

God and Time

Overview

This issue addresses the importance and nature of exploring church history and provides a brief overview of the history of the western church. We will initially focus on the benefits of studying church history and then examine the nature of history and God's role in it. We will also provide a framework for further study.

In this issue we will explore several issues, including:

- Why should we study church history? Can we expect to learn anything from it that we can apply in our lives?
- How do we recognize God's hand in the seemingly chaotic history of the church? With a myriad of dates, countries, rulers, and church movements, can we identify themes and pivotal events as we examine the history of God's people?
- Have the lessons of time given us a better understanding of God and his will than our spiritual forerunners had?
- What are the major eras and events of church history?

Step 1: Grasp the Issue

Sound Bites

“Like fog creeping into a valley, years of history blur and distort our ability to hear and respond to Christ’s pure, simple call.”

“Not to know what took place before you were born is to remain forever a child.”

– Cicero

“History is more or less bunk. It’s tradition. We don’t want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth [anything] is the history we make today.”

– Henry Ford

“History is a memorial of the mercies of God, so that posterity may know them, remember them, and hymn his praises.” – Perry Miller

“The kind of events that once took place will by reason of human nature take place again.” – Thucydides

“History is but a pack of tricks we play on the dead.” – Voltaire

“Because of the providence of God, no Christian can ever afford to be, or be justified in being, pessimistic with respect of the future of the church. . . . As God steered the course of Noah’s ark in the midst of the deluge so His invisible hand remains at the helm of the church.” – R. C. Sproul

“Who controls the society’s memory, controls its will.” – Philip Hiltz

“Christianity is essentially a historical religion. God reveals himself not in doctrinal statements, nor in theoretical studies, but in action, in the outworking of a story of relationships.” – John Briggs

Case Studies

During a European history class, you find yourself distinctly uncomfortable with certain aspects of the Church’s history. You wince as you read of church leaders manipulating others in order to acquire wealth and power in the name of God. The stories

of the Inquisition and the Crusades seem completely at odds with the spirit and example of Christ.

As you talk about the issue that evening with one of your friends, she summarizes the problem, “The church makes me want to flee God, not draw near to him. If this is God’s church, why does it do such bad things? What does it say about him? If he is grace and love, then why is the church’s history one of prejudice, abuse, hate and repression?”

What do you say? Can we distinguish between God’s activity in history and the activity of the church? If so, how?

When you tell your spouse that you would like to enroll in a study on Church History, the response is, “I am so busy I can hardly keep up with the basics. I just keep going—getting the kids to all their appointments, trying to pay the bills and keep everyone in my life happy. It’s hard enough to find a little bit of time to read my Bible, pray and go to church. How do you expect me to learn or care about ancient history? It may be nice, but it sure isn’t essential. In fact, I’m not even sure it’s helpful.”

With your enthusiasm somewhat bruised, you raise the issue with your best friend, hoping to receive a more encouraging response. He says, “I just want to love Jesus. Why should I care about what old men did centuries ago? Won’t that just confuse me?”

How would you respond? What benefits can you expect from studying church history? Do you think it can impact your spiritual walk? If so, how?

What are some questions we need to explore as we seek to gain a better understanding of this issue?

Step 2: Study the Scriptures

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

As Paul deals with some of the troubles in the church at Corinth, he begins to relate key events in Israel's history.

- Why does Paul say these things had occurred in Israel's history (vv. 6, 11)?
- Based on biblical revelation, Paul draws lessons from biblical history. To what extent can we do the same with post-biblical church history?

Exodus 3:13-15

God came to Moses to appoint him as the deliverer of his people, the Hebrews, after captivity in Egypt for the last 400 years. Moses fearfully asked God how his people would know him.

- How does God identify himself to the people of Israel?
- What does this suggest about the relationship of the Judeo-Christian faith to time?
- How is this different from other religions?

Genesis 50:19-20

The story of Joseph provides a unique perspective on providence, the hand of God that guides history. After Joseph had lived through shifts in fate fitting of a melodrama, he confronted his brothers who sold him into slavery.

