

THE STORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH SIMPLY TOLD



DR. STANFORD E. MURRELL

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The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 1

The Story Begins

The story of the Christian church begins in the time of Christ. Jesus was born of a virgin in Bethlehem according to prophecy. Isaiah 7:14 *“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.”* His father was a carpenter, and Jesus, as a child helped in the shop and learned the trade. Every Jewish child was required to be skilled in some manual labor even if they were to become a Rabbi. The apostle Paul was a tentmaker by trade though he had sat at the feet of Gama’liel (ga-ma’li-el; *“reward of God”*).

When Jesus was 30 years of age his cousin, whose name was John, began to preach in the spirit of Elijah. Going into the dessert John called upon people to turn from their sin because God was about to bring in a new age. A world revolution was about to come for the Messiah would soon appear. *“He that cometh after me,”* said John, *“is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”* Matthew 3:11-12 Therefore, the people must prepare their hearts by repenting of sin, making restitution when possible, and changing their code of conduct.

The common people were attracted to the message of the man sent from God. In contrast the religious leaders, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, resented John for he lashed out against them with strong remarks (Matt 3:6). The day came when the One of whom John’s message anticipated appeared. Jesus was baptized of John in the Jordan River and then began His own ministry in Galilee, the northern part of Palestine. Once more the common people came out to hear Jesus. They listened to His gracious words and profound teachings as He taught with authority. Christ lightened the burden of their religion by giving up the petty rules and regulations of the Pharisees.

In their religious zeal the Pharisees condemned those who were hungry for rubbing off the husks of corn and eating the grain if this were done on a Sabbath. Jesus said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”* Jesus taught men to forgive injuries and to love others, including one’s enemies. As the Lord of the Universe, Christ, cured people of all their diseases. The result was that the people followed Jesus. Some even wanted to make him a king (John 6:15) but the Lord withdrew Himself from such people for there could be no crown without the Cross. Time and again Christ revealed why He had come. It is important to understand why Christ came for only then can the story of the Christian church be comprehended and appreciated. With that in mind consider briefly the various reasons why Jesus came.

Why Christ Came

First, Christ came to reveal the Father and to do His will. Jesus said, *“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.* (John 6:3). It was the will of the Father that in Christ He would be made known. One day a disciple name Philip said to Christ, *“Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. 9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?”* (John 14:8-9). In Jesus is all the fullness of the godhead (Col. 2:9). In as far as we want to see the Father we have seen Him in Christ (John 14:8-9).

Second, Christ came to fulfill prophecy and to bear witness to the truth. When we go to Moses and all the prophets of the Old Testament we find many references to Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore we love and respect the Old Testament for it anticipates the Lord’s first coming. And we remember that all Scripture is given by inspiration *and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness* (2 Tim. 3:16). When we go to the Scriptures we go to truth. Jesus said, *“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice”* (John 18:37).

Third, Christ came to establish the Davidic covenant. The Bible records that God the Father made a covenant with David that an heir from his seed would sit upon his throne and rule over Israel. In a real and spiritual way Christ came to establish the promise. Following His resurrection the Lord ascended into heaven to sit down on the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33-36 cf. Heb. 10:4, 5, 10, 12). There is a Man in the heavenlies who rules over the affairs of the universe for all power in heaven and earth has been given unto Him (Matt. 28:18). One day there will be a more visible manifestation of this sovereign rule of the Savior when the Lord returns but He is even now King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 7:14; 19:16).

Fourth, Christ came to make a sacrifice for sins. It was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. That is why Christ said from the essence of His divinity when He was but a baby in the cradle, *“Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared for me”* (Heb. 10:4, 5, 10, 12). It was in the body the Father prepared that Christ offered himself as a substitute for sins, once for all. In the sacrifice He made for sins Christ did not come to make men savable but to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21 cf. John 12:47).

Fifth, Christ came to reconcile man to God the Father (2 Cor. 5:19; Heb. 2:17; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6). The word *“reconcile”* means *“to bring together.”* The sin of Adam and the personal sins of individuals unite to place a barrier between the Father and the souls of natural men. This sin barrier must be removed so that fellowship can take place once more. Christ has entrusted all of His disciples to go and tell the world that while men are still in their sins, while men are hostile and rebellious, Christ died that souls might live (Rom. 5:8, 10).

Sixth, Christ came to be a High Priest for His people. Since the days of Aaron there have been many high priests for the children of Israel but Christ is the last. The disciples of Christ should tell others to always remember that day and night they will find Him to be a faithful High Priest full of mercy in spiritual matters (Heb. 2:17). If, in the middle of the night, the heart is awakened burdened with sin, Christ can minister to that person. Jesus is only a prayer away.

Seventh, the Lord came to destroy the devil and his works (Heb. 2:14). Jesus does hate Lucifer with a perfect and righteous hatred. The Lord of Holiness despises what the Evil One has done to himself, to other angels, and to all of mankind. Lucifer knows that one-day Christ shall take and cast him into a Lake of Fire where he will be confined forever and ever (Rev. 20:15). Lucifer knows his fate is sealed and that Christ can do what He says and so the Prince of Darkness hates Jesus. While Diabolos (lit. *accuser*) cannot touch the Lord again he will seek to destroy the disciples of Christ which is a large part of the story of the Christian church. Therefore, every believer needs to beware. Every Christian needs to be careful because Satan (lit. *slanderer*) is still a very real adversary. He is moving about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Therefore, all disciples must beware. Though Christ has come to destroy the works of Satan there are lessons of life that can only be learned in a context of pain and suffering and temptation.

Eighth, Christ came to reverse the historical curse (Rom. 5:12). When Adam sinned there was a curse placed upon him, his descendants, and even the earth itself. When Adam sinned death entered into the world and has been passed upon all since that dreadful moment. Babies die, children get horrible diseases, there is sadness and sorrow in the universe because of the curse. But Christ has come to reverse the curse. Christ has come to give life in the place of death. Christ has come, not to slay men, but to save them. Christ has come to invite souls to eat of the Tree of Life once again (Rev. 22:14).

Ninth, Christ came to heal the broken hearted. When He first began His public ministry, the Lord went into the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth and turned to Isaiah the prophet. He read these words. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised”* (Luke 4:18). For more than 2,000 years the Church has had the privilege of telling people that if they need a Friend, if they need Someone to love them and comfort them, if they are broken hearted, they can come to Christ who has promised to never cast anyone out who comes by faith alone (John 6:37).

Finally, Christ came to be an example for believers. *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”* (1 Pet 2:21). Christ is the perfect example of how to handle suffering. In His death the Lord revealed that evil is not handled by acts of retaliation or attempts at isolation. Evil can only be broken by being absorbed. And that is what Christ did. He took the sins of His own people and absorbed them (Col. 1:21, 22). He gave His life a ransom for the many (Mark 10: 45). He saved His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21) so that the work of redemption accomplished could be applied to precious souls with the passage of time. What a glorious message the Church has to share with the world. God in Christ has provided a Savior. And what a Savior Jesus is!

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*“We have heard with our ears,
O God, our fathers have told us,
what work thou didst in their days,
in the times of old.”*

Psalm 44:1

Chapter 2

Trial by Fire

To help communicate the gospel of redeeming love to the world, the Lord Jesus Christ gathered around Him a core group of disciples (Matt. 10:2-4). *“Now the names of the twelve apostles are these:*

- *The first, Simon, who is called Peter,*
- *and Andrew his brother;*
- *James the son of Zebedee,*
- *and John his brother;*
- *Philip,*
- *and Bartholomew;*
- *Thomas,*
- *and Matthew the publican;*
- *James the son of Alphaeus,*
- *and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus;*
- *Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.”*

Of these twelve men all but one gave their lives for Christ. Each suffered great trials and tribulations. The traitor, Judas Iscariot, went out and hung himself only to have the rope break sending his body crashing over a precipice so that his stomach ripped open and his intestines spilled out (Matt. 27:3; Acts 1:18). Among the leaders of the Jews who were hostile to the emerging Christian community was the one who later became the apostle Paul. Getting permission from the priests at Jerusalem to go to Damascus and hunt out the Christians, Saul of Tarsus was converted to Christ.

In the Greek cities, and in Rome, he who once persecuted Christians now preached Christ crucified and risen from the dead. By his steadfast loyalty to the gospel message of salvation by grace through faith apart from meritorious works (Eph. 2:8,9), Paul turned the world upside down until his death by martyrdom in Rome, c. AD 67.

Despite persecution, the Christian community thrived even when forced to hold their religious services in the catacombs. These underground passages, extending for hundreds of miles, commonly 8 to 10 feet wide, 4 to 6 feet high, formed a winding maze beneath the surface of the outskirts of Rome.

- The catacombs were used as places of refuge and worship during the days of official persecution.
- The catacombs also became the cemeteries of the Christians. The word “*catacomb*” means “*A place of sleeping underground*”. Christians believe that death is only a sleep (1 Cor. 15:1)-and who is afraid to go to sleep?

The Icon Controversy

In the catacombs the early Christians began to express their faith. Along the walls of the catacombs were ledges for the remains of the dead, and on the open spaces were carved names and words and pictures, many which are now familiar to us.

- In one picture, to show the resurrection, Jonah is viewed as coming out of the whale.
- Greek letters were used to express the deity of Christ, “*alpha*” and “*omega*” for Christ is the first and the last.
- The symbol of the dove was used to speak of the Spirit of God and also for peace.
- The fish was a common sign of Christianity because Jesus had fed the multitude with loaves and fishes. The word for “*fish*” in Greek contained the first letters of the Greek words meaning, “*Jesus Son of God Savior.*”

In AD 725 one of the greatest controversies of the Church would arise over the use of symbols or icons [Greek, *eikon*, image or representation]. The controversy arose in the Byzantine Empire with the prohibition of image worship by Emperor Leo III. Pope Gregory II supported this imperial edict by denouncing iconoclasm as a heresy in AD 727 and moving to stop the usage of religious images in worship. He had become sensitive to the criticism of the Moslems who accused Christians of making graven images and thus being idolaters. It is one thing to make a decision affecting millions; it is another to enforce what is decreed. In the East and in the West, church leaders and people opposed the edict. One influential theologian of the time, John of Damascus (c. 675-749), denied the Emperor’s right to legislate religious beliefs. The controversy continued during the reign of Emperor Constantine V (741-775). It was finally settled at the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) when it was decreed that images should be venerated [held in respect] but not adored [worshipped].

No Caesar but Christ

While the Church today, in more comfortable surroundings, continues to be concerned with the proper usage of religious symbols (if any), it must not be forgotten that in times of intellectual darkness or personal distress the most simple visual aide can communicate hope and be a great source of comfort and blessing. One principle that all Christians in all the ages have agreed upon in regard to religious icons and is that, no symbol of loyalty is to be honored which can be construed as a substitute for faith in Christ. Loyalty to this principle brought terrible testing for the early Christians because the emperor of Rome was regarded as a god. Because the emperor

was regarded as a god he was worthy of worship. Incense was burned on altars built in his honor. When Christians refused to offer incense or recognize the emperor as divine they began to be officially persecuted.

Suffering Saints

An insight into what the Christians faced is reflected in a letter from one of the governors in the provinces to the emperor Trajan. The letter was written about AD 111-113 years. Pliny the governor of Pontus, Bithynia (Turkey) said, *“It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in the trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.*

“Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

“Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

“They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

“I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.”

A License to Kill

The Roman authorities thought they had good reason to kill and torment Christians; they were viewed as a threat to society. Consider the evidence.

- Christians were hesitant to go to hospitals for the care of patients came under the protection of the god Aesculapius and while the sick man lay on his bed, the priest went down the aisle chanting to the god.
- Christians were reluctant to support the local schools for the children learned stories about the pagan gods-not as stories but as truth.
- A Christian sculptor found himself in a difficult position for he would surely be required to make images of pagan gods.
- Christians began to withdraw from society in many ways.
- Christians would not attend the gladiatorial combats where men fought to the death for the pleasure of the people.
- Christians would not go to the theater because the plays were vulgar and violent.
- Christians stopped using the courts of law. Paul taught Christians to settle disputes among themselves. The practice grew of letting the pastor/bishop decide disputes. He would do this from a chair called a *cathedra*.
- Christians would not go to war.
- Christians would not take the weak or unwanted children out in the woods and leave them to die or be picked up by the robbers.

Enduring Criticism and Cruelty

Because of these and many other practices, the Christians became objects of fear and hatred. Many false accusations arose.

- Christians were accused of being cannibals because Jesus said at the Last Supper, “*This is my body. This wine is my blood.*”
- Christians were accused of being unpatriotic.
- Christians were accused of being atheists because they did not believe in all the false gods.

In Smyrna, now a city in modern Turkey, about 150 years after Christ, a mob rose up one day against believers. “*Away with the atheists!*” was their cry. And then the chant began, “*Get Polycarp!*” Polycarp, the aged bishop of Smyrna, wanted to give himself up to the crowd to show people that he was not afraid to die for Christ but friends persuaded him to flee to a small farm in the country. The mob pursued and Polycarp was brought back to Smyrna. He was encouraged to dispel the anger of the mob by placing some incense on the local altar and saying, “*Caesar is Lord.*” Threatened with death if he did not, Polycarp answered, “*Eighty and six years have I served Him and He has done me no wrong, and can I revile my King that saved me?*” Polycarp was burned at the stake.

The Mystery Religions

Christianity did not just challenge the madness of mobs or the kingdoms of this world; it also threatened other religions. The gods of Greece and Rome who sat upon the sunny mountaintop of Olympus were no match for the rising Son of Righteousness. Jupiter and Juno, Mercury and Venus, Mars and Saturn gave their names to the planets and to a day of the week. Other gods were popular in the Roman Empire, gods of the earth and underworld, as Attis, Dionysus, Isis, and Osiris. The stories associated with these gods and goddesses helped to explain the mysteries of life and the seasons of the earth while promising that men might die and return to life. Religiously inclined Romans wanted to believe in gods and goddesses for men grope for ultimate truth. But the god of this world darkened their eyes and so they were left to search after false gods such as Mithras, the god of light. According to the legend, Mithras killed a bull by stabbing him in the flank. From the wound came grains of wheat. To the Roman mind here was an explanation of the growth of vegetation, which was able to live because of the light and warmth from Mithras, the god of the sun. His birthday was on December 25, when the sun began its upward course. And, as the sun comes back to life, so should those who believed in Mithras. A person who had put their faith in these pagan Mysteries would have to renounce them upon becoming a Christian and learn that Jesus was not just another god who died every fall and rose every spring. Jesus was not a myth of the seasons but the One who, according to the eternal purpose of God, gave Himself once and for all to a cruel death on behalf of others and now lives to reign forever.

The Rise of the Docetics and Gnosticism

Existing along side the Mystery Religions of Rome and Christianity was another religion that attempted to unite concepts from both. This alternative religion taught the physical or material world was bad. In fact, God is not in this world at all for God would have nothing to do with flies and fleas and fevers. No good God would have made this world. Nor would a good God have made our bad bodies. Since the body is bad, and Jesus is good, Christ could not have had a body,

not a real body. Jesus, they said, was not really born, did not really suffer and die and rise again on the third day. Those who believed this were called Docetics, from a Greek word meaning, “to seem.” They were also called Gnostics, from the Greek word meaning, “to know” because they believed that the only way to be liberated from the body was to know more. Well educated, the Gnostics relished in philosophies, astrology, and magic, all of which the Bible warns against.

The Spirit of Anti-Christ

The influence of the Docetics or Gnostics made an impact on the early Church to the point that the apostle John had to warn Christians that their teachings were that of an antichrist. 1 John 4:3 *“And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”* Despite the persecutions, despite the hostility of the mobs, despite the false accusations and the constant challenge from other religions, the Church grew stronger and attracted followers for specific reasons.

- **God has an elect people whom He will save.** Acts 18:9-10 *“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.”*
- **The people of God have a better message than any other religion.** What is more glorious than a gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone? And who is more glorious than Jesus Christ? As Napoleon once said, *“This Man vanished for eighteen hundred years still holds the characters of men as in a vise.”* The Little Corsican sat stupefied as he compared his greatness with the greatness of the man of Galilee.
- **The early Church demonstrated the power of the risen Christ in their midst.**
 - ❑ Those who valued riches now shared with the poor.
 - ❑ Those who once hated now prayed for their enemies.
 - ❑ There was a common fund to care for widows, orphans, the aged and those shipwrecked.
- **Christians were willing to die for their faith.**

“Among us,” said one of the early Christians, “you will find uneducated persons, workingmen, old women who are not able to explain in words the good of our teaching, but they show it in deeds. They do not make speeches but do good works. When struck, they do not strike again. When robbed, they do not go to law. They give to those who ask of them and love their neighbors as themselves.” Jesus once told Peter that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church. Jesus spoke the truth. Hell unleashed its fury against the infant Church but the Lord was there to protect His little flock.

*“Onward Christian soldiers,
marching as to war;
With the Cross of Jesus,
going on before.”*

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,” (Hebrews 12:1).

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 3

The Growth and Struggles of the Saints

By the mercies of God the growth of the Church was not hampered by severe tests. In fact, in the words of one Church father, St. Cyprian who was martyred in the year 258, “*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.*” During the second century (AD 101-200) the blows against Christianity fell frequently but not everywhere at once. Greater persecution would come again at the beginning of the third century (c. AD 202), in the middle (c. AD 250) and just after the close of the century (c. AD 303-304).

A Canon of Scripture for the Church

During the periods of rest from physical persecution the Church had to contend with internal strife arising over questions of doctrine and morality. Local bishops (lit. *overseer*) or pastors had to address various issues. To guide their thinking and decisions, counsel was sought from the writings of others, especially the apostles. But which writings were to be trusted? Which writings were genuine? Which writings were to be received into the Canon (lit. a ruler by which to keep things straight)? The story of how the books of the *Bible* were recognized by the early Church is a fascinating story in and of itself. For now it can be said that initially, the letters of Paul were accepted as divinely inspired along with the four Gospels. Combining art with faith the four gospels were indicated by the heavenly creatures seen in a vision by the prophet Isaiah. One face was that of a lion, another of an eagle, another of a calf, and the fourth of a man. These became the symbols of the four Evangelists.

- Matthew was given the symbol of the Man because he presented Christ to the Jewish world as the Messiah.
- Mark was given the symbol of the Lion because he presented Christ to the Roman world as the Servant.
- Luke was given the symbol of the calf because he presented Christ to the Greek world as the Perfect Sacrifice.
- John was given the symbol of the eagle because he presented Christ to the entire world as the Son of God.

