

## 6 eras of Church History:

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### 1. **Persecution** \_\_\_\_\_ (30-312 A.D.)

Matthew 5:11

Following in the way of Jesus many of his followers endured suffering were killed in cruel, tortuous ways.

Christians were persecuted because they were considered a secret society, intolerant of others, and desiring to take over the world. They were loyal \_\_\_\_\_ to God and refused to worship the Roman political leader, Caesar (Emperor) \_\_\_\_\_.  
(cf. Matthew 5:11-12; 10:28; John 15:18-21; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-14)

#### *Examples of persecution:*

##### Localized persecutions:

64	Nero	(Peter & Paul killed)
96	Domitian	
112	Trajan	(Ignatius killed)
160	Antonius Pius	(Polycarp killed)
165	Marcus Aurelius	(Justin Martyr killed)

##### Widespread & general persecutions:

250	Decius	(Perpetua killed) – requires proof of sacrifice to Roman emperor.
303	Diocletian	

#### *Results of the persecution:*

1. The gospel \_\_\_\_\_ spreads rapidly and more individuals place their trust in Jesus \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The church was made up of small groups that met in homes \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Christians violate Roman social norms by including the poor \_\_\_\_\_, slaves \_\_\_\_\_, and women \_\_\_\_\_ as equal participants in congregations.
4. There are no lukewarm \_\_\_\_\_ Christians.
5. Believers must respond to heresies (false teachings) \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Books of the NT are gathered.
  - b. Apologists such as Tertullian & Justin Martyr defend faith in Jesus.
  - c. Gnosticism arises as the greatest heresy.
    - i. Taught that the body is evil and spirit is good (denial of incarnation & resurrection of Jesus).
    - ii. Taught that salvation is only for an elite few with special “knowledge” of the universe (denial of the authority of the Bible & sufficiency of Jesus’s death).

## 2. Popularity (313-590 A.D.)

In 312 the Roman Emperor, Constantine, converted to Christianity. In 313 he issued a decree of toleration for all religions of the empire, including Christianity. Christian persecution and martyrdoms ceased.

*Results:*

- a) Churches gained great power and wealth.

Rather than meeting in secret places (catacombs), Christians worshipped in beautiful cathedrals. Property is returned to Christians who had been persecuted, tax breaks were given to Christian priests, and Christians held both legal & political roles.

- b) Creeds were established in order to preserve unity in the state church.

- In 325 the Council of Nicea affirms the *full* deity of Jesus.
- In 400 Augustine asserts that the Holy Spirit proceeds from *both* the Father and the Son and corrects Pelagianism by affirming the sinfulness of humanity and the grace of God.

- c) The persecuted church became the persecuting church.

In 380 Roman emperor Theodosius I declared Nicene Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. The government now depended on Christianity for unity in the empire so differences could not be tolerated.

- d) There were many superficial conversions because of Christianity's popularity.

Christianity was now socially accepted and trendy. By converting to the Christian faith people even received social and political benefits.

- e) Some men became monks in order to search for personal faith and retreat.

Hermits, like Anthony then Pachomius, established the first monasteries which would prove essential in preserving the written Word of God (and Western civilization itself) in the centuries to come as illiterate tribes invaded Rome.

- f) The bishop of Rome begins claiming divine authority as the pope.

A bishop was a pastor in a large city who had authority over priests in smaller surrounding towns. On June 6, 445 bishop Leo I received a decree from the Roman Emperor, Valentinian III, using Matt. 16:18 to support that Peter (as the first bishop of Rome) was superior to all other bishops and passed this *papal* authority on to his successors. The decree ordained the rulings of the Roman Bishop (the "pope") were to have the force of law and any opposition should be treated as treason.

The Roman Empire officially fell to invading Germanic Tribes in 476. The Roman bishop was in effect the last remnant of the old western half of the Roman Empire, the final remaining continuation of the Western civilization before the invasion.

