

PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHURCH



Biblical Theology and History

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CHURCH

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

In this section, we will explore the fundamental nature of the church as revealed in the New Testament writings. First, it is important that we understand what it means to develop a BIBLICAL THEOLOGY and what we mean by that term. Second, we will begin developing a biblical theology of the church through a wide-ranging study.

What is a Biblical Theology?

Theology is the study of God (*theos+logos*, God+knowledge). This term is generally associated with *systematic theology*, the use of classical logic to reach conclusions based on proposals. This kind of theological argument says something like “God is loving” followed by a series of verses which *prove* the statement. While systematic theology has its value, there is a danger of using the text to prop up existing beliefs.

In other words, it asks, “What did the biblical author believe?” This might sound like it has the same objective as systematic theology, but systematic theology is a way to articulate a particular belief drawn *from* Scripture. Biblical theology asks what beliefs gave rise to the Scriptures. It is a subtle distinction, and more often than not, both approaches will yield the same result; and they *should*.

The Defining Characteristics of a Biblical Theology

1. Deals systematically with the historically conditioned progress of the _____ of God, as deposited in the Bible.
2. Pays careful attention the fact that revelation was _____ and *communicated through men*.
3. Concerned with _____, showing God’s activity through history, attempting to view the text in the same way in which it was written.
4. Not concerned with means of revelation (or analysis) other than that which is found in the Bible.¹

¹ The definition of “biblical theology” is not firmly established, and the term is often employed to mean many things. This list is adapted from Charles C. Ryrie, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Dubuque, IA: ECS Ministries, 2005; reprint), 10–12.

The Method of Biblical Theology

1. Builds directly upon _____ of the Biblical texts.

Biblical theology goes beyond exegesis, for it not only presents what the writer said but also seeks to discover the theological pattern in his mind, of which the writing was a reflection.²

2. It must, to the best of the theologian's ability, set aside _____ as a guide, subordinating theological precedent to original historical context.
3. It is concerned with _____, rather than the entire Bible as a whole. By surveying periods or the thoughts of particular biblical authors *in situ* before attempting to combine them, we see "new" (to us) ways that the whole testimony fits together.

The Application of Biblical Theology

The challenge of biblical theology is that it requires *a lot of work*. Doing biblical theology in the limited times we have available to us in our sessions is simply impractical. Therefore, the sessions of our program will blend biblical and systematic theological approaches. We have attempted to provide "snippets" of the greater teaching of the texts through cited verses, allowing us a glimpse into the writers' beliefs.

The Foundation of the Church

The Message of the Church in Scripture at the Beginning

- As bizarre as this statement is, _____.

The New Testament was not yet written, and the interpretation of the Old Testament was still developing as the apostles saw it anew in light of the gospel. Therefore, the gospel defines the church's approach to everything.

- The message of the church was and is _____ which ushered in the gospel as the NT authors understood it, and everything was filtered through the resurrection.

² Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 14.

Read Acts 23:6, 24:21. *Why was Paul arrested and tried?*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–28. *What is the purpose of the crucifixion if there is no resurrection?*

The Primary Purpose of the Church is the Proclamation of the Gospel

- The fundamental definition of the church's mission is found in _____.

We refer to this as the _____ character of the church.

Read John 1:10–14. Discuss the way John describes the incarnation. How does this apply to the church and the world?

Read Acts 1:9. What is the scope of the mission of the church?

Can the Gospel of Jesus Christ be separated from the Church of Jesus Christ?

The Church as the Recipients of the Gospel

The church that is not *transformed* by the gospel is not the church.

- The gospel creates something _____, not simply the continuation of existing institutions.

The fusion of Jew and Gentile into a new people was not the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Jewish "thing." It was an acceptance of components of all people under the banner of the gospel.

- Read Leviticus 26:12 and 2 Corinthians 6:14–18. How does Paul reinterpret Lev 26:12 when discussing the church?

The gospel is, and always has been, _____.

(Acts 13:44–52, 26:22–23; Rom 1–3; cf. Isa 49:6)

Salvation in Christ is for *all people*.

(Rom 3:28–31, 10:5–21; 1 Cor 1:20–30, 12:12–20; Gal 3:23–29; Col 3:1–11; Rev 14:6–8)

Key Terms Related to the Church

Assembly (Gk. ekklēsia, appears 11 times)

If you have heard of one Greek word to describe the church, it is probably *ekklēsia*.

Commentators rely on a somewhat dubious etymology to argue that it always means “called out assembly.”

- **Read Acts 19:39–40.** The word *ekklēsia* appears twice in these verses. Can you identify which English word that translates it?

How might we also render ekklēsia in this particular passage?

Word Studies and Multivalence

The word study can be a useful tool for analysis. A word of warning is necessary. Words are malleable. Their meanings are often contextual, and it is very easy to rely too heavily on dictionaries and superficial tools (many of which are available for free on the internet) that do not consider the complexity of language. In many cases, the words listed below are multivalent, which means they can have a wide variety of meanings and usages. This is known as “multivalence.”

*One example will probably suffice in explaining this. Let’s take a look at the Greek word *nomos*. Usually, this word means “law,” and Paul uses it to describe the Torah or Law of Moses. We assume this to be the case unless the context dictates otherwise. In **1 Corinthians 14:34–35**, Paul cannot mean the Torah as we have it because what he describes does not appear there. He is instead describing the oral law, or rabbinical tradition. This usage was perfectly reasonable within the sect of the Pharisees during this time, but it is quite distinct from a reference to the written Scriptures.*

The NT writers were not bound to dictionary definitions. They wrote in living languages, with all the nuance and idiom inherent in any language. We have to be cautious about being too rigid with word studies and their significance in determining doctrine.

- **Read Hebrews 12:23.** Sometimes, it can be read broadly to include _____.

*The term can be read broadly, as when it renders the Hebrew word *qahal*, usually translated as “congregation” (Ps 22:2; Heb 2:12).*

Who are those described in Hebrews 12:23 as a “called out assembly”?

The theological term for this is _____ or CHURCH IN PROSPECT.

- In general, *ekklēsia* is used to describe _____.
Take a few minutes to consider some of the passages below.

Acts 5:11, 11:22, 13:1, 15:3–4, 16:6

Rom 16:1, 5, 16, 23

1 Cor 1:2, 4:17, 7:17, 14:19, 16:19; 2 Cor 8:1, 18, 11:28

Gal 1:22; Phil 4:15; Col 4:15–16; 1 Thess 2:14; Philemon 2

In particular, consider 1 Corinthians 11:18. What truths can we draw from Paul's usage there?

- *Ekklēsia* can also read broadly, speaking of the church as something that transcends a single location. Consider *Matt 16:18; Acts 9:31; 1 Cor 10:39, 15:19; Gal 1:13; Eph 1:10, 5:22–33.*

What conclusions can we draw from this *multivalent* usage?

Consider the following quotes from prominent theologians on the subject of the church.

"We should note that the individual congregation, or group of believers in a specific place, is never regarded as only a part or component of the whole church. The church is not a sum or composite of the individual local groups. Instead, the whole is found in each place."³

The church therefore cannot be defined in merely human terms, as an aggregate of individuals associated for social, benevolent, or even spiritual purposes. There is a transcendent element in the church. It is the great company of persons whom Christ has saved, in whom he dwells, to whom and through whom he reveals God (Eph. 1:22, 23).⁴

Fellowship/Communion (Gk. koinonia)

- **Read 1 Corinthians 1:9.** Paul uses this word to represent the church in _____ (1 Cor 1:9).

What is the nature of the fellowship of the church here?

³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 956.

⁴ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 888.

- **Read 2 Corinthians 13:14 and Philippians 2:1.**

In general, *koinōnia* represents that _____ – the Spirit bringing us together (2 Cor 13:14; Phil 2:1).

- **Read Romans 15:26 and 2 Corinthians 8:4, 9:13.** What does *koinonia* represent here?

This isn't all that the church shares. Consider Galatians 2:9 and Hebrews 13:16. What does the church share in these passages?

Some Broad Ideas to Consider

- In the gospels, the disciples always minister in groups and always discuss things as a group (Matt 9:19, 14:22, 21:6, 26:19; Mark 4:34, 6:7, 10:13; Luke 10:1–20; John 9:2, 20:20). This was true after the resurrection as well, when the disciples assembled in the upper room and often appeared in public as a group (Acts 1:13–18; 2:1, 4:32–33, 5:12, 12:12, etc.).
- When the church was scattered, it formed new churches in the places they went. Paul established *churches*, not just converting individuals.
- The entire New Testament was written *to be read in the churches*, not by individuals.

The Elect/Chosen (Gk. eklektos)

- **Read Luke 9:35.** Who is the “chosen one”?

- **Read Luke 6:13, John 6:70, John 15:14–17; Acts 1:2.**

Who are described as Jesus's *chosen*?

How is someone made one of the *chosen*?

- **Read Matthew 22:14, 24:31.** Are the chosen *necessarily* gathered in one place?

- Read Romans 8:31–35; 1 Peter 2:1–10 (cf. Isa 28:16).
- Read Revelation 17:14. John pairs *two other words* with “chosen.” What can we learn from this usage?

What conclusions can we draw from the usage of this term “elect”?

Family of God/Sons of God

- Read John 1:12; Rom 8:14–19; Phil 2:15; 1 John 3:1, 5:2.

Familial language in the New Testament is grounded in _____. where sonship was a legally defined right, granted by “adoption”—the public declaration of legal parentage.

The Body of Christ

- Paul uses the metaphor of a body when discussing _____ of the church (Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 10:17, 12:27; Eph 4:12; Col 3:15).

Read Ephesians 5:23. When you think about a body, what attributes come to mind?

Does the metaphor of a body apply best to a local church or to the “greater” church?

The Temple of the Holy Spirit

- Consider 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 5:15, 6:16. Why does Paul evoke temple imagery?
- Read 1 Pet 2:4–8. What do you think Peter meant by “a spiritual house” (Gk. *oikos pneumatikos*)?

The Hebrew Scriptures don't actually use the word "temple" very often, and it can be confusing because the same word (Heb. heykal) can mean "temple" and "palace." The phrase "house of God" or "house of YHWH" are far more common (1 Kgs 3:1, 6:37, and over 200 other places).

Discussion

Having worked our way through the core concepts of the church, let's take some time synthesizing them into an overall view of the church. These theological concepts undergird the *practical* aspects of the church. They are the "what" of the church.

The Function of the Church

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

It would be an entire course to build a theology of the Holy Spirit (called a *pneumatology*), but here are a few points concerning the Holy Spirit and the Church.

The Son is the promised bearer and bestower of the Spirit. In the Old Testament the Spirit empowered only certain individuals and resided with the community only generally. The Spirit's presence was transitory and incomplete.... [In the Church] there is a profound intertwining of Word and Spirit in the life of believers. The Spirit of God concurrently regenerates and indwells the people of God with the Word of God.⁵

The Fundamental Role of the Spirit

- One of the hallmarks of the gospel is the *presence of the Holy Spirit* in the Church.
 1. *Although the Spirit was present in the Hebrew Scriptures, He had a different role then.*
 2. *Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come after the resurrection (John 14:15–31).*
 3. *The apostles received the Holy Spirit from Jesus (Matt 28:19; John 20:22; Acts 1:8, 2:1–4).*
 4. *As the gospel expanded from Judaea to all Jews to the Gentiles, they received the Holy Spirit anew.*
- **Read 1 John 3:24–4:6 (compare to 1 John 5:5–12).** What is the primary confession (Gk. *homologeō*, "say the same thing") of the Spirit in the Church?

⁵ Malcolm B. Yarnell, "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2014), 530.

If there is a warning about false spirits, what does this say about the spiritual influences inside the church?

Other Roles of the Spirit

- Let's discuss some of the other roles of the Spirit in the church.

Romans 8:1–27; 1 Peter 3:18–22. _____

1 Peter 2:19–21; 2 Timothy 3:16–18. _____

1 Corinthians 12:12–14; Ephesians 2:17–22. _____

John 14:25–27. _____

John 4:24; Ephesians 5:15–21; Colossians 3:12–17. _____

1 Corinthians 2:14–16. _____

Galatians 5:16–25. _____

Discussion

- What conclusions can we reach about the role and necessity of the Spirit in the Church?

Who is a Member of the Church?

As we discussed before (under the word study of *ekklēsia*), there is a multivalence in the idea of the church. There are two usages of the same word, which we differentiate here.

The Visible Church	The Invisible Church
Local Church	Greater Church
Only believers gathered in congregational or close, biblical fellowship.	All believers, from all ages, both present on earth now and in glory.
Congregation	“Family of God”

The Believers' Church

These categories *do not* take into account denominational and doctrinal differences. For example, what about someone in your town who is a true believer but a part of a schismatic “church” group? While we would all agree that individual is a part of the Greater Church, his “church” is not. You can see how things get complicated.

- The believers' church, as a visible body, is made up of _____.
- Participation in the life of the church is a prerequisite for membership.
 1. Observation of the _____
 2. Involvement in _____
 3. Engagement in _____, which involves sharing and giving (pp 5–6), as well as submission to biblical authority.

Membership is an *active discipline*. There is no such thing as an *inactive* member.

Ordinances of the Church

The church regularly observes the ordinances that were commanded by Christ. For more on the difference between an ordinance and a sacrament, see pages 12–16.

Believers' Baptism by Immersion

- What is baptism?

Read Acts 2:38, 10:47–48. _____

Read Colossians 2:11–15. _____

Read Romans 6:3–4; Galatians :20. _____

Read 1 Corinthian 10:2; Ephesians 4:5. _____

- The Greek word *baptizō* means _____

Other forms of baptism began as *accommodations*, and the translators of the English Bible chose to transliterate *baptizō* to avoid controversies.

- There are two views of baptism on who should be baptized.

_____ The candidate is baptized *into* the covenant which Christ made with the church. In this view, baptism is an initiation into the covenant, and so it makes sense to baptize people as soon as possible. Baptism is independent of belief, and so can be performed on infants.

(Continued on page 17)

Want to Know More? *Sacraments vs. Ordinances*

We draw a careful distinction between **sacraments**, as observed in many liturgical forms of church, and that of **ordinances**, which is the term used by most free churches and believers' churches. Although the observations may look very similar, there are strong theological differences between them, and a believer needs to know what those differences are.

Sacraments: Philosophy and Politics

One tends to think that *sacrament* means the impartation of holiness, as the word *sacred* is so obviously a related term. In fact, both words derive from the Latin word indicating a hidden religious practice. The term *sacrament* derives from the Latin translation of the Greek *mēstērion* (Eph 1:9; Col 1:26, 1 Tim 3:16). This word is the root of our word *mystery*, meaning something that is hidden or not understood.

- **Tertullian**, an early 3rd century Christian, took a very mystical position. He believed that baptism was a “washing of the flesh” so the Christian could then consume “the flesh of Christ” and the soul could thereby be sustained. (*The Resurrection of the Dead*, 8:2–3)
- **Augustine of Hippo** (4th–5th century) viewed the sacraments through a Platonic lens: “...they are visible, but they are invisible.” In other words, the sacraments themselves (and Augustine recognized only two) are the incomplete physical manifestations of something supernatural. They were truly “mysteries.” (“On the Catechism of the Uninstructed,” 26.50)

In the 16th century, the reformer John Calvin described how this translation came to be. “It is well known that what the Latins call *sacramenta*, the Greeks call *mystēria*. The sameness of meaning removes all dispute.” He continues:

[The translator of the Vulgate] was unwilling to use the word arcanum (secret), lest the word should seem beneath the magnitude of the thing meant. When the thing, therefore, was sacred and secret, he used the term sacramentum. In this sense it frequently occurs in ecclesiastical writers...Hence it is that the term was applied to those signs which gave an august representation of things spiritual and sublime. (Institutes IV, 14.2)

For the medieval church, the *sacrament* is something that connects to the divine mystery, and in this sense, it is viewed as something supernatural. Calvin holds that the sacrament consists of “both word and sign” meaning that there is an act and a confession which together make up the sacred act (*Institutes IV*, 14.4). When these sacraments are observed, they bridge between this world and the supernatural. In short, they are the means by which grace flows from the divine to humanity.⁷

⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1039.

In a discussion of something so esoteric, it might feel odd to bring up politics, but this view of the sacraments is tied closely to the Christianizing of the Roman empire. In AD 380, Theodosius I issued the Edict of Thessalonica, making Nicene Christianity the only legal religion of the Roman empire. He wished to standardize the numerous Christian sects. Theodosius declared one legal church: “We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title of Catholic Christians.” This one, true “Catholic” church became, by law, the only conduit of grace to the world. Essentially, the mystery/sacrament became a tool in the hands of the emperor and his appointed church leaders to grant or withhold divine favor.

This also explains how the sacraments expanded in number during the medieval period. The 20th century Catholic theologian Karl Rahner maintained that the Church is the foundational sacrament.⁸ As such, the expansion of the sacraments is seen as an expansion or even a diffusion of the fundamental secrets of the Church. Since the “Catholic” Church was the only means of grace, that grace would be manifest in many ways. As Pope Paul VI (r. 1963–1978) put it:

“The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.”⁹

To clarify, the pope was stating that the Church is granting grace to people through these sacraments. To deny anyone any of these sacraments is to deny them access to salvation. Consider just how the Catholic Catechism describes baptism: “[baptism] signifies and *actually brings about* death to sin and entry into the life of the Most Holy Trinity through configuration to the Paschal mystery of Christ.”¹⁰ The act of baptism is seen as an act of grace because it is seen as actually bringing about the unity with Christ in his death.¹¹

While one could argue for the beauty of the sacraments as observed by many traditions, they suffer from a fatal flaw. They assume that grace is acquired through the observance of a “new law.” Grace is *controlled by the church, an idea which seems to be in conflict with Scripture*. While Calvin made it clear that he believed the sacraments were only the *means* by which God demonstrated grace to his people, he nonetheless held that one must perform the sacraments in order to receive grace (*Institutes* IV, 14.7).

⁸ Karl Rahner, “The Church’s Limits,” in *The Christian of the Future*, trans. W. J. O’Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 49–76.

⁹ Paul VI, apostolic constitution, *Divinae consortium naturae*: AAS 63 (1971) 657; cf. RCIA Introduction 1-2.

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., 1239. Emphasis added.

¹¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1018.

Rejection of Any Observance

There are those—chiefly the Quakers and the Salvation Army—that deny the necessity of *any* observances. George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, believed that there were continual *spiritual* realities for the believer, and the physical ordinances were unnecessary. Writing in 1909, one advocate stated it unequivocally.

The New Testament makes no connection between new birth and water baptism. Baptism, not of water, but of the Holy Spirit makes the heart right. By resisting this baptism, we fail to be baptized into Christ. By yielding to this baptism we become our Savior's newborn children, baptized into Christ and buried with him in baptism. This baptism is freely offered to every son and daughter of Adam.¹²

What the Quakers (and other groups) reject is the idea of baptism as a means of grace and initiation into the Church, not unlike the position the Baptists had taken earlier. Both groups believed that the Church is not possessed of grace to be granted upon observance. The Baptists, however, could not simply spiritualize the concepts as the Quakers did. There were commands to observe the ordinances, and so we observe them physically and regularly. There is no reason that ordinances cannot be simultaneously physical and spiritual. Indeed, this would be much more reasonable than spiritualizing the actions.

Ordinances: Communal Identification with Christ

The term *ordinance* derives from the same root as *ordain* – meaning something that is arranged. They are also *ordinary*, meaning they are part of what believers' churches have in common. There is no sense in which they are secrets or mysteries entrusted to a single institution. What then makes an act an ordinance? **Ordinances are those acts which Jesus Christ specifically commanded his disciples to observe as a faith community.** Whereas the additional sacraments were added through inference from the biblical practices, these two ordinances are clear commands to the Church.

1. *Baptism* is commanded as part of the Great Commission (Mt 28:18–20). In Matthew's gospel, baptism is the participle following the imperative *mathēteysate* (*mathēteyō*). It is the first action of disciple-making.
2. *The Lord's Table* (or *communion*) was commanded at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19), a command which the Apostle Paul reiterated (1 Cor 11:24–25).

In both cases, there was an immediate and universal adoption of the behavior by all churches. The presence of the Last Supper in all four gospels is testament to its historicity, but the presence of the shared meal and its connection to the fellowship of the Church demonstrates its ubiquity. In fact, some commentators have observed that there was no real distinction between the “ritual meal” of the Lord's Table and the “fellowship meal” of the

¹² James H. Moon, *Why Friends (Quakers) Do Not Baptize with Water* (Philadelphia, PA: Leeds & Biddle, 1909), 33.

church's gathering.¹³ In other words, there was no need for separating worship from fellowship. The *Didache*, an ancient manual for churches written sometime in the late 1st century AD describes the two ordinances this way:

Concerning baptism, baptize like this: Having first rehearsed all these things, "baptize, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," in running water; but if you do not have running water, baptize in other water, and if can't baptize in cold, then in warm. But if you don't have either, then pour water three times on the head "in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." And before the baptism, let the baptizer and the person being baptized fast, and any others who are able. The candidate should fast a day or two before.

Concerning the Thanksgiving Meal, hold the Thanksgiving Meal this way. First pray over the cup, "We give thanks to you, our Father, for the Holy Vine of David your child, which, you made known to us through Jesus your son;. To you be glory forever."

Over the broken bread pray, "We give you thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you made known to us through Jesus your Son. To you be glory forever." As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, but was brought together and became one, so let your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy Kingdom, for yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever."

But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs." (Didache 8.1-2, 9.1-5)¹⁴

The Meaning of the Ordinances

The *ordinance* is a responsive act. Indeed, we could say that observance of the ordinances is from within the grace that sacraments are an attempt to obtain. As such, they are not a secret we enter into by our actions, but rather a truth we proclaim through our actions. If the Church were, as sacramental traditions argue, a bridge to the hidden, supernatural world, then there is a place for the secret mysteries and sacramentalism. If, on the other hand, the Church exists for the worship and work of Christ, then such mysteries are not needed. Grace is given by Christ to the believers, and the believers then unite to form the church.

The sacramental view became entrenched because of the ubiquity of the Church. It was *everywhere* in Europe; and it was surrounded by enemies of the faith, namely Islam. The Church had no need for evangelistic ministry, and therefore the sacraments became more and more sacramental. Grace was granted *within* the church because the Church was equal to *Christendom*. Therefore, the gospel was no longer the means of salvation. All were *in* the church and thus were potentially already saved. Sacraments are related to a *powerful religion*.

Ordinances on the other hand are not about power or control, but rather the act of recognition and memorial as core to worship. They are the embodiment of the understanding

¹³ Eugene R. Schlesinger, "Sacraments," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry, et al., (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹⁴ Adapted from Bart D. Ehrman, ed. *Apostolic Fathers*, LCL 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 429-31.

of the commandment of Christ (John 13:34-35). Jesus often speaks in doublets, particularly when discussing commandments. Asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. (Matt 22:36-40)

This is often treated as a prescriptive statement – that these two actions are the purpose of the Church. Jesus extracts these lines from Torah (Deut 6:4–5, Lev 19:18) to illustrate the same relationship he makes plain in the ordinances. We are commanded to love God, which is possible in our new life in Christ (Rom 6:1–5), and to love one another. In other words, we have one ordinance that represents our restoration to God *in Christ*, and our relationship with one another *in Christ*.

The sacramental view dispenses with this identification with Christ, instead approaching the observance of the rituals as mankind’s actions mirroring God’s. This Platonic perspective sees our flesh as acting out what our spirit accomplishes perfectly. Thus we are “made divine” in our actions and brought into synergy with God—something the Eastern rite is far more open about expressing than the Catholics.

We must be cautious that in our position against sacraments that we do not completely dispense with the spiritual weight of the ordinances. There is far more than a *symbolic value* to these observances. We would not say that baptism saves a person, nor would we say that the Lord’s Table is the actual consumption of Christ’s body and blood. Still, there *is* something substantially spiritual about both observances. Christ is *present* in the observance, although not (as some traditions would argue) in the elements of the observances. The observances do not simply represent, but in an inexplicable way, they also substantiate. Thus, they are infused with something more than the tangible and experiential.

_____ A voluntary act made by one who has confessed faith in Jesus Christ. This requires that the candidate assert faith prior to receiving baptism, and the baptism itself serves as an *outward sign of completion* of the work of Christ upon them.

Participation in the Lord's Table

- There are a variety of views of the Lord's Table within Christian worship. Recounting all of them would take an entire book. Admittedly, there is a certain amount of latitude Here are a few of the dominant views.

_____ : The elements _____ (Catholic/Orthodox)

_____ : The body of Christ is _____ within the elements (Lutheran)

_____ : John Calvin believed it was the way God feeds our faith (Reformed)

_____ : There is no spiritual aspect and it strictly symbolic (most Baptists)

- What is the Lord's Table? **Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–34 together.**

A living memorial _____ established _____. (v 23; cf. Luke 22:14–23)

The _____ of the Church, _____. (vv. 24–26)

_____ by the Church (v 26)

An act of _____ for the believer (vv 27–32)

_____. Also called the “love feast” (cf. Jude 12, Gk. *hō agapē*).

Worship

There is surprisingly little information in the biblical texts about the worship of the church. Nowhere is there a clear layout of the regular worship gatherings. Christian worship is not a direct adaptation of the Jewish synagogue worship, and it seems to have been *very* distinct from temple worship as well. As will be discussed in the history section, the early Church was strongly influenced by not only the synagogue but also Greek schools of philosophy and Roman *collegia* (professional associations).

A Simple Biblical Theology of Worship

- **Read Psalm 150:1–6.**

Who is the object of worship? Who is called to the act of worship? What are the means of worship?

- Consider the role of worship in the Book of the Revelation, especially Revelation 7:9–12 and 19:1–10. How would you respond to the below statement?

Christian worship mirrors the response of spiritual beings currently in the presence of God.

- Take a few minutes to discuss these two positions on worship in the church. What are the pro's and con's of both views?

_____ : true worship involves *only components expressly prescribed* in Scripture and forbids anything not prescribed.

_____ : Christians may incorporate forms and practices not forbidden in the Scriptures, provided they promote order in worship and do not contradict scriptural principles.¹⁵

What Seems to Have Gone on During New Testament Worship?

We should consider the broad categories of acts of worship that are evident in the New Testament

- Time was devoted to _____ and provision for those in need, if possible (Acts 10:4, 16:16).
- Sharing the Lord's Table (_____) took a central position (Acts 2:46, 20:7).
- The _____ was extremely important.
- Very early on, _____ was adopted as the Christian day of worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10; *Didache* 14.1; Justin, *Apology* 1.67.3).
- _____ was part of the expression of worship from the very beginning (Acts 16:25; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16)

Paul provides us with two early hymns, which he probably authored (Phil 2:5–11; Col 1:15–20).

¹⁵ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 2–3.

- _____, but the church shifted from spaces like the temple to homes and schools relatively quickly. By the end of the first century, dedicated spaces appear to have been in use in some parts of the world.
- Giving toward expenses and support of ministers, both local and global, was _____.

Ministry and Fellowship

Ministry (Gk. *diakonia*) and fellowship (Gk. *koinonia*) are closely associated in Scripture. The fellowship of the church has already been discussed in some measure (see pages 5–6).

- Below are a few categories of ministry. Discuss what kinds of activities might fall in these categories, and what other categories might exist.

Ministry within the Church

Ministry Among the Churches

Ministry to Those Outside the Church

The Leadership of the Church

The leadership of the church has been one of the great dividing lines through history. Before discussing the diversity of position on church leadership, we should explore the biblical model of church leadership. There are essentially **five** forms of church leadership (do not confuse these terms with denominational titles), many of which get mixed up and utilized in different ways.