Also included early into the canon was the book of *Acts*. The other writings of our *New Testament* were slower in finding acceptance. Not until the fourth century was the canon completed. The stories that were left out of the Canon are called *The Apocrypha*. These false writings attempted to fill in details in the life of Christ and the apostles. The Apocrypha tells about the mother and grandmother of Jesus; as well as the Lord’s childhood—such as the time he molded birds in clay and, clapping his hands made them fly. Also included in the Apocrypha is an alleged trip of Paul to Spain and a visit by Peter to Rome where he made sardines swim.

The Apostle's Creed

As the Church grew more organized, it looked to the bishops or pastors, and especially the bishop of Rome for unwritten truth, and the New Testament for written truth. Essential truth was set forth in a creed. The word “*creed*” comes from the Latin word *credo*, which means, “*I believe.*” An example of a *credo* formula is 1 Timothy 3:16 “*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*” Though not written by the Apostles, an early church creed sets forth a summary of doctrinal beliefs and reads as follows.

The Apostles' Creed

The Father

*“I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
the Creator of heaven and earth,*

The Son

*and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:
Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.*

*He descended into hell.
The third day He arose again from the dead.*

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

The Holy Spirit

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy *catholic [universal] church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.*

* The word “*catholic*” in this Trinitarian confession refers not to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the universal church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This creed was used in the early church (c. AD 150) as a confession of faith for those receiving baptism. The rite of baptism was initially considered to be a sacrament in the sense that a sacred vow was promised. The word comes from the Latin “*sacramentum*” which refers to “*the vow promised by the soldier*”. As the soldier swore service to serve the emperor, so the Christian in baptism promised to serve the King of kings. 2 Timothy 2:3-4 “*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier*”.

Christian Baptism

Dressed in white and bearing lights the initiates came to the cleansing water. An open stream was preferred for baptism but pouring from a bowl was allowed where water was scarce. The oldest Christian church to have been preserved at all was dug up in the ruins of the city of Dura, Syria on the Euphrates River and dates from AD 232. The remains of the church have been brought to the United States and set up in the art museum of Yale University. In the front is a baptistery [for immersion]. On the wall behind it and under the arch are pictures of the Good Shepherd and His sheep, and also of Adam and Eve.

The Lord's Supper and an Early Church Service

In addition to baptism, the Lord's Supper was observed on a regular basis. The Eucharist (Gk. *to give thanks*) was part of the weekly gathering on Sunday.

- When the Church met the leader read from the Old Testament and from the New Testament.
- After a sermon the congregation rose and prayed. Then bread and wine were brought.
- The leader gave thanks and all the people said, "Amen" (Heb. so be it; I agree).
- Then the deacons served communion.
- Following more words of practical exhortation the congregation was dismissed.

Renewed Hostilities

During periods of peace the Church was able to enjoy its simple services but then c. AD 250 renewed persecution came. The new emperor Decius—who ruled from AD 249-251 and was killed in battle with the Goths near the end of AD 251)—believed that Christianity was weakening the Empire. Only by returning to the old religion could Rome be made great again. Part of the old religion included the worship of the emperor. To make certain that the citizens of Rome complied with the new laws, a certificate was required from an appointed official testifying that a sacrifice had been made to the emperor. One of the certificates [preserved in Egypt] reads: "*Presented to the commission for the sacrifices in the village of Alexander Island, by Aurelius Dogenes, the son of Satabus, of the village of Alexander Island, about 72 years of age, with a scar on the right eyebrow. I have at other times always offered to the gods, as well as also now in your presence, and according to the rules have offered, sacrificed, and eaten of the sacrificial meal; and I pray you to attest this. Farewell. I Aurelius Diogenes have presented this.*"

Then the official wrote

“I Aurelius Syrus, testify as being present that Diogenes sacrificed with us.” The document was dated June 25, 250. Death was the penalty for refusal to obtain a certificate. How were Christians to respond?

- Many failed and rushed to sacrifice out of fear.
- Some Christians went to prison for long periods of time.
- Some were tortured.
- Some lied. They found ways to obtain the certificates and presented them to an official as though they had offered a sacrifice. Bribery was rampant.

Should the Faithless be Forgiven

After the ordeal ended and the certificates were no longer required the Church faced a practical problem. What was to be done with those who had not endured the test of their faith? Should those who had compromised their convictions, lied to the Roman officials, or worse, offered a pagan sacrifice be allowed to fellowship within the church? Could such offenders be forgiven? A decision was made that the fallen could be forgiven provided they showed their sorrow by going before the local assembly in sackcloth and with ashes on their heads. This was called confession and penance. Not all Christians were happy that their prodigal brethren had been forgiven. It was believed that such easy believism and easy forgiveness would only reduce the spiritual strength of the church. In this matter the concerns were prophetic. Fifty years later when the emperor Diocletian (AD 284-305) began to persecute the church there was a “*suspension*” by many of their faith. And this time even the clergy were guilty. When copies of the Scriptures were confiscated to be burned many of the ministers surrendered the Word of God. Should they be forgiven when the crisis had past? In North Africa followers of a man named Donatist (bishop of Carthage, died c.392) said, “*No. Those who have denied the faith, those who have surrounded the Scriptures to be burned, those who have avoided suffering for the Savior are not to be forgiven.*” The tension between constant loyalty and easy believism continues to be a pressure point to the present.

The Conversion of Constantine

In the providence of the Lord official persecution came to an end with Constantine the Great (c. 285-337). Constantine is credited with being the first “*Christian emperor*” of the Roman Empire though the genuineness of his conversion is suspect. He ruled from AD 306-337. Constantine was the son of Constaninus Chlorus, the Western co-emperor of the Roman Empire, and Helena, a concubine. When his father died in England in 306 Constantine was proclaimed emperor by the troops much to the chagrin of Galerius, ruler of the Eastern Empire. The government of the Empire as a whole was very volatile. With a mighty army to command, Constantine fought one battle after another to consolidate his power. One of his great rivals was Maxentius who held Rome and Italy. Constantine was uncertain what the outcome of the battle would be. Seeking a sign from heaven, as Constantine marched toward Rome, he is said to have seen at sunset a cross of light above the sun with the words, “*Hoc Signo Vinces*” which means, “*By this sign thou shalt conquer.*”

The next day the great battle began. At a strategic moment the troops of Maxentius panicked and began to retreat onto pontoon bridges across the Tiber River. The bridges broke. Maxentius was drowned. The Battle of Milvian Bridge was over. Constantine had won Italy. It would be ten years before Constantine consolidated total control of the empire in AD 323. Wherever he ruled, persecution of the church stopped and, when Constantine was completely victorious, Christianity was the favored religion of the empire. It has been argued that Constantine had simply chosen Christianity, not so much because of the vision of the cross, if indeed he ever saw such a vision, but because the Empire needed a religion to hold all the different people together. While the debate continues as to what motivated Constantine there was a change.

The Lion and the Lamb

The coins of the period reflect this change. Some of the coins of the pagan empire had been stamped with the picture of a wolf and the twins of Romulus and Remus. The new coins added the monogram of Christ. The prophet Isaiah had written, “*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them*” (Isa. 11:6).

A High Price for Peace

The political peace that came to the Church because of the gracious acts of Constantine proved to be a mixed blessing.

- Churches now had the same rights as pagan temples.
- The Christian Sunday was made a religious holiday.
- Christian bishops/pastors were held in higher honor.
- Churches destroyed in former persecutions were rebuilt at the expense of the state. One of the more durable and impressive structures was Saint Sophia [Holy Wisdom] at Constantinople [today, Istanbul, Turkey].

However, so much wealth began to pour into the churches that St. Jerome (c.345-419), who gave to the world the Latin Bible called the Vulgate, became alarmed. “*Basilicas [churches],*” he complained, “*are built at state expense. The roofs are adorned with gold and interlaid with marble. The holy books of the Christians which once were given to the flames, are now bound in purple and inland with gold and jewels.*” For a man who championed asceticism and a monastic life it was just too much. Jerome was afraid money was corrupting the Church. He knew well that “*the love of money is the root of all [sorts of] evil*” (1 Tim. 6:10).

Rising Power for the Pope

When Constantine moved his capital to Constantinople for political and strategic purposes the western part of the Empire experienced a power vacuum which was filled in part by the bishop of Rome. The Church was beginning to grow up in the place of the Empire. The prophet Daniel had predicted that the Kingdom of Christ would one day crush the Roman Empire. Now it was happening, not suddenly but surely. Said Daniel, “*The God of heaven [will] set up a kingdom,*

which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever“ (cf. Dan. 2:44-45).

A New Strife among the Saints

Not willing to let the church grow without a challenge the Enemy of Men’s Souls instigated a new quarrel among the Christians about the relations of Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit. All Christians were united on the concept that God is one. There was no controversy on this point. But what was the relation of Christ to God? Though Christ lived on earth in a real body as true humanity, though He suffered and died, yet He also rose from the dead. Therefore Jesus is more than an ordinary man; He is God. But if Jesus is God does that not mean there are two Gods? And what about the Holy Spirit who works grace in the heart? Is He not also God? Are there three gods?

The Arrival of Arius

In the city of Alexandria, Egypt there lived an aged priest named Arius who believed he had a solution to the haunting questions of good hearts. Said Arius, Jesus was indeed more than man, but He was less than God. A young deacon in the church by the name of Athanasius was shocked upon hearing the views of Arius-and rightly so. Athanasius understood that if Christ were more than man but less than God, He would be neither one nor the other. Athanasius contended that there was one God. Christ shared in the essential essences of God. So does the Spirit. Within the One there are three.

- The Father is the Lord of the entire universe.
- The Son lived on earth and died for sinners.
- The Spirit breathes upon the soul of men to regenerate the heart, illuminate the mind, and teach us the things of God. This co-equality of the Godhead is the mystery of the trinity.

It was not long before people throughout the Empire were discussing the nature of the Trinity. Strong positions were taken on all sides. Passions began to run deep. The love of Christ was forgotten as riots broke out. The emperor Constantine was shocked that Christians would treat one another with such brutal hostility. To settle the contention and to bring peace to the Empire, Constantine called a council at the city of Nicea, near Constantinople, in the year AD 325. The Nicene Council was the first gathering of the leaders of the whole Church. From all over the world the bishops came: from Africa and Syria; from Mesopotamia and Persia, Pontus, Galatia, Pamphylia, Cilicia and Phrygia; from Thrace, Macedonia, and Achaia; and from far-distant Spain. Representatives from Rome were present. Someone has noted that, *“Never had a prince gathered such a garland in honor of His Savior as had Constantine. “*

The bishops and priests assembled in a great hall and waited for the emperor. At his arrival all arose. Constantine was majestic in his princely garments of gold and precious stones. The emperor invited the many quests to dinner. As they marched into the dining hall, on each side stood soldiers of the imperial bodyguard with swords drawn-not to punish but to honor the

Christians as soldiers of the Cross. Among the bishops was one whose eye had been gouged out in persecution. In a dramatic moment Constantine paused and kissed the place where the eye had been. In the days to follow the Nicene Council settled the dispute about the trinity in favor of Athanasius though the debates which raged were not without high moments of drama. From this council came the ideas which led to the formation of another great creed of Christendom called The Nicene Council. From the English *Book of Common Prayer* are these words.

The Nicene Creed

The Father

*I believe in one God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
And of all things visible and invisible.*

The Son

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
The only begotten of the Son of God;
Begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
Very God of Very God;*

*Begotten, not made;
Being of one substance with the Father;
By whom all things were made;*

*Who for us men and for our salvation
Came down from heaven,
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,*

*And was made of man:
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
He suffered and was buried:*

*And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures:
And ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of the Father:
And he shall come again, with glory,
To judge both the quick and the dead;
Whose kingdom shall have no end.*

The Holy Spirit

*And I believe in the Holy Ghost,
The Lord and Giver of Life,
Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son;
Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified;
Who spake by the Prophets:*

The Church

And I believe one catholic [universal] and Apostolic Church:

I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sin:

And the Life of the world to come. Amen.

Having ruled on many matters including the nature of the Trinity the members of the Nicene Council presented the results of their work to Constantine. Five members, including Arius were condemned. Unfortunately, the controversy with Arius did not end with the council of Nicene. In the years to come religion and politics would become entangled. One victorious side would vanquish the other party. The day came when the Nicene party won out completely and the emperors, wanting to avoid more religious quarrels, decreed that one who denied the Trinity should be put to death. The church had come full circle. Once Christians had shed their blood in defense of the truth. Now they would shed the blood of others.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 4

Serious Saints

When the Church became worldly and the world became more Christian in name, conscientious Christians wondered what they could do. Simple answers came: "*Get out of the world.*" "*Go to the desert.*" "*Flee the world, leave the cities.*" "*Go back to a quiet place and commune with God.*" And many did. Hermits lived in the deserts. Monks lived alone at first and then later in community settings but still, essentially alone. This monastic movement began in Egypt.

Self Denial

To be a hermit or monk was not an easy existence for the ascetics believed they were bad and their body was bad. The body must be broken by hardship.

- Some lived in caves and slept on rocks.
- Some ate only enough to keep themselves alive; dates and cabbages.
- Some went without sleep till they were so sleepy the food fell from their mouths.
- Contests were held to determine who could endure the most hardship.
- One monk stood on a single leg until he fainted.
- Several monks lived on high pillars and had their food sent up on poles.
- Many decided not to look at women.

Obviously this type of existence was not healthy. With no one to talk to, without friends or work it was easy to believe that the devil was after them. Saint Anthony (c. AD 251-356) spent a lot of his time fighting the demons in his mind. Anthony is generally regarded as the founder of Christian monasticism.

A Return to Reality

It was not long before the hermits realized that living entirely alone would drive a person crazy. Rather than return to the world the decision was made to live in religious communities; monasteries for the men and nunneries for the women. One notable monk to guide the monastic movement was Jerome (c 345-419). Returning from the desert as a hermit, Jerome confessed that despite being alone he still dreamed of dancing girls. Though he beat his chest with a rock his thoughts still caused him to sin. Once more in the city Jerome became a great teacher. He learned Hebrew and translated the Old Testament from that language into Latin (*Vulgate*).

At Bethlehem Jerome established a monastery and encouraged a nunnery to be built nearby by noble women of Rome. One of the nuns had a married sister at Rome to whom a baby girl had been born. Jerome wrote to the mother, *“Send the baby to her aunt at Bethlehem. Let her grow up near the manger of the Savior. She will not learn to lie here. She will live like an angel. Or send her to me. I will teach her myself. I will take her in my arms. I will help her with her first lisplings, old man that I am.”* Jerome was over sixty at this time. The baby never came, which is tragic because before long the barbarians were storming down the roads leading to the city of Rome. The Eternal City fell (AD 410). People believed that the end of the world was approaching. Hundreds of refugees soon poured into the monastery at Bethlehem.

John Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

Another great monk was Chrysostom. As a young man it was his deepest desire to become a priest in Antioch of Syria, but his widowed mother pleaded with him not to join the brothers on the hills above the city. However, when she died Chrysostom was able to dispose of his wealth and become a monk. But Chrysostom was no ordinary monk in that he had a revolutionary idea. Rather than withdraw from the world and call that heroic, men of God should do the more difficult task and be a pastor to the people of God. Chrysostom began to see the real duties of a Shepherd. The pastor is called upon to

- instruct others,
- care for the needy,
- administer discipline,
- comfort the troubled,
- defend the faith against error,
- settle disputes,
- restore marriages,
- offer biblical counsel,
- administer baptism and communion,

The pastor must be a man among men. All of this is much more difficult than to sleep on a hard bed or keep silent for many years or sit alone in the desert. Chrysostom would return to pastor people in order to remind them to be a generous people with their resources. *“Recall,”* said Chrysostom, *“that money is like water. It goes bad if it does not run. Do not think you have done enough because you beat down your body with fasting. I do not object to your fasting, but helping others is more important. And do not ask for lovely things if they are made by blood. Recall: a ship has to be fitted and rowers enlisted, a man for the prow and a helmsman. A sail is spread and an ocean covered. Wife and children are left behind. The merchant entrusts himself to the waves and goes to the lands of the barbarians and undergoes innumerable dangers. And for what? In order that you may have colored threads to weave into your slippers. Better use your money for the poor. How many are there in Antioch? I should say 50,000. And how many Christians? I should say 10,000, and the rest Jews and pagans. Now if the Christians were to bring in goods and share them like the apostles, couldn’t we take care of the poor, especially if we did it as they do in the monasteries? There all the cooking for the whole group is done at once and that is much cheaper. Let us learn from the monasteries. Who ever starved there?”*

And so it was that the church began to lead the way in charity and wisdom once more. Is it any wonder that Chrysostom (which lit means “golden mouth”) became a powerful force in spiritual matters? People knew that he had their best interest in his heart. By the way, Chrysostom was a name of honor given for eloquence of speech. His real name was John. To honor John Chrysostom, when the patriarchate [bishopric] at Constantinople became vacant in AD 397, the emperor’s Prime Minister wanted John for the position. But he knew that the people of Antioch loved John too much to let him go, so he kidnapped Chrysostom, carried him to Constantinople and made him bishop in AD 398.

- It was a disaster for when John preached against the rich squandering their wealth they became angry. This was especially true of the empress Eudoxia.
- When John demanded the clergy become more devout they became surly.
- To make matters worse, the patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt was outraged for he had wanted the place at Constantinople for himself.

These raging social forces united against Chrysostom. After being officially charged on twenty-nine accounts he was driven out of the city and died in exile. Like the prophets of old John was persecuted. And Jesus said, “*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*” (Matt. 5:11-12).

A Lasting Legacy

There is one lasting legacy of Chrysostom that is worthy of mention. Chrysostom was opposed to the allegorical interpretations of Scripture that had been made fashionable by the Alexandrian church. Chrysostom sought the exact, literal meaning of each verse from a close grammatical examination of the Greek text. This was a method adopted by the Protestant reformers who held Chrysostom in respect next to Augustine.

