fastest growing category and second only to Catholicism numerically around the world.

Few people from the outside could have foreseen this in the beginning years of the century.

Already in the Holiness Movement people were looking for additional experiences after conversion to deepen their faith and personal fellowship with God. They believed that after conversion to Christ a “second blessing” would further purify the believer from the tendency to sin. Some identified it as “sanctification,” others as the “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” and others as “Christian perfection.” This was the backdrop for the story we are about to hear in which two of the main characters were ministers Charles Parham, of Iowa, and Louisiana born, William Seymour.

After having received what he believed was a divine healing, Charles Parham committed himself to learn whatever he could, from whomever he could about divine healing and the holiness movement. Eventually he established the offering-based Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, where he and his students determined to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues as in Acts, chapter two. On December 31, 1900, they planned to bring in the New Year in what is known as a “watch night service.”

The result of their prayer meeting was that Agnes Ozman would be the first to experience what they had been seeking for, a definite experience from God. What would set apart this early New Years Day event from previous “baptisms in the Holy Ghost” like those described in the past, would be the way which Parham and the others understood it. From their studies in Acts they concluded that the phenomena of “speaking in other tongues” was the primary proof that one had in fact experienced this baptism in the Spirit. This would become the beginning of Pentecostalism, from the passage in Acts 2:1-4:

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a

sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

(Note: In Acts 2, the other tongues were known human languages that were previously unknown by the disciples. Elsewhere in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, “speaking mysteries” in “unknown tongues” was discussed. He mentioned both – the “tongues of men, and of angels” in I Corinthians 13:1).

About forty others subsequently spoke in tongues, but Agnes was so moved that she could not speak English for three days. Later someone understood her speaking in Bohemian. Earlier she had spoken what many thought was Chinese, but it could not be confirmed. More importantly, she and the others felt a strong sense of the presence of the Lord. She later stated:

“I had the added joy and glory my heart longed for, and a depth of the presence of the Lord within that I had never known before. It was as if rivers of living water were proceeding from my innermost being.”

Parham, who had already experienced justification and sanctification in the Methodist Church, now believed that this was a third stage in the process from which one received the power to witness for Christ in spiritual gifts, miracles and healings. (Acts 1:8) When the news media caught wind of this event, their negative reports in several papers around the country only encouraged the various holiness groups who were already expecting a greater work of God in the Church. After about four years of preaching about this new move in churches around Kansas and Missouri, he opened another Bible school in Houston, Texas. One of his students there would be a one-eyed preacher by the name of William Seymour.

### *On to Azusa St....*

William Seymour, whose parents were freed slaves in Louisiana, had from an early age been drawn to studying the Bible. At age twenty-five, he relocated to Indianapolis where he attended the



interracial Methodist Episcopal Church. A few years later in Cincinnati, he became involved with what would become the Church of God Reformation Movement. Here he was deeply influenced by the holiness movement, divine healing, the call to end denominationalism and to prepare for the Last Days.

During his travels as an evangelist, he was asked to take over for an African-American pastor, Mrs. Lucy Farrow, while she was away from her Church in Houston, Texas. Coincidentally, she had been in the home of Charles Parham, where she had received the Baptism in the Spirit, and had spoken in tongues. Upon her return to Houston, Seymour was informed about Parham and was eager to attend his Bible school when it was set up in Houston.

Because of the segregation laws in the South at that time, Seymour had to sit outside of the white classroom to hear Parham's teachings. He studied there for several months and agreed with the new Pentecostal teachings, but had not yet received the experience himself. That, however, did not stop him from preaching to others. One of his first opportunities would be at a new holiness Church in Los Angeles. He was asked to pastor there after meeting one of its members in Houston. Mrs. Neely Terry was one of the many who received the Pentecostal experience while in Houston, and being impressed with Henry Seymour, recommended him for the job.

Julia Hutchinson had recently been asked to leave the Baptist Church she had been attending because of her enthusiasm for teaching on the second work of grace, sanctification, which she believed to be the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Her new congregation on Santa Fe Street, now associated with the Church of the Nazarene, must have felt the need for a male pastor, so Elder Seymour was brought in. However, his insistence that sanctification was not the baptism, and that tongues was the only proof of the baptism in the Holy Ghost did not sit well with her.