Some observations concerning church polity seem appropriate. First, the principal modes of church polity are often not practiced in their pure or ideal form, but actual church practice may show the adoption of secular ideas or the amalgamation of more than one of the classic modes. Second, no mode of church polity is completely exempted from abuse. Hence it may be said that every polity has been perverted or abused. In addition to the weaknesses inherent in each mode of polity, the veritable sinfulness of Christians both individually and collectively in both thought and deed has contributed to the abuses. Third, every practiced mode of polity may indeed be in need of reform and correction. Finally, church polity is not an end but only a

means to other ends—growth and maturity of Christians unto Christlikeness, the proclamation of the gospel to all nations and peoples, and the coming of the kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven.”¹⁶

Types of Church Polity

- _____: Churches that rely upon a _____ as the primary structure of the church.

Roman Catholic: The Bishop of Rome (Pope) oversees a hierarchy of bishops.

The successor of St. Peter as bishop of Rome and Supreme Pontiff of the universal Catholic Church. The pope exercises a primacy of authority as Vicar of Christ and shepherd of the whole church; he receives the divine assistance promised by Christ to the Church where he defines infallibly a doctrine of faith or morals.¹⁷

Eastern Orthodox: Metropolitan Bishops (originally five) oversee affairs, but most national forms are *autocephalous* (appointing their own head). Thus, the Greek Orthodox Church has the Patriarch of Constantinople as its head, while the Russian Orthodox Church follows the Patriarch of Moscow, with historical harmony with the Patriarch of Constantinople.¹⁸

Anglican Communion: National groups of bishops are autocephalous, but all identify historically with the Church of England. (Episcopal Church in the United States).

Independent branches of the Anglican/Episcopal: Methodists, Wesleyans, and the Church of the Nazarene have *some* elements of Episcopal hierarchy, but many have become far more regionally or locally independent in their structure.

- _____: Regional churches are overseen by sessions of _____ (council of elders) which are then organized into a synod (council) or a general assembly.

Presbyterian denominations employ this polity, a somewhat obvious conclusion.

Free Church is often employed to describe churches with *local presbyterian structure* which are outside of a formal denomination.

Reformed Churches tend to employ this structure.

¹⁶ James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1990), 645.

¹⁷ John Cardinal Ratzinger, ed. *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), 894.

¹⁸ Distinct from the Roman system, in Orthodoxy, all bishops are held to be equals. “All bishops are essentially equal, however humble or exalted the city over which each presides. All bishops share equally in the apostolic succession, all have the same sacramental powers, all are divinely appointed teachers of the faith.” Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1962), 35.

* *Elder-led polity can be confused with Presbyterianism, and often the distinction is unclear.*

- _____: The local congregation is _____ although most will choose to voluntarily associate with a larger body or denomination.

Lutheran churches are essentially congregational, but they cede some authority to a synod.

Most Baptists are congregational in organization, at least essentially. Many, particularly larger churches with charismatic leaders, have moved to a pastor-led model (see below).

- _____: Authority is *primarily* invested in a _____ or a small group of vocational leaders.

Non-denominationalism: This idea, which started with restorationist movements in the 1800's, gained popularity among the Charismatic movements in the mid-20th century and with megachurches in the same period. They will usually have some kind of board that operates in an advisory capacity, but the church identity tends to be strongly identified with the pastor.

Fundamentalist Independent Baptists: Very conservative groups among the Baptists tend to rely on a solo pastor. First Baptist Church, Hammond, Indiana, is a good example.

- *Non-governmental:* Some reform movements adopted a non-governmental position, where there are no ordained leaders and emphasis is placed on “inner light.”

The Quakers practice a very loose form of congregationalism, with local gatherings self-regulating, and while they do have “overseers” in some Quaker gatherings, spiritual development and discipline is largely entrusted to the individual. They do, however, form “clearness committees” which meet with people on matters of personal development.¹⁹

- _____: The local congregation is overseen by a _____ of elders who handle only the affairs of that congregation. Usually, the board is composed of both vocational and lay elders. The congregation works in partnership with the elders.

In the Brethren tradition, all assemblies are led by an internally selected plurality of elders. This has been relaxed in some segments of the Brethren, and there is a tendency toward a more of an elder-led structure, with one or more of the elders serving as a vocational pastor.

Many non-denominationalists and Baptists transitioned to this style of leadership after dealing with the challenges of a pastor-led organization.

¹⁹ Margery Post Abbott and Carl Abbott, *Quakerism: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 113–18.

Building a Biblical Template

It is probably safe to say that the evidence from the New Testament is inconclusive; nowhere in the New Testament do we find a picture closely resembling any of the fully developed systems of today. It is likely that in those days church government was not very highly developed, indeed, that local congregations were rather loosely knit groups. There may well have been rather wide varieties of governmental arrangements. Each church adopted a pattern that fit its individual situation.²⁰

God's Leadership in the Church

- Allowing for the diversity of the church, let's consider some concrete elements of church leadership.

Read Acts 1:6–8. *What are the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Church?*

- What does the leadership of God look like in practical terms for the Church?

Read Acts 1:15–26. *How did the congregation in the upper room make the decision on who should replace Judas?*

Read Acts 9:26–28. *What principles for congregational decision-making can you identify in this example?*

²⁰ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1003.

Read Acts 13:1–4. *How did the congregation in Antioch confirm the Spirit's leading for Paul and Barnabas?*

We must conclude that church leadership is first and foremost a *confirmation of the Holy Spirit's direction*. Decisions are informed by the consensus of the congregation, but the congregation is not the arbiter of the Holy Spirit's direction.

_____ are required.

The Authority of the Apostles

- Read 1 Corinthians 12:28–29, Ephesians 2:20 and 4:11. *What office is always listed first?*
- Read 1 Corinthians 4:9 and Ephesians 3:1–6. Why does Paul make such a big deal about the testimony of the apostles?

The Shepherds of the Church

We have established that God is sovereign over all, and Jesus is the Head of the Church. The Spirit is the power of the Church, and the apostles have authority over the Church – through the New Testament. To this point, most polities agree, at least in theory, but there the discussion starts to break down. In this section, we will build a biblical theology of who are the leaders of the Church.

In the Book of Acts

While there is usually a strong emphasis on the passages dealing with the qualifications of elders—1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–16—we should not neglect the narrative of development in the Book of Acts.

- **Read Acts 6:1–7.** The apostles appointed _____ to handle growing ministry. There were spiritual requirements because of the nature of their work.
- **Read Acts 11:19–30.** What role must the elders have played in the church of Jerusalem at this time?
- **Read Acts 14:19–23.** Notice the details provided by Luke in this passage.
- **Read Acts 15:1–11.** What is the relationship of the elders to the apostles?
- **Let's consider Acts 20:17–38.** Paul provides a short template for elder leadership.

vv. 18–20 _____

vv. 21–27 _____

v. 28 _____

vv. 29–31 _____

v. 32 _____

vv. 33–34 _____

v. 35 _____

How Paul Saw Church Leadership

- **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13.** Although not explicitly mentioning elders, there are three attributes of the leaders in Thessalonica. It is likely that Paul or one of his close associates had appointed elders there (Acts 14:23). They are expressed in three participles, which are used as nouns here.

_____ “Labor among you” (Gk. *kopaiō*; cf. (1 Cor 4:12, 15:10; Gal 4:11; Col 1:29)

_____ “Have charge over you” (Gk. *proistēmi*; cf. Rom 12:8; 1 Tim 3:5; Titus 3:8)

_____ “Admonish you” (Gk. *noytheteō*, cf. Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 4:14; Col 3:16)

- **Read Philippians 1:1.**

Philippians was written around the same time as 1 Timothy and Titus, so we can tell that by the end of Paul’s ministry, he had established elders in most, if not all of his churches.

A presbyter [elder] and a bishop [overseer] are the same ... the churches were governed by a joint support that bishop and presbyter are one ... examine again the words the apostles addressed to the Philippians.... Now Philippi is but one city in Macedonia, and certainly in one city there could not have been numerous bishops. It is simply that at that time the same persons were called either bishops or presbyters. (Jerome, Commentary on the Epistle to Titus, 1,5)

- **Read 1 Timothy 3:1-6.** Paul offers two categories of qualifications. First, household management (2-5) and second, spiritual maturity (6-7). *How do these areas relate to eldership?*
- **Read Titus 1:5-9.** Notice the equivalence of elder (Gk. *presbyteros*) and overseer (Gk. *episkopos*).
- **Read 1 Peter 5:1-11.** Elders are _____. What are the roles of a shepherd listed in this passage?

Read 1 Timothy 5:17–18. What are the advantages/disadvantages of *vocational pastors* as part of the elders?

- **Read 1 Timothy 5:19–25.** Paul deals with both removing an elder and warns to take our time in selecting (“laying on of hands”) elders. *What responsibility does the congregation have in these processes? How can we safeguard against abuses?*

The Servants of the Church

Alongside the elders, there are servants (Gk. *diakonos*) who, as the name implies, *serve* the church in various capacities. In today’s church, the Greek word is transliterated as *deacon*, something that has been done since antiquity. (It is *diaconus* in Latin.)

- **Read Acts 6:1–7.** The word *deacon* is absent here, but the need was for someone to serve (Gk. *diakoneō*) tables. Why did the apostles appoint these first deacons?

What were the three qualifications of these deacons? And why were they such important qualities?

- **Read Matthew 20:28 and Luke 22:24–30.** Why is service so significant in the church? Are service and shepherding mutually exclusive? Discuss.
- **Read Colossians 1:21–29.** How does Paul describe the work of a minister (the same word as *deacon*)?
- **Read 1 Timothy 3:8–9.** Let’s consider the five specific character qualifications of a deacon.

Dignified (Gk. *semnos*): a deacon must _____ of the congregation.

Not double-tongued (Gk. *mē dilogos*): not talking out of both sides of his mouth; *honest*

Not a drunk (Gk. *mē oinō pollō prosechontas*): This speaks to _____; literally, his attention is not drawn by a lot of wine. This speaks to excess and self-control.

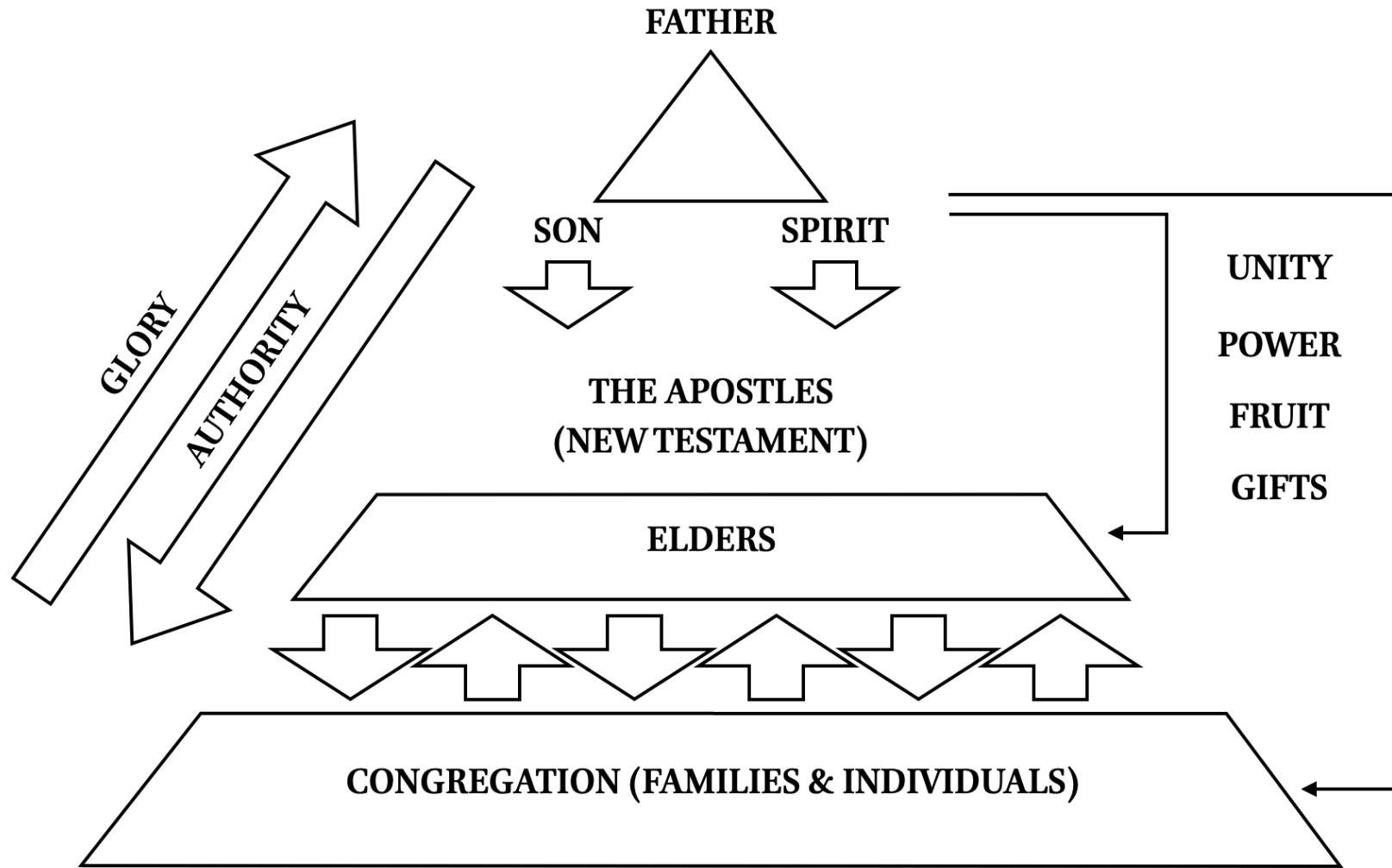
Not after greedy gain (Gk. *mē aischrokerdēs*): not using the church to enrich himself.

Holding the mystery of faith with a clear conscience: this is a corollary to the previous four, as it sums up the role of a faithful, consistent servant to Christ.

- **Read 1 Timothy 3:10.** How should the congregation proceed with selecting deacons?
- **Read 1 Timothy 3:11.** Although almost all translations render this as “their wives,” this is not present in the text. The text says women, likewise (Gk. *gynaikas hōsaytos*).
- **Read 1 Timothy 3:12–13.** Why do you think managing your household well is presented as a qualification for being a deacon?

The Inherent Flexibility of the Biblical Descriptions

You may notice how little is said about the *way* that elders and deacons fulfill their roles in the church. Paul was much more interested in their character and spiritual condition. When we talk about church leadership, we are not describing institutional homogenization (like modern milk). There will always be variety within broad parameters. Each congregation is treated as unique. The idea of a uniform, in-step approach to church leadership did not emerge until the church was institutionalized centuries after the Scriptures were completed.



CHURCH: *A SHORT HISTORY*

Introduction

Assembling a short history of the last 2,000 years of Church history is a daunting task. There is *so much* we could cover, but it would take us years. Instead, this section will provide a lot of background information for various periods of the Church. You will meet figures from each of these periods who represent, in some way, the currents of history at the time. **Be warned**, this kind of synecdochal approach to history is necessarily going to compress a lot of history into a single story, often featuring a small cast of figures. Each section will feature these vignettes of individuals as well as a broad timeline, a summary, and some supporting discussion.

The notes here are a loose framework for us to explore the history of our faith. Don't be intimidated by the breadth of the discussion. Not all of this will be interesting to everyone, but almost everyone will find something of interest.

Precursors of the Church (300 BC–AD 100)

Synagogue

These Jewish communities outside of Palestine are called _____ and it was *different* from Palestinian Judaism in a number of ways. The Jewish Synagogue exerted a significant influence upon the formation of the church early in its development. Synagogues were present both in Palestine and throughout the Roman Empire. The Book of Acts presents the synagogue a spread throughout the Roman world with synagogues in Damascus (Acts 9:2, 22), Salamis (Acts 13:5), Antioch Pisidia (Acts 13:14), Iconium (Acts 14:1), Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:1, 10), Corinth (Acts 18:4), and Ephesus (Acts 18:19, 19:8). The Roman colony of Philippi is singled out for not having a synagogue (Acts 16:13).

Consider the following biblical example of the synagogue.

- Jesus “went throughout all Galilee, teachings in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23, cf. 9:35, 13:54).

Read Matthew 6:2–5, 10:17, 12:9, 23:1–12, 23:34. How does Matthew view the synagogue?

(1) Prominent individuals who used the venue as a way of advertising their piety (Matt 6:2–5, 12:9)

(2) Jesus hints that there was a sort of hierarchy of seating arrangements with the Pharisees seeking the elevated positions (Matt 23:1–12).

(3) Disciples could be threatened with corporal punishment. (Matt 10:17, 23:34).

- Read the following passages in Luke and Acts. Consider how Luke views the synagogue.

Luke 4:16–21 (Mark 5:36): *Synagogue teaching revolved around the reading of Scripture*

Luke 7:5: *It appears at least some synagogues had buildings.*

Luke 8:41, 13:41: *Synagogues had specific leaders and structures.*

Read Acts 13:14–15: *At least initially, the synagogues were receptive to the gospel.*

- In his writings, Paul makes *no mention* of the synagogue, and he discusses the temple only abstractedly (Rom 2:22; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21; 2 Thess 2:4). (i) Likewise, the tabernacle (or simply “tent” (Gk. *skēnē*) does not appear in Paul’s writings, although it does figure rather heavily in Hebrews 8–9.

How do you interpret the absence of the synagogue in Paul’s writing?

- John’s writings, which are the last of the New Testament reflect a synagogue more hostile to the gospel.

Read John 6:59, 18:20. What is the attitude of the synagogue to Jesus?

The synagogues and their leaders were clearly opposed to Jesus.

Read John 9:22, 12:42, 16:2. How does John present the synagogues relationship with the church?

- Despite the increasing hostility between the church and the synagogue, which only got worse as history progressed, the church acquired certain attributes from the synagogue. Just based on your reading, what do you see the church drawing from the synagogue?

What differences do you see?

The Greek Academy (Philosophical School)

Philosophical schools (Gk. *haeresis*, “a group of thinkers”) became foundational to intellectual discourse in the Greco-Roman world. They provided the basis for intellectual discourse among Gentiles, and it is fairly clear that the church adopted some of the methodologies employed.

- The Greek schools of philosophy varied widely in their beliefs and structure, but there are some shared characteristics:

Three broad but interconnected realms of human knowledge: logic, ethics, and physics. Devoted to *individual care* (Gk. *psychagoge*) and *personal devotion* (Lat. *pietas*).²¹

Differing views engaged in *debate and dialogue*, favoring the logical or more reasonable explanation for the state of things.

Schools encouraged a unified intellectual worldview, a perspective on reality which you shared with your colleagues and debated with the practitioners of other philosophies.

- The Apostle Paul was aware of Greek philosophy. After all, Paul and Luke were Greek-speaking Jews from the greater empire.
- **Read Acts 17:18.** Which Greek philosophical schools showed interest in Paul’s teaching?

Epicureans and Stoics

Stoicism in particular seems to have been fairly well understood by many of the New Testament authors.²²

- **Read John 1:1–5.** The Greek word translated as “word” is *logos*, which was used to describe a Stoic ideal. It is also the equivalent of the Hebrew *hadabar* (Ps 33:6), used to understand the creative work of God (“God said,” Gen 1:3). John probably had both uses in mind.

Is it at all surprising that John might have been familiar with Greek philosophical ideas?

²¹ Robert L. Wilkes, “Collegia, Philosophical Schools, and Theology,” in *The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity*, ed. Stephen Benko and John J. O’Rourke (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1971), 268–91.

²² For exploration of the presence of Stoic ideas in the New Testament, consider the essays collected in Thomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Ismo Dunderberg, eds. *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010). Most of the study has been on Paul’s use of Stoicism in his Epistles to the Corinthians. See Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 137 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Troels Engberg-Pederson, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

- We should not assume Paul, or any New Testament author, was rigidly adherent to a particular Greek philosophical school. If Paul were such an adherent, he would have listed it in his qualifications, as he does his rabbinical pedigree in Philippians 3:4–7. It is more likely that there was a general acquaintance with philosophy among the apostles and early church leaders simply because the philosophical schools were so ubiquitous.
- There are a number of early Christians who had an intimate knowledge of Greek philosophical ideas. Below are two who are well-attested by their own written works.

Justin Martyr (c. AD 100-165)

He mentioned his pursuit of philosophy before conversion (Justin, Dialogues 2–3). Justin points out that none of these philosophies he pursued in his youth resulted in anything substantial because they did not lead one to God.

After accepting the Christian God, he continued to wear his philosopher's robes, and in his Apologies, Justin demonstrates a thorough knowledge of philosophy.

For Justin, the Christian faith was a philosophical school but one which presupposes the revelation of God rather than seeking to obtain it.

Irenaeus (c. AD 130–200)²³

Authored a logical argument against Gnosticism, entitled “On the Detection and Overthrow of So-Called Gnosticism,” which we know today as Against Heresies.

Unlike Justin, Irenaeus was born into a Christian family. He was conversant in Greek philosophy. He was ordained by Polycarp, a disciple of John in Ephesus, sometime in the latter half of the second century AD. Bishop of Lugdunum (modern Lyon, France)

Although Irenaeus was roughly contemporary with Justin, the two took very different tactics. This is probably because Irenaeus was born into a Christian family while Justin was not. Still, Irenaeus was conversant in most of the Greek philosophical stances. Since the Gnostics relied heavily upon Neo-Platonic ideas, Irenaeus addressed them directly.

He opposed the Stoics but also employs their methods, arguing strongly for what might be considered proto-orthodox unity in the Godhead through reason rather than simple proposition from Scripture.

²³ George Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity*, Ancient Philosophies, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), 28.

Want to Know More?

Greek Schools of Philosophy

Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit
“Captured Greece has conquered its fierce captor.”
(Horace, *Epistles*, 2.1.156–57)

One of the peculiarities of the Roman society was the way it first admired, then emulated, and ultimately absorbed Greek culture. This is most obvious in their mythology and religious practices, which the Romans more or less adopted wholesale. Initially, Greco-Roman religion had very little impact on Christian thought. It was so different from Judaism and other eastern religions that the Christians saw no parallels. (This changed in the fourth century AD when Christianity was absorbed and adapted to Roman culture.) One of the other reasons Greco-Roman religion did not impact Christianity is that it had no ethical teachings. The Greco-Roman religion lacked a clear moral code. The gods themselves were capricious and exhibited behavior like their human subjects.

Whereas Greco-Roman religion did not have much of an effect on Christianity, their philosophy did. Philosophy was meant to be concrete principles and understandings of the way the world worked. The Romans did not have a philosophical tradition, and so they adopted the Greek philosophical traditions as if they were their own. Greek was the language of intellectual discourse in the Roman empire, and most of the great Roman writers penned their works in Greek.

At its root, Greek philosophy is about the deeply ingrained belief in the superiority of human wisdom. Ethics were established not by divine mandate but by human imagination. Philosophy was the work of only a small, educated elite among the Greeks, but the philosophical schools were revered almost to the point of cultic, slavish devotion. Once a Roman adopted a philosophical school, he adhered to it at all costs. The height of being an educated Roman was to spend time in Achaia (mainland Greece), especially Athens, studying under one of the great philosophers of the day.

Pythagoreanism

One of the earliest of the well-known Greek philosophers, **Pythagoras** (570–490 BC) was already becoming mythical by the end of his lifetime. His philosophy was taught in a closed community which had unique dress, followed a vegetarian diet, and held property in common. They were so secretive that password (Gk. *symbola*) were required to ensure someone was a true initiate. Pythagoras taught that the soul (Gk. *psychē*) was eternal, and he held to a form of reincarnation, which was probably why he adopted vegetarianism.

After a couple centuries of obscurity, Pythagoras’s teachings became popular among the Roman elites in the first century BC, since it was quasi-religious in nature and dealt with a great number of existential issues. Proponents such as Apollonius of Tyana contributed to its

popularity in regions of Asia Minor. This later form of Pythagoreanism was less guarded and therefore became popular, particularly among physicians. At the core of the Pythagorean philosophy was the idea that the universe was systematic, finite, and numerical. Therefore, any situation could be resolved through calculation and mathematics. Probably because of its quantitative bias, it was often found in tandem with the cult of Aesculapius, the god of medicine.

The Platonic Academy

The student of Socrates, **Plato** (428–347 BC) taught relentless inquiry. This was an extension of the ideas of Socrates, and it is through Plato that Socrates' philosophy was preserved. Plato believed in experimentation and debate as the means of acquiring knowledge. He also held that the observable universe was a shadow of the greater reality. This greater reality was expressed in the natural sciences, mathematics and logic, and the theory of forms. This greater reality is the “ideal,” and knowledge of the ideal was the end goal of all philosophy.

Platonic thought developed this idea of a greater reality into a sense in which the observable universe was not simply a shadow of the greater reality, but a warped and damaged shadow. Combined with quasi-Christian beliefs, this gave birth to what is known today as Gnosticism, which held that a secret knowledge revealed the true nature of the universe.

Aristotle and the Peripatetics

Aristotle (384–322 BC) challenged the thinking of Plato, who was his teacher. For Aristotle, logic and reason was more important than practical knowledge or empirical proof. If one could reason it to be so, it was so. Because he was the tutor of Alexander the Great, Aristotle became the most famous and most influential philosopher of Greek culture. His works were especially popular among the Roman elites, who styled themselves the successors of Alexander. (Because of this, his works were more frequently copied than other philosophers, and so his methods were emulated in medieval Europe. Much of theological debate during the medieval and modern periods have been based on Aristotelian arguments.)

What we possess of Aristotle's philosophy is not his primary works in their original context, but in edited volumes. Aristotle's followers were known as “Peripatetics” (literally “the walkers”) because Aristotle preferred to teach while walking. Around 40 BCE, Aristotle's logical method was compiled into a six-volume text called *Organon* by Andronicus of Rhodes. His discussions of what might be considered theological or cosmological were edited into a single volume entitled *Metaphysics* sometime in the first century AD.

The Cynics

Today, the idea of being a cynic carries the connotation of pessimism or defeatism. In the Roman world, cynicism was a “back to nature” movement which rejected the comforting logic and reason of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle. It saw the universe as more chaotic, less rational, and therefore one must respond more pragmatically. The most famous cynic was **Diogenes of Sinope** (412-323 BC), a contemporary of Aristotle. Supposedly, when Alexander the Great met Diogenes, the great conqueror wanted to honor the philosopher. He asked Diogenes, “What favor can I offer you?” Diogenes, who was lying in the sun and drinking from a jar of wine, replied, “get out of my light” (Gk. *apokotēson mou*).

Cynics chose to accept the world as it came, rather than trying to change it. They challenged any societal norm or custom that they did not agree with, sometimes indiscriminately, and they intentionally chose poverty and aestheticism. It is not hard to see the parallel between the cynics and the monastic movements of the medieval period.

On the Porch (Gk. *stoa*) with the Stoics

The Stoics believed that nothing was more important than the pursuit of complete wisdom. Physical and spiritual pleasure were distractions. **Zeno of Citium** (334–262 BC) first studied cynicism, and the two schools are somewhat closely related; but it was his second successor **Chrysippus** (280–206 BC) who formalized the most well-known version of the philosophy. For the Stoics, the highest good was virtue (truth) in living, and so ethics played a key role in Stoic philosophy.

Because Stoics elevated the concept of a “universal law” which was, by definition, virtuous, Stoicism heavily influenced Jewish thinking, especially among the Greek-speaking diaspora. It made sense to the Jews that *if* there was a universal law, that law must have a lawgiver, and therefore morality indicates the existence of their God. The Gospel of Matthew may identify this Stoic influence in Judaism and use it to demonstrate the inability to attain ethical purity, leading to the need for the gospel.²⁴ Paul may also employ Stoic philosophy, especially in his epistles to the Corinthians where he emphasizes “the body,” something the Stoics also emphasized.²⁵

²⁴ Stanley K. Stowers, “Jesus the Teacher and Stoic Ethics in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, ed. Thomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Ismo Dunderberg (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 59–76.