Before Rome Fell

As the barbarians pushed their way into the interior of the Roman Empire the church found itself once more being tested. A strong leader was needed and found in an officer who was put in charge of the region around Milan in upper Italy. His name was Ambrose. Ambrose had been brought up in a Christian family, but had never been baptized. When the bishop of Milan died a new one had to be chosen. Care in the choosing had to be taken because the concerns raised by Arius had not been fully resolved among the people. Christendom was still divided over the deity of Christ. Both the Nicene and Arian parties wanted to place their own person as bishop. Ambrose feared there would be more rioting. As Ambrose walked into a church one morning to worship, a child called out, “*Ambrose for bishop.*” The idea was electrifying and all the people cried out, “*Ambrose for bishop!*” Nothing that he could say would stop the people from shouting. He had not been baptized but that was soon taken care of. He had never been a monk like Jerome

and Chrysostom. He had never studied to be a minister. All of that did not matter and in short order Ambrose was made the bishop of Milan.

Standing for the Truth

As bishop Ambrose came down on the conservative side of church issues which meant that he had to contend with wayward clergymen and then the empress Justina. Justina supported the Arians in the religious debate and demanded for them one basilica in the city of Milan. Ambrose refused. He and his followers went to the church building requested and locked themselves in. The empress sent troops to surround the church. While under seize Ambrose led the people in singing songs which melted the hard heart of the empress. In the end Ambrose had his way. The church was not surrendered to heresy.

Ecclesiastical Judgment of an Emperor

As Ambrose contended for the faith against heresy he defended the purity of the church against easy believism reflected in his dealings with the emperor Theodosius. Theodosius was a great general. He was able to hold back the barbarians. But Theodosius had a terrible temper. At Thessalonica (Salonika, Greece) there was a famous chariot driver. He was guilty of a crime for which an officer of the emperor had arrested him. His arrest did not go well with the people. They wanted the driver freed, so they killed the officer who arrested the charioteer. This display of mob violence infuriated Theodosius. The games came. Seven thousand people gathered in the arena. Theodosius took advantage of the moment to avenge the death of the officer. All the exits were blocked. The soldiers came and the seven thousand spectators were killed. It was not too long after this incident that the emperor came to Milan and the church of Ambrose for Communion. The bishop met the emperor at the door. *"You cannot enter here with hands soiled by human blood."* In the providence of the Lord the heart of Theodosius was convicted. What could he do to regain favor with the Church? The emperor had to promise never to carry out a sentence of death until forty days after the offense, lest anything be done in anger. And he had to do penance before being admitted to Communion. This ecclesiastical Judgment of an Emperor was a sign of the way things were going to work in the western part of the empire. In the East the emperor was to rule the Church; in the West, popes were to command kings.

The Influence of Augustine

The ascendancy of the church over the state was enhanced by the influence of Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a little town in North Africa. We know more about Augustine than most men of his time because he wrote the story of his life in his Confession. Central to the theology of Augustine was the sovereignty of God and the depravity of the human heart. His own depravity was crystallized by an incident that took place in his childhood. As Augustine tells the story, he was part of a gang of boys who played late one night and then decided to steal fruit from a neighbor's pear tree that was laden with fruit but not ripe.

Discovery of Total Depravity

“We took huge loads,” says Augustine, “but we did not eat them-just nibbled and threw them to the pigs. It was mean, but I loved it. Why did we do it? A murderer does not kill just for killing. He wants to get even or to take something from the man he kills, but we robbed the tree for nothing at all. I am sure of this, that I should never have done it if I had been alone. The gang spirit carried us along. When someone said, “Let’s go. Let’s do it,” each was ashamed to come out and say that he would be ashamed to do it. We chuckled to think of the prank we were playing on the owner, sound asleep, little suspecting that his tree was being stripped. It was mean. I hate now to think about it.” Redeeming love had brought Augustine to the place where he now hated what he once loved. But the road to that spiritual turning had been long and arduous.

A Faithful Mother Named Monica

Augustine’s father was a pagan until late in life. His mother, Monica, was a Christian who was distressed over her son’s private behavior and eternal soul. One day she took her concerns to her bishop who encouraged her heart by saying, *“The son of so many tears cannot be lost.”* In his early manhood Augustine took a mistress which bore him a child. Needing money to support his son and the child’s mother, Augustine became a schoolteacher in the city of Carthage. But the students were unruly, as Augustine himself had been in his youth. Hearing that the students were better behaved in Rome he slipped off with the boy and mistress without telling his mother. The boys were better behaved in Rome but they were not better in heart for they would skip off before paying their tutor. When an opportunity for teaching opened in Milan, Italy, Augustine went there. His mother found out and joined her son. Milan was the city of Ambrose. Augustine went to hear him preach. He was interested in the art of elocution-the usage of the voice and hands, the pattern of sentences. But in Ambrose, Augustine found more than an orator; he found a man of God. Here was a brave soldier of the cross. Here was a man of decision. Augustine wanted to be like that. But Augustine was not ready to change. *“Lord, make me chaste,”* he later confessed to praying, *“but not yet.”*

A Day of Divine Delight

Because he was not married to the mother of his boy, and to please his own mother Monica, Augustine sent the woman back to Africa, and then took another mistress. At this point in his life Augustine heard of some monks who lived apart from women. He wondered why men would make such hard lives for themselves. He questioned Ambrose who acted like a monk even though he was a bishop. During this period of re-evaluation of his own life, Augustine went to visit a friend. Walking in the garden of the house by himself, Augustine meditated. *“Strange,”* he thought, *“that when I tell my hand to beat my breast and tear my hair it obeys, but when I tell my mind to do something, it refuses.”* While considering the weakness of the human will Augustine heard the voice of a child playing in a house nearby. The child was repeating a phrase: *“Take up and read. Take up and read.”* Perhaps the child was playing school.

Submission to the Sovereignty of God

In the providence of the Lord, Augustine went over to a seat and found there a copy of the *New Testament*. As he took up the manuscript to read, the pages opened at the words in Paul's letter to the Romans, "*Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, 14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*" (Rom. 13:13, 14). The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit flashed. The converting ministry of the Spirit took place and changed his heart. Augustine surrendered to the Lordship of Christ. "*I bowed my neck,*" he later wrote, "*to the yoke that is easy and my shoulders to the burden that is light.*"

Salvation: The Gift of God's Grace

Augustine came to understand that though a man may do better or worse, the way his life comes out depends on God and His grace. The word "*grace*" means a free gift that is freely bestowed at the discretion of the one who gives it. God's forgiveness, God's love, and God's power are not ours to command, but His to give, when and where and to whom He will.

A New Servant for the Savior

Believing that he had become a Christian, Augustine went in from the garden and told Monica that the Lord Jesus had become his Strength and his Redeemer. A little later Augustine and his son were baptized by Ambrose of Milan. Then the decision was made to return to Africa. On the journey home Monica fell sick and died. Augustine was heartbroken. He sang the songs of Ambrose and wept profusely. Then, when he got back to Africa, the boy grew ill and died. Now alone without mother or child and having never legally married, Augustine became a monk. He wanted to spend his days in peace and study but the Lord had other plans. Augustine would become the bishop of Hippo. As a bishop Augustine faced many great challenges socially and theologically. One of the greatest concerns for the Church was the invasion of the barbarians. Why did God let them run rampant so that even the City of Rome was taken? Some thought God was angry at the Arians for rejecting the divinity of Christ. But if that was true why did the Nicene party suffer as well? Augustine sought a deeper answer, and felt that he found what he sought. The fight going on now, he said, is a reflection of a great fight going on in heaven between the forces of good and evil. These forces break out on earth and a Cain kills an Abel. The Roman Empire, for the most part, is like Cain and has grown by taking land from other peoples. It is the result of greed. The barbarians are only paying Rome back for what she has done to others. The Roman Empire will pass and something else will come. In fact, it is already come, and the church should be there to guide that new political entity.

In the years to come rather than separating church and state, other bishops and popes would try to fulfil the dream of Augustine to have a government guided by the church in righteousness. In the end, said Augustine, nothing on earth will last except love. He made a comparison between money and love. "*Money,*" he said, "*is made smaller if you give it away, but love grows. We show more kindness to a man when we give him money if we do not ask it back, but we do not give love unless we require it to be repaid. When money is received it stays with him who receives it and leaves him who gives it, but love does not leave the man who gives it, and if it is*

not repaid, still it stays with him, and he who receives it does not possess it unless he gives it back.”

A Prayer of Spiritual Passion

While Augustine was great in preaching, he was greater in his prayers. *“Late have I loved Thee whose fairness is so old and yet so new. Late have I loved Thee. And behold Thou wert within and I without and there I sought Thee. Unlovely I broke upon the loveliness which Thou hadst fashioned. Thou wert with me and I was not with Thee. Long was I held from Thee by those things which without Thee are naught. Thou didst call and cry and burst my deafness. Thou didst gleam and glow and dispel my blindness. Thou didst exhale fragrance. I drew breath and I pant after Thee. I have tasted and do hunger and thirst. Thou hast touched me and I burned for Thy peace. Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee.”*

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 5

With an Eye Eastward

The successful encroachment of barbarian people from the north mandated that the Roman Empire be partitioned. Once the city of Rome had been the center of the world. Now, the city was on the edge of two worlds, the Western and Eastern Roman Empires. The eastern portion still called itself the Roman Empire even though the people spoke Greek. Latin was spoken in the West. The break up of the Empire anticipated a great division in the Church into a Latin portion and a Greek. The Latin Church began to refer to itself as the Catholic or Universal Church in an effort to maintain political and spiritual control but those in the east did not accept this overarching authority believing that too many new doctrines and practices were being introduced. They called themselves Orthodox. The result today is the historical establishment of

- the Roman Catholic
- the Anglo (English) Catholic Churches
- the Greek Orthodox
- Russian Orthodox churches.

Constantinople

Constantinople was the capital of the Eastern Empire where the Greek language was spoken, but not exclusively. Within the Eastern Empire were many groups of people besides the Greeks. In fact the

- Armenians
- Syrians
- and Ethiopians

did not like the Greeks, nor their empire, nor their Church structure and so formed separate Churches of their own. If any good came from this ecclesiastical fragmentation it was the spread of the gospel into Persia. The Persians were fighting with the Greek Empire and would not accept any form of Greek religion. However, an exception was made when the Greeks drove Syrian Christians (called Nestorians) out of the Empire. In the providence of the Lord, the Persians welcomed the Nestorians. Many Persians came to faith in Christ.

The Nestorians

One reason why the Greek Church drove the Syrian Christians out of the empire was because of their religious beliefs, which had been articulated by their founder Nestorius (late fourth century-c. 451). Born in Germanicia (modern Maras, Turkey), Nestorius studied in Antioch in southern Turkey on the Orontes River, near the Mediterranean. He became a monk, and earned a reputation as a popular preacher. Not much else is known of his life until 428. In that year the Emperor Theodosius II brought him to be the religious leader of Constantinople (modern

Istanbul, Turkey). Nestorius attacked what he considered to be heretical ideas of various colors and then won the support of the emperor by promising him heaven and the backing of the church against the Persians.

The Controversy Begins

Because he was a man who loved a religious debate, Nestorius brought to the city a presbyter from the city of Antioch named Anastasius who attacked from the pulpit the popular usage of the term *Theotokos* (“*God-bearer*”) to describe the Virgin Mary. The local Christian community was outraged but Nestorius stood by Anastasius contending that “*Mary was but a woman, and it is impossible that God should be born of a woman.*” Fearing that the deity of Christ was being exalted to the loss of his true humanity Nestorius pointed out that Mary was also *anthropotokos* (*man-bearer*). The fears of Nestorius were justified because the teachings of Apollinarius were still in view. Apollinarius had asserted that the humanity of Christ was imperfect. His views had been condemned at the Council of Constantinople in AD 381 but the seeds of sedition had already been sown. The debate between Nestorius and other church officials grew heated as one side tried to stress their position at the expense of the other. In the end, Nestorius found himself opposed by Cyril, the patriarch of Alexandria and Celestine I, the bishop of Rome. Both of these men in their respective cities convened a council and condemned Nestorius to be a heretic.

The Significance of a Name

The councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) clarified the orthodox view that Jesus' two natures are inseparably joined in one person and partake of the one divine substance. The usage of the term *Theotokos* (God-bearer) as a fitting title for the Virgin Mary was retained instead of Nestorian's preferred title *Christotokos* (Christ-bearer). In his zeal to uphold the humanity of Christ Nestorius slipped into error for he did teach that Christ had two natures (human and Divine). For Nestorius, Jesus was two persons in one and not two natures inseparably joined in one person. Is this important? The answer is yes because if Jesus were two persons then He should not be worshipped as wholly God nor even honored as a good man, for He claimed divinity saying, “*I and my Father are one.*” On another level, Nestorius was right in not calling Mary the mother of God. Mary might be called the mother of Christ, but not the mother of God. God has no mother. God is the creator of Mary and everyone else.

Unification of the Church

In the midst of various theological debates the Greek emperors made a practical attempt to

- subdue the barbarians in the West,
- recover the city of Rome,
- and reunite the Church.

The most successful was the great emperor Justinian. Ruling in the sixth century AD Justinian did manage to regain, for a short time, most of the old Roman Empire. His reign is remembered for two great achievements.

- Justinian rebuilt the beautiful church of St. Sophia, which stands today in Constantinople. Constantine had built the original structure. Ten thousand workers were employed and paid in silver on a daily basis. The emperor appeared each day to encourage the work. The church was rebuilt in 5 years, 11 months, and 10 days from the laying of the first stone December 25th, AD 537.
- Justinian sorted out the best of the Roman laws into one unified system called The Code of Justinian. But there were some bad elements in the new Code.
 - A denial of the trinity invited the death penalty.
 - A repeat of baptism was to invite death.

The first Code was to silence the Arians who denied the deity of Christ while the second Code was designed to deal with the Donatists in northern Africa who had broken away from the Catholic Church after the persecution of Diocletian. Since the Donatists did not recognize the Catholic structure as being the true church they rebaptized those who united with their cause.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 6

The Rise of Islam

Following the death of the Roman emperor Justinian (d. November, 565), much of the Roman Empire he had recovered was lost once more. Territory in the East also vanished with the rise of the faith and followers of Islam. The term “*Islam*” means “*submission*”. The cry of Islam was, “*There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet!*” Mohammed (570-632 AD) was given to revelations from God which he eloquently articulated to his family and friends. Initially the citizens of Mecca where he resided thought him demented and forced him to leave. Mohammed found converts elsewhere. His first religious community was in the city of Medina. Amazingly, within ten years - after beginning his conquest in AD 622 - Mohammed had managed to unite all of Arabia in a powerful movement of radical reform. Within 25 years his followers had taken Egypt, Palestine, Persia, and Syria. In 75 years, North Africa and Spain were part of the crescent. Islam remained for centuries the dominant empire of the Mediterranean world.

The Secret of Success

The success of the Islamic faith can be attributed to following factors.

- The wielding of a bloody sword that showed no mercy to those who did not submit and
- The desire of Armenians, Syrians, and Ethiopians to come out from under the oppressive rule of the Greek emperor who did not disturb the religion of the people conquered as long as taxes were paid.
- Being a simple but fanatical religion.

Foundations for the Islamic Faith

The Moslem faith (*iman*) rests first of all in the basic conviction of one God who exists by Himself and not as a tri-unity. Jesus was recognized as a moral man but only a man. Allah is addressed in prayer by 99 names.

The attributes of Allah include

- all seeing
- all knowing
- all hearing
- all speaking
- all willing
- all powerful
- love

- compassion
- forgiving
- stern in punishment, arbitrary in purpose

Angels surround God to

- Support His throne
- Guard hell
- Serve as intermediaries

The four chief angels are

- Gabriel, who brings revelations
- Michael, the guardian of the Jews
- Raphael (Azrael), the angel of death
- Uriel (Israfil), who is to sound the trumpet at the resurrection
- There are also good and evil spirits

A Book Called the *Koran*

In addition to belief in God and angels the Islamic faith relies on the *Koran*. While the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Gospels are respected, only the *Koran* is so final that no other book is needed. The *Koran* is the Word of God, eternally preserved on tablets in heaven, revealed to Mohammed by Gabriel.

The Last Prophet

As other religious writings are acknowledged and then set aside, so are former prophets. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus were commissioned to proclaim a new dispensation but Mohammed is the last prophet. In fact, all the others predicted his appearance.

The Best is yet to Come

Concerning the future, Islam teaches of a heaven and a hell. The souls of unbelievers will be tortured in hell until the resurrection at the end of the world. Then, the trumpet will sound and the graves will be opened. Good and evil deeds will be weighed in the balance, and every one must pass over hell on a bridge finer than a hair and sharper than a sword. Those who walk carefully and up-rightly will enter heaven as the righteous. They will be welcomed with feasting, music, fine garments, perfume, and beautiful maidens. Allah would also give to those who fought for Him rivers of cold water, milk, honey, and wine, though wine is not to be consumed on earth. Those who were conquered by the Islamic warriors compelled people to either accept the Koran, or pay taxes or be killed.

Five Duties for the Faithful

Every Moslem is to

- Confess daily that “*There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet!*”
- Pray 5 times every day facing Mecca
- Give alms
- Fast from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan (9th month) of the Islamic calendar
- Make a pilgrimage to Mecca once during a lifetime

Islamic Influence on Christianity

In addition to removing people and territorial places from the sphere of Christian influence the Mohammedan invasion transformed religious beliefs. The Islamic faith allowed no images of the divine. Many Christians accepted this conviction and began to protest the religious images which churches had come to accept.

- The plain cross of Christ had been replaced with the body of Christ being crucified.
- The Virgin Mary, called the Mother of God had many images (Gk. *icons*).
- Special Christians were exalted to a special sainthood such as Peter, Paul, Jerome, and Augustine. To make matters worse, Christians began to pray to the saints believing their prayers carried more power with God. Supernatural powers began to be associated with the saints.
 - ❑ Christopher became the patron of travelers
 - ❑ George became the patron saint of England
 - ❑ Andrew watched over Russia and Scotland

People kissed the icons of the saints, put them in dry wells to bring the water back, and trusted the religious symbols to perform great miracles.

The Changing of an Icon

When the emperor Leo tried to put a stop to the worship of icons, the great Iconoclastic Controversy erupted. The word “iconoclast” comes from the Greek word for “*image*” and another word meaning, “*to break.*” The matter was resolved between the Christians in the East and the followers of Mohammed by a compromise. The Eastern Church gave up fully rounded sculptures. A bas-relief was used instead because this flat sculpture is more like a plain picture than a pagan idol. The Roman Church however did not compromise on this matter and retained the use of fully rounded statues.

A Great Division

The Iconoclast Controversy left bitter feelings between the Eastern Church and the Western Church. In the 11th century when the Church officially split, memories of the Iconoclast Controversy would be part of the reason for the separation. There were other issues that contributed to the division between the East and the West.