- What insight does Joseph give into God's involvement with history?
- What "good" is God working for?

Step 3: Consult Other Sources

Our readings will try to help answer three main questions or problems with studying church history. Reading 1 answers the question, “What could I possibly learn that is important for me today?” Reading 2 poses one perspective on the question, “How can God really be in control of this mess?” Reading 3 and 4 provide assistance for the problem, “How do I keep track of the big picture?”

As you read try to answer these questions: How do you hope this study can help your spiritual walk? In what ways is God like a “chess master”? How does this metaphor help and how it is limited?

“Church History: What’s in it for You?” by Ethel Herr.

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Church History: What's in it for You?

by Ethel Herr

Without a warning the college student beside me blurted an unexpected challenge: “If our goal as Christians is to study to know Jesus Christ better, how can you spend so much time studying history?”

Maneuvering my car through heavy traffic, I scrambled for an instant answer to her question—one with a confident ring of authority that would befit my “superiority” of years and experience. “Help Lord!” I prayed. “What do I say now?”

Quietly, I heard God’s gentle rebuke: “Can you forget how precious I’ve become to you since you have been researching Church history? Think of the things the history books have taught you about walking with Me—examples, warnings, and insights. Remember your project journal filled with expressions of wonder and awe and worship—reflections on all you’ve learned?”

Confidence returned and the answer flowed: “Kathy, nothing else I have ever studied has so opened my eyes to the supremacy and beauty of Jesus Christ. History, for me, has been the great revealer of incarnate God.”

Later, as I mulled over the incidents of the day, I began thinking my way through Scripture. I discovered that God has always used history as a tool for revealing Himself. He knew that His people in each generation would lose their identity if they had no knowledge of His relationship with them in the past. So, in the Law, He gave the people of Israel specific instructions for teaching their children that He was the faithful God of Israel. They were to tell them the stories of the

Exodus and wilderness wanderings and to build monuments and celebrate rituals He designed to illustrate these historical events.

Later, He inspired His prophets with a perpetual call to repent, based on historical recall: “Thus saith the Lord . . . Look back at what I’ve done for you . . . Remember Me . . . Learn from your fathers’ errors. . . .” Jesus used history to identify Himself as their promised Messiah.

Finally, when the Apostle Paul addressed difficult contemporary problems in the Corinthian church, he grabbed these new believers by the hand and led them on a journey into their spiritual roots in Jewish history. In 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, he left for the Church illustrations of five ways that a study of the history of God’s people can equip us to deal with life’s challenges and stimulate personal growth.

Insight into Today

First, learning about the past helps us to understand the present (1 Cor. 10:1-10). “Now these things occurred as examples” (v. 6). It is much easier to detect evil in the actions of another person in another time and another place. Distance reduces emotional involvement and increases our objectivity.

Paul began with a remote time. He reminded the Corinthians of the sins of the Israelites: They set their hearts on evil things, they were idolaters, they committed sexual immorality, they tested the Lord, they grumbled (vv. 6–10). Then, lest the Corinthians feel smug about their superior righteousness, Paul warned them: Don’t you

set your hearts on evil things; don't *you* be idolaters; don't *you* commit sexual immorality; don't *you* test the Lord; don't *you* grumble.

If he were writing today to the Church of San Francisco or New York, he would probably draw further examples from apostolic Carthage, medieval Rome, Reformation Germany, colonial Boston. Then he would point the finger at our twentieth-century evils—misplaced priorities, materialism, relaxed morals, worry, insensitivity.

Looking back helps us to understand where today's trends come from. Each of us is the product of a long line of circumstances, human achievements, opinions, and movements. We have not only genetic roots but also intellectual, social, and spiritual roots that link us with every era of history. Likewise, twentieth century society and churches are rooted in the past. All modern philosophies, moral values, and thinking patterns are simply old trends sporting new colors, tailored to fit a new generation. When we study our roots, we open our minds and hearts, as C. S. Lewis once wrote, to the "clean sea-breezes of the centuries" and see ourselves and our times more clearly.