Upon returning to preach again at the church, he found the doors padlocked. Undaunted, Seymour continued to teach in the home of an Irish family who afforded him hospitality. When more space was needed, they moved the meeting to 214 North Bonnie Brae Street. This was the home of Richard and Ruth Asberry, relatives of Neely Terry who were Baptists. Henry Seymour by all accounts was a very humble man, and this might explain why those of different races and persuasions often befriended him.

By now, reports were coming in from other parts of the world where great outpourings of the Holy Spirit were being accompanied by many signs, wonders and miracles like speaking in tongues. American Pentecostal historians, influenced by Frank Bartleman's writings, tend to think that the Azusa Street revival under Seymour was the beginning and source of the revival. The first significant revival however, was in Wales, under Evan Roberts in 1904, where 30,000 conversions were reported. We have already mentioned the Irvingites in London around 1831. Reports of tongues speaking and prophesying also came out of D.L. Moody's Y.M.C.A. meetings in 1875. None of these revivals made a "doctrine" out of it like Parham and Seymour did, and that might have been a good thing at the time.

In any event, the outpouring Seymour and those who gathered with him from all areas and backgrounds finally came on April 9, 1906. First, Owen Lee, the Irishman who earlier hosted Seymour received the baptism while Seymour laid hands on him and prayed. This started a chain reaction as Seymour and seven others "fell out" under the power of God, speaking with tongues. Later a young girl who had never been taught to play the piano, began to play beautifully and sang in what the others believed to be Hebrew.

This kind of excitement went on continuously for about three days. The crowds grew to the point that the front porch collapsed into the front yard. The meeting had to be moved again to an abandoned building on Azusa Street, where everyone pitched in and cleaned up. By now the media was sending out more negative reports, which only drew more people out to the mission. Seekers from all over the country and beyond came out to experience for themselves first hand what was being understood as the "latter rain" spoken of by the prophet Joel. (Joel 2:23)

Not all were positive about the revival, including Charles Parham. He was aghast at the lack of order, the many manifestations other than tongues, and especially the mixing of blacks and whites in this fashion. For a period of three years, the color line had disappeared between races, there was freedom in ministry between men and women, and denominational lines were blurred as well. In time, new denominations would be formed, with both doctrinal and racial lines established. But the experiences the people had in that short revival would live on in testimonies, books, stories, and in the churches that embraced the Pentecostal experience.

In just a few years, Pentecostalism had spread to Britain, Scandinavia, Central Europe, India, China, Central Africa, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Australia. The natural tendency to organize, which both Parham and Seymour resisted, led to the formation of several major denominations. The largest is the Assemblies of God, with headquarters in Springfield, Missouri, and presently over three million members worldwide.

### ***Love Not the World...***\_\_\_\_\_

Christianity in America was influenced very early on by the Puritans and Separationists, who leaned towards strict standards of living. It was of course easy to see the inherent problems of undisciplined living, especially when forging civilization out of a wilderness. The moral standards found in the Bible also would provide some stability in communities where governmental order had not yet been established. However, the problem of legalism is difficult to avoid when issues that are not clearly spelled out in the Bible become rules for the normal Christian life. Paul addressed this in Romans chapter fourteen, where he encouraged patience and toleration in this area. The New Testament was not, however weak in its condemnation of those things that *are* clearly spelled out.

In times of renewal and revival, particularly in the Holiness and Pentecostal movements, the strong language of the Bible was used against the popular culture of that day to convince people of their need for salvation. Card playing, jewelry, facial makeup, movie theatres, gambling and other forms of entertainment were added to the taboos of drunkenness, sexual immorality, lying, cheating etc. that were on the standard list. The rapidly changing times were so threatening to established standards that the logical answer to many was a return to the austerity of the earlier times.

The tension of being in the world while not of it, a light to the world but not at home in it has existed in the Church from the beginning. Some would emphasize our work in this world, while others the world to come. The emphasis of eternity in heaven would increase as the optimism of a better world through the new scientific discoveries began to decrease. For about one hundred years, Europe had relative peace while each nation was preoccupied with the discovery and colonization of the Americas, Africa and Asia. This ended with the outbreak of World War I, which clearly demonstrated

how the newer technologies could be used to bring even greater devastation and bloodshed than the world had ever seen before. The idealism of the Enlightenment was subsequently shattered. America, where the impact of the war was not as fully felt, would not be similarly affected until the stock market crash of 1929, which resulted in the unemployment of one fourth of the labor force.