Two Issues Relating to Cultural

- The clergy in the East wore beards while those in the West were shaven.
- The clergy in the East were allowed to have wives while those in the West were forced to remain celibate.

Two Issues Relating to Doctrine

- The question of authority within the Church had to be resolved. The bishop of Rome believed that he had priority over all the church but the bishop of Constantinople disagreed and had the support of a vast amount of people. Despite sending representatives to participate in the first seven ecumenical councils ending with Second Council of Nicaea in 787, the issue of papal authority could not be resolved. Matters came to a crisis when the bishop of Rome asserted his disputed authority and excommunicated the Eastern Orthodox City of Constantinople in 1054.
- Pope Leo IX argued that he had to do what was done because the patriarchs of Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey) were emphasizing facets of the trinity that were not sanctioned by the Second Council of Nicene. For example, the Eastern Church would not assert that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son *as well as* from the Father (*the filioque clause*). The trinity was never denied by the Eastern Church or by the Western Church but there was a difference of emphasis concerning the relationship among the members of the Godhead.

A New Religion for Russia

As the patriarchs struggled for power, as church councils argued and debated, the gospel continued to be preached and souls continued to come into the kingdom of heaven. The Greek Church took Christianity to the Slavic peoples such as the Serbs, Bulgarians, and Russians. Russia became Christianized under Vladimir I in AD 988. His grandmother, Olga, had been a Christian but she had never given a good testimony to that fact among her people. According to legend Vladimir was questioning which religion to promote in his country. There were so many religions to choose from. Christianity was just one religion among many and even then the Christian community was divided. As the legend continues, messengers of the various religions came to the court of Vladimir to present their claims. First the representative of the Mohammedans pictured the joys of paradise. Vladimir was impressed until he learned he would not be able to drink wine on earth. “*That would never do,*” he said. “*Drinking is the joy of the Russians.*” Then the representative of Judaism stepped forward but was stopped. Vladimir did not want to hear from someone without a country. The representative of the Roman Catholic

Church was dismissed because Vladimir's grandmother had not been a practicing member of that faith. Then came the Greek representative who painted a vivid verbal picture of the horrors that awaited all who rejected the Orthodox faith.

The heart of Vladimir was arrested and he decided to investigate the Greek religion. To that end he sent court officials to Constantinople. They were taken to the church of Saint Sophia. The magnificence of the buildings, the movements of the clergy, the lovely vestments, the heavenly music of the choir, the sweet odor of incense, and the procession of the deacons carrying torches to speak of Christ, the light of the world, impressed Vladimir's representatives. When they gave their report Vladimir's first words were, "*Where shall we be baptized.*"

Christianity had come to Russia under the auspices of the Greek Church and there it would remain for a long time. However, when the Eastern Roman Empire fell to the Turks, the Russians said that as Constantinople had been the second Rome, Moscow should be the third. In other words, Russia would establish her own ecclesiastical structure. In this way the Russian Orthodox Church was born. At the hands of the Bolsheviks who came to power in 1917 the Russian Orthodox Church suffered a terrible setback. Hating the wealth of the church and the contemplative life of the priests, many priests were killed and many churches were plundered. But Christianity has outlived the Bolshevik Revolution, which only lasted until 1989. Concerning His Church Jesus said, "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matt. 16:18).

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 7

A New World Order

With the fall of the Roman Empire at the hands of the barbarians in AD 410, the map of the world changed drastically as did the power and political structures. In the providence of the Lord, the Church was to benefit by the social upheaval through the personalities of powerful leaders such as Gregory I (c. AD540-604). He is called Gregory the Great. Gregory became the bishop of Rome in AD 590 shortly after the time of the emperor Justinian (AD 482-565). The territorial gains of Justinian had been lost in the West and the barbarians were in control of much of Italy. The government at Constantinople was unable to control events in Rome. A strong leader was needed and found in Gregory. The secret of the strength of Gregory lay in large part to the treasury over which he presided. Surprisingly enough the church had grown rich. The wealth of the church came into existence in a variety of ways.

- **Personal sacrifices.** Many who served in the church took vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty. The church was not the place in which personal wealth was to be made. Nevertheless, the sacrifices of many made the church as an institution quite prosperous.
- **Generous gifts.** Wealthy landowners that had come to faith would give land to the church. People would give animals to the church for the forgiveness of sin. Others would give jewels and money. The gifts of God's people were generous.
- **Contributions related to penance and pastoral duties.** The Church discovered that it could make money by demanding donations for a variety of religious activities, and so money was extracted from God's people.

With the resources of a vast kingdom at his disposal Gregory enjoyed power. He would use the money wisely enough to enhance the office of the papacy.

- **The poor were fed.** Governmental responsibilities in social matters were taken over by the Church. The government of Rome had supplied the food of Rome. Now the church owned the land and the grain.
- **Money was used as a redemption power.** When the barbarians captured Roman soldiers and for their release demanded a ransom, it was the Church that could afford to pay what was asked.
- **Treaties were negotiated.** Gregory had official dealings with the countries around Italy. He negotiated with the barbarian kingdom in Spain, France, and England.

The Might of the Monastery

To help dispense goods to the poor, deal wisely with delicate issues, and negotiate treaties, Gregory turned to the monks of the monasteries. The man who was to profoundly influence monasticism to meet the challenges of the New World order was Benedict of Nursia, Italy (c. AD

48-547). He provided a place of safety for those fleeing from the barbarians by building a monastery high on a mountain cliff. The place is called Monte Cassino.

A Rigid Set of Rules

The rules of Benedict became the standard of Western monasticism.

- Vows were taken of celibacy, poverty, and obedience
- Monks could not travel without special permission.

Life was self-contained within the monastery. The monks had to do their own work; farming, cutting down trees, cooking, washing, and cleaning. To accomplish the physical labors and to incorporate the spiritual life of prayer and meditation, singing and reading together, not to mention meals, study, and sleep, the day was structured.

- 2:00 AM - 4:00 AM prayer
- 6:00 AM - 9:00 AM study
- 9:00 AM - 12:00 Work in the fields
- Dinner at noon (Note. The word comes from the Latin *nona*, which means the ninth hour, i.e. 3:00 p.m.-counting from 6:00 AM. The monks could not change the rule of waiting till “noon” for dinner but they could move up the hour which is what they did).

While the monks ate in silence someone would read a good book to them. If a monk wanted something on the table sign language was employed.

- For an apple the monk was instructed to “*put thy thumb in the fist, and close thy hand and move afore thee to and fro.*”
- For milk the monk was commanded to “*draw thy left little finger in the manner of milking.*”
- For mustard, “*Hold thy nose in the upper part of thy right fist, and rub it.*”
- For salt, “*flip with thy right thumb and thy forefinger over the left thumb.*”

After dinner came a nap, then work again in the fields till sundown, evening songs, and bed. The younger monks would sleep between the older ones to prevent any type of levity or outbursts of anger. The monks did the cooking and serving in turns. At the beginning of each week the monks would ask God to help them not make any mistakes. A special table was reserved for the father of the monastery called the “abbot”, an Aramaic term meaning, “*father.*” The abbot was required to be an exceptional person. “*The abbot must not be worried nor anxious, neither should he be too demanding or stubborn or jealous or oversuspicious, for then he will never be at rest.*” The monks were to obey him in all matters. He in turn was to consult with them, even to the youngest. All were to confess their faults to one another.

The Meaning of the Monasteries

The original intent of the monasteries was so that individuals might retire from a troubled world, live quietly, and work their way into heaven. But the monasteries became places of study, entertainment, education, and, in the end, social reform.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 8

The Winning of the West to Christ

With new power and wealth the popes and monks who guided Christendom in the early centuries undertook the task of evangelizing as much of the world as possible. One by one the nations would be evangelized in fulfillment of Christ's Great Commission. Jesus said, *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen"* (Matt. 28:19-20).

The Gospel Invades Ireland

Prominent in the story of the conversion of Ireland to Christ is the influence of a man named Patrick (AD c. 387-493). Patrick was born at Kilpatrick (now Dumbarton). He was the son of a deacon named Calpurnius. At the age of sixteen, Patrick was captured in a raid by Irish pirates, kidnapped, and sold to Milchu, an Antrim chieftain. Six years later he was able to escape to Gaul (France) where he became a monk. After returning to his family in Britain, Patrick had a vision of babies pleading with him to come to them. Patrick believed he was being called to return and preach to the very people who had enslaved him. To Ireland he would go. Finding church support, and after being made a bishop, Patrick returned to Ireland. In 431 he landed at Wicklow. Though his labors were not without conflict, Patrick was able to win clan chiefs to Christ who in turn led their people into the new religion. So great was the success of Patrick that once converted, Ireland became a center of Christian influence throughout Europe. Patrick died March 17, 493.

A Man Worthy of Honor

The literary efforts of Patrick are slim. He wrote his Confessions to respond to those who were critical of his moral lapse when he was fifteen. There is also a letter addressed to the Christian subjects of a ruthless British chieftain named Coroticus. The believers were being treated in a brutal manner after being abducted as slaves. Patrick wanted to protest. He knew all too well what unjust suffering was. But his story is that of returning good for evil. The Bible says, *"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. 21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Rom. 12:20-21). Because Patrick returned to Ireland the Christians there captured the vision of sending out missionaries. Believers from the Jewel of the Islands went over to Scotland. Columba, an Irish monk (AD 521-597), established a monastery on the island of Iona, which was used as a base to convert Scotland. From Scotland efforts were made to convert England. It was not easy. The pagan Angles and Saxons resisted the Christian influence. Believing Britons were pushed into Wales.

The Trinity

One of the great symbols associated with Patrick is that of the shamrock. *"You tell us that there are three gods and yet one,"* the perplexed Irish said when St. Patrick was preaching the gospel to them in the 5th century AD. *"How is that possible?"* The saint reached down and pulled up a shamrock. *"Do you not see,"* he replied, *"how in this wildflower three leaves are united on one stalk, and will you not then believe that there are indeed three persons and yet one God?"*

Augustine of Canterbury

While the Irish were sending missionaries from the north downward, Gregory I (b. 540; pope, 590-604) sent missionaries to the south of England to work upwards. The story is told that one day Gregory was in the market place in Rome and saw some slave children for sale. “*Who are they?*” he asked. “*Angles,*” came the reply. Gregory’s heart was touched and in a moment he knew they and all young people like them needed the gospel. “*Not Angles,*” he replied, “*but angels.*” To evangelize England, Gregory I sent Augustine of Canterbury whom was readily received by Bertha, the wife of King Ethelbert of Kent. However, Augustine was only allowed to minister out of doors for fear of any magic he might do indoors. Rumors had spread that Augustine could make tails grow on the backs of those he did not like.

A Message of Hope

Augustine of Canterbury had no magic but he did have a glorious message that brought hope to the hopeless. One of the King’s advisers understood the power of hope. When King Ethelbert asked his council what they thought of Christianity, one of them replied: “*Oh King, the life of man is like the flight of a swallow through our banquet hall, out of the dark and the cold for a moment through the light and warmth and into the cold and dark again. A religion that can tell us more about that dark beyond certainly ought to be followed.*”

Making a Statement with Hair

When the missionaries from Rome working up from the south met the missionaries from Scotland working down from the north into England, a terrible discovery was made. There was little harmony among the brethren. One major difference was the way each group of monks cut their hair. The Roman monks had been cutting their hair, since the days of Jerome (c. 345-419) by shaving (called a *tonsure*) most of it off, but not all. The Roman monks shaved on the top and left a little rim around the ears like a crown of thorns. In contrast the Irish shaved from the ears up and left a little tuft on top like a halo. Apparently, this was a major concern and caused great distress among the monks.

The Celebration of Easter

Another area of concern was the true date for the celebration of Easter. Since the Council of Nicaea (c. 325) it had been decided that Easter should be observed on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. So far so good. But the problem came when it was discovered the Irish were using a different calendar! The whole matter was brought before a king named Oswy who decided that he would side with those in favor of the Romans. He had heard that Peter had the keys to the kingdom and decided he did not want to offend the doorkeeper of heaven.

A Bible for the British

To help spread the gospel message a commitment was made to put the Scriptures into the hands of the common people. One way to do this was through song. According to legend the earliest English poet Caedmon, an illiterate herdsman, was given a dream one night of the story of creation. In the dream he began to make up verses to sing.

Caedmon's Hymn

*Now we must praise the Ruler of Heaven,
The might of the Lord and His purpose of mind,
The work of the Glorious Father; for He,
God Eternal, established each wonder;*

*He, Holy Creator, first fashioned the heavens
As a roof for the children of earth.
And then our guardian, the Everlasting Lord,
Adorned this middle earth for men.
Praise the almighty King of Heaven.*

Translated by Robert Mullin

The master of the herdsman, after hearing of Caedmon took the serf to a local monastery. While Hilda, the local abbess of Whitby told the story of the Bible to the herdsman, Caedmon immediately changed it into verses that were written down. Employed by the abbey until his death (c. AD 678), Caedmon continued to turn biblical stories and events of the life of Christ into poetry.

The Wisdom of King Alfred

In the 9th century King Alfred, the Saxon (AD 849-899), believed that as the Greeks translated the Hebrew Scriptures into their own language, and the Latins translated the Hebrew and Greek into their own language (as per the *Vulgate*), so a Greek, Hebrew, and Latin version of the Bible should be turned into English. With the assistance of church scholars Alfred translated a work into the Saxon tongue entitled *Pastoral Care by Gregory the Great* (c. 540-604). Alfred wanted his people to be pious and educated. He was weary of wars with the Danes and weary of widespread ignorance. To encourage learning he set up a school to educate the sons of noblemen. He also established two monasteries for which famous churchmen of the Saxon period were grateful.

The Delightful Dunstan

The most famous churchman of the Saxon era was Dunstan (c. 908-988). There is a delightful story associated with this archbishop of Canterbury. It is said that he pinched the nose of the devil with a pair of pliers. That Dunstan might have pinched the nose of Satan seemed possible to his people for he was a devout man. Dunstan restored the monastic life and established three

monastic houses (Peterborough, Ely, and Thorney). Besides being a scholar, Dunstan was a gifted musician and illuminator of precious manuscripts.

A Godly Man Named Martin

While the work of evangelism continued in the islands, the work of revitalizing religion in France occupied the church. Most of the country had come under the sphere of Christianity by the time of Constantine (c. AD 285-337). One of the first missionaries to bring the gospel to France was Martin of Tours (c. AD 335-397). Before his conversion and while serving as a soldier, Martin met a man poorly clothed. Moved with compassion, Martin took the single garment he had on, cut it in half, and offered the other half to the beggar. That night in a dream Martin believed he saw Christ wearing the clothing he had offered. Soon after this experience Martin left the army and became a monk. Zealous against the Arians, Martin was appointed the bishop of Tours in 372. At first Martin dwelt in the cathedral but decided to leave it. Accompanied by eighty disciples he returned to the monastic way of life and moved to minister in the countryside. Many rural churches were established because of his evangelistic labors. When he died while on a pastoral visit at Candes, thousands gathered to mourn his departure.

The Conversion of Clovis

When the barbarians invaded the Empire they many times assimilated into the cultures to which they came. Though the Franks were pagan they did convert to the Christian faith because of their king, Clovis (c. 466-511). Clovis first came into contact with the Christian religion after his marriage to Clothilda of Burgundy. Resisting the attempts of his wife to convert him, Clovis did not embrace Christianity until he faced defeat in battle. Then he cried, "*Jesus Christ, whom Clothilda calls the Son of the living God, help me and I vow that if I win I will be baptized in thy name. My gods are not helping me and plainly have no power. Now I call on thee. Only save me, from my enemies.*" Clovis won his victory and Christianity won the outward allegiance of a country.

The Gospel in Germany

The movement of Germany into the sphere of the Christian faith is largely credited to the labors of a missionary from England. Winifred was his given English name but he became known as Boniface (AD 680-754). Seeking to establish credibility with the local chieftains, Boniface challenged the superstitious beliefs of the common people in a god named Wotan who resided in a tree. Promising to cut the tree down and prove that Wotan was no god, Boniface did exactly that. He took an ax, cut the tree down and, according to legend, used its parts to make a church. The people were impressed that Boniface was not killed on the spot. Despite great success in some parts of the land Boniface returned to a group of people who had initially opposed his presence. The Frisians had turned Boniface away once but many now embraced his message. The very success of Boniface became the basis for his death at the age of seventy-five. Jealous pagans with swords drawn came upon him and his fellow travelers. Though others would have fought on his behalf Boniface forbid violence. He died for Christ, as did all that were with him. Nevertheless, the kingdom of heaven continued to grow but not always in the way it should have.

A Christian Champion Named Charlemagne,

Northern Germans were forced to embrace the Christian faith by a king of the Franks called Charlemagne (AD 742-814). For twenty-six years Charlemagne (lit. *Charles the Great*) fought the Saxons until there was a submission to his rule and religion. Because he was a champion of the Church, on Christmas day, AD 800, Pope Leo III crowned him emperor. Though Charlemagne was under no obligation to the Church, the act of the pope crowning the king had great symbolic power as it subordinated the secular to the sacred. Perhaps there could be a new Roman Empire, a Holy Roman Empire. Time would tell.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 9

Tension between the Secular and the Sacred

As the world took on a new shape in the West following the fall of Rome in AD 410 there was tension between the State and the growing power of the Church. The State needed the Church to teach the people a common language and faith. Secular rulers also needed the Church to approve their legitimacy in order to ensure stability. The popular people were no longer inclined to obey a ruler unless assured that his authority came from God. The best way to reassure the people was to allow the Church to give the crown. Thanks to Peppin (b. 741 d. September 24, 768), king of the Franks, the pope was allowed not only to give the crown but also to become a sovereign over five cities in Italy. This was the beginning of the papacy as a kingdom. From AD 754-1870 the popes ruled over much of Italy. The lines of distinction between the secular and the sacred were growing hard to identify. Simplistic concepts no longer applied.

The Challenge of the Church

It was once easy to say that the State should concern itself with the physical expression of a man's life while the Church should minister to man's spiritual needs. However, order, justice, and peace are not only civil matters, they affect spirituality and morality. If the soul and body were divided one from the other it might be easier to let the State deal with the outward expressions of humanity and allow the Church to concern itself with the conscience, reverence, and the workings of the heart. But that is not possible. Social and religious matters become more complicated to deal with as the Church itself becomes a government and the proprietor of property and land. The great challenge of the Church is to stay focused on the kingdom of heaven without undue involvement with the kingdoms of this world. The success or failure of the Church to do this is a large part of the story of western civilization.