Help for Modern Problems

Second, Church history has a tremendous capacity to help us deal with problems (1 Cor. 10:11–13). "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us" (v. 11).

We often try to solve life's problems by applying a set of handy theological maxims: "Jesus saves and satisfies," "trust and obey," "let go and let God." While each of these maxims may be biblically sound and practical, if we apply them automatically to complex

issues they will keep us from coming to grips with the deep, underlying problems at the heart of our struggles.

By contrast, "History is truth teaching by example."¹ We learn to apply abstract truth more readily when we meet it in a story. The examples of Church history take our doctrinal statements, clothe them in flesh and blood and emotions, and give them purpose.

Defense against Complacency

Paul told the Corinthians that the examples of history would equip them with two indispensable tools for dealing with daily problems. First, it gave them a defense against becoming too self-satisfied. "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (v. 12).

Studying history jolted me out of complacency. I was startled to learn that Martin Luther, a man mightily used by God, was so far from perfect. I was shocked when I read the writings of well-respected Reformation church leaders who each accused the others of being atheists because they didn't see God in exactly the "right light." If these people had problems, how much more should I daily open my life to God's scrutiny?

Many a church has started with a pure fire of devotion to Jesus Christ and His honor, only to get sidetracked by some obscure issue and begin to make compromises. With the passing of generations, greater compromises follow. An eventual blurring of God's purposes has completely changed the courses of whole church groups.

When we look at these examples, we cannot face our church problems complacently. They show us that the full

¹ E. M. Bounds, *The Possibilities of Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 68.

impact of our actions may not be felt for many years. Studying the graphic illustrations of history helps us avoid disaster by determining the long-term effect of proposed quick-fix solutions.

Defense against Temptation

In addition, a study of history convinces me that I am not alone in my tendency to be tempted to sin. “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man” (1 Cor. 10:13). It also assures me that God is faithful to rescue all who cast themselves on His mercy and strength. “And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.”

Further, history models God-honoring solutions to problems: “He will also provide a way out.” The revival begun in Korea fifty years ago burns brightly yet. Many contemporary church leaders visit and study this spiritual phenomenon in search of clues for solving the problems of their own churches.

Hoping to gain some insight into the thinking patterns of the seventeenth-century European Calvinists, I picked up a little book entitled *Use and Non-Use of the Organ in Churches of the United Netherlands*. I did not expect to be edified, only informed. But this unconventional little book held a surprise for me. I discovered that the reasons for concern in the seventeenth century were very appropriate for today. The author boiled the whole controversy down to a consideration of the function of music in the church. Was it to provide a forum for display of talent? Or was it to offer worship to the God of the universe? Reading this seventeenth-century document has influenced my whole approach to the music ministry in my own church.

Finally, we can find stability to resist temptation in a base of reference that does not constantly fluctuate with the winds of change in a world hostile to God. History binds us together and relates us to the headship of Christ in His body. A modern historian writes,

Loss of history indicates always the decay of the people. A people without history is a people without character, without soul. They have then no Fatherland in which to be rooted and to which to be attached. . . . Both country and people become a spiritual wilderness, an empty room, where demons hover about, a refuge for anarchists and criminals.²

Our western cosmopolitan civilizations have grown up out of a vast, indistinguishable underground network of intertwined “Fatherland roots.” Today, more than at any other time, we need desperately the strong, binding, “Fatherland” influence of a solid sense of Christian roots as revealed in Scripture and exemplified in Church history.

A Guard against False Teaching

Third, studying Church history prepares us to discern false doctrine. The Corinthian believers were trying to determine what to do about meat offered to idols. In 1 Cor. 10:14, Paul put his finger on the heart of the problem that they perceived to be one of simple personal liberty. “Flee from idolatry,” he wrote. The Communion ordinance was an outward act of worship of the true and living God. A history lesson showed how Israel’s sacrifices, too, were acts of worship to the

² W. Aalders, “Laatste Woorden Willem I Waren van Grote Betekenisl,” trans. Ehtel Herr, *Reformatisch Dagblad*, 29 Mei, 1984, p. 7.

same God. By contrast, the “sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons. . . . You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too” (vv. 20–21).