Popular preachers like the former professional baseball player, Billy Sunday, would involve themselves in social issues of the day, as was common with revivalists and pastors going back to the first Great Awakening. Being one of the first of the tent revivalist and traveling Gospel shows, his meetings drew huge crowds and were as entertaining as they were convicting. Like Aimee Semple-McPherson, who established the Four Square Gospel Pentecostal denomination, and was a radio star in her own right, he fascinated the country with his high profile showmanship.

One of the issues he championed was the Prohibition of alcohol sales. Here was one issue both the liberal and conservative Christians could agree on, which unfortunately backfired. A substance that had always been a source of trouble was more available than ever before with modern production capabilities. Now the difficulty of banning something that had long been legal would soon be realized. Bootlegged whiskey and the illegal selling of alcohol became a new industry. Today we look back on this period as “The Roaring Twenties,” in which organized crime in the U.S. grew in unprecedented power.

Another major disappointment for conservatives attempting to impact society would be the ban on teaching Evolution in the public schools. The state of Tennessee's law against Evolution would be challenged in the famous Scopes “Monkey” trial in 1925. The American Civil Liberties Union and some businessmen in Dayton, Tennessee saw this new law as an opportunity for a publicity stunt. They found in John Scopes a teacher who was willing to violate the law so they could challenge it in court.

It became a major media event in which the people of Tennessee and the Fundamentalist Christians who opposed Darwin's theory of Evolution were portrayed as ignorant, religious fanatics. The prosecuting attorney, William Jennings Bryan was a popular and respected Christian statesman at the time, but was probably not the best man for the job. When the defense attorney Clarence Darrow

called him to the witness stand as a Biblical expert, his defense of his faith in Biblical inerrancy was unconvincing.

Bryan died in his sleep just five days after the trial at age 65. He won the case in court, but lost in the court of public opinion. Fundamentalism would continue to be a force in Christianity, but not so much in American politics until later in the twentieth century, when Jerry Falwell would lead the “Moral Majority.” During this period, the concept of separation between Church and State took on connotations the Founding Fathers of America could not have imagined. The banning of teacher-led prayer in the public schools, and the legalization of abortion by the Supreme Court prompted a resurgence of Christian involvement in politics. This block of voters can no longer be overlooked by today's politicians.

### *In the Sweet Bye and Bye*

When the world seemed to be making progress in science, technology, philosophy, and self-government, many Christians saw history as the continuing advancement of the Kingdom of God, and they could find evidence in the Scriptures for this understanding. World War I, the Great Depression, the Bolshevik Revolution leading to the Communist takeover in Russia and the rise of Hitler in Germany brought an increasing sense of foreboding in the world. The dominant expectation of many Evangelical Christians would now be the end of the world as portrayed in the Olivet Discourse by Jesus, and in the book of Revelation. World War II would help to confirm the belief that things were only going to get worse, and the release of atomic bombs over Japan gave evidence that a more literal interpretation of Revelation could even be plausible.

Heaven had always been a dominant theme in preaching. Salvation by grace through faith was important in Luther's day because peace with God and heaven in the next life required it. For many, any attempt to better life on earth would now be like “polishing the brass on a sinking ship.” The best thing we could do now would be to get as many into the lifeboats as we can. The means for getting people in the figurative lifeboat is of course the Gospel. The message became increasingly simple until it developed into what some call “easy believism,” where a simple confession of faith, or the right words spoken would secure one's eternal destiny.

The alter call, which was effectively used in revivalism would now become a feature of nearly every Evangelical Sunday or midweek church service. The call to serve the community, unless for the sole purpose of winning souls would diminish. The separation of Church and State would now be taken by some to mean that Christians should never be involved in politics. This group would criticize proponents of the "Social Gospel" and their attempts to "legislate morality." The divide between the liberal Christians, who saw the planet as worth saving, and the conservatives, who sought mainly for the salvation of souls, increased.

The "Pre-tribulation Rapture" which was espoused by John Darby and popularized in C.I. Scofield's 1909 reference Bible, was more appealing than ever. The Second Coming of Christ, which was a common theme of evangelistic preaching for over a century, appeared even closer than before. Baptist, Holiness, Pentecostal and Nazarene churches all felt that the end of the age was upon us. This belief was intensified all the more in 1948 when Israel became an independent state. That event more than any other stimulated interest in Biblical prophecy concerning the end-times. This was one Biblical prophecy that was not just figuratively or "spiritually" fulfilled!