The Misery of a Bad Marriage

A perfect example of the overlapping concerns of the Church and the State can be seen in the issue of marriage. State rulers, especially during the Middle Ages (c. AD 500-1500) would often make political matches for themselves or their children in order to promote the friendship of a country or to solicit peace. The bride and groom may never have met until the day of marriage. As might be expected, sometimes the couple liked each other after the wedding ceremony and sometimes they did not and sued for a divorce. The Church generally took a very dim view of divorce because marriage was considered a sacrament in the same way baptism and communion were considered sacred. To keep the couple together the Church used several methods.

- **Pastoral counseling**
- **Excommunication from the Lord's Supper**
- **The Interdict** This was the most severe form of ecclesiastical punishment for it had strong political overtones. The interdict applied to the king's territory. For example, if the king of France was placed under an interdict then all the services of the Church would stop being conducted in the whole of the country. The idea was to make the king's subjects bring pressure upon the king to obey the wishes of the pope in whatever matter was of the gravest concern.

- **The Walking Interdict** This form of punishment involved only the king and the land within so many miles of his presence. If the king traveled, the interdict went with him; which meant that those who were affected by his presence were happy when he was able to move on.

One example of church discipline was the case of King Philip of France (AD 1052-1108) Philip was excommunicated in 1095 because he had repudiated his wife, Bertha of Holland, and married Bertrada, the wife of the count of Anjou.

Conflict between the Church and Crown

In the centuries to come the Church and the State would quarrel over other issues besides marriage, such as land. The Church owned almost one half of the land in France and Germany. The problem was that all taxes came from the land. In addition, the landholders supplied the men for the armies. It was only natural that the king would want the land to be in the hands of those who would pay taxes and support his cause. Therefore, the king began to support the local bishops and abbots himself. The protest of this practice went before the pope who, as might be expected, supported the bishops and abbots. The popes knew that if kings were allowed to appoint local church officials the next step would be to appoint the pope himself and that would never do. The time would come when this whole matter had to be settled. And the time did come. In an effort to assert papal authority and avoid paying taxes to Philip IV (king of France, 1285-1314), Pope Boniface VIII issued a papal bull [*Clericis Laicos* (1296)] which forbade the clergy to pay taxes to a secular power. A “*bull*” is an official statement by the Church with legal authority. Philip responded to Boniface by forbidding any coins to leave the kingdom. By doing this, Philip was able to keep much needed French money from going to Rome. A temporary reconciliation was ended by a fresh outbreak of the contention for authority when Philip arrested the papal legate in 1301 and summoned the first French Estates-General. This assembly, which was composed of clergy, nobles, and burghers, gave support to Philip. Boniface retaliated with the famous bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302), a declaration of papal supremacy over the state. The pope, said Boniface, is the one that wears three crowns (*a tirara*), not the state. The *Tirana* was and is designed to be a symbol of religious sovereignty reflecting papal authority over princes and people as the Vicar of Christ.

Should Priests Be Allowed to Marry?

As papal authority was asserted in secular matters it was also asserted in personal affairs of the heart. The question arose whether the clergy should be married. The Word of God predicted that “*in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; 3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3)*. The fulfillment of this Scriptural warning began in earnest in Germany under the reign of King Henry IV with the attempt of the Church to make the bishops and priests like the monks. Pope Gregory VII (served, 1073-1085) decreed that those who served the Church must be unmarried.

The Humiliation of King Henry

To enforce his will Gregory pope issued two orders.

- All bishops in Germany must receive the staff of their office from Rome not from the emperor.
- All the bishops of Germany must give up their wives.

Henry immediately defied the order by personally appointing a bishop in Milan. In the name of Saint Peter the pope promptly sent word that Henry was officially excommunicated. Furthermore, all Christians in his domain were released from any promise to obey him. Henry soon realized that he could not be an effective emperor without a papal blessing. The common people would not obey him. He had to make peace with the Church. Henry started for Rome in the middle of winter. Crossing the Alps in December of 1076 was treacherous. The feet of the horses had to be tied together so the animals could be dragged down the snow covered slopes. Very few animals would survive the ordeal. While Henry moved towards Rome, the pope started north for a meeting. He was temporally residing at the fortress of Canossa in northern Italy. It was January 1077. Snow was still on the ground when Henry, dressed in white as a penitent and with bare feet, knocked on the door of the fortress. He was humbly asking permission to see the pope. The gate did not open. On the following day Henry stood once more at the gate humbly seeking permission to see the pope. The gate did not open. The third day he stood again but all in vain. Meanwhile, inside the castle gate the pope was thinking. The successor of Peter could not refuse to forgive someone who stood at the door and knocked. Suddenly, the gate opened. The mighty emperor of Germany stood before the pope to ask forgiveness and to give many promises. The pope accepted the penitence of Henry and restored him to good favor with the Church.

Less Power for the Pope

In a surprise move, once restored to favor, Henry forgot the promises he had made which led to a second act of excommunication. But this time the situation was different. Henry was able to persuade the people that the pope had overreached his authority. The angry emperor marched on Rome, drove out Gregory VII and set up someone in his place. Later, at another time and with another pope and emperor it was decided that loyalty to both pope and emperor should be recognized by all. Nevertheless, the bishops still had to give up their wives.

Controversy in the Courts

As church and state quarreled over marriages, money, land, and authority so they would argue over the right to judge. Like the State, the Church had its own court system. The reason for this is because the Apostle Paul had said that Christians should not go to the law courts but should settle disputes among themselves. 1 Corinthians 6:1-4 *“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? 2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? 4 If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.”* Because of Paul’s admonition, canon law was established whereby the bishop could be guided in settling disputes among Christians. Initially the Church

did settle disputes involving widows, orphans not of age, and marriages. The issue of the courts became disruptive in England when the king, Henry II (1154-1189), decided that the clergy should be tried by the State no matter what they had done wrong.

Murder in the Cathedral

At the time Henry made this decision Thomas Becket, an old comrade, had been made the archbishop of Canterbury. Henry assumed that Becket would support him in this controversy with the pope but Becket surprised Henry. He remained loyal to the Church. Exasperated the King asked rhetorically one day, "*Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?*" Four knights who overheard these words took them to heart. There was a murder in the cathedral. So great was the outcry over the killing of Becket that Henry allowed himself to be whipped in public at the tomb of St. Thomas. To honor Becket people began to make pilgrimages to his grave. On their way the pilgrims would entertain one another with stories. A poet named Geoffrey Chaucer collected some of these stories in the Canterbury Tales.

The Power of Pope Innocent III

In the ebb and flow of power between rulers and Rome, one pope did emerge to hold more power than any of his predecessors. His name was Innocent III (served-1198-1216). He was more the ruler of Europe than any king or emperor. With no army, armed only with the power of interdict and excommunication, he established kings and kingdoms and took them away. Even the English king John, who had sworn by the teeth of God to put out all the eyes and cut off all the noses of all the Italians in his land and drive out all the bishops and monks, in the end had to accept the pope's own appointment to Canterbury. If there is a lesson in this struggle between Church and State, it is that despite the faults and failures of the Church, and there were many, it still remained the most glorious institution on earth. Justice and order survived in the world of the Middle Ages because of the Church.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 10

Waging War on War

While some in the modern age look back with disdain upon the Church of the Middle Ages it cannot be denied that the Church was the most powerful force in the lives of men. To the faint of heart the Church gave courage. The wayward could look to the Church for guidance and forgiveness. While the Church was not perfect it did try to seek peace. When the nobles made war on one another by destroying the land, burning castles, and carrying off servants, the Church protested. If the warring could not be stopped completely, at least perhaps it might be contained. To that end the Church pleaded that no attacks be made on religious buildings, clergymen, pilgrims, merchants, women and children, or farmers. Nor should the livestock be harmed. Tragically the slaughter and the savagery of warfare continued unabated. The Church suggested something else. A plan called *The Truce of God*. Under the terms of this agreement all fighting should cease from Wednesday evening to Monday morning. Certain seasons of the year would also bring an end to hostilities such as Advent, the month before Christmas, and Lent, the forty days before Easter. But again, because the hearts of men were desperately wicked the *Truce of God* did not effectively work. It was at this point that Pope Urban II (served, 1088-1099), conceived a novel idea. If Christians were to fight then let them not fight one another. Rather, let them turn and fight the enemies of the faith. Let them attack the Turks who had recently embraced the Islamic faith and conquered the Holy Land. There was a just cause in fighting the Turks. They were mistreating the pilgrims who wanted to travel to the sacred places where Jesus lived and died. They were also desecrating holy places. In 1095 Urban preached a sermon calling for the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont (in France).

The First Crusade

The word “*crusade*” comes from a word meaning “*cross*.” Those who took part of this new holy cause sewed a cross in color upon their sleeves. There was an immediate response to Urban’s appeal to liberate Jerusalem. Great preparations were made. Blacksmiths churned out shields and swords, stirrups and armor to protect the new defenders of the faith. Finally, in 1099 the First Crusade got underway. From different parts of Europe and by various means an army came together and marched on the Holy City of Peace. And Jerusalem was taken. The Turks were slaughtered. A great celebration took place in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher where Jesus was believed to have been born.

A Crusade for Children

Though Jerusalem was retaken from the Turks the city was not easy to keep. The Turks returned with a vengeance and Jerusalem fell once more to their jurisdiction. New crusades were launched one of which led by the English king, Richard the Lionhearted (king, 1189-1199). In the end all the crusades failed. But why? In June, AD 1212 in France an unusual boy named Stephen believed he knew the answer. Simply enough, the wrong people were doing the fighting. Stephen said that Christ appeared to him and promised that he and other young people would do what the adults had been unable to accomplish. The children were to march in faith on the holy city. They were not to put their trust in swords but in the Lord of Hosts who would perform miracles on their behalf. According to Stephen, God would cause the seas to roll back to allow the children to march to Jerusalem on dry land like Moses and the children of Israel that had walked through the Red Sea. Stephen called the children of France to join him in a new crusade and the young people came. By the thousands they came. Mothers and fathers could not stop them from coming. When

word reached Germany, another boy, Nicholas from Cologne, felt the call of destiny. He offered the same challenge to the youth there. “*Join me!*” He cried, and the youth of Germany responded. Mostly boys around the age of 12 went off to the great cause but some girls went as well. As the German children marched up the Rhine they sang songs such as:

*“Fair are the meadows,
Fairer still the woodlands,
Robed in the blooming garb of spring:
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,
Who makes the woeful heart to sing.”*

Like most great adventures in life the journey was easy at first. The children passed through the valley of the Rhine with its many towns and villages. There was food enough for all. But the situation changed when the children had to leave the river to march through the forests of Switzerland where the land had not been developed. Food became scarce. Robbers and wild animals loomed about and fell upon the children who were the most helpless. Eventually the terrifying cliffs of the Alps came into view. Some young people turned back. Others moved forward only to die upon the Alpine slopes. But there were others who made the climb and came down upon the plains of northern Italy. On to the sea the children marched.

It was at this point that the greatest disappointment took place for the sea did not roll back for them as they had been led to believe. Devastated, many of the young people made no more attempts to get to the holy land, but became assimilated into the Italian community. The rest pressed on against all odds. The children who had followed Stephen marched through France to the city of Marseilles on the coast. The sea did not open up for them either. But there was hope. Some merchants offered the children the use of their ships. Seven ships were available, capable of holding 700 men. The children boarded the vessels and sailed away. No one heard of them again for eighteen years. The sad story came out from the lips of a survivor released by the Sultan at Cairo. According to the narrator, two ships had been driven by a storm upon the rocks. Everyone on board perished. The generous merchants were in reality slave traders who sold the rest of the children to the Mohammedans. However, as one survivor swore, he never knew of a single person to accept the faith of Mohammed and deny Christ. It is a tender thought. Though the children never saw the Holy Land, they kept the faith.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 11

An Evil Inquisition

When the crusaders returned from the Holy Land in defeat, a spirit of skepticism returned with them. They passed through Bulgaria, a country of southeast Europe on the Black Sea, where the ideas of the Gnostics still lingered. The Gnostics were the ones who said that the world and the body are bad. Some of the disheartened crusaders were inclined to agree. Picking up on Gnostic concepts, the term “*cathari*” which means “*pure*” was adopted. Individuals decided to be pure and separate from the world. The Cathari reached the following decisions.

- They would not go to war
- They would not kill not even a chicken
- They would not encourage marriage
- They would not use crosses, not even plain ones without the body of Christ
- They would consider suicide since once they reached perfection death was preferable to spoiling themselves afresh
- They would work with their own hands
- They would cheat no one
- They would renounce the Roman Catholic Church and declare to all that would listen that the popes were more the followers of Constantine than of Peter as they presided over a den of thieves

The pope at the moment, Innocent III (served 1198-1216) was outraged by the remarks of the Cathari. His initial reaction was to win the Cathari back to the faith by sending a monk named Dominic (1170-1221) to preach to them. The followers of Dominic were named Dominicans. They were a new order of preachers who wished to live among the people, share their poverty and hardships, and teach simple spiritual truths. But something went terribly wrong. One of the preachers was murdered. Now the inhabitants of northern France had a reason to invade the southern portion of the country. With that opportunity came a new concept that justified evil. There would be a new crusade, not outwardly against the Turks but inwardly against the heretics. A “*heretic*” was considered at this time to be someone who believed the wrong way. In context, the Cathari were heretics.

Simply enough, the Catholic Church viewed the Cathari as a threat to its very existence because the Cathari were in the highest degree aggressive and hostile to the Mass, the sacraments, and the ecclesiastical (church) hierarchy and organization. The Cathari were also hostile to feudal government for they renounced the taking of loyalty oaths. For these reasons Innocent III appointed special agents of the Church called “*inquisitors*.” The initial purpose was to inquire into cases of heresy. Those found guilty of straying from the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church were to be punished. The inquisitors were given broad authority to use any and every means to encourage a person to confess in order to save the soul. Harsh measures were used because it was believed that heresy was a terrible crime against God. Besides, it was better for the wayward to suffer in time and return to the church than to suffer forever in eternity apart from the church. Given great freedom to root out heretics the inquisitors decided to use pain as a form of punishment. Torture chambers were established and public executions were authorized. By burning a heretic the inquisitors thought to terrify others to confess their errors, repent, and return to the Catholic Church.

The Pain of Peter Waldo

In its zeal to root out heretics, the Catholic Church began to hurt innocent individuals such as the rich merchant in southern France named Peter Waldo (c. 1150-1218). Following his conversion to Christ, Peter Waldo gave his wealth to help the poor and began to preach the gospel of redeeming grace. The Church officials ordered Waldo to stop preaching when he criticized the abuses of the clergy but he refused to obey. For this act of disobedience he was excommunicated. However, nothing and no one is truly able to stop people from coming to a man they believe is sent by God with a message from heaven. The followers of Peter Waldo became known initially as the Poor Men of Lyons (France) and later, as the movement grew, Waldensians. Joining in the sufferings and persecution of their leader the Waldensian fled to the highest mountains in the fertile valleys of the Alps. Their descendants still reside there to the present day. During the days of the Protestant Reformation, a nostalgic look back found much in the Waldensian's beliefs that Protestants could identify with. The Waldensians rejected purgatory and refused to venerate saints or pray for the dead. They also protested the wickedness of unworthy priests and the excessive wealth of the Church.

A Time to Teach

While the evil consequences of the inquisition cannot be justified nor the official persecution of the Cathari or the Waldensians, the Church did use other means for promoting the faith against threats real and imagined. One method was education. The Church was instrumental in establishing many schools and universities. From the earliest days of the monastic orders the monks became teachers of young people as they were catechized or instructed in the faith. Older scholars were offered important courses in critical areas.

- Theology, the study of God
- Philosophy, the study of the principles which under-gird the universe
- Law
- Medicine

During the days of Innocent III those who withdrew to the monasteries did not remain isolated but decided to spend most of their time with the people. The monks in this new expression of monasticism called themselves "*friars*" or "*brothers*." One prominent leader was Francis.

A Monk Married to Lady Poverty

Francis was born in the little Italian town of Assisi (AD 1182). Rejecting a life of wealth and ease offered by his wealthy merchant father, Francis became "*Married to Lady Poverty*", as he liked to say. On a daily basis Francis would give away everything he did not need. He worked hard, but not for wages beyond the bare necessities he needed to buy. He would beg, not for the best food but only the scrapes. He would only beg one day at a time taking no thought for the morrow (Matt. 6:25). When Francis went to minister among the lepers he was indifferent as to whether he would contract their diseases. His commitment was to go to men wherever they might be, in cities or in the country, in the hospitals or in the field. In time a new monastic order was established by Francis called the Franciscans.

Riches beyond Compare

One reason Francis could give up living a self centered life was because he was convinced the Christian has riches beyond belief as he gazed upon the Father's world and beheld the sun, moon, stars, and lilies of the field. An attitude of gratitude swelled in the mystic's heart and he called upon all living creation to give thanks to God. It is said that Francis would preach to the birds. *"Little sisters, you should praise God that He saved you in the ark and gave you the air in which to fly. You sow not, neither do you reap, but God gives you food and drink. He has given you tall trees for your nests, and because you cannot spin nor sow He has now made you coats. Therefore, little sisters, be not ungrateful, but strive to praise God."*

As creation was precious to Francis so was Christ. According to legend Francis thought so much about Christ, especially His wounds in death, that reddish spots appeared on his own hands. The marks, which appeared on the hands and feet of Francis, were called "*stigmata*." Francis accepted these marks as a sign of becoming like Christ. The strong spirit of self-sacrifice manifested by Francis attracted attention and then followers. Women as well as men wanted to be like he who was like Christ. A devout woman named Clara founded a monastic order for women known as the Poor Clares. They would work for Francis and pray his prayers.

*"Where there is Love and Wisdom,
there is neither Fear nor Ignorance.
Where there is Patience and Humility,
there is neither Anger nor Annoyance.*

*Where there is Poverty and Joy,
there is neither Cupidity nor Avarice,
Where there is Peace and Contemplation,
there is neither Care nor Restlessness.
Where there is the Fear of God to guard the dwelling,
there no enemy can enter.
Where there is Mercy and Prudence,
there is neither Excess nor Harshness."*

Francis of Assisi

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 12

A Day of Divine Judgment

If there were one word which characterized the minds of men during the Middle Ages, it would be faith. Men believed. They believed the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed. They also believed in a day of divine judgment for which they would have to give an account whether they were guilty of seven deadly sins or had kept the seven cardinal virtues, the seven works of mercy, and the seven sacraments.