²⁵ For more on this, see Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 137 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Epicurean Hedonism

Epicurus (341–270 BC) was skeptical of religion and any sense of a transcendent reality, such as the Platonists argued for. For his followers, the only reality is the present universe. True wisdom was found in rejecting the fears that motivate religion and ethics and embracing natural impulses and the pursuit of their satisfaction. The Latin poet Lucretius encapsulated Epicureanism in a poem called *De rerum natura* (“the nature of the things”).

*Look back again—how the endless ages of time comes to pass
Before our birth are nothing to us. This is a looking glass
Nature holds up for us in which we see the time to come
After we finally die. What is there that looks so fearsome?
What's so tragic? Isn't it more peaceful than any sleep?
(Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.972–76)*

Epicureanism was not restricted to some kind of hedonistic ethics. Their “free” behavior was tied to their belief in the inherent completeness of the physical world, which did not require the input of the divine or transcendent. Thus, the cosmos is without purpose. It simply exists. Events do not have eternal implications, because the eternal requires the existence of something beyond the physical. There are no souls, no gods, and any experience is the result of the physical world. Thus, the highest good is simply to experience this present reality to its fullest.

The Roman Collegia (Voluntary Associations)

Although the Greek-speaking world was *technically* under the authority of the Roman Senate and emperor, such a large geographic area could not be efficiently administered on a day-to-day basis by Roman authorities. The primary administrative unit was the city (Gk. *polis*). These cities could be under direct Roman authority, but often they were free cities with their own local rulers and laws. In order to have some kind of representation, many groups of people organized into *collegia*, or associations. These could be organized around a profession, a particular interest, or a religious purpose—especially funerary associations (Lat. *collegia funeraticia* or *collegium salutare*).²⁶

- **Read Acts 19:23–27.** Notice that the gathering of silversmiths is called an assembly (Gk. *ekklēsia*). During his reign, Caesar Augustus (r. 27 BC–AD 14) banned all the *collegia* because of things like this.

Several associations were formed under the specious name of a new college, which banded together for the perpetration of all kinds of villany.... All associations, those only excepted which were of ancient standing, and recognised by the laws, were dissolved.
(Suetonius, *The Life of Augustus*, 32.1)

Why might the Romans have viewed these professional associations with apprehension?

Any group that could band together like the silversmiths in Ephesus could potentially destabilize a major city. These kinds of groups were a threat.

- **Read Acts 17:1–9.** How did the church in Thessalonica come to be?

Paul preached in the synagogue and was opposed by the Jews. The church seems to have been expelled from the synagogue and formed something new with the “devout Greeks.” The assembly may not have had enough men to form a quorum for a new “Christian synagogue.”

- Let’s take a moment to consider some of the character of the Thessalonian church from Paul’s two epistles to them, as well as referencing in other epistles.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9. Why would Paul be reluctant to be supported by the Thessalonians? (See also 2 Cor 8:1–5; Phil 4:16.)

²⁶ This section draws heavily from Richard S. Ascough, *Paul’s Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians*, WUNT 2.161 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). Only the Thessalonian church is considered here, but Ascough contrasts this with the Philippian church, which seems to have been a different kind of voluntary association.

It seems likely that the Thessalonian church was not wealthy and did not have the usual benefactor most churches had. It may have been more of a “blue color” church. In 2 Corinthians, Paul seems to indicate these churches were not well-off at all, perhaps because they had been excluded from synagogue and civic affairs in general.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3, along with 2:9. Paul emphasizes the idea of work and labor in his letters. Could this hint at the kind of work the Thessalonian Christians were involved in?

It may be that they were largely artisans, perhaps as leather workers/tentmakers (Acts 18:3) like Paul. There were leather workers’ guilds in Phrygia and Pisidia.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13. Who is Paul describing as “those who labor among you”?

It seems to be that the Thessalonian leaders worked alongside their members in the trades. No reference to a church in a particular home or a named leader shows there were leaders, but they were not as distinct as in other churches.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Is Paul speaking of “church work” here or is there a broader message?

The indication seems to be that there was general, every day work which the church members were all engaged in, which would make sense if they had a similar vocation.

If you read 1-2 Thessalonians, one of the interesting things is that there are *no women* mentioned. How could this be when the church was started with “not a few of the leading women”?

It seems likely that Paul’s epistle was written to the church as an “association” of those who were laboring in the “secular” world together, rather than his usual didactic approach because this church was “blue collar” and organized more like a labor society.

- While there is no way to be definitive based on allusions in the text, it seems at least possible that the new churches, especially in largely Greek cities, organized themselves in a combination of the synagogue and *collegio*, with some variations in structure and focus, as needed at the time.

Why Discuss These Broad Categories of Precursors of the Church?

The church did not appear in a vacuum. It emerged from the Jewish and Greek cultures and the social and cultural context influenced areas which were not specifically delineated by the apostles. There may have been great flexibility in how the church was organized and if this is

so, from the beginning, the church had a certain independence and autonomy of the local assembly, an issue which becomes important as the church develops.

The Young Church (AD 40–300)

This time period is often referred to as “the early church” or “the primitive church,” but these indicate that perhaps the church became something else after this period. Here, this period is referred to as “the young church” because this was the period of the church’s development and life prior to being thrust into the imperial spectacle around AD 300.

To put it briefly, as the Church expanded, the Romans began to take notice of it. It is common to describe the persecutions of the Church during this period as if they were widespread, but often there were only local actions. It was really not until the third century AD that imperial action was taken against Christians.

When Did the Church Begin?

To answer this question, we have to go back to our biblical theology of the Church. (Revisit the discussion of “Who is a Member of the Church” on pages 9–11.) Allowing for the concept of a “Greater Church,” there are things the Visible Church cannot exist without:

1. FOUNDATION: The Message of the Church is *THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST*.
 2. FUNCTION: Without the *HOLY SPIRIT*, the Church cannot fulfill its mission.
- If these are fundamental to the Church’s existence, what is the earliest point that the Church could have existed?

After discussion, point them to Pentecost (Acts 2). This does not disallow the inclusion of OT believers or those who came to faith during Jesus’s ministry as members of the INVISIBLE church; but the Visible Church begins there.

A Timeline of the Young Church

The figures offered here are approximate, because we do not have definitive dates for most of the events.

- 30 Jesus is crucified and resurrected; 50 days later, the Spirit falls on the apostles in Jerusalem
- 45 Saul of Tarsus (Paul) and Barnabas are chosen by the church of Antioch to engaged in itinerant ministry.
- 50 The apostles and elders assemble at Jerusalem to decide how to handle Gentile conversions.

- 51–53 Paul establishes the church of Corinth after preaching through Macedonia; over the next decade or so, he writes his larger epistles.
- 54–55 Paul is resident at Ephesus, spreading the church throughout Asia.
- 60 Imprisoned in Rome, Paul begins writing his prison epistles
- 67–68 Peter and Paul are martyred in Rome.
- 70 The Temple in Jerusalem is destroyed by the Romans.
- 95 Clement (becomes bishop of Rome
- 95–98 John, the last apostle, is exiled on Patmos and writes the Revelation.
- 110 Ignatius of Antioch is tried before Trajan for worshiping Jesus and denying other gods.
- 113 Pliny the Younger, as governor of Bithynia, writes to Trajan asking how to handle Christians who appear before him.
- 150 Polycarp and Anecitus write letters to each other, debating the dating of Easter.
- 160 Marcus Aurelius took a position hostile to the Christians, prompting a number of regional persecutions.
- 200 During the reign of Septimus Severus, regional persecutions of Christians increased, although the emperor took no official position.
- 245 Beginning with Decius, emperors became increasingly hostile to Christianity, as the empire became harder to manage.
- 250 Origen writes *Against Celsus* in response to the arguments against Christianity being presented by Roman philosophers.
- 303 Diocletian issues a series of edicts condemning Christians and rescinding their rights. It is the greatest and most widespread persecution of Christians.

Notes

- Prior to becoming an empire-wide religion (see below), Christianity did not have any kind centralized hierarchy or structure. Much of its unity was dependent upon the Holy Spirit at work through:

The Canonization of Scripture: At some point prior to AD 300, the canon appears to have been fixed *independently* throughout the world.²⁷

Composition: *the human author wrote the work and “published” it to its original audience.*

Collection: *recognizing the authority and uniqueness of the text, churches brought together collections of works either by author (Pauline) or genre (gospels).*

Circulation: *these collections were copied and distributed together by the churches, sharing resources regionally and globally.*

Canonization: *the churches recognized universal authority of collections in circulation, thereby rejecting other, less universally accepted texts.*

The Exaltation and Exclusivity of Christ-Worship: This may seem to be an obvious point, but the Christian church was distinguished from Judaism by their reverence for Jesus Christ. The seeming contradiction between being monotheistic *and* exalting Christ made them unusual. While not all of the churches may have seen Christ as equal with the Father, all revered him as more than just a man.

This became clearer in 1888 when a previously unknown document entitled *Didache kuriou dia tōn dōdeka apostolōn tois ethnesin*, “the teachings of the Lord to the nations through the twelve apostles” was published by an Orthodox monk named Philotheos Bryennios. He had found the document in an 11th century manuscript in Constantinople, but it was clearly a copy of a much older document, probably dating from the second century AD. In the text, we find certain characteristics of this early church:

1. *Submission to the authority of the apostles as a past group, not a present succession.*
2. *Baptism by immersion was the rite of initiation into the Church, but there was allowance for physical incapacity or the lack of adequate water.*
3. *The observance of the Lord’s Table as an exaltation of Christ in worship.*
4. *Repeated assertions of the Lordship of Christ in the Church.*

²⁷ For an excellent discussion of this approach to canonization of Scripture, consider Benjamin P. Laird, *Creating the Canon: Composition, Controversy, and the Authority of the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), especially 141–76. Also see Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

The Young Church and Epistolary Ministry

After the passing of the last apostle, the church entered a strange new time. John probably died around AD 96–98, during or shortly after the reign of the emperor Domitian. In all likelihood, the Church had been without the apostles for so long that his passing was remarkable but not epic.

- One of the most important elements of the Young Church was the continued epistolary ministry. Bishops *continued* to write letters, not just to congregations they were directly responsible for, but also in response to questions from other congregations.

Clement of Rome (AD 45?-99)

May have been an associate of Paul (Phil 4:3) and Peter in Rome. He may have been ordained by Peter (Tertullian, Praescr., 32), and tradition says he was the third bishop of Rome.

His epistle to the Corinthians is the oldest Christian document outside of the New Testament.²⁸ It is one of the longest known documents of the period, stretching to fifty-nine chapters.

Ignatius of Antioch (AD 35-110)

*Most likely an associate of John and Peter. After serving as the bishop of Antioch (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.36.2), he was tried before the emperor Trajan, and in the partial transcript of the trial, he is the first person to use the term *katholikos* or *catholic* (universal) concerning the church.*

Ignatius wrote at least nine epistles to churches and two to individuals. There are another nine epistles written in his name which are spurious. *This indicates how influential he was.*

Trajan said, "Do we not then seem to you to have the gods in our mind, whose assistance we enjoy in fighting against our enemies?" Ignatius answered, "You are in error when thou call the demons of the nations 'gods.' For there is but one God, who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that are in them; and one Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, whose kingdom may I enjoy." Trajan said, "Do you mean Him who was crucified under Pontius Pilate?" Ignatius replied, "I mean Him who crucified my sin, with him who was the inventor of it, and who has condemned [and cast down] all the deceit and malice of the devil under the feet of those who carry Him in their heart." Trajan said, "Do you then carry within you Him that was crucified?" Ignatius replied, "Truly so; for it is written, 'I will dwell in them, and walk in them'." (Mart. Ign. 2)

²⁸ This epistle is considered canonical in the Coptic Church, and Eusebius thought it was important enough that he included the whole text (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 3.15). There is also a manuscript of it in Codex Alexandrinus, a fifth century AD codex containing the Scriptures in Greek. A second epistle often attributed to him is probably pseudepigraphic.

Polycarp of Smyrna (AD 69-155)

A disciple of John and the bishop of the churches in Smyrna, which is one of the churches John addressed in the Apocalypse. He wrote an epistle to the Philippians which appears to be authentic (Irenaeus, Haer., 3.3) and was martyred during the reign of Antonius Pius during a persecution focused in Asia Minor.

Polycarp's epistle to the churches of Smyrna echoes Pauline language, *often quoting Paul as Scripture.*

Papias (AD 60–130)

An associate of both the apostle John and Polycarp, Papias apparently heard from the apostles, especially Philip, how the gospels were recorded in written form.

And Papias, of whom we are now speaking, confesses that he received the words of the apostles from those that followed them, but says that he was himself a hearer of Aristion and the presbyter John....

It is in the following words: "This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ.⁹ For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord's discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely." These things are related by Papias concerning Mark.

But concerning Matthew he writes as follows: "So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able."³ And the same writer uses testimonies from the first Epistle of John and from that of Peter likewise.⁵ And he relates another story of a woman, who was accused of many sins before the Lord, which is contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews. These things we have thought it necessary to observe in addition to what has been already stated.

(Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.39.7, 15–16)

Doctrinal Debates

Because Christianity emerged from Judaism, the debates of this period were primarily concerned with the relationship of the two, and the person of Jesus Christ. Because there was no "official" church and the third century was a period of persecution, these were dealt with mostly by regional leaders.

- ***The Ebionites*** were a sect of Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah but rejected his divinity and the authority of the apostles.
- ***Docetism*** on the other hand rejected the idea of Jesus's humanity, arguing that he was fully divine and that his human body was an illusion (Gk. *dokētai*).

- **Gnosticism** combined Neoplatonism and extrabiblical “visions” to argue that the “true” faith required hidden knowledge (Gk. *gnosis*) that was entrusted to only a very small, elite group.

Persecution

Christians were difficult to identify because they carried no external markers of their faith. They did not dress any different from their pagan or Jewish neighbors. They had the same names and occupations as those around them.

- The only way to verify if someone was a Christian was through **sacrifice to the emperor**. This test was used in Asia Minor and possibly Rome, but was not employed elsewhere. As a result, persecution was localized in those areas.
- Perhaps the largest Christian populations during this time were in **North Africa** of all places, particularly the city of Carthage and the region around it.

The Imperial Church(es) (AD 300–800)

BEGINNING EVENT: The Edict of Milan (AD 311)

CLOSING EVENT: The Coronation of Charlemagne as “Emperor of the Romans” (AD 800)

The Roman Empire was in decline for most of the third century AD, but this decline was checked by the emperor **Diocletian** (r. AD 284–305) who reorganized the empire into **diocese** and separated the administration of the empire between himself and a co-emperor named Maximian. Both then took junior emperors (called *Caesars*) so there was a clear succession. He and his co-emperors then passed a number of edicts that stripped Christians of their rights, in an attempt to unify the empire.

Diocletian died in AD 305, and immediately his co-emperors began fighting for control. One of his co-emperors was a general named Constantius Chlorus, who was stationed in Britain and Gaul, and when Constantius died in AD 306, his troops declared his son **Constantine** (r. 306–337) as emperor. The young man then consolidated power over the next eighteen years, becoming sole emperor in AD 324. Along the way, Constantine ended the persecution of the Christians, and then allied himself with their religion, claiming to convert and being baptized at the end of his life (which was common in those days).

We had desired formerly to bring all things into harmony with the ancient laws and public order of the Romans, and to provide that even the Christians who had left the religion of their fathers should come back to reason...And yet since most of them persevered in their determination, and we saw that they neither paid the reverence and awe due to the gods nor worshipped the God of the Christians, in view of our most mild clemency and the constant habit by which we are accustomed to grant indulgence to all, we thought that we ought to grant our most prompt indulgence also to these, so that they may again be Christians and may hold their conventicles,

provided they do nothing contrary to good order. But we shall tell the magistrates in another letter what they ought to do. (The Edict of Milan, AD 311)

After Constantine, the Roman empire became Christian, and by the end of the fourth century AD, all over religions were outlawed. Christianity went from representing less than 20% of the Roman population to 95% being at least nominally Christian. The issue was that this massive shift meant that where Christianity had been fairly diverse and regional before, now it was imperial and needed to be standardized. The period was therefore marked by ecclesiastic councils where groups of bishops decided issues of doctrine and methodology.

This period is the time of the **Imperial Church**, something that eventually morphed into the medieval Roman Catholic Church. In reality, there was not one monolithic Roman Church, but competing visions. The bishops of Rome and Constantinople would vie for power well into the medieval period, but the bishops of Alexandria, Ephesus, Antioch, and eventually Jerusalem and Carthage were all involved in resolving disputes among the churches—extending their authority more and more.

Politically, the empire saw an influx of Germanic tribes, most of whom had converted to Arian Christianity (see below). They became powerful in the armies and when the Romans attempt to curb their power, they revolted over and over again. The result was the fall of Rome, and the contraction of Roman power from Europe north of the Danube and west of Ravenna (near modern Venice). The church in Rome sought protection and found it in Clovis and the Salian Franks, who converted to Christianity and held the Arians at bay.

In the East, the Roman Empire remained relatively strong, and during the reign of Justinian I (r. 527–565) they were able to reconquer much of Italy, although they only held it for a little while. The Germanic tribes in the west began to adapt Latin to their own uses, which gave birth to the Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, etc.) while the Eastern Empire continued to speak Greek, as they had since antiquity. During Late Antiquity, the Eastern Empire (sometimes called the Byzantine Empire by modern historians), waged wars with Persia, and in the early seventh century, these wars depleted both empires, leading to a dramatic change.

Islam was founded in Arabia at this time, and the Muslim armies surged out of Arabia and spread across the Middle East, North Africa and into the Iberian Peninsula (today Spain and Portugal). The Eastern Roman Empire turned their attention to defending Eastern Europe and Anatolia (modern Turkey), but regions like Syria and Palestine (the Roman terms for the region of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan) fell to the Muslims.

In the West, the Franks, under a nobleman named Charles Martel (“the Hammer”) stopped them at the Battle of Tours in 732. His grandson, also named Charles (or technically Karl), became the king of the Franks and then was crowned “Emperor of the Romans” by the pope. His authority was not recognized by the eastern emperor, but Charlemagne, as he became known later, established a sweeping kingdom that encompassed most of what is

today Western and Northern Europe (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Northern Italy). When he died, this land was divided among his sons, but nonetheless constituted what became known as “Christendom” in contrast to the Muslim world.

Throughout his whole reign the wish that he had nearest at heart was to re-establish the ancient authority of the city of Rome under his care and by his influence. (Einhard, Vita Caroli Magni)

In addition, Charlemagne initiated what is known as the Carolingian Renaissance, a flowering of knowledge and education in what is today France and Belgium. He drew heavily upon British scholars, since that island was a bastion of knowledge, since it was mostly shielded from the Germanic invasions. In the fifth century AD, there had been a migration of pagan Angles and Saxons to the island, and they converted to Roman Christianity in the sixth and early seventh century.

Timeline

- 311 The Edict of Milan ends the official persecution of the Church.
- 325 The Council of Nicea is called to answer **Arianism**.
- 410 Rome is sacked by the Visigoths, and Honorius orders Roman legions out of Britannia. The Western Roman Empire essentially ceases to exist, and German chieftains begin setting up petty kingdoms.
- 426 Augustine of Hippo writes *The City of God*, a Christian response to the sack of Rome.
- 430 Patrick goes to Ireland and begins a 60-year mission to convert the Scotti.
- 458 Jerome prepares the Latin translation that eventually becomes the *Vulgate*.
- 476 The Goth chieftain Odoacer kills the last western emperor and sends the imperial garments to the remaining emperor in Constantinople. Odoacer takes the title “King of Italy” instead.
- 508 Clovis I, king of the Salian Franks, is baptized into Roman Christianity.
- 530 The Benedictine Order is established by Benedict of Nursia, reforming existing monastic systems and establishing a rigid “rule” for daily life among clergy.
- 595 Augustine of Canterbury and other continental missionaries establish Roman Christianity in Britain.
- 637 Arab Muslim forces take Jerusalem, and within a century, took all of the Middle East and North Africa.

- 664 The Synod of Whitby brings all Celtic rite churches and monasteries of Britain under the Benedictine Order. This process had been more gradual in Europe.
- 732 Charles Martel stops the Muslim advance into Europe at the Battle of Tours.
- 800 Charlemagne is declared “Emperor of the Romans” by Pope Leo III, essentially creating medieval Europe.

Origen (AD 185–253)

There are many reasons to study the often-controversial Christian apologist and philosopher Origen (AD 185–253). He was influential in the eastern version of Christianity that emerged after Constantine.

- *Against Celsus* was a philosophical response to criticism of Christianity, some of which included accusations of:
 1. *Atheism: Because Christians refused to acknowledge any deity as real except theirs.*
 2. *Necromancy: Because Christians often worshiped in the catacombs and graveyards before dawn on Sundays.*
 3. *Cannibalism: Because Christian spoke of eating “the body and blood of Christ”*
 4. *Incest: Because Christians called each other “brother” and “sister”*

I must deal with the matter of Jesus, the so-called Savior, who not long ago taught new doctrines and was thought to be a son of God. This savior, I shall attempt to show, deceived many and caused them to accept a form of belief harmful to the well-being of mankind. Taking its root in the lower classes, the religion continues to spread because of its vulgarity and the illiteracy of its adherents. And while there are a few moderate, reasonable, and intelligent people who are inclined to interpret its beliefs allegorically, yet it thrives in its purer form among the ignorant. (Celsus, True Doctrine)

- He created the *hexapla*, *the first compilation of Greek translations of the Old Testament.*

Because texts were copied by hand, there were multiple lines of the manuscripts, with variations among them. He attempted to standardize them.
- His theological ideas eventually gave rise to Arianism, because there simply wasn’t philosophical language to explain Jesus’s nature as the Son of God.

Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 265–339)

As Flavius Josephus gathered the sources of Jewish history for Vespasian in the first century, Eusebius of Caesarea gathered the sources of Christian history for Constantine in the fourth. Without his *Church History*, we would know little to nothing about the period before

Constantine (the Ante-Nicene Period, or “before Nicaea). He was bishop of Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean coast of Syria Palaestina (the Roman province) and became Constantine’s personal chaplain.

- Beside his *Church History*, Eusebius wrote a glowing biography of his patron Constantine.
- The sources he used for his history were probably gathered by Origen in the previous generation.

Jerome (AD 342–420)

- Produced *the Vulgate, a standardized Latin translation of the Bible* from the Greek and Hebrew.

The older Latin texts – Vetus Latina – are of mixed quality. Originally, he translated the OT from LXX but later learned Hebrew and was translating the OT when he died in Bethlehem.

Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430)

Augustine essentially framed medieval theology or at least provided it with a starting point. He developed the theological justifications for the fusion of Christianity and the Roman state, as well as justified things like the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, a “just war,” and the foundational concepts behind what would become medieval monasticism.

- Known for two works, *Confessions and The City of God.*
- More than any other thinker of his day, Augustine framed the idea of a *“Catholic,”* or universal, but he emphasized unity in diversity.

Could I therefore maintain opposition to my colleagues, and by resisting them stand in the way of such conquests of the Lord, and prevent the sheep of Christ which were wandering on your mountains and hills—that is, on the swellings of your pride—from being gathered into the fold of peace, in which there is one flock and one Shepherd? Was it my duty to obstruct these measures, in order, forsooth, that you might not lose what you call your own, and might without fear rob Christ of what is His: that you might frame your testaments according to Roman law, and might by calumnious accusations break the Testament made with the sanction of Divine law to the fathers, in which it was written, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”; that you might have freedom in your transactions in the way of buying and selling, and might be emboldened to divide and claim as your own that which Christ bought by giving Himself as its price. (Epistle 93,5-19)

Gregory I (AD 540–604)

Elected as Bishop of Rome in AD 590, Gregory was a tireless reformer and agent for change. He sent Christian missionaries literally everywhere, including Britain. He established two bishoprics—Canterbury and York—and absorbed the Celtic Rite into the Roman Catholic Church.

Venerable Bede (AD 672–735)

In a strange irony, the Christians *furthest from the site of Christianity's founding* became the last bastions of ancient Christian learning as Islam conquered the Middle East and North Africa, and Europe descended into petty kingdoms that could not support intellectual traditions for a time.

- Lived his entire life at the monastery in *Jarrow*, on the northeastern coast of England, exposed to the occasional raids of Danes and Norsemen across the North Sea,
- Wrote a five-volume *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*) that spanned from the Anglo-Saxon conversion to his day. *Given that this was a little over a century, the detail of his work is absolutely invaluable to the students of the period. The work relied on such an enormous variety of sources from Josephus to Pliny the Elder to the fifth century cleric Constantius of Lyon that we can say rather definitively that the English monasteries of his day probably had the most robust libraries in the Christian world.*

Alciun of York (735–804)

- Chief scholar of the Carolingian Renaissance; Trained by one of Bede's disciples, Ecgbert.
- English and Irish scholars and monks preserved much of the record of the pre-medieval Church.

Christological Controversies

One of the key characteristics of this period is the debate over Jesus Christ's nature. Christianity had to answer accusations made by the Romans, as Origen had done. To do so, they had to *explain* how the mysteries of their faith worked but do so in terms that philosophers could understand. This, in turn, forced the Church to carefully articulate their best understanding of the testimony of Scripture, and this narrowed the range of acceptable expression.

- *Donatism*: While not a christological argument, this issue was raised by North African leaders. In their time, they were known as the *traditores*, "those who trade [their faith]."

Named after Donatus of Casae Nigrae. The debate was over people who had recanted their faith during the Diocletian persecutions. First, were these people to be accepted back into the Church; and second, were those baptized or ordained by those who had recanted still allowed in the Church.

- Arianism: Arius was a well-respected elder (presbyter) in North Africa, and his teaching was the first truly major doctrinal debate of the Church.

Arius taught that Jesus was a divine being, but that he was CREATED by God and therefore not equal with God. The debate was “settled” at the Council of Nicaea, but the Arians continued to flourish into the 8th century. In particular, Arian missionaries went into Eastern and Central Europe where they converted many of the Germanic people. When Rome was sacked in AD 450, it was by Arian Christians – not pagans.

- Monophysitism: The belief that Jesus had only one nature, neither human nor divine, and yet both.
- Nestorianism: The belief that Jesus’s natures were fully distinct but not full. Thus, he was half divine and half human.

Want to Know More?

The Real Patrick of Ireland

In AD 410, the emperor Honorius ordered all Roman legions out of the province of Brittainia, what was essentially the modern countries of England and Wales. Brittainia had been Roman for three centuries, and the countryside was dotted with Roman cities complete with hippodromes and baths. Without the legions manning the defenses, the Picts began to advance from the south, the Saxons began crossing the North Sea and settling on the eastern coasts; and the Scotti (the Latin name for the Irish) began raiding the western villages looking for slaves. The remaining Romano-Briton population was pushed south and west into what is now Wales.

Somewhere on the western coast of Wales, there was an unfortified market town called Bannavem Taburniae. The local Christian community was led by a Roman deacon named Calpornius, and he had a son who he named Patricius. When this young man was sixteen, a band of Scotti raided his village and took him captive. They carried him, and presumably a number of other young Romans, to their homes in Hibernia (Ireland). Being captured at such a young age, Patricius never completed his education, and would later in life protest that it was the reason he had such a rustic way of speaking and writing Latin.

Toiling in the field of Ireland, Patricius saw visions of a man he called Victoricus; and when he managed to escape to his homeland, this man visited him again, delivering a message calling for him to return to Ireland and preach the gospel. The official church opposed this, but Patricius was determined to return, surrendering his Roman identity and later writing, "To the pagans I live among, I have lived faithfully and will continue to do so" (*Confessio*, 48). Patricius returned to Ireland, and over the next few decades, he preached the gospel and established monasteries throughout the countryside.