The object of man’s worship has always been the core issue in false religions—in Corinth, in Ur, in Rome, in Miami. Often these come to us as such subtle imitations that we need special wisdom in discerning truth from error. We know that now, as in apostolic days, “many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1). If we do not know our Scriptures or our history, we may be swept away by these convincing counterfeits.

A Guide to Spiritual Growth

Fourth, studying Church history helps us grow in our relationship to the Lord and to one another (1 Cor. 10:23–11:1). “Everything is permissible,” the Corinthians had said. As long as they were not worshipping the demons, their consciences were clear, so now they thought they could do what they liked. Paul reminded them that the issue went deeper than their own consciences. “Not everything is beneficial,” he countered. “Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (vv. 23–24) and “the glory of God” (v. 31).

To support his argument, he pointed them to the historical example of Jesus Christ. “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). He brought them face to face with the One who emptied Himself of every right He possessed in order to redeem others who were weak and unable to help themselves.

Just as considering Christ’s example helped Paul to form godly attitudes and priorities, historical study has broadened my perspective and clarified many issues. It has shown them to me from more than the

circumscribed, narrow point of view I grew up with.

Until I married into the military, my religious life was loaded with fringe doctrines I had been taught to regard as marks of orthodoxy. When my husband and I began working in military chapel programs, we made an amazing discovery. Many of our co-workers were as orthodox as the Bible on basic issues of faith and salvation. Yet they disagreed with us on prophecy, definitions of worldliness, modes of baptism.

God provided a wise chaplain’s wife who guided me past the prejudicial blind spots of my heart to see the historical, extra-biblical origins of some of our confident orthodox positions. She challenged my viewpoints and taught me how to distinguish absolutes from negotiables. This freed me to dig deeper into history, where I was able to crystallize my thinking, stabilize my roots, and deepen my commitments to the things that count. Only in this historical approach to life have I been able to hope for some sort of mature balance in thinking, believing, and living. Lacking this balance I had spent a good many years falling off the log at one end or the other.

Headed for the Future

Finally, history prepares us for the future (1 Cor. 11:23–34). The Corinthians were so involved in their here and now that they lost sight of history’s examples. This was especially evident in the way they used their celebration of the Lord’s Table to promote petty, selfish goals. To counter this problem, Paul recited another history lesson, recalling the night Jesus instituted this sacred meal. He concluded with Jesus’ words for all future generations: “‘Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the

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Lord's death until he comes" (vv. 25–26). They had to look back to look forward. They had to do both before they could handle the present responsibly (vv. 27–34).

The Yestermorrow Christian

History will go on until God Himself steps in and brings it to a glorious culmination in eternity. Only when we know how the discussion began and how it has progressed can we learn to function as intelligent citizens of the future.

In 1 Corinthians 10–11, God is calling us to “move from yesterday to tomorrow—Yestermorrow.”³ Of all people, Christians should be most eager to gain a “yestermorrow” mentality, for our roots are deep and rich and our prospects indescribably exciting.

As “yestermorrow” Christians, we gain a balanced view of the extent and limits of our responsibilities. History frees us to see that we are not personally responsible to cure all the ills of our society—not even of our families. Some things we must tackle with confidence in the God of history. Others we must turn over to others, again trusting God to superintend. A host of other things we must wait for, pray for, trust God for while we maintain a hands-off stance.

More important, the “yestermorrow” Christian can face each day, even the specter of future disaster, with intelligent confidence rather than panic. Jesus told His disciples, “I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt. 28:20). Even so, at times we feel alone, cut off from support in dark moments of our ever-present *now*. Then we find

immeasurable comfort in the accounts of suffering Christians who displayed courageous faith in every age of Church history. They were sustained by the certain imminence of His promised Second Coming. We remember that our plight is not unique. We, too, are sustained to face the future and the present.