Seven Deadly Sins

- Pride
- Greed
- Luxury
- Envy
- Gluttony
- Anger
- Despair

Seven Virtues

- Wisdom
- Courage
- Self-control
- Justice
- Faith
- Hope
- Love

Seven Works of Mercy

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Visit the sick
- House the homeless
- Ransom captives
- Bury the dead

Seven Sacraments

- Baptism, which was given to babies and was to be administered only once
- Confirmation, formally joining the Church
- Confession, which includes doing penance and making restitution
- Ordination, a sacrament for the clergy

- Marriage
- Extreme unction, an anointing given to the dying
- Communion or mass, from the Latin words, "*Ite, missa est,*" meaning, "*Go, you are dismissed.*" Just before the most important part of the communion celebration beginners in the faith were not allowed to stay. They were dismissed.

Movement beyond the Divine Mystery

With all of this the Church had gone too far. The purpose of communion is to draw men to Christ, not drive them away. Nevertheless, elaborate rituals continued. A High Mass was formulated, so called because the words were to be sung by a choir in a high or loud voice in contrast to the Low Mass where the words were simply said by a priest in a low voice. The people were not allowed to partake of the wine, which spoke of the blood of Christ, lest it be spilt. They could take of the bread for something magical happened when the priest spoke the words, "*Hoc est corpus meum,*" ("*This is my body*"). The Church dogma said that the bread changed, not in appearance but really, into the very body of Christ. The Mass then became a true feeding on Christ, which meant that sins are ever crucifying Him afresh and His pain and sufferings are renewed. On this point the Bible teaches that Christ, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; (Heb. 10:12).

Three Distinct Destinies

When the Day of Judgment arrived and a just verdict had been rendered it was believed that God would choose one of three destinies for each soul. Individuals would be sent to hell, purgatory, or heaven.

- **Hell** refers to a place of endless and hopeless torture. According to Dante written over the entrance to hell are the words, "*Abandon Hope all ye who Enter Here*".
- **Purgatory** refers to a place of purification with a view towards a second chance at redemption.
- **Heaven** is the dwelling place of the righteous.

To describe these places in detail Dante, an Italian of Florence wrote a poem called the *Divine Comedy* (c. April, AD 1000). The term comedy was used, not because the poem was designed to be funny or clever but because the poem ends well.

Creative Ways of Communicating the Gospel

To share the gospel with the common people the Church employed a variety of methods such as:

- **Plays.** The plays were written in simple language and told Bible stories.

- **Preaching.** When the people gathered, the preachers would denounce them for their sins and then set forth a life of holiness characterized by virtue, works of mercy, and observance of the sacraments. One of the most gifted of the medieval preachers was Savonarola (AD 1452-1498), a Dominican of Florence. Savonarola was fearless in condemning worldliness and corruption in the Church and society. When the French army moved to invade Italy and advanced to the wall of Florence, Savonarola went to the pulpit and proclaimed that the judgment of God was falling upon the people. A young man in the audience named Michelangelo never forgot the forceful words that were spoken. Years afterwards he expressed the impact of that moment in a masterpiece, *The Last Judgment*.
- **Music.** Music has always played a vital part in the Christian faith (Psa. 100:2; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).
- **Church structure.** In the Catholic Church the altar is the focal point of attention. Worship culminates in the mass. In the Protestant church the pulpit is the focal point of attention. Worship culminates in hearing God's Word.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 13

A Spiritual Invasion of the Sanctuary

Tragically, following the death of Innocent III and Francis of Assisi the Medieval Church was invaded by a spiritual force more intrusive than any natural enemy the Church had faced.

- **Greed came into the Church and the poor were plundered.** The greed of the Church for money was matched only by the greed of the State. Kings looked with covetous eyes upon the wealth pouring into the Churches and monasteries especially in France and England. A great contest began for the coins of the kingdoms. The king of England dipped his hand freely into the wealth of the Church while the king of France refused to let any coins be transported to Rome.

Pope Boniface VIII (served, 1294-1303) promised to excommunicate any king who kept the money of the Church. Not intimidated by the threat of being cut off from heaven, the king of France captured the pope and relocated the papacy to Avignon, a town under French rule. For a little over seventy years the popes were absent from Rome (1305-1377). In memory of the Jews who went into exile for seventy years in Babylon, this period in the history of the Church is called the Babylonian Captivity.

Despite being a papacy in exile, the greed of the popes was not satisfied. While in Avignon, John XXII found new ways to raise money by charging a fee for baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Every new bishop had to give the pope the first year of his salary. Then there was the sale of indulgences, which were formal grants from the pope reducing the time that a dead person would have to spend in purgatory.

- **Luxury came into the Church to adorn the priests with fine clothing.** Local churches were redecorated with inordinate beautiful works of art, pictures, and books despite widespread hunger in cities and in the countryside. The popes had to be carried in elegant chairs on the shoulders of Christian soldiers.
- **Anger came into the Church to silence with rage all that disagreed with papal dogma even if those who disagreed were loyal servants of the Lord.** When the Franciscans, “*wedded to Lady Poverty*”, declared that John XXII had betrayed the Church, he turned them over to the Inquisition to be burned. When the princes of Italy took away the land that belonged to the Church, an army was sent forth in the name of St. Peter to fight the princes.
- **Pride came into the Church. Priests and bishops began to live above the people.** They took upon their countenance a regal bearing. Church services were conducted with barely concealed contempt for the common people who were not even trusted to taste the cup of wine of communion lest they spill the blood of Christ.
- **Gluttony came into the Church.** A ravenous appetite for political and personal power was made manifest.

The Witness of John Wycliffe (c. 1329-1384)

Not all the priests were corrupt for God has always had a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 11:5). Among the chosen of God was John Wycliffe who tried to turn the minds of

the common people away from the vain superstitions of the Church by placing the Scriptures into their hands. Official opposition to Wycliffe by the Church was so severe that he had to flee to Bohemia. While the "*Morning Star of the Reformation*" continued to criticize the sale of indulgences, the doctrine of transubstantiation (the magical turning of the communion elements into the literal body and blood of Christ), and papal hierarchies, darkness continued to descend on the Church.

The Hunting of John Huss

The presence of Wycliffe in Bohemia enhanced the ministry of another critic of the Church, John Huss (AD 1373-1415). Because Huss was bold enough to criticize churchmen who rode on horses with brilliant tassels trailing behind in order to beat their fellow citizens with silver clubs, he was hated. Huss was brought to trial at a council of the Church of Constance (in present-day Germany), where over a seven-month period, Huss was accused of teachings contrary to the official Church dogma. In defense, Huss declared that he had never taught what he was accused of teaching. How could he recant or take back what he never said or wrote? Nor could he renounce the truth that the Church had become corrupt, the doctrine of transubstantiation was wrong, and salvation is by grace through faith alone. Because of his stand for righteousness, on July 6, 1415, Huss was condemned to be burned at the stake. He was immediately taken outside the city limits and tied to a stake where a fire was lit. He died with these words upon his lips: "*Lord, have mercy.*"

Revolt against Unrighteousness

The death of John Huss brought civil war to Bohemia. Rather than resolve the basic issues concerning reform, the Church only succeeded in driving more people to unite with those who were protesting greed and gluttony, pride and its abuse of power. If the dogma of the Church could lead to the persecution and murder of good men such as John Wycliffe and John Huss then who was safe within its structure?

A Movement of Reform

Despite the abuses of the Church, there were reformers inside its folds that were trying to move the ministry of the Church back to the basics of the faith. In Spain, Cardinal Ximenes led the effort to reform the Church. Brought to the royal court of Queen Isabella (1451-1504) who wanted a priest to hear her daily confessions, Ximenes found enhanced power and influence because of his association with the Queen. Taking advantage of the opportunity Ximenes moved to hold the friars of Spain accountable. They must either live according to the rule of faith they promised or leave the country. There was no other alternative. Like Wycliffe, Ximenes wanted the Bible to be put into print but there was a difference. Whereas Wycliffe wanted the common people to have the Scriptures, Ximenes was content to be the first to print the whole Bible in the original languages; the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek (1522, the *Complutensian Polyglot* so named from the little town of Complutum and "*polyglot*" because it was in more than one language).

The Rebirth of Learning

The printing press was used not only for printing the Bible but also for printing other manuscripts as well such as the writings of the early leaders of the Church. For the first time many people could read the works of Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine. In addition the ideas of the ancient Greeks could be put into print. In fact, so enthralled did many scholars become with the ancient world that the thought arose that the world could be born anew by returning to the glory days of Greece and Rome and of the early Church. This rebirth was called The Renaissance.

Enter Erasmus

One of the greatest figures to promote the new thoughts of humanism inside the Church was the priest Erasmus, of Rotterdam Holland. Erasmus not only promoted the printing of the works of the Church Fathers; he was able to produce the New Testament in Greek in 1516, six years before Ximenes was able to print the whole Bible. Erasmus was gifted as a preacher, writer, scholar and humorist. He was not hesitant to use wit with wisdom to expose the treachery of the churchmen. He mocked the concept of praying to the images of the saints or trusting in them for help. He lashed out at the greed and warring spirit of the Church. The very idea of an army led by the pope and of monks in armor was a deliberate denial of Jesus who said in Matthew 5:39 *“whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”* *“Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword”* (Matt. 26:52).

A Flickering Light

While the corruption that was within the Church was serious and pervasive, not all was bad, for God has always had a remnant of the elect according to the principle of grace. In Germany along the Rhine River dwelt good people who loved the Lord and tried to do what was right. They were called *“The Friends of God.”* Another group in Holland was called *“The Brethren of the Common Life.”* One member of this group was Thomas Kempis who wrote a classical book still read today, *The Imitation of Christ*. The labors and love of the elect of God within the decaying Church would produce much spiritual fruit. The Lord who stands in the midst of His Church (Rev. 1:13) would purify it once more. A great reformation was about to take place.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 14

Too Little and Too Late

It can be argued that for a long time the Church had tried to reform itself.

- Church councils passed laws governing the behavior of the priests but the laws were not honored.
- The printing press had improved knowledge but not morals.
- The voice of John Wycliffe and John Huss were heard and then silenced.
- The wit and wisdom of Erasmus was found to be amusing but was not heeded.
- Ximenes had driven irresponsible friars out of Spain only to use the Inquisition and a crusade to force Moors and Jews into an outward embracing of Christendom.

But all of these elements combined were not enough to stop the hand of divine judgment from falling upon the Church visible. All the self-reform efforts were too little and too late.

A Man Named Martin

Only a revolution would revitalize the Church. God had a revolution in mind and a leader for His cause in the person of a man named Martin Luther (1483-1546). Martin was not a likely candidate to lead a revolution *against* the Church for he was a devout priest and conscientious to a fault. Luther had a high view of God and a low view of man. Luther knew that God is good and great. He also knew that man is capable of great evil. Surely God must be angry at the wickedness He sees in man. What can be done to appease God's anger? What can be done by the soul that wants to be saved? The Church taught that good works would save. Luther decided to perform good works.

- He would repent often and for long periods of time, up to six hours at a time.
- He would fast until his body was emaciated.
- He would pray to the Virgin Mary and other saints to enlist their help for his cause.
- He would go on a pilgrimage to Rome and offer the mass in the Holy City.
- He would study the Scriptures day and night.
- He would sleep on a cold hard floor in his cell.
- He would deny himself.

Having performed all of these religious activities Luther still did not feel that he was just in the sight of God until one day the Lord revealed to him the meaning of saving faith. While studying Romans 1:17 Luther came to understand that it is God's grace apart from human goodness that saves. "*For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*" Luther was to spend the rest of his life teaching the glorious truth that salvation is not something that man does in order to merit the merits of Christ. Rather, salvation

is what God has done for man in Christ. The just or the righteous will accept the gift of God's grace and eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The Selling of the Gospel

When Martin Luther came to understand the grace of God in salvation he was careful to protect grace from being abused. While Luther was teaching in a university in the town of Wittenberg in a part of Germany called Saxony he discovered that members of his congregations were buying indulgences from John Tetzel. An indulgence was an official Church document offering forgiveness of sins even before any sins were committed. In addition, an indulgence was supposed to allow dead people to be released from extra time in purgatory. To challenge the concept of an indulgence as unbiblical Luther decided to invite a public debate on the topic. On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed a document he called The Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Church at Wittenberg. Luther argued that no one has any extra credits to give to others so they can get out of purgatory. In fact, Luther would later say there is no such place as purgatory. However, at the time he believed that those who were sorry for sins would be willing to suffer the cleansing of purgatory.

The Reformation Begins

Luther was astonished that his simple document inviting a scholarly debate on the sale of indulgences would be the spark that ignited a major confrontation with the Church. It was not long before the contents of the Ninety-five Theses were brought to the attention of the pope who saw the far-reaching implications. If there were no extra credits of the saints to be used by others then the Church was guilty of teaching a grave error. Perhaps the Church was wrong on other matters of faith and doctrine as well. Luther said it was.

- **The Church was wrong in its teachings concerning the Mass.** The sufferings of Christ for humanity are not repeated in communion, said Luther. Furthermore, the service should be conducted in German and not Latin.
- **The Church was wrong in its teaching about the Sacraments.** Christ did not establish seven sacraments but two, baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- **The Church was wrong to prohibit marriage.** Marriage should be encouraged and monasteries should be given up. Monks, nun, and priests should be free to marry whom they will. In time Luther would marry a former nun, Catherine (Katie) von Bora. Catherine had a tremendous positive influence on the ministry of Luther whom he lovingly called "Lord Katie." They had six children one of whom, Elizabeth, died as a baby.
- **The Church was wrong when it said the Pope had the power to forgive sin.** Only Christ can forgive sins.
- **The Church was wrong to indulge itself in luxury at the expense of the people.** "*Let us enjoy the papacy since God has given it to us*", Pope Leo X is said to have remarked after his election to the papacy.

The Excommunication of an Excellent Man

By the middle of 1520 the patience of the pope was exhausted. A bull (an official Church document) was issued ordering Luther to recant. In addition his works were to be burned. The elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise, moved to protect Luther. On December 10, 1520, Luther took the papal bull and solemnly burned a copy in a public ceremony. Early in 1521 a stronger bull of excommunication was prepared against Luther depriving him of civil rights and protection. Before the emperor of Germany, Charles V would agree to the bull being delivered. Luther would have one last chance to recant at a diet at Worms. Luther began his trip to Worms on April 2, 1521. The journey to the Imperial Diet did not manifest the repentance the church had hoped for. The journey to Worms was more like a victory march; Luther was welcomed enthusiastically in all of the towns he went through. He arrived in Worms on April 16 and was also cheered and welcomed by the people. On April 17, 1521 Luther stood before the princes of Germany and Charles V, the successor of Charlemagne. Shown a pile of his books on a table he was asked to renounce what he had written. Luther had come to debate doctrinal issues not to defend himself personally. The dynamics of the diet had changed. Luther had been deceived. He asked for more time to consider his answer. The next day Luther was ready to give his answer. *"Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."*

A "Knight" in the Lord's Army

Following Luther's appearance at the diet of Worms his protector Frederick of Saxony had Luther "kidnapped" for his own safety. Luther had not been present to hear Charles V denounce him and place a bounty for his capture. Traveling with friends, Luther approached the Black Forest when horsemen dashed out and took hold of him. His friends were allowed to travel on but Luther was taken to the castle of Wartburg. Dressing as a knight and letting his beard grow, Luther lived a comfortable life in obscurity. However, he did not remain idle but used the time to translate the Bible into the German language. What a Bible it was! With simple but direct words Luther gave the German people a Scripture they could understand.

The Challenges of Charles V

After a year in hiding, Luther was ready to return to Saxony. Reports of reckless behavior from many of his followers convinced Luther that he must not stay hidden. Casting aside regard for his safety, Luther emerged from hiding. If the emperor was going to try to arrest him, so be it. But Charles was not ready to move against Luther. He was too busy fighting the Turks and the French and even the pope. Charles had once said that he would rather lose lands and life than do anything against the Christian faith. He obviously changed his mind. The army Charles sent to

Rome took the city and captured the pope. Though he was soon released the damage was done. Great hostilities lingered between Rome and Germany.

The Power of a Name

While Charles concerned himself with affairs of the state, Luther concerned himself with guiding the new religious movement which was bearing spiritual fruit outside the organized Catholic Church. The new movement was given the name “Protestant” in 1529 at the Diet of Spires when certain Reformers made a solemn declaration of dissent from a decree of the Emperor Charles V stating that Lutheranism should not spread. However, the movement did spread and the unity of the Church during the Middle Ages ended.

Separation in the Name of Unity

In the providence of the Lord, the Protestant movement was able to capture the minds of millions but mainly in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and England. The Roman Catholic Church was to remain strong in Italy, Spain, and France. But the very success of the movement proved to be trying days for Luther. The reformation touched not only the Church but society as well as old views were reconsidered and revolutionary concepts emerged. Many stressful decisions had to be made. Music became a source of great comfort to Luther who composed some of the most enduring hymns for the Church such as the following.

*“A mighty Fortress is our God,
A trusty Shield and Weapon;
He helps us free from every need
That hath us now o’ertaken.*

*The old evil Foe
Now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
On Earth is not his equal.*

*With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One,
Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this?
Jesus Christ it is.
Of Sabaoth Lord,
And there’s none other God;
He holds the field forever.*

*Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us.
We tremble not, we fear no ill,*

*They shall not overpower us.
This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none,
He's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.*

*The Word they still shall let remain
nor any thanks have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.
And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child and wife,
Let these all be gone,
They yet have nothing won;
The Kingdom our remaineth."*

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The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 15

Division among the Protestants

The courage of Luther to challenge the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church was a source of inspiration to others. However, not everyone joined Luther's new Church. Other

“reformed Churches” began to emerge in Switzerland, Holland, and elsewhere. New leaders also emerged to carry forward the general work of spiritual reformation. One such man was John Calvin.