According to the medieval *Annála Uladh* (*Annals of Ulster*), Patricius died around AD 490. He had served in Ireland for nearly sixty years, and the *Annals* refer to him as "the great bishop and apostle of the Irish." The land was dotted with churches and monasteries which were bound not to Rome, which was so far away that Patricius seems not to even heard about the sack of the city in AD 450. While his contemporaries in Gaul (modern France) corresponded with great thinkers like Augustine of Hippo, Patricius labored in relative obscurity. Only two short documents, known as *Confessio* ("The Confession") and *Epistola ad Milites Corotici* ("The Letter to the Soldier Coroticus") are considered to be genuinely by him. There were likely more documents, but they are now long since gone.

The modern myth of St. Patrick is only loosely connected to the life of Patricius, on whom it is based. The reason is fairly simple. Patricius did not conform to the Roman church. He observed what is known as "Celtic rite," which, due to its isolation, developed along different lines than continental (Roman) Christianity. Among other things, the Celtic rite disagreed

with the continental Church on the calculation of Easter, a matter settled in the Mediterranean a century before.

Patricius's success was not well-received by the Roman bishops in Britain. As Liam and Máire de Paor have pointed out, "[Patrick] was the first to demonstrate in practice that Christianity was an institution which would break the bounds and survive the end of the Roman Empire."²⁹ Once Roman Christianity took hold in post-empire Europe (thanks to the Franks), it was necessary to create a palpable version of Patricius's life and ministry. At the Synod of Whitby (AD 664), the Celtic rite monasteries, including those in Ireland, were absorbed into the Benedictine Order, which was in conformity with Rome.

Shortly thereafter, Patricius's life became the subject of a number of emendations. The details of his life were mixed with other, more acceptable figures like the Germanus, a missionary to the Celts of Gaul and Palladius, a continental missionary sent to the Scotti around the same time as Patrick (Prosper, *Chronicum Itegrum*). Added to this dilution of his biographical details, miracles and supernatural events were added to the narrative. Numerous mythical biographies appeared in Ireland such as the *Collectanea* by Tírenách, the *Muirhú* by Maccutinus, and a collection of legends put together by the bishop of Connor, Ultán. The greatest and most outlandish stories were yet to come, with the ninth century seeing the writing of an anonymous three-part Latin work, *Vita tripartii Sanctii Patricii*, and *Vita Sancti Germani* by a Briton serving in the Carolingian court.

Patricius, a real person with a passion for the benighted Scotti, has become obscured beneath the layers of church politics and mythology. To justify their dominance over Ireland, the medieval Roman hierarchy retold and revised the historical events until they became a part of their narrative. This is a problem for much of the peripheral church during Late Antiquity (around 450–700, the period between the fall of Rome and the rise of Islam) and the medieval period because, as it is said, "the victors write the histories" and from about 1200 until 1500, the Roman system dominated the preservation of documents from this period.

We only know of Patricius's writings because they were quietly copied into manuscripts like "The Book of Armagh" (9th century, now at Trinity College Dublin) which was locked in a casket in 937 and revered by the high kings of Ireland until it passed into private hands in the eleventh century and then reappeared in 1680 when it purchased by Arthur Brownlow, a linen manufacturer in Lurgan (now in Northern Ireland). His family protected it until 1858 when it was donated to the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. It is only through that odd turn of events that we know much of anything about Patricius's real history.

²⁹ Liam de Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1996), 30.

Medieval Christendom (AD 800–1450)

BEGINNING EVENT: Charlemagne establishes “the Holy Roman Empire” (AD 800)

CLOSING EVENT: The Fall of Constantinople (1453)

Forget the “Dark Ages”!

The medieval period was *not*, as is often portrayed, a “Dark Age.” In fact, it was a period of innovation. During this period, financial innovations like double-entry bookkeeping were invented in Italian cities. Agricultural innovations like the iron plow and crop rotation helped the population rebound from repeated plagues. Chimneys and architectural innovations, which were largely restricted to the nobility, nonetheless improved living conditions for many. Finally, military innovations like the longbow put an end to the dominance of the mounted warrior (knight) and leveled the battlefield for commoners.

It was called a “Dark Age” and the “Middle Ages” by the Enlightenment thinkers, like Edward Gibbons, because Europe had only one unifying characteristic—Christianity. In popular literature, the continent descended into a benighted period of religious ignorance, dominated by a corrupt church which the humanists of the Renaissance and the Reformers overthrew. There is *some* semblance of truth to this, but the reality was more complicated. In truth, the Roman Catholic Church exerted a strong influence over Western Europe only during the thirteenth century, a period often called the Papal Monarchy; but there was a great deal of diversity, both good and bad, which prompted repeated reform movements.

The Invasion, Conversion, and Crusades of the Normans (Norse, “Vikings”, etc.)

Affairs in Britain developed relatively independent of the continent until the eleventh century, but both the island and the continent faced a new challenge in the coming of the “Men from the North,” the meaning of terms like “Norse” and “Norman.” These were non-Christian Germanic peoples from Scandinavia who “went a viking,” a Germanic term for coastal raiding. Eventually, groups from Denmark settled in a region of Britain called the Dane Law; and another moved into northern France, which became Normandy. These settled groups shielded the population from other “Vikings” but also essentially took over the nations they protected. William II, the Duke of Normandy, claimed the throne of England in 1066 (becoming William I, the Conqueror), and Norman nobles managed to take over much of western France, Italy, and Sicily. When most people think of the medieval period, with knights and ladies, they are thinking of the French Norman courts.

It probably comes as no surprise that when a new Muslim power, the Seljuk Turks, cut off the pilgrimage routes to Jerusalem and threatened the Eastern Empire, it was primarily these warrior Normans who answered the call of Pope Urban III and went on crusade (literally “took the cross”). The promise of a complete indulgence was appealing to them, given that they essentially fought wars for a living and therefore were guilty of breaking the commandment against murder. Norman nobles led virtually all of the early crusades, from Bohemond who

was the Norman prince of Sicily and commander of the First Crusade (1096–1099) to Richard III of England, who led the Third Crusade (1189–1192). After this, crusading became largely an activity of the French and German courts, petering out in effectiveness and size.

The Great Schism (East and West)

The popes claimed sovereign power over the church *everywhere* in Europe. In 1054, the papal legate to Constantinople and the patriarch of Constantinople had excommunicated each other over doctrinal issues, splitting the “Holy, Catholic Church” into two competing factions. In reality, this was just the latest in a series of divisive arguments that reflected not only a theological but also political and economic divide between the two regions. Although we look back at this excommunication “the Great Schism,” it was not that simple. The two halves of the Church had grown apart over the centuries over issues that were both noteworthy and insignificant. Attempts at reconciliation were numerous, and several Eastern emperors even became Roman Catholic, but the reconciliations never lasted.

Throughout the crusading period, tensions between the two halves of Christendom weakened Europe as a whole. In 1204, the Fourth Crusade, led by Venetians and French (mostly Norman) nobles, diverted from its course to Egypt and instead laid siege to and eventually occupied Constantinople. The riches of the greatest Christian city of Europe, including works of art and many Greek manuscripts, were carried off to other cities in Europe. Although the Byzantines eventually rebuilt their kingdom, the century of Norman occupation weakened it, opening the door for the conquests of a new Muslim power, the Ottoman Turks. Less than a century after they appeared on the scene, the Ottomans took Constantinople in 1453, and the Christian borders were pushed north to the Danube where princes like Vlad Drakul managed to check the Ottoman advances through ruthless, terrifying total war.

The Investiture Controversy

One of the reasons the Germans were not involved in the First Crusade was that they were embroiled in a battle with the Roman popes over what is known as the Investiture Controversy. The debate concerned the involvement of non-church nobles (such as kings and princes) in appointing, or “investing” bishops and abbots (leaders of monasteries) in the regions under their control. The popes claimed this power was held solely by them but given that many churches and monasteries controlled large parts of the lands in a particular region, the nobles believed they should have a say.

Gregory VII (r. 1073–1085), the pope at the beginning of this controversy, became a very powerful figure at the time by extending his authority over churches and monasteries through a series of reforms, known as the *Gregorian Reforms*. It is worth noting that Henry was not the only monarch who opposed Gregory’s interference. **William the Conqueror**, newly crowned as king of England, opposed his involvement in church affairs there, as did a number of Norman nobles such as Robert Guiscard, who was happy to take Gregory’s money as a mercenary but abandoned the pope when Gregory began demanding compliance.

In the end, the popes were able to overcome the objections of the monarchs, although the controversy simmered for many years. The German kings (usually the same person as the Holy Roman Emperor) continued to appoint their own popes whenever they felt the Roman bishop was overstepping his bounds. Eventually, the papacy became heavily influenced by France, which was the most powerful country in Europe. In 1309, the French king Philip IV forced the conclave to elect a Gascon named Raymond Bertrand de Got as Pope **Clement V** (r. 1305–1314). Clement refused to travel to Rome, and so in 1309, the entire papal palace was relocated to Avignon, in the Kingdom of Arles, which was part of the French patchwork of fealty to Philip and the French. This weakened the papal authority in the rest of Europe, and the German kings began appointing what are known as “antipopes.”

The English also continued to be a problem. The English kings had lost much of what had been the largest landholdings in France but could still claim the right to the French throne. As the heirs of William the Conqueror, the kings of England could also claim the Duchy of Normandy as their personal lands. In addition, they were descended from Eleanor of Aquitaine, the daughter of the most powerful family in France, and queen of England from 1154 until 1189 and highly influential in the courts of her sons Richard I and John, both kings of England. When Charles IV of France died in 1328 without an heir, the French throne should have passed to Edward III of England. The French, however, appointed Charles’s cousin Philip, Count of Valois, as king. This launched the conflict known as the Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453), which meant that for a century, England was largely beyond the reach of the papacy which was dominated by the French.

Trouble Brewing

Even as the popes attempted to assert their complete power over Europe, religious opposition was rising in the far reaches. In Italy itself, a controversial and little understood group known as the Albigenses emerged and had to be suppressed. The crusader orders such as the Templars and the Hospitallers became powerful, and in some places were viewed with suspicion.

The most significant events occurred in England and Bohemia in the fourteenth century. In England, a priest and respected scholar named **John Wycliff** (1328–1384) became convicted that people should be allowed to read the Scriptures in their native language. He began translating the Latin Bible (the Vulgate) into English.³⁰ He died in 1384, but the Roman Church excommunicated him after his death, exhumed his body and burned it. His works were likewise condemned, but he set the stage for a movement of lay preachers called the Lollards who continued to copy the Bible into English. Influenced by the stories of Wycliff, a Bohemian

³⁰ The development of the English languages is broadly divided into three broad stages: Old English (400–1100), Middle English (1100–1550) and Modern English (1550–Present). These are not exact, and the development was more along a spectrum. The best way to think of them is to read three vital works: Beowulf in Old English (c 800), the Canterbury Tales (c 1400), and the works of William Shakespeare (c 1600). Shakespeare and the King James Bible are the best known Early Modern works.

priest named **Jan Huss** (1371–1415), who challenged the Roman teachings on almost every point. He based his arguments on Scripture rather than on Church tradition and canon law. Pope Alexander V opposed him, and when Huss was tried, he boldly refused to recant. As a result, he was executed.

The issue with Wycliff and Huss, as well as many would be reformers, was that information could only disseminate slowly, by word of mouth. Making a copy of the English translation of the New Testament was labor intensive because it had to be done by hand. All of that changed in 1450, with the development of a cost-effective, easily replicated moveable type printing press. Although developed in Germany, by the year 1500, printing presses were set up throughout Europe, setting the stage for Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation.

Timeline

- 860 The brothers Cyril and Methodius become missionaries to the Khazars, a southern Slavic group. They develop the Cyrillic alphabet, which is still in use by Slavic-speaking people today.
- 871 Alfred the Great becomes the first King of England, taking London and most of the lands held by Danes and other “Vikings.”
- 910 The reforms within the monastery of Cluny begin, eventually leading to reforms of the French churches and monasteries.
- 911 Rollo, the leader of a Viking raiding party, converts to Christianity and is made Duke of Normandy (“Northman land”).
- 1009 Abu ‘Ali Mansur Tariq al-Hakim (r. 996–1021), the Caliph of Egypt, has the Basilica of the Resurrection in Jerusalem razed to the ground and bans Christian pilgrims.
- 1054 The Western Church (Rome) and Eastern Church (Constantinople) excommunicate each other in the Great Schism.
- 1066 William the Conqueror invades Britain and is declared King of England.
- 1070 The Gregorian Reforms attempt to root out corruption and ignorance in the western Church.
- 1071 The Seljuk Turks, recent converts to Islam, threaten the Eastern Roman Empire
- 1095 Eastern Emperor Alexios I Komnenus (r. 1081–1118) sends a letter to Pope Urban II asking help against the Seljuks, launching the First Crusade (1096–1099).
- 1122 The Investiture Controversy is resolved at the Concordat of Worms.

- 1204 The Fourth Crusade, led by the Normans of France and Italy, sacks Constantinople instead of fighting the Muslims.
- 1337 Edward III of England claims the French throne, launching the 100 Years War.
- 1450 Johannes Gutenberg's moveable type printing press is operational, and the Bible is printed in 1455.
- 1453 The 100 Years' War ends; Constantinople is sacked by Mehmet II and the Ottoman Turks

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153)

- The great preacher and “Doctor” of the 12th century, Bernard was called upon to face down perceived heresy.

He opposed the followers of Pierre de Bruys, known as Petrobrusians. This group rejected all but the gospels and rejected all church authority.

- Preached the Second Crusade in France.

The Waldensians

- Founded by *Peter Waldo* sometimes around 1175. *Vadois* also means “valley dwellers.”
- They rejected episcopal authority and favored *individual soul liberty and local autonomy.*

*We ought always to watch and pray, for we see this world nigh to a conclusion.
We ought to strive to do good works, seeing that the end of this world approaches.
There are already a thousand and one hundred years fully accomplished since it was written thus,
For we are in the last time.*

*We ought to covet little, for we are at the latter end.
We see daily the signs to be accomplished in the increase of evil and the decrease of good.
These are the perils which the Scripture mentioned in the Gospels and Saint Paul's writings.
No man living can know the end.*

*And therefore we ought the more to fear, for we are not certain
Whether we shall die to day or to morrow. (The Noble Lesson, stanza 1)*

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

- A Dominican friar so influential that Pope Benedict XV (r. 1914–1922) wrote that the Church itself gained luster when she adopted Aquinas's theology as her own.

- The paragon of *scholasticism*, the merger Aristotelian thought with medieval Church doctrine.

Although the truth of our intellect is caused by the thing, yet it is not necessary that truth should be there primarily, any more than that health should be primarily in medicine, rather than in the animal: for the virtue of medicine, and not its health, is the cause of health, for here the agent is not univocal. In the same way, the being of the thing, not its truth, is the cause of truth in the intellect. Hence the Philosopher [Aristotle] says that a thought or a word is true "from the fact that a thing is, not because a thing is true." (Summa Theologica, 16.1)

Lollardy

- The term was coined by Henry Crumpe, a controversial Cistercian monk who opposed them. It actually means “poor people.”

They were supposedly followers of Wycliffe, although there is not a lot of information.

- “The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards” (1395) included some familiar themes: *The Church was too involved in temporal matters; the ceremonies of the priesthood had no scriptural basis; transubstantiation leads to idol worship; the sacraments as a means of grace is blasphemous; Christians should not engage in “holy war”; the stringent rules of the monastic orders created hypocrisy. They were very much a proto-anabaptist movement.*

Jan Huss (1371–1415)

- Probably influenced by the Lollards, he opposed many of the same things.

“I would not for a chapel of gold retreat from the truth!”

- In 1415, he was burnt at the stake for heresy because he opposed corruption in the church.
- His followers took over Bohemia and Moravia in a war (1420–1434), and these became a sort of pre-Reformation reformed state, which affirmed Luther’s objections and sided with the Protestants during the religious wars.

The Moravian Church would become one of the first Protestants to send missionaries to the Native Americans in the new world.

Want to Know More? *Anselm and Abelard*

Introduction

The intellectual developments of the medieval period are often ignored because the period is supposed to have been a “dark age.” Human beings were no less intelligent in the medieval period, but there was a severe stratification of society that limited *access* to intellectual materials. Almost all written works were in Medieval Latin, a specific version of the ancient language of Rome and its surroundings. Literacy was defined as the ability to read and write this peculiar style of Latin, which had been ossified by the Church and the ruling classes. There is therefore little contemporary record of the intellectual exchanges of the medieval period, but the lives and beliefs of two particular 11th century intellectuals will shed some light on the darkness.

One crafted a theological argument that continues to reverberate in our theological treatises today. He was eventually canonized for his contribution to the Church’s theology, and there is even a college in my area named after him. The other was possibly the best theological and philosophical mind that Europe ever produced; but when he is mentioned, if he mentioned at all, it is usually only in obscure medieval textbooks. Although these two men never met or exchanged words, they represent two sides of medieval intellectualism.

Anselm of Canterbury

Noble Birth

Every man is a product of his age. Anselm was no different. His childhood years were spent in the circle of nobles who were trying to make sense of 11th century Italy and France, which was a complex situation indeed. His family apparently lost their property during a series of upheavals brought about by the complicated presences of the Normans in southern Europe. Originally Scandinavians, they had become landed gentry in France, and now they were moving south. In response to the Norman conquests, Burgundy had been incorporated into the Holy Roman Empire as the Kingdom of Arles (or Arelat). Although it was autonomous, it had been ruled by the titular emperor since 993 but this shift meant a change in allegiances and fealty which doubtless would have influenced Anselm’s youth.

Anselm was born into a noble family in 1033. His family lived in Aosta, a town in Burgundy, what is now northeastern Italy. Anselm’s father Gundulph was related to the House of Candia, and his mother Ermenberga was probably a niece of Humbert I, the founder of the House of Savoy. When Burgundy was incorporated into Arles, the family found themselves on the outside of the ruling house. That did not, however, mean that they had lost everything. Ermenberga managed their estates well until her death, probably around the time Anselm was twenty years old.

Monastic Life

At the age of fifteen, Anselm asked his father to allow him to take monastic orders. His father refused, probably because Anselm already demonstrated the acumen and skill necessary to take over the family's holdings. But Anselm was heartbroken and fell into some kind of psychosomatic illness for years. Then, after Ermenberga died, Gundulph went into a monastery himself. This left young Anselm without parental restriction, and he fled to Norman France. Another Burgundian, Lanfranc of Pavia was prior of the Benedictine monastery in Bec, and when Gundulph also died, Anselm joined the monastery there.

The ruler of Normandy at the time was the famous Duke William II, soon to be known as “the Conqueror” when he took the English throne in 1066. He summoned Lanfranc to a new abbey in Caen, and the monks of Bec named Anselm the prior. A little over a decade later, he was consecrated as bishop of a new diocese at Bec. This was actually a cunning move by one of his rivals, the bishop of Évreux, who wanted to prevent Anselm from becoming the bishop of Rouen, and consequently becoming the most powerful cleric in Normandy. So, by convincing William to create a new diocese, it cut Anselm out of Rouen, leaving the position open the bishop of Évreux to take.

Archbishop of Canterbury

Once established as King of England, William summoned Lanfranc to replace Stigand as Archbishop of Canterbury after Stigand's death in 1070. William died in 1078, but Lanfranc remained in England, assisting his son William Rufus (II of England, III of Normandy) until Lanfranc also died. Finding a Norman replacement was difficult, because the new archbishop had to be both a Norman *and* a well-regarded churchman who was involved in the sweeping changes on the continent, which are now known as the Gregorian Reforms. He found his man in Anselm.

Anselm took some convincing. First, he demanded that William recognize the authority of Pope Urban II. The Investiture Controversy was raging, and Urban had a German rival, Clement III. Second, Anselm required William to return any lands he or his father had seized from the see of Canterbury. Finally, Anselm demanded that William accept Anselm's spiritual advise at a level that almost amounted to an Old Testament prophet. Impressed by Anselm's boldness, William returned the lands and taking the other demands under advisement. On December 4, 1093, Anselm swore fealty to William and was enthroned. It was an uneasy relationship from the beginning.

England had always had a loose relationship with Rome. The Normans were fervent Christians, but they likewise preferred to be left alone. Lanfranc had appreciated this, and he had allowed the English clergy great latitude. Anselm, on the other hand, believed strongly in the authority of the pope. He had a close affinity with Urban II, who had been the Grand Prior of Cluny, and strongly supported reform. Anselm opposed the idea of secular lords having authority over the Church and its bishops. He demanded that William allow him to go to

Rome to seek papal confirmation of his see and to ask the pope to resolve the conflicts. William flatly told Anselm that if he left, it would be to exile. Anselm left anyway.

As soon as Anselm left, William seized the see's property. Anselm traveled through France and on to Rome where Pope Urban II affirmed the Gregorian reforms and confirmed Anselm's enthronement, although he informed Anselm he would not step in to resolve the dispute. He did not have to because in 1100, William II died. His brother Henry I became king and he invited Anselm back to England. Henry quickly found himself at odds with Anselm as well, and Anselm appealed to Urban's successor Paschal II to resolve the situation. Paschal reaffirmed Anselm's case, but Henry refused to accept the ruling or Paschal's authority. He continued to ordain bishops in England, and a furious Anselm went into exile again, threatening Henry I with excommunication.

Finally, in 1106, Paschal mediated a compromise. Anselm refused to return, staying this time at his former abbey in Bec. It was not until Henry journeyed to Bec and met Anselm personally that the two signed the Concordat of London and Anselm returned. He spent his final two years working with Henry to consolidate the Church of England and bring the churches more and more under the pope's authority. He died in 1109.

Anselm's Theology

Land and vassalage were more than economic niceties in Anselm's world. They were cultural *sin quo non*. You simply could not have had any kind of society or culture without them. The European feudal system had been developed in the wake of the fall of central government in Italy and had become so integrated into their thinking that medieval people could not think outside of it. Whenever we read Anselm, we have to remember that this is his world. Particularly, there are three points I want the readers to note:

1. **Aristocratic Nobility:** Anselm was born into landed aristocracy, and he served the church as an abbot and a bishop, both roles that involved lands and fealty. He routinely contested matters with kings and popes.
2. **Relationships and Celibacy:** Anselm had no romantic or intimate involvement with women that we know of. He was totally committed to the church and the papacy. He was not close to his family, did not seem to value friendships, and he could be quite difficult.
3. **Papal Supremacy:** Anselm worked toward a church unified under Rome's primacy. He would rather be in exile than cooperate with a king who did not recognize the Roman Church's authority.

Peter of Abelard

Early Life

A generation younger than Anselm, Peter of Abelard was born in 1079, to a Breton family in the town of Le Pallet - about ten miles east of Nantes in Brittany. We know next to nothing about his family, outside of references in his own writings, especially his autobiographical work, *Historia Calamitatum* ("The Story of My Downfall"). His father was a soldier, probably a mercenary. He makes no mention of his mother.

His father recognized Peter's quick wit and sharp intellect, and he provided his son with basic liberal education. He probably imagined that Peter would make a good soldier, but Peter's great passion was philosophy. He excelled at dialectics, and he became immersed in the thinking of Aristotle, which was at the time available only in either Boethius's 6th century translation or poorer translations made not from Greek but from Arabic. Unsatisfied with the challenges available close to home, Peter wandered France, looking for intellectual challenges. He spent some time learning from Roscellinus of Compiègne before he moved to Paris and became a student at Notre-Dame de Paris.

In Paris, Peter changed his last name to Abelard. He began his studies under William of Champeaux and very shortly was outshining his teacher. Before too long, William and Peter were debating fiercely, with William taking the prevailing view of Platonic Realism while Peter began to develop his own views based on Aristotelian Nominalism. Platonism dominated medieval philosophy, but Abelard's childhood fascination with Aristotle had blossomed into something of a contrary career. At the age of thirty-six, Peter had bested most of the greatest minds of his age and was named the chair of the school of Notre-Dame.

Aristotle's Challenge

Abelard challenged received thought because he was Aristotelian. To put it simply, Aristotle taught that there is no such thing as *itness*. A tree does not have *treeness*. Love does not have *loveness*. We define what these things mean, what makes a tree or what actions can be considered love. This view is today called *nominalism*.

Most medieval thinkers, such as Anselm, held to a Platonic view of the world. This view, known as *realism*, holds that everything in the world has *itness*. For example, all trees have a form of *treeness* that makes them trees. There is this central idea in the mind of God that is a tree. When the neo-Platonists of the last couple centuries of the period before Christ taught this, they applied to the entire world. Thus, what we observe in the real world is a faulty reflection of the true *itness*. This was picked up by the Gnostics and extended to the idea that what we observe here - the material world - is corrupt and sinful. This idea, in its essentials, was carried into the medieval period by most philosophers of the day.

Abelard rejected realism. The world was not corrupt by its nature. It is corrupt because we perceive its corruption. Love is not defined by the sexual act or the feeling of hormones in the

body. We decide to define love by these things. He became well-known for an argument in which he would write lists of arguments for and against something, in Latin *sic et non*. While a realist would argue that an act is *always* right or wrong with absolute certainty, Abelard would pragmatically analyze the situation and decide based upon that. He was, in essence, the father of the objective analysis. Almost single-handedly, he thrust Aristotle back into the forefront of philosophical thought and may have indirectly been responsible for the development of scholasticism in the 13th century.

Heloise

Abelard met his match not among the male scholars of the cathedral school but in the person of a woman twenty years his junior. Her name was Heloise, and she had been trained in classical languages and writing as a child. When her parents died, Heloise was adopted by her uncle, Fulbert, who was a canon of Notre Dame. The two met in 1115, when Heloise was no more than a teenager. Peter was struck by her intellect, as well as her beauty. "She is not bad in the face, but her copious writings are second to none." According to his account, he fell madly in love with her, and he determined to be made part of her father Fulbert's household.

Once in the household, he eventually won Heloise's affection and they were secretly married. Heloise was soon pregnant, and she gave birth to a child the odd pair of intellectuals named Astrolabe. Her uncle was outraged, and he forced Heloise to deny their marriage. She was exiled to a nunnery, but Abelard's fate was far worse. Probably at Fulbert's behest, a group of local troublemakers kidnapped him, took him to the woods, and then castrated him. Disgraced and maimed, he abandoned his public career and joined a monastery.

Abelard's life in exile was miserable. He alienated those around him because he employed an almost encyclopedic knowledge of church doctrine to call into question any arguments he felt were improperly presented. Eventually, he was driven from the monastery and became a hermit. He built a hermitage known as the Oratory of the Paraclete. Even as a hermit, he was attacked, and when he fled to southern Brittany, he managed to have Heloise made the abbess at the Paraclete.

The two lovers never met face to face again. For the rest of their lives, Abelard and Heloise maintained their relationship by correspondence. Deprived of the physical acts we refer to as love and intimacy, Abelard and Heloise simply defined their theological conversations as intimacy and expressed their love that way. Their Aristotelian nominalism freed them from what was supposed to be love, and they created something uniquely theirs. Their letters can only be described as eroticism of the theological. They wrote theological questions and answers as passionately as any couple ever wrote about intimacy and romance.

Bernard of Clairveaux

Abelard's teaching (and he was something of a rockstar in his day) attracted the attention of another popular teacher named Bernard of Clairveaux. In 1128, Bernard had served as secretary of the Council of Troyes. He was a bit of a celebrity himself, pushing the French

bishops to accept Pope Innocent II at the Council of Étampes and in 1131 accompanied the pope to a council at Reims where the Germans also recognized Innocent's claim.