### *The Mystery of Iniquity*

Another chapter in the story of the Church as being "in the world, but not of it," must be inserted here. Paul, Luther, Wesley and others all knew the dangers of misunderstanding the gospel of the grace of God. The name of this mistake is known as *antinomianism*. This word combines the Greek word "anti," or "against," with "nomos," or "law," to mean "against laws or rules of conduct." In the New Testament an equivalent Greek word has been translated as "iniquity," "lawlessness," "unrighteousness," and is always in contrast to that which pleases God. Probably the best New Testament description is found where Jude wrote of certain men who had turned the grace of God into a license for immorality. (Jude 1:4) They apparently reasoned that God's grace was such that a person is not only forgiven of transgressions, but also free to continue in them.

This is the extreme opposite of legalism. Since in Christ we are saved by grace, some people believe that there is no standard for living other than our own subjective impressions of what *we* believe the Holy Spirit is directing. To some this could appear to be mostly a

doctrinal controversy, but to others it offers an opportunity for serious behavioral errors and the resulting consequences. (Galatians 6:7-8). This tendency is easily encouraged in the Dispensationalist's sharp dividing line between the Old Covenant and the New. There, even the teachings of Jesus are seen as only for the Old Testament Jews, which some believe shall only and finally be in force in the future millennium.

### ***Law verses Grace – Again!***

This only fuels the legalist, who rightfully reacts to the lack of true fruit in the lives of some professing Christians. A mighty champion of legalism was found in Herbert W. Armstrong and his Radio Church of God, the seeds of which began airing in 1934. Armstrong's dynamic, powerfully convincing preaching led to the formation of the World Wide Church of God in 1968 under His headship. Among his heretical teachings was *British Israel*, which states that Great Britain, the United States and several European countries comprise the ten lost tribes of Israel. From there he established that these nations are still under the Law of Moses, with the Saturday Sabbath, tithing and dietary laws, and that they are central in Biblical prophecy. He also rejected the doctrine of the Trinity and traditional church doctrines concerning the last judgment.

This story would end in an event that is unprecedented in church history. After Armstrong's death in 1986, his successor, Joseph W. Tkach, along with his son and others began to question his predictions concerning the Last Days. Over time they realized that there was no factual evidence behind his foundational teaching of British Israel, and the house of cards began to fall. When Tkach announced that the New Covenant had come, and that salvation was by grace alone through faith in Christ, about one half of the 100,000 members remained loyal to Armstrong's message and broke off into splinter groups. This amounted to a huge financial loss that required the selling of huge portions of the organization's holdings.

However, this change has resulted in thousands of New Covenant Christians who have been welcomed into the Evangelical fold. They now enjoy the true grace of God in Christ and affirm the major tenets of the historic Christian faith. To indicate this new situation the name of the organization in the U.S. was changed in 2009 to Grace Communion International.

## *Times of Refreshing*

### *From the Presence of the Lord* \_\_\_\_\_

1948 and the years following would become highly significant for Christianity. The Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in a cave in Israel, included some of the oldest surviving copies of the Old Testament of the Bible. They also revealed many historical facts about Israel before and during the time of Christ. That year also saw the beginnings of a new surge of evangelistic preachers who would become institutions in America and famous around the world. Billy Graham for many decades would hold great “Crusades for Christ” and powerfully convince millions to surrender to Christ, while Oral Roberts would promote salvation, faith healing and prosperity in the Pentecostal tradition. Both began in large circus tents and advanced to larger venues over time. Numerous others heard the evangelistic call and have kept the “traveling salvation show” going to this day.

The Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination that some believed was due for a fresh outpouring, had to deal with what came to be called the “New Order of the Latter Rain.” This stirring of the Spirit that was welcomed by many started in Saskatchewan, spreading across Canada, the United States and to several other countries. It was short-lived, however, in part due to its flat out rejection by the leaders of the Assemblies of God. In some ways it was a reaction to denominational systems in its focus on the New Testament pattern of leadership. The teachers in this movement emphasized how Christ “gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13 NASB).

They concluded that not only were the spiritual gifts of the New Testament still valid today, but also the ministries of apostles and prophets as well. With the restoration of these ministries, the Church of Jesus Christ would come to full maturity and do the “greater works” which Jesus foretold. The result would be a great end-time gathering of souls into the Church, the Body of Christ. Instead of the great apostasy that Fundamentalists predicted, the age would end in a more positive, victorious note ushering in Christ's Millennial Reign.