The Presence of John Calvin (1509-1564) and the Rise of Presbyterianism

Before his conversion John Calvin had been a brilliant student of law, largely in obedience to the wishes of his father. His real intellectual passion, however, remained focused on the humanities. Aware that he possessed a stern disposition Calvin confessed that before salvation he was more like a *"raging beast"* in the manner of Saint Paul. He manifested a rebellious spirit and was full of self-pride. Then, in a wonderful way he was suddenly converted. The Sovereign subdued his heart just as the risen Savior had subdued Saint Paul. Like Paul, Calvin understood that it was only after his conversion that his own *"hardened heart"* had become teachable. After his conversion, and like also in the manner of Saint Paul, Calvin immediately became *"inflamed"* with his new knowledge of righteousness. He wanted to preach the Gospel of redeeming grace. Calvin did preach. He was used of God, especially in Geneva, Switzerland to establish the Presbyterian Church, which would later be strong in France, Holland, Scotland, England, and America.

The Zeal of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

While Calvin labored in Geneva, Ulrich Zwingli labored to establish the Reformed Church at Zurich, Switzerland. In the spirit of Luther, Zwingli believed that the Catholic Church had erred on many important issues.

- He opposed the sale of indulgences.
- He objected to celibacy for the clergy and married.
- He believed that the pope had stolen the keys from St. Peter.
- He preached from the Bible verse by verse instead of simple reading selected portions.
- He spoke to the people in simple terms and in their own language instead of Latin.

While these practices were commendable Zwingli did go too far in his reforms because of a guiding principle he embraced. Zwingli taught that what the Bible does not command may not be done. Luther believed that what the Bible does not prohibit may be practiced. The difference of philosophy would have far reaching repercussions. Because Zwingli believed that only what the Bible permitted should be permitted in the Church he moved to remove all images and crosses in the churches. The same was true for musical instruments. Whereas the Lutherans loved to sing with an organ accompaniment, Zwingli led the people to sing, if they sang at all, without any musical instrument.

The Presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper

The greatest difference between Zwingli and Luther centered on the presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper. While Luther argued against the Mass of the Catholic Church and the idea that the elements become the literal body and blood of Christ, he also taught that the body of Christ is with, in, and under the bread and the wine. Since Jesus said, *"This is my body,"* and *"This is my*

blood,” His body and His blood must somehow be present in a real but mystical way, said Luther. In truth, it is difficult for many to distinguish between Lutheran theology and Catholic theology on this point. Zwingli’s position was clearer on this matter. Zwingli contended that Christ is no more literally or mystically present in the elements of Communion than when He said, “*I am the true vine.*” The bread and wine simply remind the believer of the sufferings of Christ at Calvary. The elements are only designed to show forth the Lord’s death until He comes again the second time for all who believe (1 Cor 11:26; Heb. 9:28).

A New Challenge by the Catholic Church

The Catholics in Zurich challenged the position of Zwingli. Since Switzerland was ruled over as a part of the Holy Roman Empire but by a council of the representatives of the people, religious matters came before the council. When the council met the position of Zwingli was embraced.

- The Mass was terminated.
- Images and organs were removed from Church buildings.
- A traditional Catholic custom of not eating meat during the forty days before Easter (called Lent) was stopped.

Unfortunately, the ideas of Zwingli did not transfer in an orderly manner from one custom to the next. Those who would not give up their religious symbols found them smashed by zealous reformers. In Basel, Switzerland rioting broke out and every image in a public place of the town was smashed except one. To this day the image remains of the Virgin Mary smiling upon her child, perhaps also upon all who pass by.

Christians Killing Christians in the Name of Christ

One of the dark ironies of the Christian religion is that it is associated with a logical disconnect between rhetoric and reality. Though Christ taught love, tolerance, and turning of the other cheek, His followers have chosen to use the sword against one another. In Germany, Luther claimed that the Jews, who refused his "rightful" depiction of the gospel, should have their synagogues and books burned, be driven out of the cities, and be forced to toil the land for their opposition to the gospel. In Switzerland, while certain parts moved to embrace the beliefs and practices of the Reformers, other parts of the land remained loyal to the Catholic Church. As a result, Catholics and Protestants began to kill one another. Zwingli himself was left dead upon the field of battle.

The Beliefs of the Ana-Baptist

Despite bloodshed and violence the Reformation continued, as did the fragmentation of the Protestant community. Joining the Lutheran, Reformed, and Presbyterian Churches, were the Ana-Baptist. Specific doctrinal positions were associated with this movement.

- **The baptism of professing believers.** Some of the followers of Zwingli who had embraced the method of a strict interpretation of the Bible began to argue that no where in the Bible is there a clear command for babies to be baptized. Why then should babies be baptized? A conviction began to take place in the hearts of some that babies should not be baptized. Those

who had been baptized as an infant began to baptize each other. The name “*Ana-Baptist*” (meaning *over-again-baptizer*) began to be associated with them.

- **The separation of Church and State.** Perhaps the Ana-Baptist would not have been persecuted so much if they had not also advocated a separation of Church and State.
- **The avoidance of armed conflict.**
- **The non-taking of an oath.**

Because of these positions Protestants and Catholics united against the Ana-Baptist. Many who were associated with the movement were drowned or burned. Nevertheless, the movement persevered and grew. Descendants of the Ana-Baptist movement can be found in other groups such as the Mennonites in the Netherlands and the Hutterites in America.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 16

Calvin’s Geneva

While the Ana-Baptist sought converts with religious zeal so did the Presbyterians. The term is from the Greek meaning “elder.” The reference is to the managing of Church affairs by elders and not by bishops. While the Lutherans placed Church matters into the hands of bishops who ruled sections of a country, the Presbyterians placed Church matters into the hands of elders who

formed councils in the manner of those that had oversight of the Swiss cities. Each local assembly had a board of elders, and a group of Churches had a council of selected elders called a presbytery. John Calvin was instrumental in establishing the Presbyterian form of Church government which he presided over as leader of the Protestant community in Geneva. A man of keen intellect and iron will, Calvin brought order to Geneva. The pressures he faced were enormous for the Reformation was constantly under assault. In France the Roman Catholic Church resented the presence of the French Calvinist, called Huguenots. Fearful of growing political influences by the Huguenots, the young king Charles IX, influenced by his mother Catherine, moved against them on August 24, 1572; St. Bartholomew's Day. Almost three thousand Huguenots in Paris were massacred. Within three days more than twenty thousand Huguenots were executed across France. While Catholics rejoiced Protestants wept in horror and hid in fear. The scale of slaughter was so great the murder of the Huguenots had to have been planned for some time. Out of the massacre came a renewed effort within the Protestant community to resist the evil of tyrants. Arguments began to increase by way of literature for resistance against rules for reasons of conscience.

Five Points of Faith

Despite the violence and bloodshed the doctrinal principles of the Reformation were established.

- ***Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone)***. The Reformers affirmed a belief in the Scriptures as being without error. The Bible alone is the only source of written divine revelation. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for salvation from sin. The Bible alone is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured. While creeds and council and individual wisdom are important they may not bind a Christian's conscience. It was also affirmed that the Holy Spirit does not speak independently of or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible.
- ***Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)***. The Reformers believed that salvation is the rescue of a soul from God's wrath by His grace alone. Salvation is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who brings souls to Christ. It is the Spirit who releases the heart from its bondage to sin. It is the Spirit who brings forth a resurrection of the heart from spiritual death to spiritual life. Salvation is never to be considered to be a human work.
- ***Sola Fide (Faith Alone)*** The concept of being justified or declared righteous by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone was a vital truth to the Reformers. In justification the righteousness of Christ is credited to those who are the heirs of salvation.
- ***Solus Christus (Christ Alone)*** The Reformers affirmed that salvation is accomplished by the work of Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement are sufficient for the justification and reconciliation of individuals to the Father.
- ***Soli Deo Gloria (Glory Of God Alone)*** The Reformers affirmed that because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, the soul that is saved must live for His glory alone.

New Reformation Leaders

In the providence of the Lord, new Reformation leaders emerged to build upon the firm foundation of the Reformation principles. Theodore Beza and John Knox were among the most notable. Theodora Beza (1519-1605) was a French refugee who had left the Roman Catholic Church. This action caused his beloved father much distress. Gifted with a brilliant intellect, Beza embraced the Reformation teaching. Leaving France, Beza went to Geneva, Switzerland where he rose to leadership position. Over the years Beza did much to advance the Reformation cause. He succeeded Calvin as the Church leader at Geneva. While Calvin and Beza were advancing the Reformation principles in France, John Knox was making great progress in Scotland despite the opposition of Mary, Queen of the Scots. Mary was an ardent Catholic. Because Knox enjoyed a leadership position in the Church there was going to be tension between Church and State, for Knox made it known openly that he was determined not to obey Mary as queen until she left the Catholic Church. Mary called Knox into her presence and asked if he thought it right that subjects should disobey sovereigns? Did not the Bible teach, "*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God*" (Rom. 13:1). Knox replied that any higher power to be subject in as far as they rule righteously. In the absence of righteousness and justice, well, did not Daniel and the apostles refuse to obey?

In the end, the contest between Church and State grew bitter. War erupted between Protestants and Catholics. Mary lost her throne. The country became Presbyterian. Later, the son of Mary, King James I, was able to unite Scotland and England under his reign. Knox made the unity of the two nations possible by helping to bring Scotland to the Protestant faith.

Civil War and Church Conflicts

Religious bloodshed and violence broke out in France. Protestants were known to wear the ears of priests on strings like a collection of pearls. Catholics were known to have arrested Protestants from overcrowded prisons to drown them in the river. Calvinists destroyed Catholic Church buildings and smashed images and crucifixes. Catholics plotted and executed the massacre of the Huguenots (French Protestant Calvinists) on Saint Bartholomew's Day in 1572. As the hatreds and hostilities continued, as the nation was torn apart by religious wars, the idea arose that perhaps it would be better to have religious tolerance. Maybe Catholics and Protestants should be allowed to express their faith in one country. One person who accepted this concept was Henry, heir to the Kingdom of Navarre.

Henry of Navarre (1553-1610)

As a youth in a Catholic school, Henry had once been whipped every day for a month until he agreed to go to Mass. Henry initially refused going to Mass because he had been taught the Protestant faith by his Calvinistic mother. Following his school days Henry became a Protestant again and united with their military causes. He became a leader in the Protestant forces in the Wars of Religions and was able to win victory after victory against the Catholic forces. When his cousin Henry III died in 1589 Henry was the successor to the French throne. However, Pope Clement VIII (served, 1592-1605) refused to recognize him as king unless he joined the Catholic Church. Henry decided the country was worth a Mass. He embraced Roman Catholicism and in

1595 the people removed the ban of excommunication from Henry IV. Henry in turn granted freedom to the Huguenots in the Edict of Nantes (1598).

The Reformation Comes to England

The Protestant Reformation took root in England in large measure because the king wanted a male heir to the throne. Henry VIII (1491-1547; king, 1509-1547) was married to a Spanish princess, Catherine of Aragon who in turn was the aunt of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. Catherine was able to conceive several children but they all died with one exception, Princess Mary (1516-1558). Obsessed with the idea of having a male heir Henry asked Pope Clement VIII to grant a divorce so he could marry again.

To make the basis of the divorce appear legitimate in the eyes of the Church a flaw was found in the marriage. Originally Catherine, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, had been married to Henry's elder brother Arthur. Henry had always felt uneasy with this arrangement but had agreed to the marriage when he was eighteen. Now he wanted the marriage annulled. Pope Clement VIII might have granted the divorce if not for the influence of Charles V who did not want his aunt humiliated. Henry's Chancellor, Archbishop Thomas Wolsey of York (c. 1475-1530) could not convince the pope to grant the requested divorce. In anger Henry had him dismissed to die in disgrace.

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury suggested that the matter of Henry's divorce be submitted to the universities of England and the continent for a learned opinion. It was not long before a favorable opinion returned. Henry should have his divorce. But what about the Church? In all of this, Henry had been a devout Catholic. In 1521 he had written a tract, *The Assertion of the Seven Sacraments* to refute the teachings of Martin Luther. In appreciation Pope Leo X had awarded Henry with the title "*Defender of the Faith*". Henry would solve the problem of the Church by having parliament declare him to be head of the Church of England. It was done. Revenues to the papacy ceased, the marriage to Catherine was annulled, and the marriage to Anne Boleyn took place. She was already pregnant with a daughter, Elizabeth. The marriage did not last long. Anne was beheaded in 1536 on charges of adultery. Henry moved on to marry Jane Seymour who gave Henry the legitimate son he longed for, Edward VI, who died as a youth. Jane was accused of adultery and suffered the fate of Anne.

Henry next married Anne of Cleves only to divorce her in order to marry Catherine Howard whose head was cut off within a year on the charge of adultery. Finally, there was Catherine Parr who managed to outlive Henry. Having broken with the Roman Catholic Church officially, Henry turned a covetous eye on the wealth of the Church. In 1536 the confiscation of the lands and wealth began. All resources were taken over by the crown. The Protestants were delighted as might be expected with the suppression of the monasteries. They were even more satisfied when the publication of Tyndale's translation of the Bible was authorized. Thomas Cranmer pressed for a more Protestant form of Church liturgy and gave to the world *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Suddenly, however, Henry returned in his heart to the Catholic Church and published his Six Articles, which made belief in the Specific Roman Catholic doctrines mandatory. Those who had

embraced the Protestant doctrines had to submit, leave the country, or face the real possibility of being burned at the stake. Following Henry's death on January 28, 1547, his daughter "Bloody" Mary Tudor (1516-1558) would try to return England back to the Catholic faith.

It was a terrible time for the Protestants. The Church of England was instructed to use Latin and adhere to the Roman form of services. Protestant doctrine and worship was forbidden. Leading Protestants were tried as heretics. Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and John Hooper were found guilty of heresy and burned at the stake. Turning to speak, Cranmer uttered his last words: "*Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, and play the man, for we shall this day light such a candle in England as, I trust, by God's grace shall never be put out.*" By the mercy of God, Mary I died in AD 1558. A bloody reign of terror ended. Her half sister, Elizabeth I, succeeded her to the throne on Thursday, 17 November 1558, aged 25. A golden era for Protestants began. Tired of the religious conflicts Elizabeth I (1533-1603), though Protestant, created a climate that allowed worship by Catholics and Protestants. Blessed with a keen intellect and a wry sense of humor it is reported that the Good Queen Bess would not give her opinion of the Lord's Supper. She is said to have stated the following.

*"Christ was the word that spake it,
He took the bread and brake it,
And what His words do make it,
That I believe and take it."*

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 17

The Counter Reformation

In response to the Protestant Reformation the Roman Catholic Church began to reform itself reflected in the rise of new orders such as the Jesuits, the Capuchins, and the Daughters of Charity.

The Capuchin

The Capuchins were a new branch of the Franciscans established in 1528. Saint of Assisi (1182-4 Oct 1226) and Saint Clare of Assisi (1194-11 Aug 1253) founded the Franciscans. The Capuchins committed themselves to caring for the poor and sick while observing the vows of poverty. Their influence touched many countries including the United States. In 1725, the Capuchins established the first Catholic school in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana after the founding of the city in 1718 and the laying out of its streets in 1721.

The Jesuits

Of greater influence in reforming the Catholic Church and advancing its causes were the Jesuits, meaning the Order of Jesus. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), of Spanish nobility, founded this order. Loyola was a knight in the service of the queen of Spain against the French when he was wounded in battle. A canon ball took off his leg. Left in a pool of blood Loyola thought he was going to die. But the French nursed him back to health. While recuperating from his traumatic ordeal, Loyola decided he would become a knight for the queen of heaven. Humbling himself, Loyola went to school with children in order to learn how to teach. In time, with Church approval, he went from Spain to Paris where he gathered around him a group of students of his own. He was well received and his influence grew. A man of great vision, Loyola offered his services to the pope and suggested that he be allowed to establish a new order with three goals: to teach Roman Catholics the dogma of the church, to convert Protestants back to the Catholic faith, and to be missionaries to non-Christian communities world wide. The order was established and the work began. Intelligence and personal bravery characterized those who joined the new Jesuit order. Loyola himself was the perfect example as he went to the Portuguese capital in India. From there he went to Japan with a longing to enter China. A cunning attempt to be smuggled onto the mainland failed. Loyola died before his dream of bringing the gospel to China could be realized.

The Daughters of Charity

While the Catholic Church moved to reform itself, educate its people, and recapture what was lost, the poor and needy were not forgotten; reflected in the Daughters of Charity organized by Vincent de Paul. Born in France, in 1580 of a peasant family, Vincent died in Paris, 27 September, 1660.

After studying to become a priest Vincent was ordained in 1600. In 1605 some fantastic adventures began when he was captured at sea by Turkish pirates who killed the captain of the ship and enslaved the rest. Vincent was taken to Tunis. He was sold as a slave, but escaped in 1607 and was able to return to France. Gifted with the ability to teach children, Vincent was employed by rich families whom he managed to convince should use their wealth to help the poor. In addition to helping the poor, Vincent's heart was drawn towards the convicts made to serve in the galleys of the ships of France. Going to the galleys, Vincent saw horrible sights of convicts crowded together with chains on their legs made to row in damp conditions. Their only food being black bread and water. The prisoners were covered with vermin and ulcers. Their moral state was still more frightful than their physical misery. Vincent wanted to help. Assisted by a priest, he began visiting the galley convicts of Paris in order to speak kind words to them and to do them every manner of service however repulsive. In this manner Vincent was able to

win their hearts and see many come to faith. To care for the physical needs of the convicts a house was purchased where Vincent established a hospital. To help him in the hospital came women of nobility of soul who were ready to sacrifice themselves to help others. These were the Daughters of Charity (Love).

Results of the Counter-Reformation

One positive result of the Counter Reformation was a renewed effort to remember that the kingdom of God is not like the kingdoms of this world. To display this truth in a symbolic way the Church allowed itself to be divested of political authority. In 1870 Italy was made one nation and all power as a state was taken from the Church. There was one concession made to the Church. In 1929, it was decided that the pope would be permitted to be the ruler of a small piece of land in Rome called the Vatican City State. The purpose of this autonomy was to convey the spiritual concept that the leader of the Church should not have to live in the country of any earthly ruler because the Church represents the Heavenly Ruler of all men. It is a nice thought.