Bernard deeply distrusted Abelard and his inquisitive nature, but he also respected and feared him. In 1121, Abelard had been forced to burn his own work on the Trinity. Bernard continually condemned Abelard to the pope. Abelard was not one to back down, and he began pressing for the two to meet and argue their case. Bernard was afraid of the great theologian and thinker, but in 1141, he was finally backed into a corner and forced to present his case before a council at Sens. Bernard campaigned in the background, believing he could have Abelard condemned. At first, the fifty-seven year old Peter argued so convincingly that he was released, but Bernard was not easily deterred. He summoned a second court and Abelard was condemned. Abelard accepted without complaint, but he protested to Rome.

In 1141/2, while waiting for notice that his case would be heard by the pope, Abelard died at the prior or St. Marcel. His last words were reportedly, "I don't know." At great risk to herself, Heloise had his body brought to her at the Paraclete, where it was buried. Heloise lived another twenty years later. When she died in 1163, her body was laid beside his. Today, they lie beside one another in the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

Contrasting Abelard with Anselm

The differences between Abelard and Anselm should be immediately obvious if you have read these brief sketches of their lives. Anselm— landed nobility, chaste until death, and fanatically loyal to the Church hierarchy—had little in common with Abelard—a Breton peasant turned teacher, castrated for his affair with a younger woman.

- **Individual Freedom:** Because he was not a landowner or a vassal, Abelard had no sense of fealty or vassalage. He was a free agent, no matter what he did. He therefore was not bound by the strictures of the age.
- **Passion and Love:** Abelard knew love and passion. He embraced *love* as the defining attribute of God. He recognized what love *could be* and assumed God would be all of that in perfection.
- **Reason:** Abelard valued the human mind over "ultimate reality." No hierarchy could establish illogical or unreasonable rules for free human minds. All things must be ordered.

Anselm and Abelard on the Atonement

Having met Anselm and Abelard, we now want to take a moment to consider how their different backgrounds and philosophical approaches affected their theology. To do this, we will take one fundamental belief under consideration: the atonement of Jesus Christ. Basically, the atonement is a theological shorthand for "how did Jesus's death save people?" It is a complex issue that has been debated for centuries and there are lots of opinions on it.

Before we get into it, let's summarize what we learned about these two men's lives. Anselm was from landed aristocracy and was involved in a lot of political debates in both the "secular" and "sacred" realms. Abelard was a peasant philosopher who wrote theological love letters to his beloved Heloise. The two could not have been different, and yet both opposed the popular theology of atonement they encountered among their fellow clerics. In the medieval church, the overwhelming view was that because of sin, Satan had ownership of all mankind. Through his death, Christ purchased or ransomed people from Satan. Such a view did not reflect the views of the Church Fathers nor did it align with the Scriptures, and so both Anselm and Abelard adopted alternate views.

Anselm's Famous Syllogism

In his essay *Cur Deus Homo?* ("Why God Man?"), Anselm laid out what is essentially the modern Western view of the atonement. Here are some essential statements of his syllogism:

Everyone who sins must pay to God the honor he has taken away, and this is satisfaction, which every sinner must make to God.

Nothing is less tolerable in the order of things than for a creature to take away the honor due to the Creator and not make recompense for what he takes away.

When you render to God what you owe to Him, even without having sinned, you ought not to count it as payment for a debt you owe because of sin.

It is necessary that the Heavenly City be completed from among men, and if this completion can occur only if the aforementioned satisfaction is made, and if only God can make this satisfaction and only a man ought to make it: it is necessary that a God-man make it.

Anselm goes on, but this begins us down the road. He builds his syllogism thus:

1. Sin creates a debt from the creation to the Creator.
2. The debt must be paid by man.
3. The debt is too big for man and only God can pay it.
4. Thus, only a God-man could pay it.
5. Jesus alone can satisfy the debt.

His rhetoric is sound. He rejects the idea that *Satan* is involved in the atonement at all. It is strictly God and man. This was a radical idea indeed. But notice the financial nature of his argument. Sin creates a *debt* to God— a requirement for payment.

Abelard's Position

Abelard rejected Anselm's financial syllogism. He argued that the God-man was not *required* for the atonement. Instead, he argued that Jesus' atonement for sin was a

manifestation of the reality of love. In essence, that salvation through Jesus's death was the definition of love. It was not a necessary act, but rather a volitional act.

Where Anselm lived in a world of fealty and ownership, Abelard lived in a world of unrealized love and devotion. He was free from the worldly concerns that consumed Anselm, and thus did not feel it necessary to define God's forgiveness of sin by necessity and debt but rather by feeling and love. Thus, forgiveness of sin was not found in the satisfaction of a debt but rather in the knowing of love.

Our redemption through the suffering of Christ is that deeper love within us which not only frees us from slavery to sin but also secures for us the true liberty of the children of God, in order that we might do all things out of love rather than out of fear - love for him who has shown us such grace that no greater can be found.

Who Was Right?

I will leave the final interpretation to you. Personally, I think both Anselm and Abelard captured part of the idea of the Atonement. My interest in them is bound up in my belief that truth exists in tension - that God allows diverse experiences and thinking to mold our diverse thinking and we then frame our theological concepts. Theology is not the rule of one true over many, but many facets of one grand thought in the mind of God, sparkling and kindling passions in the hearts of man.

It is a poor testimony to the state of the church in the 12th century that Abelard was essentially hunted down by Bernard of Clairvaux because he disagreed with Anselm. His view, known as the Moral Theory today, is virtually unknown in the western church. Anselm was a political favorite of popes. Abelard was an obscure monk teaching the masses. Anselm's theory has become church dogma; Abelard's is viewed as nearly (not quite) heretical. At the core of this theological fine point is a class war, a reality that someone like Anselm simply would struggle with concepts that Abelard found natural, and vice versa. The tension between them was *forced* into resolution by Anselm and Bernard's view being accepted and Abelard being marginalized and forgotten.

The Renaissance and Reformations (1450–1650)

Beginning Event: The Invention of the Moveable Type Printing Press (1450)

Ending Event: The Peace of Westphalia (1648)

The Printing Press and Humanism

It is difficult to overstate the impact of the development of Gutenberg's printing press. It is unclear exactly when he perfected his printing technique, but by 1450, his press was churning out copies of the Bible, in Latin of course. The idea was so simple that it is amazing no one had thought of it before. Trained as a goldsmith, Gutenberg made type out of metal, and the type was so durable that it could be set and reset thousands of times. In the time it might take to make a single hand-scripted book, Gutenberg could print and distribute hundreds. The press was easily duplicated, and within a decade, there were printing presses all over Europe churning out books and pamphlets in every conceivable language.

Gutenberg's invention came at a time when there was an intense interest in books. This was the time of the Renaissance (a later appellation) when Europeans, stirred by renewed relations with the Eastern Roman Empire, became interested in their past. The pursuit of knowledge *ad fontes* (from the source) rather than filtered through tradition and hierarchy became the normal path of education. This was called the "New Learning" or later "humanism." In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the best and brightest of Europe traveled to Italy to be trained by Greeks who had fled the invading Turkish armies. With Gutenberg's press, however, this knowledge could be printed and distributed anywhere and in any language.

Martin Luther and the German Reformation

One of the beneficiaries of this confluence of intellectual pursuit and technological marvel was an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther. Luther was not the first to protest the excesses of the Roman church, but he was the first to do so in the common tongue and distribute his protests via printed books. Because the Roman Catholic Church was slow to grasp the impact of the printed word and the difficulty of suppressing it, by the time they were able to respond in kind, Lutheranism had spread uncontrollably, and the Protestant Reformations were in full swing.

We should be cautious about equating this first Reformation movement with religious freedom. In fact, these early Reformers rejected Roman authority over the Church, but they still believed the Church and state were one thing. The Peace of Westphalia, which ended the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, only guaranteed the power of the princes and kings to decide what religion their particular dominion would follow.

The English Reformation

The most extraordinary moment of the Reformation was when Henry VIII of England broke with the Roman Catholic Church. Until that point, Henry had been one of Rome's staunchest supporters. When the Pope Clement VII refused to allow Henry to annul his marriage with Catherine of Aragon, Henry confiscated all church property in England and declared himself to be the head of the Church of England. His first daughter, Mary, ruled briefly as a Catholic, but his second daughter Elizabeth I ruled for decades, repulsed Catholic attempts to reclaim the kingdom and then declared her distant cousin James VI of Scotland as her successor. Because the English no longer had any continental territories, they were able to stay aloof from the religious wars, and as a result, England became one of the most successful Protestant nations.

James was not, however, tolerant of nonconformists. He believed strongly in the divine right of kings, and so any religious movement that rejected his claim to be head of the Church of England, was to be suppressed. In 1611, the same year that the King James Version of the Bible was published by the Church of England, English exiles, led by Thomas Helwys, issued what might be considered the first Baptist statement of faith. Helwys rejected the idea of a continuity of "true churches" and so had distanced himself from other English dissidents, like John Smyth. Key to Helwys's argument was that there was no such thing as "Christendom." One was not "born" into grace as the "elect."³¹ Thus, the true church was not an institution but rather the assembly of those who *choose* to follow Christ and be baptized.

Before Helwys, the nonconformist groups like the anabaptists and the English dissidents, were still seeing the church as some kind of institution to which people innately "belong." This kind of thinking is still present in modern Amish communities, who are the inheritors of the continental heritage. After Helwys, the Baptists rejected this middle road.

Timeline

- 1475 Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile marry, forming what will become Christian Spain. They launch the *Reconquista* and retake all of Iberia from the Muslims.
- 1492 Christopher Columbus returns from "discovering" the Americas and begins trans-Atlantic traffic, including the bringing of Spanish missionaries. Rodrigo de Borgia becomes the first Spanish pope, reigning as Alexander VI.

³¹ The idea of election in the late medieval and early modern period, as espoused by leaders like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, is often misunderstood because Reformed theologians have rephrased it to be more abstract. In the early Reformation, the concept of election pertained really to being part of Christendom. Grace was "irresistible" because God had willed you to be born in the Christian world to Christian parents.

Want to Know More?

Erasmus: The Last Humanist

Constantinople Falls

In 1399–1402, the great courts of Europe played host to a tall visitor who impressed kings and scholars alike. He spoke several languages (including English and French thanks to his grandmother, who was the daughter of an English knight), and he could discourse in any number of scholarly disciplines, from science to philosophy to military tactics.³² His name was Manuel II Palaiologos (r. 1391–1425), the first Roman emperor to be west of Dalmatia in nearly 1,000 years. The fifty-year-old *Augustus* had come to Europe at the behest of the French marshal Jean II Le Maingre (1366–1421). He had slipped out of his capital, Constantinople, while it was besieged by the Ottoman Turks. As Manuel progressed through Europe with a retinue of forty, he pleaded with the Europeans to join him in repelling the Turkish threat. He renounced his Eastern Orthodox faith, received Roman baptism and promised a union of the churches.

All the pomp and promises yielded little result. Although a few Italian cities pledged their aid, it was not the overwhelming force he envisioned. He died in 1449, with the spectre of the Ottomans still looming, although internal issues in the Ottoman court had slowed their war against the Romans. When the sultan, Murad II, finally died in 1451, his twenty-year old son Mehmed II (r. 1451–1481) quickly consolidated power, removed rivals, and built a force designed to topple the impenetrable walls of Constantinople. Two years later, Mehmed's artillery had failed to pierce the walls when, by chance, a siege gate was left open. The Turks streamed into the city, and the emperor Constantine XI, Manuel's son and heir, fell in the melee, ending the Eastern Roman Empire which had survived since the time of Constantine.

It is hard to overstate the repercussions of the fall of Constantinople. All at once, the Silk Roads that had brought spices, silks, and other trade goods from Asia were brought under Muslim control. In shock, England and France ended their Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), contemplating a new crusade that never came to fruition. The Houses of Aragon and Castille united to drive the Muslim Moors from Iberia (modern Spain and Portugal) in a campaign known as the *Reconquista*. Then they turned their attentions to the sea, forging around the horn of Africa and across the Atlantic to reach Asia and reestablish a new Silk Road. Petty Christian rulers like the ruthless guerilla Prince of Wallacia, Vlad Dracul, won Pyrrhic victories

³² It is likely that Manuel's education was overseen by his paternal grandmother, Helena Kantakouzene. As a student of Demetrios Kydones, he would have been exposed to not only Greek classics, but also the burgeoning thought of the western world, such as the works of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). See Siren Çelik, *Manuel II Palaiologos (1350–1425): A Byzantine Emperor in a Time of Tumult* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 39–4.

against the Turks along the Danube, delaying the Turks long enough for the lines of a new Cold War to solidify.

Ad Fontes and the Rise of Humanism

The geopolitical impact of Constantinople's fall dwarves that of Manuel's procession half a century before, but in the schools and universities of Europe, Manuel's appearance had changed *everything*. Greeks who had come to Venice and other Italian cities during the 14th century had found only small audiences. Latin was the language of the academy in Europe. Greek was virtually unknown, and although some Greek manuscripts had been brought to Europe during the brief period of Latin rule over Constantinople (1204–1261), there was virtually no interest outside of a small group of scholars who were interested in a return to the ancients.

Manuel's procession thrust this interest in the ancients into the metaphorical limelight. Teachers like the Greek Manuel Chrysoloras (1350–1415) went from obscurity in Florence to continental celebrity almost overnight. Even his small group of close followers rose to high level positions throughout Europe. Suddenly, Pope Gregory XII needed a secretary versed in Greek affairs, and so he summoned Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444) to his side. Another of his students, Ambrogio Traversari, made a name for himself by translating ancient philosophical works. More than that, Chrysoloras composed the *Erotamata* (Greek for “Questions”), a sort of Greek grammar and reader which was circulated in Italy in the decades after his death.

After Gutenberg perfected the movable type printing press, the design was so easily replicated that printing houses emerged everywhere in Europe within two decades. By 1470, Nicolas Jenson had set up a print shop in Venice, and he developed the first Greek type. The first book he printed was the *Erotamata*. It became an instant bestseller, and Jenson's workshop could not keep up with demand. Another printer working in Venice, Aldus Manutius, began producing smaller octavo copies of Greek texts, sometimes with a translation in parallel columns.³³ Another of Chrysoloras's students named Guarino de Verona made the dangerous trips to Constantinople and other Greek sites, returning with texts ranging from biblical texts to bawdy comedies. By 1480, Jenson and Manutius's print shops were the largest in the world, churning out texts in Greek and Latin as quickly as the young students of Europe's universities could buy them.

There had been hints of a revival in classical knowledge and texts in the preceding century. People like Petrarch and Boccaccio had begun collecting ancient Latin manuscripts and reviving the ideas they found in them in the fourteenth century, but it was this obsession with Greek in the wake of Manuel's tour of Europe that ushered in the obsession with seeing this ancient world reborn; and it was the printed press that made it available to all of Europe.

³³ A *quarto* is a book with 4 leaves printed on each side of a folio, a total of eight pages. An *octavo* has 8 leaves, and so yields 16 pages, and therefore is much cheaper to produce once the type is set.

It was known by many names, but two were almost universal. It was called “the New Knowledge” by those who opposed it out of traditional allegiances, and “humanism” by those who advocated for it.

Although largely forgotten today, men like Basil Bessarion and John Argyropoulos were celebrities throughout Europe. Young men traveled to Italy to learn Greek directly from these scholars. For example, Giovanni de Medici (the future pope Leo X) and Thomas Linacre (one day to become the personal physician of Henry VIII of England), spent years under Janus Lascaris and Demetrios Chalkokondyles, Greek scholars in exile in Florence. This kind of situation was hardly commonplace, but there were enough of them that this “New Learning” spread quickly out of Italy and into the universities and chancellories of Western Europe. Universities previously devoted to recitation of canon law became, almost overnight, hotbeds for revolutionary ideas.

One of the creeds of humanism was the pursuit of knowledge *ad fontes*, “from the source.” For example, a true biblical scholar could not simply read the common Latin translations of the Bible which were available in cathedrals and monasteries. A true scholar would seek out the Greek copies and determine the original text. While for Petrarch, this meant running around Italy and purchasing Greek manuscripts for his private collection, this new generation of humanists could purchase an inexpensive printed *octavo*. He could gloss it, carry it with him when he was engaging in debate with his peers. Knowledge spread across Europe at a speed that is difficult to understand.

The Greatest Scholar in Europe

Sometime in the middle of 1466, a young woman named Margaretha gave birth to the son of a Dutch priest named Gerard, possibly in Gouda. At his baptism, the boy’s father named him Erasmus, after St. Erasmus of Formiae. Church law forbid Gerard being married, but it is likely that Margaretha was his wife in all but church law. Along with his half-brother Peter, Margaretha’s son from a previous marriage, Erasmus attended some of the best schools in the Netherlands. All classes were in Latin, but when Erasmus had not yet hit puberty, a new schoolmaster named Alexander Hegius introduced Greek to the curriculum. The young Erasmus seems to have taken to languages and academia as if it was second nature.

His parents died of the bubonic plague when Erasmus was in his late teens. In 1484, Peter entered the Augustine monastery in Stein. Erasmus followed the next year. For an illegitimate child of a priest, the only real path was ordination into the priesthood, and Erasmus was ordained in April 1492. The Netherlands could never contain a mind like Erasmus’s. He became an itinerant scholar, studying in Paris in 1495, then in 1499 he traveled to Oxford in England. He traveled to England at least three times during his life, and he counted among his friends some of the most influential English scholars. He carried on a constant correspondence with Thomas More, John Colet, and Thomas Linacre. In 1506, Erasmus

traveled to Turin where he received a Doctor of Divinity, and from there, he went to Venice and then to Padua.

Everywhere that Erasmus went, he accumulated knowledge about Greek generally but the Greek New Testament specifically. “My mind is so excited at the thought of emending Jerome’s text [the Latin Vulgate], with notes, that I seem to myself inspired by some god.” (Epistle 273) The problem was that no one was willing to publish a correction of the Vulgate, which was considered the inspired Word of God. Admitting there might be issues with the text was something no one was willing to do. He was turned down by every publisher he approached.

Then a number of things happened that changed the situation. First, Giovanni de Medici was elected pope, taking the name of Leo X. Leo determined to remove any influence of the Spanish Borgia family from the Roman Church. Rodrigo Borgia, as Pope Alexander VI, had commissioned one of his Spanish cardinals, Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, to create a university in Spain. Cisneros was regent to the young emperor Charles V, and one of the most powerful men in Europe. Led by Diego Lopez de Zúñiga, the scholars at the university had done a revision of Jerome’s Vulgate and completed the New Testament in 1514. They had held off publishing the text until the Old Testament was finished.

Leo casted about Europe for someone who could beat the Spanish to press. He may have known Erasmus from Venice, but he was a close friend of Thomas Linacre. One way or another, Leo commissioned Erasmus, who rushed to the print shop of Johann Froben in Basel, Switzerland. Working at a truly blistering speed, Erasmus and Froben were able to publish Erasmus’s Greek/Latin New Testament in 1516. It would go through seven subsequent revisions, but it quickly became accepted as the standard, the *textus receptus* or the finest reproduction of the Greek text *ad fontes*. With only minor alterations by later scholars, it would remain the standard for nearly three hundred years.

Erasmus and Luther

Erasmus wasn’t just versed in languages, nor did he restrict his work to ancient Greek. He was famous for his correspondence with scholars, dignitaries, reformers, and nobles. The published letters span twenty-one volumes, and his collected works another seventy-four. His best known early work is his *Institutio principis Christiani* (“The Education of a Christian Prince”), which he published in 1516 and dedicated to the sixteen-year-old prince soon to become the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. The work was undoubtedly a response to the pragmatic and sometimes ethically dubious *Il Principe* (“The Prince”), published by Niccolo Machiavelli three years prior.

After Martin Luther’s reformation began, Erasmus wrote *De Libero Arbitrio* (“On Free Will”), which argued against predestination, something both Luther and Calvin supported. Erasmus argued that God could not be arbitrary, and since predestination (as it was understood in medieval theology) was inherently arbitrary and excluded people for no reason

other than someone must not be elect, it did not reflect the God of the Bible. His humanist training was clear. God must not only be the God of revelation but also the God of reason. Human beings were given reason by God, so logically they must be able to reasonably accept his sovereignty and will.

Early in the Reformation (1518), Luther claimed an affinity with Erasmus. Erasmus, however, claimed to have no knowledge of who Luther even was. In a letter to Luther's superior, Albrecht of Mainz (to whom the 95 Theses were addressed), Erasmus called Luther "a perfect stranger to me." He told Pope Leo X, "I have no acquaintance with Luther." Despite the reformation fervor surrounding him, Erasmus remained a faithful Roman Catholic until his death in 1536. He saw Luther as reckless and dangerous. He told the Bishop of Utrecht, "If only he had followed my advice and refrained from that offensive and seditious stuff, he would have done more good and been much less unpopular."

For his part, Luther considered Erasmus a compromiser and a coward. Despite his reliance upon Erasmus's Greek New Testament for his own German translation, Luther said Erasmus was impious and a hypocrite. He went so far as to admonish Erasmus not to mention him in any of his works or answer any of his arguments. Erasmus unleashed a series of essays and books answering Luther's arguments. Luther turned on Erasmus, calling him "a reptile" and "a viper" in letters; and in return, Erasmus labeled Luther as insolent and said to Willibald Pirckheimer in 1526, "he has left no room for friendship between us."

Final Thoughts

While the Protestant Reformation remade Europe and was at least partially responsible for the rise of Western Civilization, Erasmus was not wrong to condemn Luther's tactics. The century of religious wars that tore Europe apart in the 16th and 17th centuries might have been avoided if Luther had tempered his words and actions. Then again, Erasmus did not have to deal with the direct repercussions of the Vatican's policies as Luther did. He was safely sheltered in his academic world while Luther was among the people. On the other hand, if Erasmus had joined Luther, the world would have been deprived of his enormous output of letters and works which sculpted much of the intellectual life of the world Luther left behind.

- 1494 Under the leadership of Girolamo Savonarola, a Dominican friar, the city of Florence was seized and made an iconoclastic, democratic theocracy. Until 1498
- 1513 Giovanni de Medici becomes pope as Leo X and authorizes the sale of plenary indulgences to finance the rebuilding of Rome.
- 1516 At Leo's request, **Desiderius Erasmus** publishes the *Novum Instrumentum omne*, the first printed critical edition of the Greek New Testament, in parallel with a revision of the Latin Vulgate.
- 1517 Martin Luther sends his 95 Theses to the bishop of Utrecht protesting the sale of plenary indulgences; the recognized beginning of the Reformation.
- 1522 The Knights' Revolt and then Peasants' War begin a period of religious wars in Europe that last until the Peace of Westphalia.
- 1533 Disgruntled by the pope's reluctance to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, English king Henry VIII, the former "Defender of the Faith" declares himself the head of the Church of England.
- 1536 William Tyndale is martyred after creating an English New Testament based on Erasmus; his work becomes the foundation of all subsequent English translations in the next century.
- 1572 In the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, French Huguenots were killed by Catholic mobs, an event instigated by Catherine de Medici.
- 1588 Thanks to adverse weather conditions, the Spanish Armada fails to land troops in Britain to reclaim the kingdom, leaving England a Protestant nation.
- 1604 James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England; he authorizes an "official" translation of the Bible for use in English churches.
- 1611 Thomas Helwys publishes the "Synopsis of the Faith of the True English Church."
- 1620 English Separatists ("the Pilgrims") sail to New England and establish Plymouth Plantation.
- 1636 Roger Williams declares "liberty of conscience" (religious liberty) in Rhode Island and Providence Plantation, establishing the first Baptist church in the Americas.
- 1642 Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans rebel against King Charles I and establish a short-lived theocracy that nevertheless opens the door to nonconformist sects to thrive in.
- 1648 The Peace of Westphalia partitions Europe into Catholic and Protestant principalities, laying the groundwork for national lines.

The Overreaching Papacy

After 1300, the papacy went into a swift decline and for seventy years (1309–1376), it was in Avignon, France, and controlled by the French king. Boniface VIII was murdered in 1303, and the French king moved the pope for his “safety.”

“I am Caesar. I am emperor.”

During the 15th century, popes were focused on the PAPAL STATES, their feudal kingdom in Italy.

- In 1492, Rodrigo Borgia, a powerful Spanish cardinal, became pope as Alexander VI.

Close association of Ferdinand II of Aragon; extremely corrupt and immoral; he helped his friend and mentor Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros establish the Complutense University, with the intention of centralizing Christian intellectual life in SPAIN, including control of the text of the Scriptures – the Complutensian polyglot. Although powerful, Alexander made MANY enemies.

- After a series of weak successors, Giovanni d’Medici became Pope Leo X (r. 1513–1521).

To rebuild Rome, he demanded tribute from the bishops, paid for by selling indulgences (with a healthy commission paid back to the bishops). Albert of Brandenburg, who was both the Cardinal AND Elector (ruler) of Mainz appointed Johann Tetzel commissioner of indulgences.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536)

- *Possibly the greatest humanist scholar of his age.* He was, without question, the most popular scholar of his day.
- A devout Catholic from the Netherlands, he created the first published edition of the Greek New Testament (1516).

Originally intended as support for a revised Latin Vulgate, published under Leo X’s patronage. In competition with an edition made in Complutense University.

- He openly opposed Luther and other Reformers.

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

- On October 31, 1517, he sent his “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences” to Albert of Brandenburg as a protest.

Excommunicated in 1521, Luther became a “viral sensation,” writing pamphlets in German which essentially opened the door for principalities and cities to abandon the Catholic Church.

John Calvin (1509–1564)

- Trained as a lawyer, Calvin learned Greek at the University of Bourges, where he was influenced by humanist thinking.
- His great work was the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, first published in 1536 and expanded/revised throughout his life.
- Under his leadership (1541–1549), Geneva became the “center” of non-Lutheran reform in Europe. He knew and interacted with both Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, and even tried to bring together an ecumenical council with Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

William Tyndale (1494–1536)

- English priest, trained at Oxford. Possibly met Luther at Wittenberg in 1524.
- While in Europe, he did *an English translation of Erasmus’s New Testament*. This was the first English translation from the original languages.

Have you ever wondered why German is spoken in Switzerland, Austria, and parts of Poland?

One of the results of the Protestant Reformation was the realignment of Europe along religious lines, despite ethnic and linguistic characteristics. For example, northwestern Europe was known as *de Lage Landen* or “the Low Countries” when it was part of the Holy Roman Empire. In the wake of the Protestant Reformation, however, Europe was divided among Catholic and Protestant powers. Although the people of the Low Countries have a great deal of cultural and linguistic similarity, they differ on religion. Twelve states became Protestant, and after a protracted war, they became independent as The Netherlands. The southern territories remained under Spanish control until 1830 when it became the kingdom of Belgium. A mountainous region in the east remained under German influence, and so became the small Catholic kingdom of Luxembourg.

When Germany was formed in the 19th century, it was put together from the Protestant duchies and principalities. Austria are those which remained Catholic as did those in what is now Poland, while the German-speaking parts of Switzerland confederated because they wanted to be independent of the state.

Want to Know More?

Henry VIII and the Church of England

In 1521, Henry VIII called Martin Luther “a diseased sheep” (Lat. *morbidum esse ovem*) and earned the title “Defender of the Faith” (Lat. *fidei Defensor*) from Pope Clement VII.³⁴ As a cardinal, Clement had served as cardinal-protector of England and Henry held him in high regard. The Archbishop of York, Thomas Wolsey, was key in seeing Clement elevated to the papacy. Being a scion of the powerful Medici family of Florence, Clement had placed the merchant Giovanni Cavalcanti in London to provide financial services to the English throne. Cavalcanti essentially became the monarch’s private banker. It seemed as if the thirty-year-old king of England would be one of the Roman Catholic Church’s greatest allies in the conflict with the Protestants.

A little over a decade later in 1533, Henry had forcibly seized the Church’s property in his kingdom and declared himself the head of the Church of England. Diplomatic chaos, the stress of dealing with Henry and other monarchs, and battles with the Protestants aged Clement beyond his years, and in 1534, he died blind and jaundiced while Henry was busy building a kingdom that would eventually dominate European politics. How did things go so wrong between London and Rome?