If our goal is to study to know Jesus Christ better, why should we spend time studying Church history? Church history is the record of God relating to man through Jesus Christ. When we approach it from this perspective, something wonderful happens to us. We learn to know Jesus Christ better. For such study frees us to look beyond the gloom and pain and confusion of this life to the glory and comfort and clarity of our eternal, “yestermorrow” God.



³ Kurt W. Marek, *Yestermorrow: Notes on Man's Progress*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Westminster, MD: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).

Chess Master

by Philip Yancey

“Story-writers,” said Flannery O’Connor, one of the best, “are always talking about what makes a story ‘work.’”

From my own experience in trying to make stories “work,” I have discovered that what is needed is an action that is totally unexpected, yet totally believable, and I have found that, for me, this is always an action which indicates that grace has been offered. And frequently it is an action in which the devil has been the unwilling instrument of grace. This is not a piece of knowledge that I consciously put into my stories; it is a discovery that I get out of them.

My own life story contains details that I regret and may even resent: pain from childhood, illness and injury, times of poverty, wrong choices, broken relationships, missed opportunities, disappointment in my own failures. Can I trust, truly trust, that God can weave these redemptively into my overall story, as “unwilling instruments of grace”?

I think of God’s style as ironic. A more straightforward approach would respond to each new problem with an immediate solution. A woman gets sick; God heals her. A man is falsely imprisoned; God releases him. Rarely does God use such an approach, however. An author of great subtlety, he lets the plot line play out in perilous ways, then ingeniously incorporates those apparent detours into the route home. Thus Paul gives thanks for his “thorn in the flesh” because it advances, rather than impedes, God’s work through him; and Joseph can look back on his harrowing life and say to his cruel brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.”

In high school, I took pride in my ability to play chess. I joined the chess club, and during lunch hour could be found sitting at a table with other nerds poring over books with titles like *Classic King Pawn Openings*. I studied techniques, won most of my matches, and put the game aside for 20 years. Then, in Chicago, I met a truly fine chess player who had been perfecting his skills long since high school.

When we played a few matches, I learned what it is like to play against a master. Any classic offense I tried, he countered with a classic defense. If I turned to more risky, unorthodox techniques, he incorporated my bold forays into his winning strategies. Although I had complete freedom to make any move I wished, I soon reached the conclusion that none of my strategies mattered very much. His superior skill guaranteed that my purposes inevitably ended up serving his own.

Perhaps God engages our universe, his own creation, in much the same way. He grants us freedom to rebel against its original design, but even as we do so we end up ironically serving his eventual goal of restoration. If I accept that blueprint—a huge step of faith, I confess—it transforms how I view both good and bad things that happen. Good things, such as health, talent, and money, I can present to God as offerings to serve his purposes. And bad things, too—disability, poverty, family dysfunction, failures—can be redeemed as the very instruments that drive me to God.

A skeptic might accuse me of flagrant rationalization, arguing backwards to make evidence fit a prior conclusion. Yes, exactly.

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A Christian begins with the conclusion that a good God will restore creation to its original design, and sees all history as proceeding toward that end. When a Grand Master plays a chess amateur, victory is assured no matter how the board may look at any given moment. In a miracle of grace, even our personal failures can become tools in God's hands. Many people find that a persistent temptation, even an addiction, is the very wound that causes them to turn in desperation to God, so that the wound forms a beginning point for new creation.

Paul Tournier summed up the pattern well: The most wonderful thing in this world is not the good that we accomplish, but the

fact that good can come out of the evil that we do. I have been struck, for example, by the numbers of people who have been brought back to God under the influence of a person to whom they had some imperfect attachment.... Our vocation is, I believe, to build good out of evil. For if we try to build good out of good, we are in danger of running out of raw material.

I am certain Tournier would prefer for people never to commit evil in the first place. Unfortunately, that is an unattainable state in this fallen world. Here, the ironic response works best, for it never runs out of raw material.