A Mixture of Religion and State

Despite the efforts of Queen Elizabeth to be tolerating in religion, the intrigues continued. The pope excommunicated the Queen and freed her Catholic subjects from obedience. Mary, Queen of Scots had to be held a political prisoner for she would not agree to stop trying to overthrow Elizabeth. The people of Britain were determined not to have “*popery*” in the land. During the reign of James I, the son of Mary, Queen of Scots, Scotland and England were united. Siding neither with the Catholics or the Presbyterians, James stood with the Church of England of which he was by law the head. This upset the Catholics to the point that a plot was made to blow him up, the Prince of Wales, and the House of Parliament. In 1605 a man was found in the in the cellar of the parliament with the 36 barrels of gunpowder when the authorities stormed it. His name was Guy Fawkes. Fawkes was caught, tortured and executed. The Gunpowder Plot was over. Nevertheless, to this day, on the night of November 5th, throughout Britain, bonfires are set alight, effigies are burned, and fireworks are set off. The people do this to commemorate their country's most notorious traitor.

Reformation within the Church of England

The Protestants who were unhappy with the religious policies of King James I took their anger out by making demands to reform or “purify” the Church of England. Specific objections were made against what were considered to be Catholic practices such as

- the use of a ring at weddings,
- kneeling to take communion,
- making the sign of the cross,
- the wearing of special clerical clothing,
- the placing of organs in church buildings,
- the placing of a cross on the steeple,

- and using the *Book of Common Prayer*.

When James I produced a *Book of Sports* for Sunday afternoon, and when the king and Parliament did not meet demands to reform the Church of England and make it less Catholic in form and function, factions were created to include the Non-conformists, Separatists, Dissenters, and Independents. The differences among the groups should be noted.

- **Non-conformist.** This term was used for those Puritans who would neither subscribe to nor separate themselves from the Church of England. It included both the Episcopalian and Presbyterian movements of the Puritan party. After the Reformation, when the Non-conformist were forced out of the established church and cast into dissent, the term took on a broad meaning for all dissenting Protestant groups.
- **Separatist.** This term is usually used to designate the English Independents or Congregationalist who wished to separate from the Church of England. This involved the loss of government financial support as well as freedom from state control. John Smith was the leader of a Separatist congregation that went to Holland in 1608. The practice of adult (or “believers” baptism) was adopted. Later, some of his followers returned to England and organized the first Baptist Church there.
- **Independents.** This term is more inclusive covering all those who desired each local church to be legally independent with no ecclesiastical authority higher than that of the local institution. As a result the **Separatists / Independents** must be distinguished from the **Non-Separatist Independents** who wished to remain within the established Church and in time achieve a state supported and state established Independency. The “*independence*” desired was freedom to find new forms of worshipping-less liturgical for example.

It was a group of Separatists who settled Plymouth Colony.

It was a group of Non-Separatist Independents who established the Massachusetts Bay Colony and Connecticut.

- **Dissenter.** This term came into usage after 1662 to replace “*Puritan*”, which had come into political disfavor in many sectors during the Protectorate (of Oliver Cromwell). The term included all Protestant groups dissenting from the Anglican Church, yet it was not quite equal to the term “*Puritan*” for it included the non-conformist Episcopalians who did not break away from the church. Today, historians use the term rather indiscriminately.

The Second Volume of the *Book of Sports*

Following in the footsteps of his father, Charles I (reigned, 1625-1649), the son of James I, outraged the Puritans not only by reprinting the *Book of Sports* but more so by marrying a Catholic French princess. Furious, renewed attacks were launched

- on the observance of Christmas (it disappeared among the Dissenters for almost 200 years),

- against the *Book of Common Prayer*,
- and on the dress of the clergy.

When Charles and Archbishop Laud reacted against the Dissenters by trying to enforce a code of outward uniformity on the Church by use of the *Book of Common Prayer* civil war broke out. The Scots united with the English Parliament against the king. Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) emerged as a leader of the rebellion against the crown. Through military victory he became Lord Protector of England all the while refusing to take the crown. During the days of Cromwell the Puritans enjoyed power. The use of the *Book of Common Prayer* was stopped, the *Book of Sports* was burned and the images of saints in stained glass windows were smashed. Tragically, the Catholics were persecuted in Ireland. The Westminster Assembly met to create the *Confession of Faith* and the *Westminster Catechism*.

In politics during the fifteen years in which Cromwell ruled, he drove pirates from the Mediterranean Sea, set English captives free, and subdued any threat from France, Spain and Italy. Cromwell made Great Britain a respected and feared power the world over. He maintained a large degree of tolerance for rival denominations though he stood for a national church, without bishops. The ministers of local assemblies might be Presbyterian, Independent or Baptist. Dissenters were allowed to meet in gathered churches and even Roman Catholics and Quakers were tolerated. Cromwell worked for reform of morals and the improvement of education. He strove constantly to make England a genuinely Christian nation and she enjoyed a brief "Golden Age" in her history.

The Movement Back to the Monarchy

The reign of Cromwell, with a heavy emphasis on righteousness influenced by the Puritans, grew wearisome to many Englishmen. Charles II (1630-1685) was restored to the throne following the death of Cromwell and the failure of his son Richard ("*Tumble-down Dick*") to rule. During the days of Charles the Non-conformist were persecuted. The reign of his Catholic brother James II was no better. James was immediately rejected by the Parliament who, in 1689, invited William and Mary of Holland to take the throne. An edict of toleration was granted to all religious bodies except the Catholics.

During this period more Dissenting groups emerged such as the Congregationalists, the Baptists, and the Quakers. Robert Browne (c. 1550-1633) was influential in helping to establish the Congregationalists. His followers were called Brownists. Influenced by the Puritans, persecuted for his beliefs, arrested over thirty times, Browne argued that the state did not have any authority over worship and discipline of the church. Ironically, in the end Browne returned to embrace the Anglican Church in 1585. In 1591 he accepted an Anglican parish to pastor.

The Power of the Pen

As the Congregationalist struggled to promote the concept that the Church should not be governed by bishops or by presbyteries, but by congregations, the Baptist emerged to advocate men should not be forced to worship contrary to conscience. One of the greatest champions of the

Baptist was John Bunyan (1628-1688). Converted to Christ while working in his tinker's shop, Bunyan began to preach the gospel despite his lack of formal training or ordination by the Church of England. The Church felt threatened at the concept of just anyone preaching and so passed laws prohibiting unlawful assemblies. When Bunyan continued to speak to gatherings he was arrested for civil disobedience. For twelve years Bunyan resisted being licensed by the state but in that time he was not idle. Despite wretched personal conditions Bunyan gave the world *The Pilgrim's Progress* which has blessed countless hearts for centuries around the world.

The Light Within

Though no friend of the Quakers, Bunyan lived alongside of another persecuted people, the Quakers. It was the expressed intent of George Fox to teach people a more simple way of living. One target for destruction was the days of the week. Not wanting to recognize false Roman gods such as Mars (March) and Saturn (Saturday), or the Norse god Woden (Wednesday) the Quakers began to speak of the First day, Second day, First Month, Second Month etc. They also adapted a "plain" speech that stressed equality. Whereas the term "you" was used to speak of people believed to be in a superior level of society while "thee" was used to speak of one's equal, the Quakers were determined to speak to every one the same believing that "*there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond [nor] free: but Christ [is] all, and in all*" (Col. 3:11).

There were other innovations. The Quakers would not allow the outward forms of the Church such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, pulpits, prayer books, robes, an ordained clergy and much more. Why? Because religion was a religion of the spirit and of the heart. Men and women should be able to speak what is on their heart in a formal worship setting. While the Quakers reacted against many Christian traditions and forms they did do positive things. They placed great stress upon personal accountability by teaching that every person has an Inner Life and Light to guide the heart. The place of women was elevated in their church and prison reform took place largely because of their efforts. And they seemed to be prophetic. Stern warnings were made of how God was going to judge England for her wickedness.

In September, 1666 there was a great fire in London. For four days and nights the city burned over an area two miles long and one mile wide. Thirteen thousand homes perished. The city was devastated including St. Paul's Church. Many recognized "*the heavy hand of God upon us for our sins, shewing us the terror of His Judgments in this raising the fire, and immediately after His miraculous and never to be acknowledged Mercy, in putting a stop to it when we were in the last despair, and that all attempts for quenching it however industriously pursued seemed insufficient*" (*The London Gazette, Sept 3 to Sept 10, 1666*). Out from under the rubble came a rebuilt city and the London Cathedral whose architect was Christopher Wren. Thirty-five years in the making, the great Cathedral emerged as a symbol of enduring faith even in the midst of tragedy and divine judgment.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 18

Darkness in the Age of Enlightenment

It is popular to speak of the eighteenth century as the beginning of an Age of Enlightenment. The concept is set forth that a moral, spiritual, and intellectual darkness had fallen upon Europe because of the teachings and superstitions of the Church. Finally people grew tired of the meaningless dogma and rituals without any corresponding reality not to mention the many religious wars. Men of enlightenment decided that all the teaching about hell and devils, warlocks and witches were simply myths designed to enslave the simple. The argument is made that the Church had grown too rich, too powerful, and too complicated. After all, who can understand the doctrine of the Trinity?

The Age of Enlightenment is credited with having unusual men suddenly illuminated by a new philosophy rise up to overthrow religion and replace it with “*science*” as if science and religion are not compatible. The reality is that all truth is God’s truth whether it is contained in the Scriptures or in any other area of life. For this reason the Bible warns God’s people to “*keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babbling, and oppositions of science falsely so called: 21 Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen*” (1 Tim. 6:20-21). What is often ignored, it seems, is that it was Christian men of science like Copernicus (1473-1543) who gave the world the discovery that the sun and not the earth is at the center of the heavenly bodies. It was a Christian scientist such as John Newton (1725-1807) that gave the world new discoveries about the law of gravity. Let us not talk about the cutting away of the superstitions of the Church by men of Enlightenment as if somehow they were above the thoughts of their day. It was because Newton believed God is a God of law, rule, and order that he pursued his studies to discover the laws that govern the universe. If anything, the humanists of the Enlightenment Age were ready to plunge the world into atheism and discredit the past. The historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) blamed the Church for the fall of the Roman Empire, but not on moral grounds. He also cast doubt on the reality of the historical Jesus. In a more open manner Thomas Paine (1737-1809) in his work *The Age of Reason* was hostile to the Church. No, it was not an Age of Enlightenment. It was merely another step in the movement of humanity towards the end of history, as we now know it.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 19

A River of Spiritual Renewal

As the Church looks back with a nostalgic eye upon her history, the last half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth centuries (c. 1750-1850) seem to be spiritually attractive. During this period God was pleased to visit His people in a wonderful way. A spirit of spiritual renewal was led by men diverse in theology yet united in love to Christ and His people.

The Wesley Brothers

Credited with founding the Methodist Movement John and Charles Wesley brought a methodical zeal of holiness to the Church of England. From their days as students in the Holy Club at Oxford

University the Wesley's moved up and down the land preaching Christ and winning souls to the Savior. Scorned and jeered, beaten and abused the gospel went forth to a nation that had grown hostile to the Church. Personal spiritual renewal came to John Wesley following the warming of his heart at a quarter to nine in the evening of May 24, 1738. John had been invited to a meeting of Moravians whom he had befriended while a missionary to the colony of Georgia. While that adventure proved to be a dismal failure sending John back to England, something good came out of the experience. During a storm on the voyage back home John was terrified of dying. Noticing the calmness of fellow Christian travelers John wanted to know more of the basis for such confidence. John wanted to know how to be regenerated as well as religious. A new birth came to John. Like Nicodemus, he became a twice born man. John would write of the new birth saying it, *"is the change wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God when the love of the world is changed into the love of God, pride into humility, passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice into sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind. In a word, it is that change whereby the earthly is turned into the mind, which was in Christ Jesus. This is the nature of the new birth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit."*

Through out England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland John traveled more than 225,000 miles. But John did more than just preach. He organized the people into small classes of twelve members, who met once a week to share their struggles and to study the Scriptures together. The movement grew. Pastors were needed to look after the sheep but the Church of England would not ordain any of the lay ministers Wesley suggested. As a result, Wesley appointed individuals to ordain others thereby establishing his own bishopric for the Methodist Church.

A Return to Rome

While the labors of John Wesley and his brother Charles, who taught people to sing new songs, were appreciated by the Church of England there was no desire for a movement to challenge its authority. If there were any abuses in the Church of England they could be addressed. But if those abuses were dealt with, why not the abuses in the Roman Catholic Church? Perhaps the Church of England could even return to the Roman Catholic Church so that there could be spiritual unity in the land. John Henry Newman became excited with the very thought of a return to Rome. If some did not want to go back to the Church of Rome, well, there could be an Anglo-Catholic Church.

Booth Battles for the Bodies of Men

While Wesley created a new movement and Newman tried to restore the old, William Booth emerged to establish the Salvation Army. Modeled along a military pattern with officers and enlisted soldiers for Christ, Booth longed to minister to the bodies of men as well as their souls. To that end he started soup kitchens and set up places for the poor to sleep. Young women who found themselves in trouble and who wanted to be rescued from a life of immorality were provided for. To rally his soldiers for the Savior's cause, Booth flew a red flag representing the blood of Christ. There was a border of blue on the flag for holiness, and a center of yellow for the fire of the Holy Spirit. Loud music was played to attract a crowd in the streets. His soldiers marched and played and sang and shouted and they won souls to the cause of Christ.

A Great Awakening

What Wesley and Booth did for England, men such as George Whitefield (1714-1770) and Jonathan Edwards did for America. A great spiritual awakening broke out in the Colonies. During his student days, Whitefield was a member of the Holy Club at Oxford where he met and ministered with John and Charles Wesley. Following his graduation Whitefield came to America where he was able to preach up and down the colonies. The Lord used him as a catalyst for revival. God granted Whitefield unusual oratory skills that impressed even Benjamin Franklin—much to his surprise. Before he knew what he was doing, Franklin, ever the skeptic, not only listened as Whitefield preached but reached into his pocket and gave him money for an orphanage in Georgia.

Jonathan Edwards

As God used George Whitefield to touch the emotions of men and women and young people, He used another man to touch their minds. His name was Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was not convinced that the doctrine of human ability in salvation was correct. To combat what was commonly called Arminianism, in 1734 he began to preach a series of sermons on “*Justification by Faith Alone*.” These sermons emphasized the Reformed doctrines that all men justly deserve divine judgment but may find mercy from the grace of God by faith alone.

What Edwards wanted to destroy was the false security that the Halfway Covenant gave to unconverted but baptized individuals. He also wanted to destroy the foundation that human merit and church membership would result in salvation. Visible results began to be seen by December of 1734 as God began to awaken individuals to the true status of their spiritual condition. Their situation was desperate. When the full moment of revival hit, like the day of Pentecost, the results were dramatic. God Himself stepped down from heaven. In the words of Edwards, there were many “*surprising and unexpected*” conversions. It started with the repentance of a young lady who was known to be frivolous in her ways.

Within six months, 300 of Northfield’s [Massachusetts] 1100 residents were converted. The converts ranged in age from 4 to 70. The revival began to spread to neighboring towns and other congregations. By March 1735, most of central Connecticut was in the throes of revival. The Spirit of God would prevail upon the people until 1837. Then, like the ebb and flow of the sea, the mighty presence of the Spirit subsided, though the effects of revival lingered on elsewhere. In the 1740’s there would be new waves of religious movements. One of the most dramatic manifestations of God breaking in upon a people took place on July 8, 1741 in a Congregational Church, Northampton, Massachusetts. It was on that day that Jonathan Edwards, as a guest speaker, preached the sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* and the Lord stepped down from heaven.

The Story of the Christian Church Simply Told

Chapter 20

Christ in the New World

By the time the great revivals broke out in the American colonies the Church was well established. For over a hundred years after the discovery of the New World, missionaries had been interested in converting the Indians. Catholic missionaries moved up and down north, central, and south America to spread the gospel. Not all efforts to minister to the native Americans were honorable. Tricks were used to enslave them. Professing Christians confiscated their wealth. Force was used to conquer. And yet much good was done and the religious impact was left in places such as Vera Paz, the Land of True Peace, in Guatemala. San Francisco, which is named after St. Francis, and Los Angeles, which means "*The Angels*", as well as Sacramento, which means "*Sacrament*", reflect this influence for good.

Then came the Europeans seeking a new life in a New World. But the historic faith of the Church was not left behind. The Episcopal Church settled in Virginia. Captain John Smith wrote of this Church and how it grew from a primitive gathering under an old sail stretched to shelter the worshippers from the sun to a better structure in AD 1610. George Washington belonged to the Episcopal Church.

- The Lutherans settled in Delaware though with much difficulty.
- Maryland was founded by Lord Baltimore who was committed to the Catholic faith.
- Meanwhile the Quakers found peace in the hills of Pennsylvania.
- In New Jersey and New York the Presbyterian Church took root.
- In Connecticut and Massachusetts the Congregationalists were established.
- The Baptist managed to establish a Church in Providence, Rhode Island in 1636 thanks to the labors of Roger Williams who was exiled from the Massachusetts colony in the middle of a harsh winter. Rhode Island was the first colony to draw a separation between Church and state. All could come to worship in Rhode Island as their conscience dictated without interference from the state.

Society and Religion

As the Churches in America have shaped education, tremendous good has been done concerning social problems such as slavery and drinking. To share the good news of the gospel around the world foreign missions have been started and supported. The story of David Livingstone in Africa, William Carey in India, Adoniram Judson in Burma, and Albert Schweitzer should become familiar to Christians in each generation. The Church really is the most glorious institution on planet earth. *“and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”* (Matthew 16:18).

Supplemental Material

Religious Sects

In the years to come America would be a religious safe haven for mainstream denominations and for new sects and even cults.

- Disciples of Christ
- Unitarians
- Mormons
- Seventh Day Adventists

The practice of free religion brought many practical results to America. Many institutes of higher education were established.

Congregationalist

- Harvard Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Yale New Haven, Connecticut
- Dartmouth Hanover, New Hampshire
- Smith College Northampton, Massachusetts
- Wellesley College Wellesley, Massachusetts

Methodist

- Duke Durham, North Carolina
- Emory Atlanta, Georgia
- Vanderbilt Nashville, Tennessee
- Wheaton Wheaton, Illinois
- Southern Methodist University Park, Texas

Lutheran

- Gettysburg Gettysburg, Pennsylvania
- Concordia Westchester, New York

Presbyterian

- Princeton Princeton, New Jersey
- Washington and Lee Lexington, Virginia

Episcopalians

- William and Mary Williamsburg, Virginia
- Columbia Borough of Manhattan in the City of New York

Baptist

- Vassar Poughkeepsie, New York,
- Brown Providence, Rhode Island

Catholics

- Fordham New York, New York
- Nortre Dame South Euclid, Ohio