This was a time in which the Dispensational view of eschatology was so well established in Pentecostal and Evangelical circles, that to disagree with it was tantamount to heresy. For that reason, many were forced out of their churches. Some formed new works, which would pass on the more positive aspects of the movement to the next generation, while others became “Lone Rangers” who proceeded further out into questionable areas of doctrine.

Also in 1948 the World Council of Churches convened in Amsterdam, Holland. Of the one hundred and forty-seven, many Protestant churches were represented, including Anglicans, Baptists, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodists, Pentecostals and Independents. Most Orthodox participated but the Roman Catholics at the time were unwilling to recognize the legitimacy of the others. A more encouraging note would arise in 1962, when the Second Vatican Council would accept Protestants as “separated brethren,” and revoke the excommunication of the Eastern Orthodox in the Great Schism of 1054. While many conservatives doubted the value of these events, the stage was being set for another outpouring of the Holy Spirit which would cross denominational lines, where Christianity had established itself in every major country in the world excepting Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Tibet.

### ***“I Will Pour Out My Spirit Upon All Flesh”*** ***God: 800 B.C.***

Demos Shakarian was the grandson of Armenian immigrants who lived in Los Angeles around the time of the Azuza Street revival. His father started the family dairy farm business, which grew to become the largest in the world at the time. Using his resources, he teamed up with Evangelist Oral Roberts to form the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International in 1951. He was able to attract businessmen to his gatherings, dinners, and breakfasts to hear testimonies of faith from other businessmen. His vision was to see people from every country in the world worshipping and praising God. It was only natural that he would want to see them “filled with the Spirit of God” as he and others had been.

Their approach was very different from traditional Pentecostals in that people were not challenged to become Pentecostals. Most stayed with their own denominational backgrounds and spread the “Full Gospel” of the baptism in the Spirit there. By the early sixties,

seventies and eighties it was an international phenomenon, connecting people from about every major denomination by this common experience of being filled, or baptized in the Holy Spirit as distinct from personal salvation.

Meanwhile people in Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian and Reformed churches were also coming into what was now designated by other leaders in the movement as the Charismatic Renewal. By distancing themselves slightly from Pentecostals, a certain respectability was maintained. The Pentecostals could not easily shake the old image of sawdust-floored tent revivals and the “holy rollers” of the early days. At the same time, some of the Charismatics developed a stigma of their own as being naive and “flakey.” Nevertheless, the idea that the Christian life was to be characterized as joyful, enthusiastic, lively, and victorious could not be erased from the collective consciousness. Many of the churches that did not embrace the charismatic gifts did eventually open up to the new worship and praise music that grew out of the Charismatic experience.

### ***“I Have a Dream”***

The 1960's in America were times of dramatic change with the assassination of President Kennedy, the Vietnam War and the protest movements it provoked. The Social Gospel now would re-emerge with its most legitimate cause and most powerful representative yet. Martin Luther King Jr. was a Baptist minister who was influenced by the non-violent resistance of Mahatma Gandhi, a respected leader in India's struggle for independence from Great Britain. The issue of racial prejudice against blacks and other minorities was forced to the forefront by King in his organized sit-ins and peace marches, which culminated in the historic “March on Washington” and his stirring, memorable speech, “I Have a Dream,” in 1963. While racial prejudice has yet to be fully eliminated, the movement that he and others led succeeded in transforming the consciences of many. Since then, much progress has been made towards racial equality in America.

While older assumptions concerning race and war were being challenged, traditional values regarding marriage and sex also came under fire. The “British Invasion” was a fresh brand of rock and roll music from England that stimulated significant musical innovation

while encouraging freedom of expression in every other area. The sexual revolution was already underway with the development of birth control and the use of penicillin to cure sexually transmitted diseases. The new drug culture and the protests against the Vietnam War blended all these elements into a “drop out” mentality which characterized the “hippie” movement. From this non-conformist group came a new style of Christians who became known as the “Jesus People.”

The Hippie commune was for some a transitional stage towards the kind of communal life seen in the early days of the Jerusalem Church in Acts. The Jesus People, being disenchanted with both the Hippies and the blandness of the organized churches they had observed, sought, like many non-conformist movements before them, a return to the simplistic life of the Early Church. This included charismatic signs and miracles, and the intense expectation of the Lord's return for His Church. Beginning on the West coast of the United States, various flavors of the Jesus Movement sprung up in Nashville, Tennessee; Greenville, South Carolina; Costa Mesa, California and in the United Kingdom as well.