A Walk through the Centuries

by Carol and Roddy Smith

Before the Time of Christ

Civilizations of all kinds were developing in the world before Christ walked the earth. Lands were being conquered. Rulers were rising and falling in power. By 3000 B.C., writing was developing, and so histories were recorded. The world seems to have begun its population around Mesopotamia (where Abraham, father of the Jews, made his home) and from there spread out. All around the shores of the Mediterranean different cultures developed: the Greeks, the Macedonians, the Romans. These early civilizations still affect our everyday lives and even patterns of thinking in the most basic of ways.

The Life of Christ

The life of Christ is such a small amount of time compared to the years of the world. Thirty-three years. And only three or fewer years spent in public ministry. Yet, the life of Christ changed the course of history. It is on His years of teaching and work that the early church based its choices about how to formalize this movement first called “the Way” and later called Christianity.

Jesus’ life functioned on two levels in the history of Christianity. On one level, He was God’s punch through time and space to redeem His world. On another level, Jesus’ human life and work was the founding of a world religion. To take one without the other is to not fully understand the impact of Jesus’ life on earth. To understand Jesus’

role as the guru of Christianity without understanding His deity is an empty faith. To recognize His deity without understanding the impact Jesus’ life made on the course of history, whether He was believed or not, leaves us unaware of the world we live in and the general understanding of the Christian faith.

The Early Church (From Pentecost to A.D. 300)

The decisions made by the church during this time were revolutionary. It was as if they had been given a new world with no rules and no established roles, then left with the responsibility to define how it all should work. Building a house leaves people with an overwhelming amount of decisions. Building a faith movement must have been that times ten.

It was like leaving a baby on a busy street corner to figure out its way home. The baby has to first understand its own body and how to function as a person. Then the baby has to figure out where it’s going and how to get there and whom to ask for help along the way. That was the task ahead of the early church, just as confusing and precarious at times.

At first the infant church was governed by those who had worked directly with Jesus. As they passed away, their writings became the rule of thumb collected into what we know as the New Testament. From there the church leaders had to make the best educated choice they could make. The role of the bishops was established, a form of authority, government, and communication. These people did what any people do. They looked around them to see what kinds of organizational structures were working, and they tried to implement some of those

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structures. If they hadn't, in human terms, the Christian faith could have spilt into many permutations very early on.

The early church established a baseline: the person of Christ. They fought to nail down that the Christian faith was, at the bottom line, God in Jesus, sacrificing Himself to be in relationship with humanity. Believing that Christ was God was essential to the faith. Protecting that truth in purity was where much of the energy of the early church was spent.

The Roman Empire (A.D. 300 to A.D. 590)

There are two sides to every coin. Constantine, the emperor of the Roman Empire, converted to the Christian faith. In fact, he made it the state religion. Yea!

It is yea, right?

This one event propelled Christianity to the forefront of the bulk of the world. It made the church safe to grow. In the sense that the message of Christ's sacrifice would freely spread, this was the best of news. It was wonderful that the church didn't have to fear persecution. This very safety factor made the church vulnerable to other enemies, though. The corruption of power. The dilution of the truth. The enemies within. Heresy.

Without a doubt the heresy that typified the era of the Roman Empire was the heresy of Arianism. This was the belief that Jesus was not equal to God, but was the next best thing. Arianism touched on the most significant point of agreement—the person of Jesus Christ. Orthodox Christianity held firm its stance that Jesus was both parts in one, God and man. The fight between orthodox Christianity and Arian beliefs was as strong as any modern religious prejudice or conflict.

The church formalized its structure with a hierarchy of bishops that resembled the emperor hierarchy of the Roman Empire. The end of this age is marked by the fall of the western half of the empire (modern Spain, France, and Italy).

The Middle Ages (A.D. 590 to A.D. 1517)

The first part of the Middle Ages is a mystery in many ways. With the fall of the Western Roman Empire to invading barbarians, the progress of mankind took a few steps back. The world as they knew it went into a period of chaos and disarray.

In what had been the Western Roman Empire, the church was actually the unifying factor of this time period. While rulers came and went, the bishops continued in their spiritual authority. It is the church that actually kept communication open and some kind of organizational structure in place, first through monastics and then through the popes (the powerful bishops of Rome).