### 3. Popes (590-1517 A.D.)

The church became a highly powerful organization as the popes claimed greater and greater authority.

*Results:*

- a) The church began to divide into East and West branches.
- In the West (Latin-speaking and “catholic”), the bishop of Rome (the pope) began to take over *political* leadership. Pope Gregory the Great claimed universal rule over Christianity in 590. Today more than 600 million Roman Catholics are globally united by their loyalty to the pope.
  - In the East (Greek-speaking and “orthodox”), the bishops did not make these claims, and allowed the emperor to take care of politics but the emperor also functioned as the *spiritual and church* authority. Today 15 different church groups are associated with the Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian, Greek, Syrian, etc.).

*The division between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox did not become official until 1054 A.D.*

- b) In 610 an Arab merchant, Muhammad, had a series of visions that he claimed to be from God. For the rest of his life he continued to claim such visions and spread his beliefs by a mix of evangelism and military conquests. Today, Muslims make up the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest religion and Islam is the fastest growing in the world.

The Carolingian Renaissance began by 800 with Charlemagne, the first ruler of the new Holy Roman Empire, and the rediscovery of documents from the classical period of Ancient Greece & Rome. This evolved into the 12<sup>th</sup> Century Renaissance when knowledge from the Eastern Roman Empire, (Byzantium) which had never fallen like the West, found its way to Central and Western Europe through Muslim trade.

- c) The rise of universities led to the height of Medieval philosophy known as Scholasticism. During this time many studied the relationship between faith and reason. Theologians (Anselm, Abelard, and Aquinas) began to emphasize logic as a proper means of defending the Christian faith.
- d) Emperor Alexius I Comnenus (in the East) appeals to Pope Urban II for military help to defend the empire. Pope Urban called Christians to begin a “holy war” against Muslims in 1096 beginning 200 years of Crusades (battles to regain the Holy Land, Jerusalem).
- e) The Roman Catholic church insisted that humanity is saved by participating in the sacraments, which were to be administered and defined only by the priests and the pope.

#### 4. **Protestants** \_\_\_\_\_ (1517-1789 A.D.)

*Two significant events in this era helped form contemporary evangelical Christianity.*

##### 1) The Protestant **Reformation** \_\_\_\_\_.

Those who opposed Catholic Church beliefs on communion, church membership, priestly hierarchy, forgiveness of sins, the authority of the Pope, and who should read/interpret/apply the Bible. These “Pre-Reformation Protestors” included: Catherine of Siena, Waldensians, Jan Hus, John Wycliffe, Lollards, Geert de Groote, Florens Radewijns & the Brethren of Common Life, Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Then, in 1517, a monk named Martin Luther questioned the teachings of the church by posting 95 theses on the church door in Wittenburg, Germany. Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther but his protest began the Reformation which was carried on by Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, Bucer, Tyndale, and others. The Reformation prompted people to learn how to read and translate the Bible into the language of the common person (before it had only been translated into Latin for Catholic priests to interpret). The reformers asked three basic questions:

a. How can a person find God’s **forgiveness** \_\_\_\_\_?

Roman Catholic:	Faith and Works (sacraments)
Protestants:	Faith Alone

b. What is the source of religious **authority** \_\_\_\_\_?

Roman Catholic:	The Bible and the church (the pope & tradition)
Protestants:	The Bible alone

c. What is the **Church** \_\_\_\_\_?

Roman Catholic:	A hierarchy beginning with the Pope and priests who have special power and authority handed down to them from Peter.
Protestants:	Priesthood of all believers.

##### 2) The Evangelical **Awakening** \_\_\_\_\_.

A German movement called **pietism** \_\_\_\_\_, led by Spener and Francke, stressed “a living faith.” While upholding the importance of theology pietists stressed living a life that was transformed by the gospel rather than merely accepting its ideas. *Individual* devotion to Bible study, prayer, faith, and fellowship were emphasized.