The well-known Calvary Chapel, Hope Chapel, and the Vineyard churches of today all trace their roots back to the Jesus People. Contemporary Christian Music, which is a major player in the music business today and the Charismatic praise and worship music mentioned earlier both trace back to the music of these groups. The casual dress that is common in many churches today could also be blamed in part on the Jesus People and the culture of that movement. The de-emphasis on “proper” church appearance, including priestly robes, pulpits, buildings and stained glass, and the sense of mutuality among members has also left its mark on many. Several House Church movements have been birthed from both the Jesus Movement and the Charismatic Movement. Those men, women and young people who tasted genuine fellowship and the freedom to exercise their spiritual gifts found most traditional church services to be stifling.

The one-on-one fellowship in closer relationships that Christians have often experienced in new movements and revivals is now seen to be a vital element of a healthy church life. For this reason, many larger churches have embraced the concept of “cell church,” or simply “small groups.” The largest church in the world in Seoul, Korea, is a cell church, with 800,000 members. The underground

church in China is a huge mass of house churches. Thousands of House Churches are reported to exist in Vietnam, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Sri Lanka, and Latin America. Many are content to continue meeting in homes with no plans for a traditional church building, while others hope to grow towards meeting in one.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is beginning to explode in so-called “third world countries” while North America and Europe move into the Post-Modern and Post-Christian Eras. Even Russia, where for 70 years the Communists determined to eradicate all forms of religion, is seeing renewal. The Gospel of Jesus Christ could never be confined to one group or culture. It has found its way into every culture, system of government, economy, and lifestyle. It has found its place everywhere, all the while resisting conformity and demonstrating its life-transforming power.

**1904-05** The Welsh Revival with Evan Roberts

**1906** The Azusa Street Revivals begin under William Seymour. The beginning of Pentecostalism.

**1914-18** The First World War

**1917** The spread of atheistic communism begins, eventually overtaking Russia, China, Cuba and many smaller countries.

**1925** Billy Sunday preaches salvation and entertains large crowds in America.

Scopes “Monkey” trial pits Fundamentalist Christianity against the teaching of Evolution in the public schools.

**1929** The stock market crash in New York initiates the Great Depression.

**1939-45** World War II involves most major nations. Hitler murders millions of Jews. It ends with the explosion of the Atom bomb on Japan.

**1948** Oldest known copies of the Bible are discovered near the Dead Sea in Israel.

Israel becomes a state.

Billy Graham's Evangelistic Crusades for Christ.

World Council of Churches formed.

“The New Order of the Latter Rain” impacts Pentecostal Churches.

**1962** Second Vatican Council accepts Protestants as “separated brethren” and revokes the 1054

excommunication of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

**1962** Baptist preacher Martin Luther King, Jr. receives the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in the civil rights movement.

**1968** Herbert W. Armstrong forms the World Wide Church of God, denying the Trinity and teaching the Old Covenant. By the end of the century, the denomination reorganized under the New Covenant in Christ and was accepted into mainstream Evangelicalism.

**1970's and 80's** The Charismatic Movement brought the Pentecostal experience into most major denominations around the world.

**1990's** The "Third Wave" of the Pentecostal/Charismatic revival ushers in the era of health and prosperity teachings, mega churches and house churches around the world.

# 10

## THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

### *The Future of the Church* \_\_\_\_\_

By the beginning of the century Christians in the West own their own radio and television networks, and the Internet is carrying every conceivable version of Christianity to the ends of the earth. Huge mega churches are established in almost every major city that could support a Walmart store. At the same time, the word “spirituality” has become preferred over Biblical faith in many homes, and the Gospel is regularly promoted as primarily a means to material health and wealth.

In the midst of the rapidly changing times, the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches with their enduring traditions continue to be a source of stability and comfort for many. Some of their slow and gradual changes were absolutely necessary. However, unlike most liberal Protestant churches, these ancient churches are more resistant to the influence of secular culture. The traditional Protestant values dating back to the Reformers are also seeing a resurgence. Again, modern attacks on the reliability of the Scriptures have forced a re-examination of the roots of Christianity and a rediscovery of the power found in God’s written Word.

The threat of a Russian invasion of Israel as predicted by many end-time paperback writers has dwindled, but the events of September 11, 2001 have called attention to an even greater threat. Islam has recently become the greatest rival of the Christian faith since the first century of its development. The political tensions between the nations that are populated by Christians and those by Moslems make it extremely difficult for communicating the message of Christ's love to anyone identifying with Islam. And the extremists want to keep it that way.