By the end of the Middle Ages, the papacy (system of popes) had declined and what was left of the Eastern Roman Empire (the Byzantine Empire, which was a primarily Greek culture) was gone. The church was badly in need of reform (as was the general culture), but there was disagreement on where to start. Did they need to start all over with a new system? Did they need to do more education? Did they need to reject the church altogether?

The Reformation (A.D. 1517 to A.D. 1648)

It was during this period of history that America was discovered and that what we now call the "Protestant Reformation" occurred.

Movements to reform the Christian church began before Martin Luther, but it was his famous demonstration posting ninety-five theses to the Wittenberg door that still stands as the

marker of the Protestant Reformation. Several other reformations took place as well: Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin (Reformed and Presbyterian churches), the Anabaptists, and then the Mennonites, the Anglicans and Episcopalians (the British movement affected by Calvin's teaching). There was also a counter-reformation that happened within the Roman Catholic Church at the same time that these new movements were coming into their own.

The Enlightenment (A.D. 1648 to A.D. 1789)

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were typified by closing minds as well as opening minds.

In the church, orthodoxy was battering down the hatches. The movements of the Reformation and the denominations that sprang from them became more and more fixed in the beliefs and practices that had become their distinctives. It's an easy thing to understand. These denominations had formed out of a desperation to do the right thing. It would make sense that they would hold tightly to their attempt. Unfortunately, the church of Christ lost some unity, and blood was shed in the process.

At the same time, the general culture of the world was opening its mind to resemble more of the philosophical and moral culture that we recognize as "modern." The celebration of humanity (humanism) took the form of a renaissance in the arts: literature, painting, sculpture, philosophy. What we now call "humanities" in the college forum found its birth right here. The crafts of thought and creativity were alive and well.

Before this time the Christian church had faced some competition, such as Islam, but the competition was outside of the church

walls. This new way of thinking, this humanism, this rationalism, this individualism, this philosophy was something that could integrate into the church. The church had something new to reckon with, a new understanding of humanity and each person's role within that.

Nineteenth Century: Revivals and Revolutions

The 1800s were full of change. Political upheavals such as the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the independence of Latin America put a face on the journey toward autonomy that had been the struggle of societies since the Roman Empire and Middle Ages. Liberalism (a religious counterpoint to orthodoxy) and modernism were on the rise in Protestant circles, while in the Catholic world there was a return to the ancient. (It was during this century that the Catholic Church declared the pope infallible.) The Industrial Revolution changed the way people worked and lived.

The nineteenth century was full of missionary expansion throughout the world: Asia, the Pacific, Africa, Latin America, and the world of Islam.

Twentieth Century

During the course of world history, civilization seemed to be working on the assumption that life could get better and better. Invention, industrialization, technology all forged ahead. But humans, with their need for power and freedom, stayed the same. In the twentieth century, the population faced the realization that for all our best efforts, societies were still flawed, the earth was still being abused, there were still cruel rulers in power. The dream of any kind of utopian society seemed clearly a myth.

Christianity in the twentieth century existed mainly in three forms: Protestantism, Roman

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Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodox. The church in all three of these branches found a parallel experience to the general culture. The time was typified by “anti-colonialism,” which means in lay-terms, “nobody wanted to belong to anybody else.” Churches didn’t want to be forced to adhere to a denomination. Races of people didn’t want to remain unheard. Countries wanted to establish their own governments.

The Catholic Church opened its mind to modern ideas. The Protestant Church began

to address a need to evaluate its practices in light of a world that had changed around it. The Eastern Orthodox Church faced the ramifications of the Soviet revolution on the whole of Europe.

In the end, everything became more decentralized, and yet with the increased technology the world grew smaller.

Twenty-First Century

And now what?