Henry VIII was only eighteen years old when he came to the throne in 1509. His wife Catherine was the daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castille, co-rulers of what is now Spain, although at the time it was still two separate kingdoms. She was six years older than Henry and had been briefly married to his older brother Arthur, who had died less than a year after their wedding. Arthur was just fifteen years old when he died, and Pope Julius II had granted a special dispensation for Catherine to marry Henry on the grounds that Catherine and Arthur had never consummated their marriage. Henry initially rejected the match, but in 1509, after his father died and he was crowned king, Henry saw the sense in the union, and they were married shortly thereafter in a small ceremony.

By all accounts, Henry was more than happy with Catherine. They produced a number of children, but all but one were either stillborn or died in infancy. Their only surviving child was a daughter, Mary. Henry became increasingly convinced that he needed to find a woman who could give him a male heir. He had a number of affairs, one of which produced a son whom Henry hoped to legitimize and make heir, but he too died. Henry then decided to have Catherine step aside and have the marriage annulled by having the new pope, Clement VII, reverse Julius’s dispensation on the grounds that Arthur and Catherine *had* consummated their marriage. This approach appears to have been Cardinal Wolsey’s idea. He conducted a private inquiry and then wrote to Clement requesting the annulment. At the time, however,

³⁴ Louis O’Donovan, trans., *Assertio Septem Sacramentum or Defence of the Seven Sacraments by Henry VIII, King of England* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1908), 167–73.

Clement was not in a position to grant such a dispensation. He was the prisoner of Francois I, the king of France. His only hope was the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, who was hastening south with an army to break Francois's hold. Charles was Catherine's nephew, and he was in the midst of attempting to rebuild a Catholic Europe. Therefore, Clement could not grant the annulment without jeopardizing his own safety. He did what weak men do in difficult situations. He delayed doing anything. Instead, he sent an aged delegate named Lorenzo Campeggio to adjudicate the matter with Wolsey. This gave Catherine, who was skilled in court intrigue, time to discover the plot. Campeggio tried to convince Catherine to acquiesce. Instead, she fired off a letter to Charles V, Pope Clement, and another of Charles' aunts, Margaret of Austria. Soon, all of Catholic Europe was up in arms over Henry's attempt to get rid of Catherine.

Henry, however, ignored this. He had taken Anne Boleyn as his mistress, and he was determined to marry her. Desperate to avoid making a ruling, Clement turned to extreme measures. He told the English ambassador Gregorio Casale, "that your majesty [Henry] might have a dispensation to have two wives."³⁵ Henry turned to Thomas Cromwell, Wolsey's former assistant. Cromwell convinced Parliament to have Henry declared "the Supreme Head of the English Church." Together with Thomas Cranmer, a close associate of the Boleyn family and now Archbishop of Canterbury, Cromwell convinced Henry that there was legal precedent for Henry to declare himself independent of Rome. At the Diet of Speyer (1526) and then again at Aubsburg (1531), with the explicit consent of Charles V and implicit consent of the pope, the Church had ruled that there was a principle of *cuius religio, eius religio*, the idea that the ruler chooses the religion of his realm.³⁶ Cromwell and Henry's privy council now argued that as a Christian prince, Henry was free to follow his religious conscience, which quickly became the law of Britain.³⁷

Buoyed by this advice, Henry and Anne traveled to France. There, he concluded a treaty with Francois in which the French king agreed to recognize the annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine. Upon hearing this, and on the advice of both the new English ambassador, Edmund Bonner, and his sister Eleanor of Austria (who was Francois's wife and queen of France), Charles V agreed not to oppose the annulment. Sentiment was shifting in Henry's favor, and so in 1533, Cranmer declared the marriage annulled. Cromwell had convinced Parliament to pass a law making it illegal to appeal Cranmer's decision.

Clement had already put the gears into motion to excommunicate Henry, and when news of the excommunication reached England, the new Supreme Head and his advisors were

³⁵ J. S. Brewer, and R. H. Brodie, eds. *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII: Preserved in the Public Record Office, the British Museum and Elsewhere*, vol. 4 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1920), 6627.

³⁶ Literally, "whose realm, his religion." The phrase does not occur in the decisions of these assemblies. It was coined by Joachim Stefani in 1582, but it reflects accurately the sentiment of Augsburg.

³⁷ Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–4.

ready. Cranmer argued that the Church could not err, but Clement clearly had since his actions went against not only the decision of the Church in England but also the will of the emperor and the French king. Therefore, Clement could not speak for the Church. Therefore, Henry and the Church of England must be the true Church and Clement's claim to authority was invalid. It was a deft move, since it allowed that previous popes had a true claim to authority, but Clement did not. He struck a balance between the Protestant impulse, using the same arguments Luther had against Leo X, and Henry's deeply held belief that he remained the defender of the faith.

After his death in 1547, Henry's young son Edward VI reigned for six years before he was succeeded by his half-sister Mary, who was married to her cousin Philip II (Charles V's son). The two returned England to the Catholic fold during their reign (1553–1558) but Mary's untimely death led to her sister Elizabeth, the daughter of Anne Boleyn, taking the throne. Refusing Philip's offer to marry her, she remained unmarried for her lengthy reign and left the kingdom to James VI, her cousin and the King of Scotland. During this time, England was undeniably the most powerful Protestant nation in Europe, and although they assisted Protestant armies during the religious wars, they did not participate directly. Indeed, the only thing that brought England down for a time was its own internal disputes, especially the English Civil War in which nonconformist Puritans took control of the kingdom for a generation.

The Continental Anabaptists

The Reformation's output of printed Bibles and classical works had a corollary effect. It spurred the study of the Scriptures outside of the institutional or state churches. A number of Bible scholars began advocating for two key doctrinal changes.

- They rejected the idea of an *established state church* to which every person in the state belonged.
- As a corollary, they required *baptism of the believer upon profession of faith*.

They became known as the Anabaptists, Latin for “rebaptizers.” The normal mode of baptism, however, was still pouring or sprinkling.

- Two key Anabaptist thinkers, was strongly influenced by Luther and Calvin.
Balthazar Hubmeier – the great Anabaptist theologian
Menno Simons – (Mennonites, eventually the Amish)
- Anabaptists were not uniform. In 1535, an Anabaptist group occupied *Münster*. In the name of biblical literalism, they advocated a socialist theocracy, legalized polygamy, and attempted to enforce OT laws, including execution for adultery.

The English Baptists

The early Baptists, who broke away first from the Church of England and then from the rest of the Puritan separatist movement, believed that they were establishing a church that was faithful to the teaching of the New Testament. Fundamental to that conviction was their belief that the church should consist of those only who had in the freely chosen, conscious assent of faith, surrendered their lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ.³⁸

Tudor England often had varying attitudes toward non-conformists. Some sought to separate from the Church (“Separatists”), but others sought to purify it (hence, “Puritans”). Many non-conformists fled to the continent, setting up their own communities in Switzerland and the Low Countries. The initial group of New England settlers, which we call the “Pilgrims” of *Mayflower* fame, were Separatists. They set up their settlement at Plymouth Plantation. A later group of Puritans created the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It was this latter group and their intolerance that resulted in events like the King Philips’ War, and the Salem Witch Trials.

³⁸ Michael Walker, *Baptists at the Table* (Oxford: Baptist Historical Society, 1992), 1. For discussion, see Paige Patterson, “Observing Two Ordinances—Are They Merely Symbols?” in *Upon this Rock: A Baptist Understanding of the Church*, ed. Jason G. Duesing, Thomas White, and Malcolm B. Yarnell, III (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2010), 102–116.

- *Thomas Helwys* was one of the English Puritan exiles to Europe who encountered the Anabaptists. Back in England, he formed a Baptist congregation when their first leader joined the Mennonites. His congregation abandoned Calvinism, which was prevalent among the Puritans, and therefore were known as the **GENERAL BAPTISTS**.

Men's religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretic, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure. (Thomas Helwys, 1612)

Helwys speaks to the issue with Calvinism at this time.

It assumed a state church, so the idea of being "elect" pertained to being a member of a particular Christian nation. You were born into Christendom and therefore were baptized as an infant. Following the Anabaptist views, Helwys rejected this idea but did so not just politically but also theologically. Faith was a matter of conscience rather than of citizenship.

- Another group in London, called the "Jacob-Lathrop-Jessey Church," adopted a similar stance, but they adhered to a form of Calvinism, and so are known as **PARTICULAR BAPTISTS**. They also continued to use pouring as their mode of baptism.

In 1640, a group led by Richard Blunt left the JLJ Church adopted immersion based on Colossians 2:12 and Romans 6:4.

The first published defense of immersion was published by Edward Barber, entitled *A Small Treatise of Baptisme, Or, Dipping* (1641).

- In 1644, *the First London Confession* established the fundamental Baptist beliefs.

The congregationalist Puritans (those who practiced congregational government, as opposed to presbyterian government) and the Baptists were close allies in England, since they were both non-conformists. In the New England colonies, however, the Puritans were the establishment faith, and the American Baptists quickly became a persecuted group.

- *Roger Williams* (1603–1683), a non-conformist in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was exiled to Rhode Island where he established the first colony with religious tolerance. He established the first Baptist church in the American colonies.
- The Baptist minister *Obadiah Holmes* (1610–1682) was publicly whipped by the Massachusetts authorities for performing the Lord's Table in private homes without permission from the state church.

Enlightenment and Disestablishment (1650–1800)

During the Reformation and the subsequent religious wars, Switzerland and the Netherlands were generally tolerant of dissenting groups, and so many English dissidents were initially welcomed in these states. William Tyndale did his English translation in Germany in the 1520's and wrote a treatise opposing Henry's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. He was executed in 1535, but the freedoms in Europe allowed English dissenters to flourish. A Puritan translation of the Scriptures, known as the Geneva Bible, was published in 1560.

Non-Conformists and the Colonies

The Separatists remained unwelcome in England. Robert Browne's congregation had left England in 1588, and although he returned to England rejoined the Church of England, the congregation remained in the Netherlands. The congregation arranged to travel to the American colonies, and the Brownists (even though Brown was no longer a member) formed the core of the famous pilgrims who settled in Plymouth.

After Elizabeth I's death in 1603, the Puritans began returning to England, but they were becoming increasingly frustrated with James I (r. 1603–1625) and his successor Charles I (r. 1625–1649). A large group of Puritans under **John Winthrop** created the Massachusetts Bay Company and sailed for New England. Between 1630 and 1645, over 20,000 dissident Puritans left England for Boston, Salem and the other settlements under the company. Eventually, Oliver Cromwell and a Puritan army executed Charles and sent his wife and son into exile. They established a theocratic "English Commonwealth." The Massachusetts Colony absorbed Plymouth in 1691, but the Puritans had taken over from the Separatists decades before.

The highly successful English politician George Calvert was created First Baron of Baltimore (1625) after resigning his offices and publicly declaring his Catholic faith. Charles I who was lenient toward Catholics, granted a charter to his son Cecilius Calvert for a Catholic colony in 1632. Calvert named the colony for Charles I's Catholic wife, Henrietta Maria. The English Commonwealth actively suppressed Catholicism, so Catholics found a home in Maryland, but the colony also allowed Protestant settlers, and in 1689, the Puritans formed an army and seized the government in 1689. As they had in Massachusetts, the Puritans placed strict controls on Catholic practices, and Catholics were banned from holding office after 1704.

In England, the Puritans were defeated in 1660 and the English monarchy restored. Charles II was restored to the throne, but he proved as intolerant as his grandfather and father. In the New World, he found a solution to his financial problems from reclaiming the throne. William Penn, the son of one of Charles's largest creditors, was a non-conformist Quaker, and Charles offered him a charter for a massive plot of land between Maryland and New York in payment. Penn accepted and created the second colony (after Rhode Island) with religious freedom (1681).

The Enlightenment

In Europe, the religious wars caused a new threat to emerge. This was the Age of Reason or the Enlightenment. The movement began in France, and soon swept across Northern Europe. It was a natural outgrowth of Renaissance humanism, which pursued knowledge outside the realms of established institutions. This attitude was married with a response to the century of warfare. At the core of the Enlightenment mentality was the idea that religious kept people ignorant, and so freeing yourself from the darkness would free you to greater accomplishment.³⁹

Let us endeavor to disperse those clouds of ignorance, those mists of darkness, which impede Man on his journey, . . . and no longer be duped by an imagination that has been led astray by authority.⁴⁰

This movement gave birth to a number of quasi-religious movements based on reason rather than revelation. Perhaps the most popular was *deism*, which held that there was a Creator God, but he simply started things. Since the creation event, nature has operated on the rules he established. God did not intervene in nature's operations, so miracles, the supernatural and revelation were therefore human creations or natural phenomena. As the American Thomas Paine put it:

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish; appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.⁴¹

While initially, such views were hostile to Christianity, they were quite convenient for those who rejected the idea of a state religion. Groups like Quakers and Baptists did not wish to force others into their faith, but rather to practice privately and without restrictions. They also did not wish to support a state religion they did not agree with through taxes. So, in some respects the Enlightenment was a welcome development. In fact, this particular aspect of the Enlightenment is fundamental to modern thought on individual conscience in the western world.

³⁹ The terms Renaissance ("rebirth") and Enlightenment were invented during this period. Edward Gibbons' *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* made the argument that Christianity was the reason for Rome's fall (conveniently ignoring that the Christian Roman empire in the east lasted for another thousand years). It was during this period that the medieval period became the "Middle Ages" and the "Dark Ages." These were both coined by Enlightenment thinkers to position this time when "Christian authority" was supreme as a benighted period.

⁴⁰ Baron von Holbach, *The Systems of Nature or the Laws of the Moral and Physical World*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (London, England: Paternoster Row, 1817), 6.

⁴¹ Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (New York: D. M. Bennett, 1877, repr.), 6.

The Great Awakening

George Whitefield and the brothers John and Charles Wesley were classmates at Oxford and formed a “Holy Club” where they sought to find deeper spiritual meaning to their faith. In part, at least, this was a response to the Enlightenment’s dismissal of religion. The Wesleys were influenced by Moravian Christians during their journeys to serve as ministers in the newly formed colony of Georgia. In 1738, John Wesley experienced a radical transformation in his faith while listening to a reading of Martin Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. He became convinced that salvation was free to all, and individuals must make a personal decision to follow Christ. Whitefield had a similar experience shortly after the Wesleys had left for Georgia.

Although Whitefield and the Wesleys remained in the Church of England, they launched a series of evangelistic crusades on both sides of the Atlantic.

Completely unrelated to Whitefield and Wesley, the Presbyterian minister Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) began preaching similar themes in his Northampton, Massachusetts, church. His most famous sermon is entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” was published throughout New England and established Edwards as one of the great preachers of his day. At the same time, he was removed from his pulpit in 1751 because his convictions ran contrary to the established church doctrine.

The Baptist leaders of this time had some similarities with the Methodists and Edwards, but they differed in that they rejected the establishment churches. Roger Williams established the first Baptist Church in the colonies, but he then left the Baptists. It was left to men like Isaac Backus, who became a Baptist in 1751 and founded a Baptist Church in Middleborough, Massachusetts, and Hezekiah Smith

Timeline

- 1560 Geneva Bible is completed for English exiles in Europe.
- 1611 The Authorized of King James Version of the Bible is published.
- 1618 The Synod of Dort condemns Joseph Arminius’s interpretation of Calvin’s theology.
- 1620 The Pilgrims, composed of English Separatists, land New England and establish the Plymouth Plantation.
- 1632 Lord Baltimore (Cecilius Calvert) is granted a charter for a Catholic colony in the area between New England and Virginia, which he dubs Maryland.
- 1660 Charles II is restored to rule in Great Britain, ending the Commonwealth.
- 1662 English non-conformists are excommunicated and even jailed for not abiding by the new Book of Common Prayer

- 1739 George Whitefield, a Church of England cleric, preaches his first sermon in the colonies, essentially launching the First Great Awakening.
- 1746 Princeton College is founded to provide education to all, regardless of denomination.
- 1789 The newly established United States of America makes freedom of religion a fundamental right for all citizens.

Great Awakening Leaders within the Establishment Churches

George Whitefield (1714–1770)

Whitefield was acclaimed one of the greatest speakers of his day, speaking to 25,000 people at a time.

John Wesley (1703–1791)

John Wesley established Methodism, seeking to be methodical in his faith to ensure fidelity, and despite opposition within the Church of England, he flourished as well. Wesley held to an Arminian theology.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

- A staunch Calvinist, Edwards led a revival that began in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1734. He called for a *personal conversion*, an individual commitment to Christ, as a requirement for membership.

The Half-way Covenant (1657) had allowed unconverted people to become partial “members” in the establishment churches. Edwards’ grandfather, Solomon Stoddard had opposed this, and Edwards provided the theological basis for its eventual rejection. This prompted a division in the established churches between the “Old Light” (traditionalists) and the “New Light” (revivalists).

- Best known for the sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” but his greater contribution was *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737) and the biography of David Brainerd, who died in his home in 1747.

Great Awakening Leaders among the Baptists

John Gano (1727–1804)

Founded the First Baptist church of New York (1760). He served as Washington’s chaplain, and he led a prayer marking the end of the Revolution in 1783.

Isaac Backus (1724–1806)

After leaving the congregationalists, he established a Baptist church in Middleborough, Massachusetts. He also wrote a sprawling history of the Baptists in the Americas, which is one of our primary sources for history.

Hezekiah Smith (1737–1805)

Smith was a circuit-riding evangelist who established Baptist churches throughout New England.

Disestablishment of Religion

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.
(Amendment 1, US Constitution, 1791)

- The “Establishment Clause” of the US Constitution may be one of the most significant government documents ever written. For the first time, a national government relinquished any control over the religion of its people.
- The clause was first proposed by Fisher Ames as a revision of Samuel Livermore’s proposal, “Congress shall make no laws touching religion” and introducing the idea of “exercise of religion” rather than just “liberty of conscience.”⁴² *What is significant about Ames’s revision?*

Under the Enlightenment philosophy, the liberty of conscience was already assured; but EXERCISE of religion meant the actual practice of assembly and worship. It moved beyond a state religion with dissenting individuals. What is more, it protected from regionalism – since religion characterized many regions. New England’s diversity.

- The price of disestablishment was that it allowed *all* beliefs, evident soon in the form of Universalism, which had previously been a “private” view of many ministers.

Elhanan Winchester was a Baptist minister with little training who took the Awakening’s appeal for all men to come to Christ as a message of universal salvation. Aided by George de Benneville, Winchester framed universalism as a response to Calvinism – or rather, the ultimate conclusion of Calvinism if one accepted evangelical ideas. God must will to save all.

⁴² Marc Arkin, “Regionalism and the Religion Clauses: The Contribution of Fisher Ames,” *Buffalo Law Review* 47 (1999): 763–828.

- In 1802, the [Danbury Baptist Association](#) wrote to President Thomas Jefferson concerning the establishment clause. (It was one of *many* Baptist associations such as the Warren Association in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, the Charleston Association in North Carolina.) Jefferson's response reflects his deist beliefs, as well as an understanding that this freedom from establishment was meant to shield faith from government interference.

To messers. Nehemiah Dodge, Ephraim Robbins, & Stephen S. Nelson, a committee of the Danbury Baptist association in the state of Connecticut.

Gentlemen:

The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good as to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist association, give me the highest satisfaction. My duties dictate a faithful and zealous pursuit of the interests of my constituents, & in proportion as they are persuaded of my fidelity to those duties, the discharge of them becomes more and more pleasing.

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection & blessing of the common father and creator of man, and tender you for yourselves & your religious association, assurances of my high respect & esteem.

Th. Jefferson

Jan. 1. 1802.

What Effect Did this Period Have on Church History?

The Enlightenment led to the freedom of religion, because it emphasized individual conscience. The problem for American religious leaders was that it guaranteed the freedom not only to themselves but to others, including deists, universalists, Jews, and Muslims. The American Baptists fought for this freedom, but it also became their downfall, as the Baptist emphasis on local autonomy allowed for the presence of ill-informed and, at times, unregenerate men to assume positions of leadership.

Want to Know More?

Hezekiah Smith and the New England Baptists

Introduction

Religious tolerance was a long time coming in New England. Massachusetts was the last state of the new United States to end the establishment of religion in 1833. There was good reason for state-sponsored churches like the Congregationalists in Massachusetts to be unwilling to offer tolerance to dissidents. The Church was so deeply integrated into New England society that any kind of dissent was seen as sedition. There were, however, a handful of Baptist ministers who worked closely with one another to transform the landscape of not only New England, but eventually influence the formation of the United States.

One of these men was Hezekiah Smith, the first pastor of the First Baptist Church in Haverhill, Massachusetts. Throughout his life, Smith was an itinerant evangelist and a vocal supporter of religious liberty. Quirky and idiosyncratic, Smith was also tireless and apparently quite amiable. His direct, no-nonsense style won over many who should have been his opponents. He counted among his friends the most influential Baptist leaders of his day as well as a number of powerful politicians who contributed to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, particularly in the area of religious freedom.

Early Ministry

Born in 1737 on Long Island, Smith was raised in New Jersey by pious parents. What little information that is available about his childhood comes from the sermon preached at his funeral in 1805 by Samuel Stillman and the recollections of his granddaughter Mary Smith, which were provided to William B. Sprague in the mid-1860's. As Mary's husband Samuel F. Smith wrote, "He left no continuous nor even fragmentary record of his life, out of which his biography could be framed, nor would he ever permit a painter to delineate his features on canvass."⁴³

At some point in his youth, Smith joined John Gano's prominent Baptist church in New York, and he attended the Hopewell Academy, the first Baptist institution in the colonies.⁴⁴ There were no Baptist colleges in the colonies, so after Hopewell, Smith and a number of his classmates, among them another lifelong friend James Manning, went to Princeton College

⁴³ Samuel F. Smith, "Hezekiah Smith, D.D." in *Annals of the American Pulpit: or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of Various Denominations from the Early Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-five with Historical Introductions*, vol. 6, ed. William B. Sprague (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865), 97.

⁴⁴ Janet Moore Lindman, *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 164.

which had been founded by members of the New Light Presbyterians.⁴⁵ Smith graduated in 1762 alongside his friend Manning who was the salutatorian of their class.⁴⁶

Early Ministry

Smith's extant journals begin the autumn after he graduated, and they reveal a young man devoted chiefly to itinerant preaching. The Hopewell Church had licensed him to preach, and he availed himself of every opportunity.⁴⁷ His first entry includes a note on a sermon he preached at the home of John Briton in November 1762, just across the Delaware from Kingwood, New Jersey.

*Tho' the People applauded the Discourse, I did not see much Appearance of Good done. And I had to ask Forgiveness for doing any Thing, that would Cause God to withhold the quickening Influence of his Spirit.*⁴⁸

That same month, he began working his way to the Carolinas via Maryland and Virginia, despite losing two horses on the way because he was always forgetting to tie their leads to a tree when he camped (Journals, I, 4–14). In February, 1763, Smith arrived in Charleston and met Oliver Hart, the pastor of the Charleston Church and leader of the Charleston Association (Journals, I, 21–23). Smith spent the next year preaching through anywhere he could find a hearing, and on Tuesday, September 20, 1763, he was ordained to the ministry by a council consisting of Hart and three other pastors. He ministered in the South until February 1764, when he sailed back to New York and there met up with Gano (Journals, I, 43–44; 56).

New England

In 1764, Smith and Manning sailed to Rhode Island with the intention of starting what is now Brown University, but then was intended to train Baptist ministers (Journals, I, 62). Smith bounced back and forth between New England and New Jersey before being asked to fill the pulpit of the West Parish Church in Haverhill, Massachusetts. During the autumn of 1764 and

⁴⁵ When it was founded in 1746 for “the Education of Youth in the Learned Languages and in the Liberal Arts and Sciences,” Princeton was officially the College of New Jersey, although it was commonly called Princeton or Prince Town by Smith's time. The school's name was not changed until 1896, but it will be referred to as Princeton here. Unlike virtually every other institution at the time, Princeton was open to “any Person of any religious Denomination whatsoever.”

⁴⁶ Reuben Aldridge Guild, *Life, Times, and Correspondence of James Manning, and the Early History of Brown University* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1864), 33.

⁴⁷ John David Broome, “Hezekiah Smith of Haverhill,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 1.1 (1965): 8.

⁴⁸ Hezekiah Smith, “Journals” I, 3, in John David Broome, *The life, ministry and journals of Hezekiah Smith: pastor of the First Baptist Church of Haverhill, Massachusetts 1765 to 1805 and chaplain in the American Revolution 1775 to 1780* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2004). Henceforth, this source will be noted as simply “Journals” with the appropriate volume and page number in the text.

the spring of the following year, Smith preached to swelling crowds, baptizing laymen and clergy alike (Journals, II, 35; III, 22).

While the Establishment organized opposition to the popular preacher, but Smith simply ignored them.⁴⁹ To his supporters, Smith was a “second Whitfield” and his popularity continued to rise.⁵⁰ He was turned out of West Parish, so on May 9, 1765, Smith and a group of dissenters from Haverhill and the surrounding towns covenanted to form a new Baptist congregation (Journals, III, 25–26). In the autumn, his friends John Gano and James Manning were present when the new church called Smith as pastor. He would remain pastor for forty years, and he would build it into one of the largest congregations in New England.⁵¹

The New England Frontiers

Haverhill became one of the launching point for ministry throughout England. Around this time, Smith had met Isaac Backus, the Baptist pastor in Middletown, Massachusetts, and renewed a friendship with a classmate, Samuel Stillman, who was the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Boston. The three set about preaching throughout New England, reaching both the settled population and the newcomers while Manning trained new ministers to fill the pulpits of the churches they established.⁵² According to Backus, who wrote an extensive history of the New England Baptists, there were only fifty Baptist churches in the region, and almost all of them were south of Boston.⁵³ The number of churches doubled by 1776, and in 1794, there were nearly three hundred.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Hezekiah Smith, *The Doctrine of Believer's Baptism By Immersion Only: Asserted and Maintained Against the Attempts of Mr. Jonathan Parsons, A.M. to invalidate it, in two sermons preached at Haverhill West-Parish, Lord's Day April the 28th, 1765, and since published* (Boston, MA: Philip Freeman, 1776).

⁵⁰ Broome, “Hezekiah Smith of Haverhill,” 9.

⁵¹ Isaac Backus, *History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, vol. 2 (Providence, RI: Providence Press Company, 1871), 309–10; Broome, *The Life, Ministry and Journals*, 71.

⁵² C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800: Strict Congregationalists and Separate Baptists in the Great Awakening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 243; Alvah Hovey, *A Memoir of the Life and Times of the Rev. Isaac Backus* (Boston, MA: Gould and Lincoln, 1859), 153, 325.

⁵³ Backus, *History of New England*, 306–10.

⁵⁴ Roger Finke and Rodney Starke, *Churching of America 1776-1990* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 277–78; John Asplund, “The Universal Register of the Baptist Denomination in North America for the Years 1790, 191, 1792, 1793, and Part of 1794” in *An Anthology of Early Baptists in New Hampshire*, ed. Terry Wolever (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2001), 142. Other early sources give the total Baptist population of New England as over 17,000. See William Bathelder, *A Discourse Delivered in Haverhill, July 1816, on a Baptismal Occasion*, 2nd ed. (Exeter, NH: Samuel T. Moses, 1823), 18.