Nevertheless, those who believe in the Christ of the Bible believe Him to be the all-powerful, Creator God, for whom nothing is impossible. But the question arises: What will He do next? Will He soon bring down seven years of Great Tribulation, and after that establish His reign in the earth? Or will he continue in the coming decades to send His messengers to the slums, the penthouses, the huts, the palaces, the nightclubs, the jungles, the living rooms of people around the world, testifying of His purpose for their lives?

Maybe the question should be; what will *we* who believe do next? Will we take seriously the sacrifices that have been made on our behalf for our salvation by Christ and the millions of His faithful followers? Will we avail ourselves to Him more fervently and consistently to fulfill His purpose for our lives? Will we make His challenge to love one another as He loved us a priority over the minor issues that divide us? Or will we calmly accept things as they are and go our own way?

If the writing of this brief overview of church history accomplishes anything at all, I pray through it that we might all be challenged to become a part of His Story.

Amen.



## Epilog

Those of you who stayed with me from the first chapter until now, have I hope, at least a taste of the rewards that the learning of our heritage can bring. This whirlwind tour of church history could be just the beginning of your further explorations into the work of God that began in Genesis, and continues unto this day.

But what have you come away with from your time spent in this book? Among other things that God might have in mind, I hope you can begin to look at your brothers and sisters in Christ who are from different backgrounds in a new light. Even if we still disagree on various points, perhaps we can learn from the others point of view. Though the things that divide us may often seem trivial from one vantage point, many are important issues that need to be worked out among us. While some of them might seem impossible to reconcile in our current state, the desire should be there just the same. Perhaps we can at least admit that our understanding of one another is “in part,” as Paul would put it, and give each other the space to be different in areas that are not fully clear to all.

Until then, we will eagerly anticipate the time when the Church of Jesus Christ comes to full maturity in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, and when He clears away all the confusion at His appearing! Hopefully, for now we have received both some inspiration and insight from those who have gone before us, prompting us to find our place in His glorious plan and to energetically become a part in it.

If this becomes the result, the time and effort put into this book will have been more than worth it.

Dan Beaty,

October, 2011

## Helpful Resources:

*A History of the Christian Church*, Williston Walker

A scholarly work filled with a wealth of important facts and details of church history.

*History of the Christian Church*, 8 Volumes, Philip Schaff

The standard reference work, covering up to and including the Reformation.

*The Story of Christianity*, Volumes 1 & 2, Justo L. Gonzalez

A very thorough and insightful coverage of church history up to the present time.

*Christianity Through the Centuries, A History of the Christian Church*, Earle E. Cairnes

This book contains many helpful diagrams and summaries.

*Church History in Plain Language*, Bruce L. Shelley

A much thicker book than this one, it contains a wealth of details while still keeping it an easier read of this huge subject.

*Going To Church In The First Century*, Robert Banks

An interesting and inspiring depiction of what it might have been like to participate in an early church meeting.

*Christian Thought Revisited, Three Types of Theology*, Justo L. Gonzalez

A look at the development of Christian thought in the early centuries.

*The Torch of the Testimony*, John W. Kennedy

An overview of church history with a focus on those attempting to be faithful to New Testament church patterns and principles.

*The Pilgrim Church*, E. H. Broadbent

Similar emphasis as *The Torch of the Testimony*. Written from the perspective of the Plymouth Brethren.

*Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, John Foxe

“A history of the lives, sufferings, and triumphant deaths of the early Christian and Protestant Martyrs.”

*Root Out of a Dry Ground, A History of the Church*, Charles P. Schmitt

A synopsis of the last two thousand years with the perspective that a progressive restoration has followed an earlier period of decline.

*Signs of the Spirit*, Howard A. Snyder

An interesting study of renewal movements, including the Montanists, the Pietists, the Moravians and the Methodists.

*Coming Again, But When?* Jerry Newcombe

A fair-minded treatment of the main variations on the Second Coming of Christ and the Millenium.

*An Eyewitness Remembers the Century of the Holy Spirit*, Vinson Synan.