In 1738 a sect of this group (the Moravians) influenced **John Wesley** \_\_\_\_\_. When God saved him he began to preach the gospel in England and the U.S.A. along with **George Whitefield** \_\_\_\_\_ and **Jonathan Edwards** \_\_\_\_\_.

As a result of the Great Awakenings, Christianity saw the dawn of **global** \_\_\_\_\_ mission (through missionaries such as William Carey, Hudson Taylor, and David Livingstone) and **social responsibility** \_\_\_\_\_ (through evangelicals such as Francis Schaeffer). Christians began understanding that the Gospel must be proclaimed through *both* evangelism and acts of justice & compassion.

## 5. Progress (1789-1914 A.D.)

While devout believers were transforming the way the Christian faith was being practiced social theorists; such as John Locke, Voltaire, and Thomas Paine; began to use the principles of *science* as the primary way of determining truth, this led to the period known as "The Enlightenment," (1648-1789 A.D.), as a result the church encountered three new critics:

- a. Enlightened critics believed that reason or personal experience was the only reliable source in determining what was true.
- b. Biblical critics believed the Bible was only another book and denied its miracles. The Bible was seen as a mere book full of superstitions written to maintain the power of the institutional church.

For example, Thomas Jefferson used scissors to cut out parts of the Bible that did not match his rational or scientific conclusions about God and life.

- c. Scientific critics condemned Christianity on the basis that it did not agree with what modern science showed to be true.
  - i. In 1859 Charles Darwin published his scientific research in *Origin of Species* and in 1871 in *Descent of Man* which introduced and applied the theory of evolution to humans. This theory asserts that all complex living things developed from simpler forms by means of natural selection.
- d. Deism believed *pure* religion was based on human reason. God created the universe, therefore, and left it alone with natural laws to guide it.
  - i. This view compares the world to a clock (or a big machine) that God put together with natural laws (i.e. gravity, inertia, thermodynamics, etc.) to guide it, wound it up, and left it alone to allow this *natural process* to take its course.

## **6. Present \_\_\_\_\_ (1914-Today)**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> centuries Christianity now competes with some appealing rivals. Often these worldviews are combined to form complex systems of meaning.

- a. Relativism – the belief that truth is only a matter of perspective or context.
- b. Pluralism – the belief that no single religion holds all truth but truth may be found in many different paradigms.
- c. Humanism – believes in a universal set of values concerning the worth of human life and behavior without connecting these values to a universal source (i.e. God/god/Truth).
- d. Therapeutic Spirituality \_\_\_\_\_ – the belief that we all have a general spiritual need and we should determine what that need is and how best to satisfy that need. (i.e. Oprah, Eckhart Tolle, New Age, etc.)
- e. Islam \_\_\_\_\_ – the second largest religion in the world but the fastest growing. The Muslim religion continues to directly impact international relationships, politics, democracy, global economics, and faith.

Contemporary Christianity continues to address these challenges through:

- f. Ecumenical/Liberal Protestantism meets needs through humanitarian aid known as the social gospel.
- g. Roman Catholicism continues to become less traditional and more progressive.
- h. Para-church ministries, such as Youth for Christ, Young Life, Campus Crusade for Christ, YWAM, and the Navigators, seek to evangelize the world apart from formal denominational affiliation.
- i. Prosperity gospel assures that God wants you to be healthy, wealthy, and blessed. These believers teach that “What I confess I possess,” thus you must by faith grasp what God has in store and claim them in Jesus’ name.
- j. Fundamentalism takes a defensive stance against what they see as biblical illiteracy, poor doctrine, and decaying morality.
- k. The Religious Right joins the evangelical Christian faith with conservative (Republican) politics to lobby for Christian moral values in the U.S. courts.
- l. Emergent movements attempt to accommodate contemporary challenges by opening a conversation on culture and theology that encourages everyone and anyone to share their story and find their place in *the story* of Jesus while often rejecting some orthodox Christian beliefs such as the historicity of the Bible.