Smith distinguished himself as the “son of thunder,” and even drew the praise of the poet John Greenleaf Whittier, who commented “few excelled him as a preacher.”⁵⁵ He was seemingly everywhere. An average year saw Smith preaching over 150 sermons in well over thirty locations outside of Haverhill.⁵⁶ Smith was “the first Baptist preacher to be seen by many of the inhabitants of northeastern New England. In fact, he was likely the first Baptist preacher to preach in Maine in over sixty years.”⁵⁷ At the age of sixty, Smith could still be found riding his horse deep into the New Hampshire woods to Coos County.⁵⁸

When Eliphalet Smith, the Congregationalist pastor in Deerfield, New Hampshire, wrote to Manning asking for someone to baptize him and his congregation, it was Hezekiah Smith who came.⁵⁹ This happened all over New England, and not only were whole churches converted, but settled Baptists like Samuel Shepard converted under Smith’s preaching and shortly afterward relocated (in Shepard’s case to Brentwood, New Hampshire) to begin churches of their own.⁶⁰ Smith would take up the itinerant ministry as well, traveling even further into the wilderness.⁶¹

Opposition from the Establishment

As Smith’s influence grew, the opposition of the established Congregational Church increased. Isaac Backus records a letter from Martha Kimball that tells a story from 1768, illustrating the difficulties that Smith had when traveling outside of Haverhill:

Rev. Hezekiah Smith was shamefully treated by many of the people in Bradford; who came, headed by the Sheriff, Amos Milliken, at a time when Mr. Smith was to preach a sermon in our house at the request of my husband, and warmly contended with him, and threatened him if he did proceed. However, Mr. Smith went to begin service by singing, notwithstanding the noise, clamor, and threats of the people. But one of their number snatched the chair, behind which Mr.

⁵⁵ Guild, *Life, Times and Correspondence*, 181; Benjamin L. Mirick, *The History of Haverhill, Massachusetts* (Haverhill, MA: A. W. Thayer, 1832), 191.

⁵⁶ Broome, *Life, Ministry and Journals*, 206.

⁵⁷ Broome, *Life, Ministry and Journals*, 174.

⁵⁸ Guild, *Chaplain Smith*, 248; Broome, *The Life, Ministry and Journals*, 144. Smith ministered through a period of pacification and settlement. In the 1760’s, northern New England was sparsely populated, but was being settled rapidly. The population of New Hampshire nearly doubled from 1761 to 1773, and Maine almost tripled, but the frontier was still very real. James Sullivan, who was at the time Attorney General of Massachusetts, records that what is now the area of Kittery, Maine, near the mouth of the Piscataqua River was abandoned until the mid-1720’s. As late as 1754, there were still records of raids by the Wapanaki peoples.

⁵⁹ Ebenezer E. Cummings, “A Sermon, Preached Before the New Hampshire Baptist State Convention at Its Tenth Annual Meeting, Held at Deerfield, October 20, 1835” in *An Anthology of Early Baptists in New Hampshire* edited by Terry Wolever (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2001), 13; Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 243.

⁶⁰ Cummings, “A Sermon,” 13; Backus, *History of New England*, vol. 2, 169-170; Guild, *Chaplain Smith*, 135-36.

⁶¹ Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 251.

Smith stood, from before him; upon which my husband desired Mr. Smith to tarry a little till he had quelled the tumult; but all his endeavors to silence them were in vain. Upon which my husband desired Mr. Smith to begin public service; which accordingly he did, and went through then without further molestation.⁶²

Although Smith and the Baptists sought to abide by the demanding laws of tolerance in place in Massachusetts at the time, they were nonetheless the subject of persecution. Beside crowds appearing at their meeting places, the constabulary would often assess ridiculous taxes upon them for being “dissenters.” Such was the case for both Martha Kimball and many like her.⁶³

Usually, the resistance was more passive. Early in his ministry, Smith was welcomed into towns by the Congregationalist ministers, such as in Methuen in August 1764 (Journals, II, 34–35). After becoming the pastor in Haverhill, however, it took two years for him to even get permission to preach in Maine. Even then, the pastors like the pastor in Falmouth (present day Portland) refused to share the platform with him. On June 29, 1767, the pastor wrote about Smith, “Burnham urged me to invite Smith to preach, which I refused to do.”⁶⁴

Through all of this, Smith proved himself a resolute but compassionate man. His journals overflow with records of visits to members and non-members alike. In time, the opposition gave way to respect both inside and outside Baptist circles. The membership of the Haverhill church extended well beyond the town limits, and Smith devotion to caring for those both within and without earned the respect of merchants and ministers alike.⁶⁵ His influence spread well beyond his own capacity.

The Warren Association and Rhode Island College

With Manning’s Rhode Island College receiving its charter in 1764, the New England Baptists looked to organize. A number of Baptist churches including Smith’s in Haverhill and Backus’ in Middleborough, met in Warren, Rhode Island, to affirm the Philadelphia Confession and form an association in 1767. Smith’s church was the first to join and was the largest and most influential church in the association.⁶⁶ Despite his involvement at the beginning, Backus’s congregation was reluctant to join, although they finally did in 1770.⁶⁷ Closely modeled on the Philadelphia Association, which had sent Manning to Rhode Island, this Warren Association

⁶² Backus, *History of New England*, 145.

⁶³ Backus, *History of New England*, 145.

⁶⁴ Henry S. Burrage, *History of the Baptists in Maine* (Portland, ME: Marks Printing House, Printers, 1904), 30.

⁶⁵ Broome, *Life, Ministry and Journals*, 73–74; 145.

⁶⁶ Broome, *Life, Ministry and Journals*, 71.

⁶⁷ Broome, *Life, Ministry and Journals*, 94–96; H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Publishers, 1987), 243.

immediately went to work supporting Rhode Island College.⁶⁸ Backus and Smith had been trustees since the beginning, but in 1770, Smith, was given “suitable credentials” and sent on a fundraising tour through the South.⁶⁹

And whereas the said Corporation at their annual meeting at Warren...being well convinced of your affection and regard to the said College or University, and of your integrity and ability, did unanimously appoint and request you to solicit and receive benefactions in any part of America for the benefit of said Institution.⁷⁰

Smith left for South Carolina on October 2, 1769, and set about visiting Baptist leaders like Oliver Hart, who had ordained him. Eight months later, Smith returned with £2,538 and promises of another £1,200, enough to keep the college afloat.⁷¹ Over the years, he would return to the South a handful of times to collect more funds. After Manning’s death in 1791, Smith continued to work tirelessly to support the college, and in 1797, he was given an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree.⁷²

Patriotism and Chaplaincy

When it became clear that hostilities were going to break out between the colonies and the British, many Baptist ministers stepped forward to serve as chaplains, including Smith.⁷³ When war came, Smith was already serving as chaplain of the 5th Massachusetts Regiment, which was encamped in Somerville under the command of John Nixon.⁷⁴ Prior to the war, Smith publicly declared his commitment first to the colonies’ cause:

The Antipaedobaptist churches in New England are most heartily concerned for the preservation and defense of the rights and privileges of this country, and are deeply affected by the encroachments upon the same which have lately been made by the British Parliament, and are willing to unite with our dear country men, vigorously to pursue every prudent measure for relief.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Backus, *History of New England*, vol. 2, 137; Hovey, *Life and Times*, 156.

⁶⁹ Hovey, *Life and Times*, 152; Reuben Aldridge Guild, *History of Brown University: With Illustrative Documents* (Providence, RI: Providence Press Company, 1867), 229.

⁷⁰ Guild, *History of Brown University*, 212.

⁷¹ Guild, *History of Brown University*, 215.

⁷² Brooke, “Hezekiah Smith of Haverhill,” 12.

⁷³ Guild, *Life, Times and Correspondence*, 136.

⁷⁴ Mirick, *The History of Haverhill*, 191; Secretary of State of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War: A Compilation from the Archives*, vol. 14 (Boston, MA: Wright and Potter Printing Company, 1906), 412; John W. Merriam, “The Military Record of Brigadier General John Nixon of Massachusetts,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 36.1 (1926): 38–39.

⁷⁵ Hezekiah Smith, “Circular Letter,” in *Warren Baptist Association Minutes*, 1774, 7–8, in Broome, *Life, Letters, and Journals*, 127.

The work was challenging, and Smith wrote to Backus of the sinfulness he encountered in the army camps.⁷⁶ Still, it was invigorating. From Winter Hill, Smith wrote to his wife, “lately I have perceived more of the genuine Operations of the Holy Ghost in some individuals, as I apprehend, than I have me with, since I have belonged to the Army.”⁷⁷ He went with the regiment when they evacuated the Boston area in the summer of 1776 and as they fought under Washington in New Jersey and New York. When Col. Nixon was promoted to Brigadier General in 1777, Smith became brigade chaplain.⁷⁸

Smith’s granddaughter recounted stories of a strong friendship between Smith and George Washington during this period, but subsequent research has uncovered no evidence for this.⁷⁹ Although a close friendship is not evident in the extant records, Washington did have tremendous respect for the Baptist clergy, specifically John Gano whom he invited to offer the prayer marking the end of hostilities. Washington and Smith dined together at least twice during his service, and Washington attended Smith’s services several times.⁸⁰ When Washington died in 1800, Smith delivered the benedictory prayer, so there was clearly some sort of relationship that went beyond mere acquaintance.⁸¹

Opposition to his evangelistic efforts hardened Smith’s attitude toward the established Presbyterians and Congregationalists churches. In a 1773 letter, Manning made Smith’s attitude the butt of a joke. Manning labeled Smith attitude as “brandishing weapons, take the field of Mars like an old veteran that scorns to let his sword rust.”⁸² During his period of service, he found himself in close proximity with ministers of other faiths, and his feelings seem to have softened. His journal reveals that he often utilized the meetinghouses of Presbyterian and Congregationalist, showing a remarkable change in thought. Although fiercely defensive of Baptist doctrine, Smith worked for the betterment of the situation of all.

⁷⁶ Broome, *Life, Ministry and Journals*, 135.

⁷⁷ Broome, *Life, Ministry and Journals*, 435.

⁷⁸ Broome, *Life, ministry and Journals*, 436-437; *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 39.

⁷⁹ One of the difficulties in dealing with the veracity of Mary Smith’s claim is that Washington’s journals for 1780-1781, the period when he would have met Smith, are missing. The absence of any other reference in either men’s writings, especially on the two occasions when they were in the same location, argues against Mary’s belief.

⁸⁰ Smith, “Journals,” VIII, 20.

⁸¹ Smith, “Journals,” VIII, 4.

⁸² Guild, *Life, Times and Correspondence*, 209. There is no evidence that Smith was nearly as hostile as Manning indicates and Manning is clearly joking in his letter – as he often did at his friend’s expense; but there may have been a seed of truth as well.

The Fight for Religious Freedom

In 1781 with the armies moving south, Washington discharged Smith from his duties, and he returned to Haverhill.⁸³ While had he been away, Massachusetts had adopted a constitution that included an article detailing the government's involvement in religious affairs. The content of this article was deeply troubling for many in the Warren Association, which had been fighting for religious freedom since 1768. They took out articles in the Boston newspapers in 1770. At one point Smith was even commissioned to go to England as "Chosen Agent for the Baptists to go to England with a Petition to our King to seek Redress from Oppression in Matters of Religion," a move that at least one scholar believes may have been impulsive.⁸⁴ Smith never went, although he and the Warren Association continued to fight for freedom. Smith and the other Baptists preached often on the matter and dispatched letters to anyone they thought would help the cause.

In 1793, after decades of fighting and after the ratification of the federal constitution, Smith's congregation incorporated under the Massachusetts law.⁸⁵ Backus perceived it as a compromise, but Smith believed this was a necessary step to further the fight for full religious freedom in the state. Backus did not agree, but Smith believed he needed to abide by the law in order to continue effective ministry. At least one writer attributes a role second only to Backus in Massachusetts' fight for religious freedom.⁸⁶ Neither man lived to see religious freedom granted in Massachusetts in 1833.

Smith's influence on the nation was substantial. At least one member of Smith's church, Joseph Haynes, was a serving in the Continental Congress before the Revolutionary War. In 1774, Smith urged the Warren Association to send a delegation to the Continental Congress. He helped draft the letter the commissioners carried.⁸⁷ In 1786, James Manning served in Congress under the Articles of Confederation and joined the Grand Commission alongside others who eventually called for a new Constitutional Convention. When the Constitution was brought to Massachusetts for ratification, the Baptist segment of the population resisted it because it lacked any explicit statement of religious freedom.

Fisher Ames—a congressman from Dedham, Massachusetts, a friend of Smith's and possibly a member of his church—arranged a compromise with the Baptists and others

⁸³ Broome, *Life, Letters and Journals*, 140.

⁸⁴ Broome, *Life, Ministry and Journals*, 116–17; 370.

⁸⁵ Broome, *Life, Ministry and Journals*, 118.

⁸⁶ W. H. Allison, "Hezekiah Smith," *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 16, ed. Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1935), 279.

⁸⁷ Broome, *Life, Letters and Journals*, 118.

concerned with the Constitution (Journals, V, 59).⁸⁸ He proposed that if the states ratified the Constitution, then Congress would provide a Bill of Rights in the form of amendments to the Constitution. Ames was also instrumental in the approval of James' Madison' verbiage of the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment.⁸⁹

The irony that Massachusetts guaranteed the religious freedom on the federal level while prohibiting it in their own Constitution would not have been lost on the Baptists. Still, their influence among the population far outstripped that of the Congregationalists, and this was evidenced in the continual involvement of Massachusetts representatives in the acts that constituted the federal freedom of religion. Isaac Backus is often given credit for most of the work done for religious freedom, but Smith was the tireless evangelist who had laid the groundwork by preaching to thousands and seeing them come to Christ. The partnership he shared with his more politically involved friends was a perfect symbiosis that led to radical changes of the makeup of New England.

A Note on Smith's Personal Life

There is a curious postscript to Hezekiah Smith's life and ministry. Until 1771, he lived and worked as an unattached bachelor. Then, he encountered a young woman from Boxford, Hepzibah Kimball. Their courtship must have been an interesting one. They met in November 1771, were engaged in April of the following year and married in June.⁹⁰ "Hepsy" was never a member of any church, and years later he was still asking her to "honor Jesus with the gift of her heart."⁹¹ Although the Smiths seem to have made a happy home and raised six children, Hepzibah did not share Hezekiah's passion for the Lord or for traveling. She appears not to have left their home in Haverhill, content to live her days occupied with domestic affairs while her husband ranged over the colonies first as an itinerant preacher and later as a chaplain with the Continental Army. They had four children together, and by all accounts were quite happy together despite the difference of religious opinions.

Conclusion

Smith's life was consumed by the passion of his mission, and yet he was not so passionate that he forgot compassion or tenderness. He was a faithful caregiver to his community all of his days, and he was a devoted husband to a wife who did not share his beliefs. A patriot who did

⁸⁸ No record of Ames' membership could be found, but Smith generally stayed at the homes of members when traveling, so his visits *might* indicate that Ames' family had joined Smith's church.

⁸⁹ Congressional Research Service, "U.S. Constitution Annotated," Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institution, https://www.law.cornell.edu/anncon/html/amdtiafrag1_user.html.

⁹⁰ Topsfield Historical Society, *Vital Records of Haverhill, Massachusetts to the End of the Year 1849: Volume II. – Marriages and Deaths* (Salem, MA: Newcomb & Gauss, Printers, 1911), 292.

⁹¹ Guild, *Chaplain Smith*, 148; *Life, Times and Correspondence*, 136; Broome, *Life, Ministry and Journals*, 98.

his duty for the nation while preaching the gospel to the assembled brigades, he was a strong supporter of religious freedom and yet submitted to the laws of incorporation and abided by them when his grievances were rejected. Hezekiah Smith lived his life with resolve and understanding, which was difficult in the times he lived through.

When he died in 1805, Smith had been the pastor of First Baptist Church of Haverhill for just over forty years. His itinerant ministry had taken him virtually everywhere in the colonies and the men he baptized and mentored had extended even further. Perhaps nothing says more about his life than that his funeral sparked a revival and one of the people transformed by it was Ann Hasseltine, the future wife of Adoniram Judson.⁹²

His name rarely appears in history books today, and yet he was part of a small group of Baptist ministers who can be said to have helped form the American identity as it existed at the end of the war. He was actively involved in the establishment of far more than just churches. As one of the foremost Baptists in New England during the late Colonial and early Federal periods, it is not an overstatement to say that Smith contributed significantly to the religious, communal and political identity of the United States. He modeled a mission-oriented church planting form of ministry. He encouraged education and community involvement. He participated in the development of representative government and advocated for the freedom of religion.

⁹² Broome, "Hezekiah Smith of Haverhill," 13–14.

The Church around the World (1800–1950)

In the wake of the Great Awakening, English and American Christians became focused on three somewhat interrelated concerns. A “Second Great Awakening,” marked by heightened emotionalism and novel theological developments, occurred in the early 19th century. Originating largely in the “Burnt Over District” of Western New York, this movement (and subsequent “revivals”) was marked by the first concern, namely an overriding desire to restore the “primitive” Church, the biblical model of the Church. This was an extension of both the Reformation and the Great Awakening.

Often called **Restoration Movements**, there was such diversity in these groups that it is hard to class them together. This desire for restoration led to a variety of movements within orthodoxy, but also a few heterodox movements which became apostate. It was just common sense that what passed for the Church in most of the world bore little resemblance to the Church in the Scriptures; but unfortunately, there were many attempts to restore the church based on weak exegesis, usually coupled with a powerful and charismatic personality.

The second concern was reaching those who had been “beyond” Christendom, but thanks to the imperial ambitions of the European nations, had been opened up to missions work. This had not been a concern until the Enlightenment elevated individual choice. Many young Christians felt they were called to bring the gospel to the “savages” and “pagans” of the world. Out of this were born a number of missionary movements, chiefly focused on Asia and Africa. Assorted revival movements were also birthed, especially those led by D. This movement would eventually then turn back to the places it emanated from and give rise to “home missions” – works ranging from youth ministry to eventually the birth of the “church growth movement.”

The third concern was the rise of naturalism and evolutionary theory, especially biological evolution. The response of many within the mainstream was to embrace scientific theories and ideas and adapt the Scriptures to them, giving rise to a great deal of theological liberalism. On the other side of the aisle were those who often refused to acknowledge scientific arguments and developed a response known as fundamentalism, which engaged the data reasonably at first, but then also gave rise to extremist groups.

The Church took on such incredible diversity in this period, that it is impossible to recount everything that happened. Included here are a handful of vignettes representing greater movements. Alexander Campbell stands in for the much broader Restoration movements. John Henry Neumann offers insight into the “return to the mother” movement back to the Catholic Church. It was important, however, to include several of the “extreme” restorationist movements which birthed what many consider cults.

Timeline

1789 The French Revolution begins with the storming of the Bastille.

- 1833 Massachusetts ends religious establishment as part of bringing Maine (previously a part of Massachusetts) into the Union as a free state. The United Kingdom passes the Slavery Abolition Act.
- 1835 Alexander Campbell writes *The Christian System*, followed by 1851's *Christian Baptism*.
- 1844 William Miller's predicted "Second Advent" of Christ comes and goes.
- 1845 The Episcopal Methodist Church and Baptists (the Triennial Convention) split over the issue of slavery. (The Presbyterians split in 1861.)
- 1859 *On the Origin of Species* is published, ushering in the "evolution controversy."
- 1864 Pope Pius IX issues *Syllabus of Errors*, rejecting all modern, rational science and political liberalism, essentially closing the RCC off from the world.
- 1870 The First Vatican Council affirms the pope's infallibility.
- 1871 Victor Emmanuel unites Italy as a single state and takes the Papal States from the pope, leaving only the Vatican in the RCC's power. (In 1929, this was finalized.)
- 1881 The New Testament of the English Revised Version of the Scriptures is published.
- 1886 The Student Volunteer Movement begins.
- 1897 C. P. Jones and C. H. Mason leave the Baptists to form the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), perhaps the first Pentecostal denomination.
- 1906 The Azusa Street Revival begins in San Francisco, signaling the beginning of the Pentecostal movement.
- 1909 C. I. Scofield begins popularizing the dispensationalist view of history.
- 1910 *The Fundamentals* begin appearing, under the editorial review of R. A. Torrey.
- 1914 The Assemblies of God break off from the COGIC and quickly become the largest Pentecostal denomination.

William Wilberforce (1759–1833)

- In 1785, Wilberforce became an *Evangelical* (originally denoting a sect within the Church of England committed to the Great Awakening call to personal conversion). *Evangelical was the way those within the Church of England referred to those who believed in a personal choice to follow Christ. It is synonymous with the "New Light" in the American colonies.*

- He is best known for his crusade against slavery, leading to the Slavery Abolition Act (1833).

Alexander Campbell (1788–1866)

- Campbell's focus was on a minimalist, Scripture-based, non-denominational form of Church. *In particular, he emphasized the necessity of baptism.*
Often misunderstood to teach “baptismal regeneration,” Campbell held that “actual” remission of sin was achieved through belief in Christ, but “formal” remission came through baptism. He was careful to make this clear.

“There is no occasion, then, for making immersion, on a profession of the faith, absolutely essential to a Christian ... he who thence infers that none are Christians but the immersed, as greatly errs as he who affirms that none are alive but those of full and clear vision.”⁹³

- His movement merged with a similar group led by Barton W. Stone.

Churches are usually described as “Disciples of Christ” or “Christian churches.” There is a breakoff group called the International Churches of Christ, which is considered more extreme.

Extreme Restorationist Movements

Seventh Day Adventists: Ellen G. White (1827–1915)

- Adventists are generally characterized by two beliefs:
Almost all observed the Sabbath, worshiping on Saturday.
Attempted to predict the second coming of Christ.
- She claimed to receive prophetic visions, especially after the Millerite disappointment (1844).

Some are tauntingly enquiring, 'Have you not gone up?' Even little children in the streets are shouting continually to passersby, 'Have you a ticket to go up?' The public prints, of the most fashionable and popular kind [...] are caricaturing in the most shameful manner of the 'white robes of the saints,' Revelation 6:11, the 'going up,' and the great day of 'burning.' Even the pulpits are desecrated by the repetition of scandalous and false reports concerning the 'ascension robes', and priests are using their powers and pens to fill the catalogue of scoffing in the most scandalous periodicals of the day.⁹⁴

⁹³ Alexander Campbell, “Any Christians among Protestant Parties,” *Millennial Harbinger* 1 (1837): 411–14.

⁹⁴ James White, *Sketches of the Christian Life and Public Labors of William Miller: Gathered from His Memoirs by the Late Sylvester Bliss and from Other Sources* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1975), 310.

Mormons: Joseph Smith (1805–1844)

- Founded the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons)*.

Christian Science: Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910)

- Eddy wrote a book entitled *Science and Health*, which argued for *“mental healing.”*

This was essentially Neo-Platonism, positing that illness was the result of our mental state and that the “primitive church” healed the sick through a process of self-realization. This includes disciplines like reading Science and Health, attending services, and even asking for the help of a “nurse.”

- The denial of fundamental components of the faith (such as Christ’s deity) led to Eddy being branded an apostate.

Jehovah’s Witnesses: Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916)

- Founder of the Watchtower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses)

Strongly influenced by Adventists, Russell began an analytical study of Scripture and became convinced of several key doctrines: (1) salvation was only by works, (2) there was no such thing as heaven or hell, and (3) Jesus is a created being (Arianism) and the Holy Spirit is not a person but a presence.

John Henry Newman (1801–1890)

- One of the founders of the Oxford Movement, Newman was essential to the growth of evangelicalism.

The Oxford Movement asserted that the COE must hold Scripture as its authority.

- Then in 1845, he left the Church of England and in 1879 was created a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church.

His experience influenced Isaac Hecker, a key Roman Catholic figure in the 1800’s who started the Paulists – an “evangelical” Catholic sect. Hecker opposed the First Vatican Council’s decisions, marking a division between American Catholicism and European Catholicism which lasted well into the 20th century and still lingers in many ways.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892)

- A Baptist pastor in London who was acclaimed as one of the finest preachers of his generation.

- Spurgeon vehemently opposed the [Downgrade Controversy](#), the introduction of theological and philosophical liberalism into the Church.

Brooke F. Westcott (1825–1901) and Fenton J. A. Hort (1828–1892)

- Westcott and Hort were perhaps the most important [textual critics](#) of the 19th century.

[They prepared a new edition of the Greek New Testament which incorporated many recently discovered manuscripts—such as Vaticanus and Sinaiticus—which were earlier than the manuscripts Erasmus had when he did his edition. They also supervised the ERV, which became part of the “official” English translations and Book of Common Prayer.](#)

Prominent Figures in Global Missions

William Carey (1761–1834)

- [The Father of Modern Missions](#) who went to India in

“Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.”

- Influenced by another Baptist **Andrew Fuller**, who formed the “Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen” in 1792. Carey was their first missionary.

He [Fuller, speaking of himself in the third person] thought, however, that what they [Christians he knew] meant by a belief of the gospel was nothing more than a general assent to the doctrines of revelation, unaccompanied with love to them, or a dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. ... It appeared to him, that we had taken unconverted sinners too much upon their word, when they told us that they believed the gospel.⁹⁵

Fuller became convinced that Calvinism, which he adhered to, had allowed unbelievers to pretend they were believers. By extension, if “Christians” could come to faith, then so could the heathen. This motivated him to develop a theology of missions.

Adoniram Judson (1788–1850)

- As a congregationalist, partnered with Luther Rice as missionaries to India.
- Studied baptism on his trip to India and converted to Baptist. Eventually went to Burma instead.

Carey, Rice, and Judson eventually moved the Baptists to form [the Triennial Convention](#) (so called because it met every three years) which eventually became most modern Baptist movements.

⁹⁵ Andrew Fuller, *The Works of Andrew Fuller*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: William Collier, 1820), 10–11.

Want to Know More?

Charles Briggs and the Battle for Inspiration

In the wake of the American Civil War, with Darwinism dominating scientific discussion and higher textual criticism questioning the core beliefs in the Scriptures, many Christian institutions felt threatened by encroaching “new” views. Just as Christianity was reaching an apex of presence in American society, the basis of its authority was being examined and, in many, cases weakened. Conservative institutions scrambled to answer these criticisms, and sadly many handled the issue poorly. Such was the case when the Presbyterians, especially a group known as the Princetonians, felt it necessary to expel Charles Briggs over his interpretation of the inspiration of Scripture. The essence of the conflict was the question of ecclesiastic verses academic authorities. Could academic inquiry be independent of confessional belief? It was a confusing, frustrating time in evangelical Christianity, and its implications were far-reaching. As A. B. Bruce described the conflict, “The American Presbyterian Church was set on fire, like the prairies.”⁹⁶

The Crisis

In 1876, Charles Augustus Briggs was inaugurated as the Davenport Professor of Hebrew and Cognate Languages at Union Theological Seminary. Having received his doctorate from the University of Berlin, Briggs was considered “one of America’s most gifted, German-trained Old Testament scholars.”⁹⁷ He was widely respected during his tenure at UTS, but in 1891, he was brought before a “Prosecuting Committee” appointed by the New York Presbytery.⁹⁸ He was accused of making “erroneous and ill-advised utterances” which concerning the inerrancy of Scripture.⁹⁹ The trial dragged on until 1893, ultimately ordering him expelled from the Presbyterian Church.¹⁰⁰

What Had Briggs Said?

At issue were statements Briggs had made during his inaugural address. In the address, he had asserted that there were six barriers to understanding and accepting the divine authority of

⁹⁶ A. B. Bruce, “Introduction” in *Inspiration and Inerrancy: Inaugural Address by C.A. Briggs, D.D., Together with Papers upon Biblical Scholarship and Inspiration*, ed. Llewellyn J. Evans and Henry Preserved Smith (London: James Clark & Co., 1891), 5.

⁹⁷ John J. Feeney, Jr., “Charles A. Briggs and the Organic Reunion of Christendom,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 47, no. 1 (1978): 93.

⁹⁸ Ronald F. Satta, “The Case of Professor Charles A. Briggs: Inerrancy Affirmed,” *Trinity Journal* 26, no. 1 (2005): 74.