An insider's history of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements

A useful Internet resource is the Christian Classics Ethereal Library at: [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)

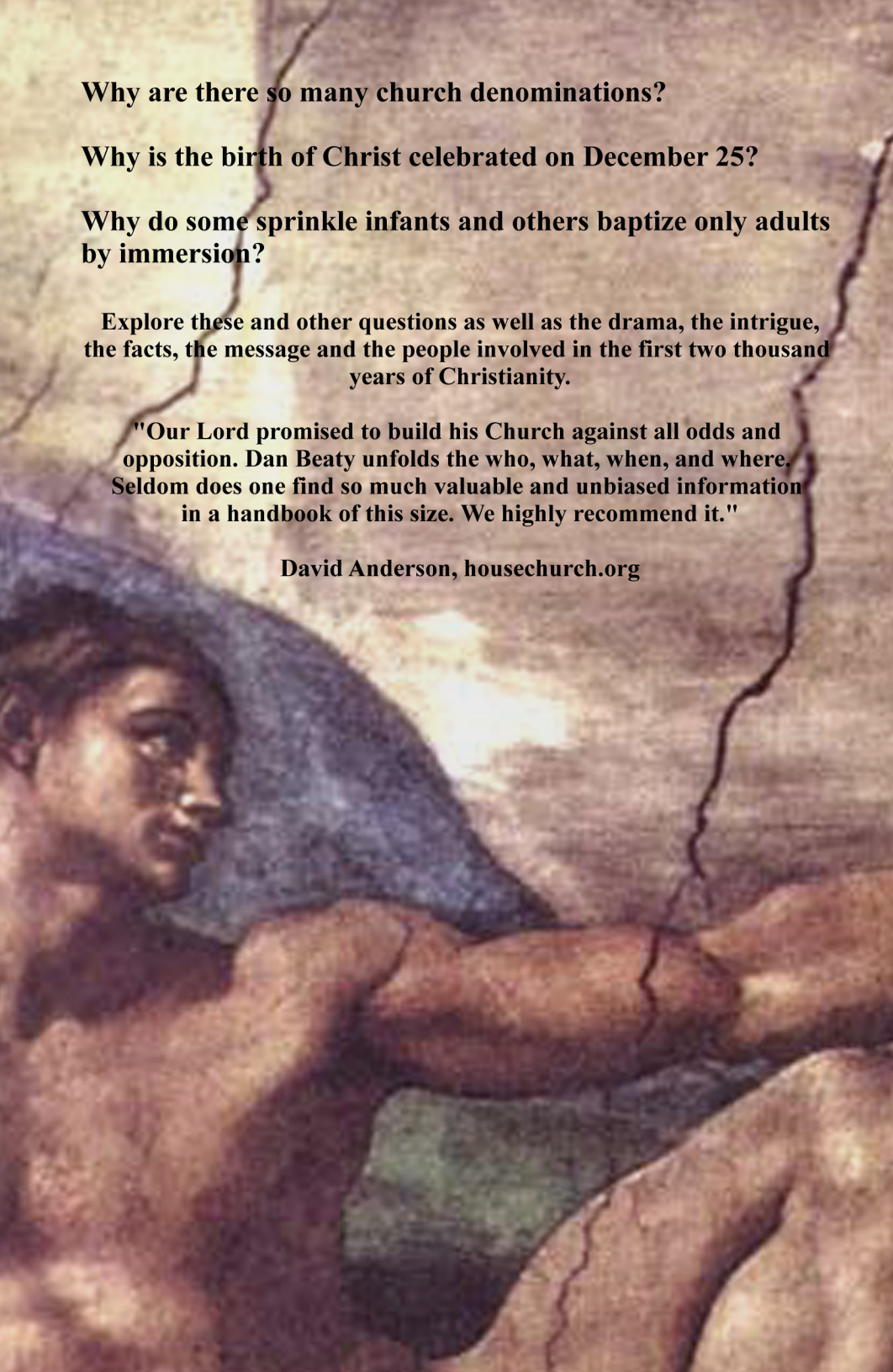
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan Beaty is a small business owner in Columbus, Ohio, who has been teaching from the Bible in homes and churches for over 35 years. His interest in church history began in the early seventies, and has been fed over the years by the resources mentioned in the resource list as well as by numerous trips to the local library.

For more information and literature, go to:

**[www.livingtruth.com](http://www.livingtruth.com)**





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**Why is the birth of Christ celebrated on December 25?**

**Why do some sprinkle infants and others baptize only adults by immersion?**

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**"Our Lord promised to build his Church against all odds and opposition. Dan Beatty unfolds the who, what, when, and where. Seldom does one find so much valuable and unbiased information in a handbook of this size. We highly recommend it."**

**David Anderson, [housechurch.org](http://housechurch.org)**