Summary Table of Church History

by Timothy Clark

Time	World History	Church History
1 AD 100 200	<i>Greek culture and Roman rule</i> – Provides stable setting for growth of church, but also for persecution of church	Early Church (1-325) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity – Who are we? What do we believe? • Growth and dispersion • Intermittent persecution • Canon defined/Written scriptures
300 400 500	<i>Constantine divides Roman empire</i> – Latin west from Rome and Greek speaking east form Constantinople <i>Germanic “barbarians” sack Roman empire</i> – Creates chaos in Western Europe and new role for church	Roman Empire (325-600) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toleration – Edict of Milan • Official religion • Monastic movement • Church councils decide: Who is Jesus; Nature of Godhead; Role of grace in salvation
600 700 800 900 1000 1100 1200 1300 1400	<i>Islam conquers</i> – Eastern Mediterranean, Palestine and North Africa <i>Charlemagne declared new Roman emperor</i> – Moves hub of European power north toward France <i>Feudalism</i> – Continued political and religious chaos in Europe with feudal lords independently ruling their land as they wished <i>Crusades</i> – Launched to regain lands from Islam <i>New European culture and politics (kingdoms, nationalism, Renaissance, humanism)</i> – Demise of church’s role	Middle Ages (600-1500) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Papacy develops power in chaotic Western Europe • Central role of monastic orders • Great Schism – Eastern/Western Church • Crusades • Seminaries and cathedrals built in North Western Europe • Call for reforms in weakened church
1500 1600 1700 1800 1900 2000	<i>European exploration and colonization</i> – Church expansion <i>30 Years War over religion</i> – Leaves Europe skeptical of state/religious ties <i>American and French Revolutions</i> – Increased church/state separation <i>World War I and II</i>	Reformation (1500-1650) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New churches (Lutheran, Reformed, Church of England, Anabaptist) • Recovery of beliefs about church, scripture, faith and grace Enlightenment & 19th Century (1650-1900) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation of church and state • Evangelical Revivals in England and North America • Rise of Protestant Liberalism 20th Century (1900-2000) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pentecostal movement • Evangelical movement • Vatican II

Step 5: Discuss the Issue

1. What attracted you to this study? What are you hoping for? What questions do you hope to answer?
2. What background have you had in studying the history of the church? Where did you have this opportunity? Was it positive or negative? Why?
3. Why do you think there is so little emphasis on church history in many congregations? How do you think this impacts individual Christians, as well as churches?
4. Is there a downside to focusing on the history or traditions of the church?
5. Imagine a person finding the Bible in remote Mongolia, where there is no Christian tradition or church. What challenges might this person face? What advantages might this person have?
6. How should Protestant congregations relate to the history of the Church prior to the Reformation? Is the history of the Roman Catholic Church relevant to the history of the Protestant church?
7. How do you anticipate studying history can deepen your personal spiritual life, your participation in the church, or your interaction with non-Christians?

God and Time

Step 6: Take Steps to Obey

1. To focus your study over these weeks, record your prayer to the Lord, presenting him with your needs for this study.

2. Take time to reflect on your personal journey of faith. Write down 2 or 3 major lessons you have learned about God during your relationship with him.

3. In which areas of your life are you fearful? Write down your concerns. Ask God to give you faith in his sovereign control of your life.

Issue Evaluation Form

Name: _____

Please make brief comments on any of the following aspects of this issue:

Sound Bites and Case Studies (Were any of these particularly helpful or unhelpful? Are there any quotes or scenarios you think we should add?):

Study the Scriptures (Were the passages selected appropriate? Are there other passages you might have added?):

Consult Other Sources (What were your overall impressions of the articles? Did they hold your interest? Were they instructive? Are there any you would drop or add?):

Form a Response & Take Steps to Obey (Were the exercises helpful and meaningful? Are there any you would drop or add?):

Discuss the Issue (Were any of the questions particularly unhelpful or especially helpful? Were they clear? Did your group discuss any issues that could be added to our list of questions?):

Overall Impression of this Issue (Please rate the issue 5= Outstanding, 1= Poor. Also include any general impressions or comments regarding this issue.):

1 2 3 4 5

Corrections (typos, grammatical errors, wrong passages, etc.):