⁹⁹ Charles A. Briggs, “Response to the Charges and Specifications Submitted to the Presbytery of New York,” *Andover Review* 16, no. 96 (December 1891): 624.

¹⁰⁰ Briggs returned to Europe, converted to Anglicanism, and never returned to the United States. He died in 1913.

Scripture, among which he included the teachings of verbal inspiration and inerrancy.¹⁰¹ What he had in mind, however, was not the denial of inerrancy but rather the human perception or experience of inerrancy. In his mind, the authority of the Scripture was not *proven* by human means but was *experienced* through the Spirit's presence.¹⁰² So, the Bible could, and should, be treated as inerrant whether we *believe* it is inerrant or not. Our beliefs are experiences articulated through human reason, and therefore our *perception* of errancy or inerrancy is not to be trusted. Scriptures is authoritative even without the "cushions" of human validation, whether through individual experience or institutional appointment. Briggs reasserted his position during his trial, as well as authoring his "Response to the Charges and Specifications Submitted to the Presbytery of New York," which appeared in the December 1891 issue of the *Andover Review*.¹⁰³

Charles Hodge, the president of Princeton Seminary, took issue with Briggs's position. Hodge was a staunch anti-rationalist who rejected evolution, modernism, and most scientific evidence that could not be directly supported by Scripture. Toward the end of his life, he proudly declared:

"They [the Princeton faculty] were content with the faith once delivered to the saints. I am not afraid to say that a new idea never originated in this seminary...The Bible is the word of God. That is to be assumed or proved. If granted; then it follows, that what the Bible says, God says. That ends the matter."¹⁰⁴

Inherent in his declaration are three driving values. First, Princeton represents the true, unchangeable doctrine of the church. Second, that this requires no confirmation. Third, there is no room for challenging their views. In his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge wrote:

"Philosophy seeks to attain knowledge by speculation and induction, or by the exercise of our own intellectual faculties. Theology relies upon authority, receiving as truth whatever God in his Word has revealed."¹⁰⁵

Ironically, the terms *inerrancy* does not appear in Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, although he most clearly adhered to a strict view of it.¹⁰⁶ He left it to his son A. A. Hodge and another Princetonian, B. B. Warfield, to develop a clear interpretation of the idea. In their definitive statement on the matter in their 1881 editorial "Inspiration," the two maintained that the Bible's inerrancy was not a matter of "an absolute literalness, which the Scriptures never

¹⁰¹ Charles A. Briggs, *The Authority of Holy Scripture: An Inaugural Address* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 29–42.

¹⁰² Briggs, *Authority*, 19–22.

¹⁰³ Charles A. Briggs, *The Bible, the Church and the Reason: The Three Great Fountains of Divine Authority* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), 7–8.

¹⁰⁴ A. A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge D.D. LL.D, Professor in the Theological Seminary Princeton, N.J.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), 521.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 56.

¹⁰⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 165.

profess.¹⁰⁷ Their view was not, as they felt Briggs asserted, that if a single error was proven, the entire Christian faith was threatened. They made it plain that “Christianity would be true and divine, and being so, would stand, even if God had not pleased to give us, in addition to His revelation of saving truth, an infallible record of that revelation absolutely errorless, by means of Inspiration.”¹⁰⁸ They allowed that the Scriptures might include information that was contextual and therefore might assert something that conflicted with modern knowledge. The Scriptures were held as infallible witness, not as absolute scientific argumentation. “Inspiration does not suppose that the words and phrases written under its influence are the best possible to express the truth, but only that they are an adequate expression of the truth.”¹⁰⁹

The Climate that Led to the Debate

Today, we might have trouble distinguishing Briggs and Hodge’s views. We must understand that at the First Lateran Council in 1870, Pope Leo XIII and the Roman Catholic Church had completely rejected any sense of modern thought or scientific inquiry as “detestable errors” and took the Latin Vulgate as absolute, despite the evidence of textual criticism.¹¹⁰

“Now, we have to meet the Rationalists, true children and inheritors of the older heretics, who, trusting in their turn to their own way of thinking, have rejected even the scraps and remnants of Christian belief which had been handed down to them.”¹¹¹

In his inaugural speech and his other writings, Briggs went out of his way to distance himself from the teachings of both the Roman Catholics and those he perceived as liberals. He had been exposed to both the extreme conservatism of the Catholics and the absurd liberalism of continental theologians and critics. At the same time, he embraced the science of textual criticism as an important confirmation of the Scriptures inspiration. In a very real way, Briggs perceived his position as a middle road between institutional obstinance, as he saw it in the Roman Catholic position, and purely rationalist pursuit. Briggs’s manner, however, was so abrupt and often dismissive that it alienated the Princetonian conservatives. It was his rejection of the institution of the Church determining inerrancy that became the sticking point.¹¹² Sadly, Hodge and Warfield struggled to see that this was Briggs’s intent.

¹⁰⁷ A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, “Inspiration,” *Presbyterian Review* 2, no. 6 (April 1881), 237, <http://scdc.library.ptsem.edu/mets/mets.aspx?src=BR188126&div=0>, accessed January 21, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁰⁹ Hodge and Warfield, “Inspiration,” 256.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹¹ *Providentissimus Deus*, 10.

¹¹² Briggs, *The Bible, the Church, and the Reason*, 16.

Conclusion

Although inerrancy was the topic of Briggs's trial and expulsion, it was not the source of the conflict. As even Old School proponents like C. Peter Wright of Oberlin Theological Seminary had noted, both sides were arguing based on assumptions, and this argument was still being made years later.¹¹³ Put succinctly, both views held that manuscript evidence has errors. They differ by their assumption about when the errors occurred. Both sides affirmed the authority of Scripture, and since the matter of these autographs was not a part of the Presbyterian confessions, Briggs was perhaps justified in his opposition to the accusations.

Where Briggs erred was in aligning against the Princetonians who believed they were protecting the authority of Scripture through academic and ecclesiastic means. Since Briggs rejected their authority to do this, he came into conflict with them. The trial established the position of Hodge and Warfield for the time being, but within a generation their conservative heirs would abandon the Presbyterian Church (USA) under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen because their own position was undermined by the voice of the majority. Ironically, Machen's arguments against liberalism were based not on inerrancy but simply on the authority of the Scriptures.¹¹⁴ In this sense, Hodge's own successors held a view closer to Briggs's than Briggs may have.

Perhaps even more sadly, Briggs's sometimes justified criticism of the Princetonians contributed to a caricature of the conservatives (and eventually fundamentalists) as anti-intellectual and rigid that continued well into the twentieth century, and his treatment contributed to empathy for positions far more liberal than his. The contemporary tensions of the day and the uncomfortable union of Old and New School Presbyterians was not resolved by the heavy-handed trial, and conceivably contributed to further division. Instead, the trial polarized the Presbyterians into the liberal and conservative camps, the latter of which eventually left and formed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church under Machen.

¹¹³ Satta, "The Case of Professor Charles A. Briggs," 70; W. Robert Cook, "Biblical Inerrancy and Intellectual Honesty," *Bibliotheca sacra* 125, no. 498 (April 1968): 173-174.

¹¹⁴ Bauder, "Communion of the Saints," 88.

Movement toward the Post-Christian World (1950–Present)

It is difficult to write a history of events that we are still evaluating. The late 20th and early 21st centuries have been a period of transition for the Church. Globally, the steady march of progress that marked the period after the Enlightenment reached a shocking and horrifying pinnacle in the 20th century. World Wars saw the introduction of weapons of mass destruction. The Battle of the Somme in 1916 saw a million casualties, but that was nothing compared to the 6 million Jews murdered in the Nazi *die Endlösung* (“Final Solution”) or 50 million who died in combat between 1938 and 1945. Modernity, with all its promises of glory and equality, had instead become the instrument of horror, the likes of which mankind had never seen.

The response of the Church to this was mixed, to say the least. In Europe, secularism took hold. Eastern Europe fell under the atheist domination of communist totalitarianism, but across Western Europe people shed the tatters of a religious identity in favor of sentiments ranging from nominal apathy to open hostility. Christian denominations began pushing for doctrinal compromise in the name of ecumenical unity. In America, prosperity gave birth to moral apathy, especially among the young. Among the fundamentalists, there was a knee-jerk reaction to this malaise, breaking from existing denominations, forming their own institutions, and redirecting their energies to increasingly separatist impulses.

Evangelicalism and Ecumenicalism

The vast range of moderate Christians who found themselves unwilling to adopt liberalism or fundamentalism adopted the term **evangelical** as a broad description. This eventually led to the rise of non-denominationalism, with individual congregations leaving denominations, or in some cases, disguising their denominational affiliations.¹¹⁵ This in turn contributed to the development of megachurches and Christian broadcasting networks, both uniquely late 20th century innovations. Without denominational checks and balances, evangelicalism found itself precariously positioned when accusations were leveled on many of their leaders, and scandals with prominent individuals became front page news.

Perhaps one of the most wide-sweeping events in this period was the rise of the Charismatic Movement. This shadowed the Pentecostal movements of the previous century, but those was largely confined to specific denominations which had formed as separate from their parent denominations. Thus, the Assemblies of God broke from the Church of God in Christ which in turn broke from the Baptists. The Charismatic movement occurred first *within* mainstream denominations, and then it moved to the non-denominational evangelicals. Many of the megachurches were Charismatic in their origin.

¹¹⁵ There were already non-denominational groups, such as the Campbell-Stone churches and many of the Baptists, such as the Southern Baptists, but these groups were fully independent of any kind of association or connection.

To reach the younger brothers and sisters of the World War II veterans, Chicago businessman Torrey Johnson established Youth for Christ in 1944. The first employee he hired was a young evangelist named Billy Graham (1918–2018)

Perhaps due to movements like the evangelicals and the Charismatics, coupled with a concern about the divided nature of the Church, there was a push toward a sense of unity among the different groups, known as *ecumenicalism*. Perhaps most prominent among these interdenominational movements were the World Council of Churches (1948), the Promise Keepers (1990), and the far more conservative Gospel Coalition (2005).

Many mainstream denominations worked toward unification. The northern and southern factions of the Methodists came together again 1938, and then were joined by the Evangelical Union Brethren to form the United Methodist Church in 1968. The Presbyterian Church USA was formed 1983, when the southern Presbyterian Church in the United States and with the United Presbyterian Church in the United States came together. For the most part, evangelicals remained outside of the civil rights movement, especially in the south. The Baptists, on the other hand, had first separated into the American Baptist Church (formerly Northern Baptist Convention) and the Southern Baptist Convention). These assorted groups divided into further factions, most of which still exist. Additionally, the middle of the 20th century saw a significant rise in the number of independent Baptist churches, which had always existed but, in many places, took on a more and more hostile posture toward Baptists who remained in the conventions or denominations.

The “Global South” and Christianity Outside of America

The end of World War II was seen as a great opportunity for American missions, with Gen. Douglas MacArthur calling for thousands of missionaries to come to Japan, and missionaries flooding into war-torn Europe to provide both spiritual and physical relief.

The Charismatic movement and liberation theology became wildly popular in “the Global South,” a term that loosely designates Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. This was largely due to the poverty of many of these areas. The promise of economic blessing and freedom from oppression appealed to these people.

There were also marked attempts to reach closed nations, those who did not allow religious workers to enter. Designated the 10-40 window (a reference to the region between 10° and 40° North latitude which encompasses the Middle East and most of Central and Eastern Asia) by Luis Bush of Partners International in 1990, this region was targeted by many foreign missions agencies. Entering the countries required the development of tent-making ministries, with missionaries entering as workers in vital industries.

(Continued on page 115)

Want to Know More?

A History of Youth Ministry

Origins

The root of youth ministry is the “young men’s societies” which were formed throughout the English-speaking world over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The YMCA (originally Young Men’s Christian Association) is a good example of these kinds of programs.

Prior to this, there was no sense of adolescents in the church. Young people attended church with their parents, and at the appropriate age, they were baptized into the church membership. Sunday School, which had been developed at first to provide education for underprivileged urban youth, became a catechetical tool. Children were introduced to the dogma of their church, prepared for baptism or other initiation rites. In the late nineteenth century, however, the growing population of the United States meant there was a large group of young people who often lacked direction or spiritual depth. These young people expressed little interest in church membership, and they drifted away. This “youth problem” was a very real concern for the church leaders of the day. Sunday schools were not answering the young people’s needs, and they were drifting from church to participate in alternative activities.

The Endeavorers

In answer to this, churches innovated and developed “youth societies.” The movement really began with Francis Clark, the young pastor of Williston Church in Portland, Maine. An orphan at the age of seven, Clark had been adopted by a Congregational minister and in 1864, at the age of thirteen, he joined the church in Claremont, New Hampshire.

“Moved, as I trust, by the Spirit of God, when thirteen years of age, I stood up, trembling and abashed, in the little prayer-meeting room of the Claremont church and confessed my desire to be counted among the followers of Christ. No evangelist or season of religious excitement had brought me to a decision, but religious training and conviction.”¹⁶

Clark went on to attend Dartmouth, and he engaged actively in prayer meetings, seeking depth in his Christian journey. After college, he went to Andover Theological Seminary, and then married Harriett Elizabeth Abbott. He became the pastor of Williston at just twenty-five years old, and he observed that unlike his own experience, the young people were not engaged in church life. He attempted to start numerous ministries, but they all failed. The young people lacked the foundation he had received from his adopted parents, but there was something missing. What is more, they lacked the *challenge* his parents had given him in his faith. Ministry was geared *for* the young people, but it did not ask them to *become* anything.

¹⁶ Francis E. Clark, *Memories of Many Men in Many Lands: An Autobiography* (Boston: United Society of Christian Endeavor, 1922), 38–39.

Clark formed a separate youth class and prayer meeting. This class dug into doctrinal questions and discussed Christian classics like *Pilgrim's Progress*. His wife Harriett formed the "Mizpah Mission Circle," which focused on practical ministry. The Circle met at the pastor's home every weekly and discussed evangelism and mission work. Out of this work was born an international movement, known as The Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor or "Endeavorers."¹¹⁷ As part of joining the youth class, young people took a simple pledge which demanded a great deal from the individual:

Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I promise Him that I will strive to do whatever He would like to have me do; that I will make it the rule of my life to pray and to read the Bible every day, and to support the work and worship of my own church in every way possible; and that just so far as I know how, throughout my whole life, I will endeavor to lead a Christian life.

As an active member I promise to be true to all my duties, to be present at and to take some part, aside from singing, in every Christian Endeavor meeting, unless hindered by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. If obliged to be absent from the monthly consecration meeting of the society, I will, if possible, send at least a verse of Scripture to be read in response to my name at the roll call.

At the core of Clark's vision was the idea of accountability, which is reflected in the pledge given above. He realized that the problem was not that young people were incapable of church membership. It was that church membership required little or nothing of them, and the young people needed to feel there was weight and value to their journey. Other, secular organizations required pledges and placed responsibility on the shoulders of the young people. They were engaged in business and trades, where a man's word was valuable. So, he created his pledge, and he held the young people accountable in their "Christian endeavor." He articulated what it meant to engage in Christian endeavor:

1. Confession of Christ
2. Service for Christ
3. Loyalty to Christ's Church
4. Fellowship with Christ's People¹¹⁸

Clark recognized there was a disconnect between the youth of his church and the way church was being done generally. He identified a trend in the society around his church which could be adapted to developing strong Christians from the disinterested youth. Once the youth were engaging, then Clark structured plans for leadership and creative ministry. He purchased a Christian newspaper, *The Golden Rule*, which they used to connect their widening ministry in various "unions" which developed around the world. By making a simple requirement and then building both a regular meeting *and* a more global instrument of

¹¹⁷ This society still operates as "The World's Christian Endeavor Union," which is an association of thirty national societies.

¹¹⁸ Mark H. Senter, III, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, Youth, Family, and Culture Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 145–47.

teaching in the newspaper, the movement was built upon responsibility and accountability. Young people were given a significant role in the church, and they flourished.

Clark's program and many like it had a brief period of success, but then they all went into steep decline following a single, cataclysmic event—World War I. This global conflict shattered the optimism and hope of the age in a way that is difficult to understand today. Young men died in the hundreds of thousands, and skepticism about traditional religion grew. Prosperity in the “Roaring Twenties” meant parents were better off. Their children did not have to work, and they were attending public high schools and universities. By 1930, groups like the Endeavorers were rendered irrelevant. “Their forms and techniques, which remain much the same as they were in the beginning are no longer suited to modern society.”¹¹⁹ The horrors of World War II ended the effectiveness of these societies.

Word of Life and Youth for Christ

In the 1940's and 1950's, youth ministry shifted to large scale evangelistic rallies, held in large venues. The idea was simple. Christian young people were told to invite their friends so they would hear engaging speakers present a motivational, often emotional appeal to reject the rising wave of secularism in favor of a form of evangelistic activism. Stripped of religious terminology, the messages were presented in everyday language. They were short, punchy messages with a call to follow Christ which was targeted at nominally Christian kids as well as their secularized friends. *Unlike the Endeavorers, these rallies were conducted outside the bounds of the traditional church.*

This approach probably began with Lloyd T. Bryant, who built a number of youth centers on the East Coast. These centers ministered to down-and-out teens who needed somewhere to go after school during the Depression. Parents trusted the youth centers to provide a space for their teenagers, and the centers in turn met the social and spiritual needs of the kids they served. Coupled with the meeting of this need for urban youth, Percy Crawford pioneered the concept of Christian radio. The traditional church service or prayer meeting could not compete with the entertainment on the radio, so Crawford put together fast paced, well-organized programming that appealed to the youth of the day.

The idea of a combined social and spiritual experience and the use of media like the radio led to the development of these youth rallies. Jack Wyrzten was the energetic organizer of two of these organizations that started in New York—Word of Life International and Youth for Christ (YFC).¹²⁰ A jazz musician and salesman, Wyrzten had little in the way of education and training, but he saw the potential of a mass appeal to youth. Wyrzten had come to faith through relationships with other young people, so he saw the opportunities that existed if you

¹¹⁹ Katherine Evelyn Niles, “A Survey and Critique of Young People's Societies,” *Religious Education* (1929): 534.

¹²⁰ I have a soft spot for YFC, because my grandfather came to Christ when the girl he liked (eventually my grandmother) insisted that the only date she would go on was to a YFC outreach.

could get large numbers of young people in one place. He pulled together enough funds to advertise on mainstream radio stations, and his gatherings soon filled Madison Square Garden and stadiums around the country. During World War II, he expanded his ministry internationally.

The concept soon expanded well beyond Wyrzten and other evangelistic organizations were doing similar things around the country and the world. Recognizing the value of cooperation, a group of these leaders met at Winona Lake Conference Grounds in Pennsylvania and organized a “Youth for Christ International Week” in July 1945. Wyrzten did not attend, as he distrusted organizations other than his own. Instead, he continued his work under the banner of Word of Life. In his place, Torrey Johnson organized this group, known simply as “Youth for Christ” (YFC).

Throughout the mid-20th century, these youth rallies produced tremendous results. Billy Graham was YFC’s first paid evangelist, and he conducted rallies throughout the country. In 1949, he conducted a series of services in and around Los Angeles that attracted over a quarter of a million attendees. It was covered by all the major news outlets. Unfortunately, the model was already losing steam. The generation it had reached was going to work and raising families. Graham would continue to be tremendously influential, and in the 1960’s, he invited the leaders of the “Jesus Movement” in California to join with him. This group was generationally removed from him, and many of the “Jesus people” were young enough to be the children of those who had participated in his early YFC work.

Youth Ministry in Seminary

In 1949, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) hired Philip B. Harris to lead a Master of Religious Education program at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. This was the first time that youth ministry was taught as a distinct discipline in a seminary. Harris was the product of the SBC Sunday School program and had previously served on the Baptist Sunday School Board, focused primarily on youth work.¹²¹ In 1954, Harris completed his doctoral dissertation, which he entitled “The Youth Director.”¹²² In it, he described the concept of a professional youth minister. Harris went on to influence the entire concept of a youth minister in SBC churches, but the models that they created influenced many other denominations.¹²³

Harris’s appointment and the emphasis on youth ministry was following hard on the developing understanding that the adolescents or “teenagers” represented a distinct group

¹²¹ Lamire Moore, *Southern Baptists in Illinois* (IL: n.p., 1957), 209.

¹²² Harris was awarded a Doctor of Religious Education (D.R.E), a degree no longer awarded by SWBTS.

¹²³ Bruce L. Merrick, “A Historical Study of the Influence of Philip Brown Harris on Youth Ministry in the Southern Baptist Convention as Reflected in His Life and Work,” EdD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994, 1–3.

which had to be reached in particular ways. Unlike previous generations of young people, this generation of kids was dealing with the ubiquitous presence of media (movies, radio, public schools, magazines, etc.) which influenced their thinking.¹²⁴ The strange dichotomy of the prosperity of the USA after World War II but the possibility of global warfare and plague created tension and turmoil, which would boil over in the 1960's. Swift and cheap transportation thanks to the automobile and the ready availability of cash meant these teenagers were doing things in their leisure that their parents had never dreamed of. The "baby boom" produced the largest generation of Americans ever, and when these people reached adolescence, they did so in an era of unprecedented connectedness and freedom.

Youth Emphasis Becomes "Church"

At the same time, parachurch youth ministries were shrinking in influence, but the Jesus Movement gave birth to a new idea. These young, rough around the edges Christians went *back* to church. There is a specific moment in history where this happened. In 1968, Chuck Smith was a forty-year-old pastor of the struggling Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California. He took a huge risk and invited the young, charismatic Lonni Frisbee to lead a Christian commune out of Calvary Chapel. Smith served as mentor and primary teacher while Lonni and the young people who came to Christ were the energetic and creative force behind spreading the message of a church open to inviting the young to be not only participants but leaders and innovators.

In the 1970's a young Christian named Bill Hybels saw youth ministry in the church as vital to the development of the church. He wanted to build Christian community, not just outreach events. To that end, he and a group of friends launched Son City Spectacular out of South Park Church in Park Ridge, Illinois. On Tuesday nights, young people gathered and were treated not just to a message from Scripture but music and drama and multimedia presentations. Hybels would teach on topics he believed were relevant. The group quickly outgrew South Park Church, and it became Willow Creek Community Church. Leaders around the country observed the success of Willow Creek, and they began emulating this youthful approach to church. New churches were planted all over the world which left behind the traditional stylings of church in favor of the newest fads that attracted people in a non-threatening, relevant way.

Where Is Youth Group Now?

Today, many churches employ the techniques pioneered by Willow Creek as part of their "regular" services. It is increasingly rare to find a church that does not emphasize youth and youthful elements in their worship. Generally, the trappings of church are stripped away in favor of relevance and attraction. It is an observable fact, however, that adolescents *still* do not find relevance in the general church makeup. This is because the techniques employed in most congregations are those employed in the previous generations' appeal to their peers

¹²⁴ Merrick, "A Historical Study of the Influence of Philip Brown Harris," 80-81.

when they were young. Now that they are the parents and grandparents of the youth, relevance has become irrelevance. Mark Senter has observed that while “conversions” in youth ministry have kept up with population growth, it is only working in certain, homogenous populations.¹²⁵ In other words, while parachurch and local church youth ministries may still be doing *something*, they are increasingly outdated and having to reinvent themselves to remain relevant.

Historical Conclusion

Why does all this history matter? For two reasons. First, it is because youth ministry as it has been done for over a century and a half becomes irrelevant. It is not that it is becoming irrelevant, but that methods and modes *become* irrelevant over time. Culture moves on, and youth ministry tends to lag behind. Second, these approaches to youth ministry address primarily evangelistic needs. Youth ministry is notoriously bad at handling the needs of *growing* people in their Christian journey. This is why, with each subsequent generation, youth ministry seems to lose its grip. People either mature and become “the adults” in a congregation or they abandon the faith once it is no longer as fun as it once was. Youth ministry built on appealing to needs will inevitably have to change with those needs.

¹²⁵ Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 257–58.

The Civil Rights Movement

American Christianity became embroiled in the battle for Civil Rights. Although this battle had been going on for decades, it was in 1953 in Montgomery, Alabama, that it began in earnest with Rosa Parks's refusal to move to the back of a transit bus. This move had been decided by Black leaders in the city, among them the young Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and it began a cascade of events that culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Subsequent legislation clarified the idea of desegregation and equality under the law.

Evangelical Scandals

In 1987, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker were the leaders of PTL Ministries, which included a widely syndicated satellite television network, a theme park, and a number of other ventures. It was revealed that Jim had defrauded thousands of people in a real estate scheme, and he was sentenced to federal prison. Already in the public eye after accusations of sexual misconduct, the Bakkers' empire quickly crumbled. This was followed in 1988 by the revelation that another popular preacher, Jimmy Swaggart, had hired prostitutes on multiple occasions. Both Bakker and Swaggart had begun ministry in the Assemblies of God but had since become independent. The lack of oversight inherent in their approach to ministry was apparent, and large ministries scrambled to form some kind of accountability.

This did not, however, prevent the scandals from coming. In 2006, the president of the National Association of Evangelicals, Ted Haggard, was revealed to have engaged male prostitutes in drug-fueled escapades. A number of other megachurch leaders were caught in various scandals, including Mark Driscoll who founded Mars Hill Church in Seattle (2014), Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church (2018), and, posthumously, the evangelist and apologist Ravi Zacharias (2020).

Denominational Splits over Sexuality

In their 2015 decision on *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, the United States Supreme Court nullified any US laws preventing homosexual marriage. This was the culmination of a legal battle that had been ongoing for the better part of two decades. This open attitude toward the recognition of non-heterosexual marriages was hotly debated in the mainstream denominations, as well as the broader evangelical community.

Already in 2012, conservatives among the Presbyterian Church (USA) had split over the issue of ordaining LGBT clergy. They formed ECO, which stands for Evangelical, Covenant, and Order. The Episcopalians, who had been at the center of the LGBT controversy since the ordination of Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, in 2003, were suspended from the Church of England communion in 2016. Most recently, 3,000 conservative churches left the United Methodist Church and formed the Global Methodist Church because the UMC refused to address the issue of sexuality, as well as a number of doctrinal points.

Timeline

- 1941 InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is officially organized in the USA.
- 1947 Evangelist *Billy Graham* holds his first crusade in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Charles E. Fuller* founded Fuller Theological Seminar. Later *Donald McGavran* teaches there, advocating new thoughts on the church growth movement.
- 1948 The World Council of Churches is founded in Amsterdam.
- 1951 *Bill Bright* founded Campus Crusade for Christ.
- 1954 Sun Myung Moon founds the Unification Church in South Korea.
- 1957 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. helps form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.
- 1960 The Charismatic movement begins in Van Nuys, California, with the “Third Wave” following in 1985.
- 1962 The Vatican II council begins, reversing many of the Vatican I policies, making radical changes to the Catholic liturgy.
- 1965 The “Jesus people” movement begins when Chuck Smith invites Lonnie Frisbee to preach at Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California.
- 1968 *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.
- 1975 Willow Creek Community Church, perhaps the best-known megachurch, is founded in South Barrington, Illinois.
- 1978 The Chicago Statement of on Biblical Inerrancy affirmed evangelical belief in the inspiration of Scripture.
- 1980 The Moral Majority under *Jerry Falwell* and *James Robinson* became a strong political block supporting conservative presidential candidate Ronald Reagan.
- 1982 *John Wimber* forms the Vineyard Christian Fellowship.
- 1987 *James Bakker* resigns as head of PTL, the first Christian satellite syndication network.
- 2002 The *Boston Globe* breaks the Catholic sex scandal story, resulting in a decade of turmoil for the Roman Catholic Church.
- 2003 Dan Kimball publishes *The Emerging Church*, and the name is quickly adopted by postmodern church leaders. Kimball later distances himself from the movement.

2016 The Church of England suspends the Episcopal Church over the issue of LGBT ordination and marriage.

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