

After the fall of Rome in 476 A.D., western Roman lands lived under fragmented leadership that fought for hundreds of years. Europe was under constant attack from the Visigoths, Franks, and later the Magyars and Vikings. These barbaric threats brought brutal people into some level of Christian understanding and practice. Eventually, large numbers of them were baptized as Christians, often under duress. The Roman Catholic Church was the most important influence in the lives of Western Europeans. The power to condemn or forgive sinners gave the church considerable power in society.

When Emperor Constantine established a new capital city in Byzantium in the year 330, it planted seeds of division between the Eastern and Western Roman Empires. The popes of Rome, held up as God's direct representatives on earth, often came into conflict with the Byzantine emperors of Constantinople, who also viewed themselves in a similar spiritual capacity. Both centers of Christianity, Rome and Constantinople, gradually drifted apart and led to the Great Schism of 1054. The cultural differences between the Latin West and the Greek East were substantial, but a formal division finally occurred when the two popes' representatives mutually excommunicated the others.

Meanwhile, the forces of Islam continued to make inroads into North Africa, the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, and most of Spain and threatened to dismantle the entire culture and religion of Europe, Africa and western Asia.

That is where we left off when we learned about the first 1000 years of Church history last December and where we will embark on our journey today.

This study is divided into 6 sections:

1054-1300: Papal Supremacy

1300-1500: The Dawn of New Thinking

1500-1650: The Age of Reformation

1650-1800: The Age of Expansion

1800-1900: Revivals and Missions

1914-Present: The Age of Ideologies

1054-1300 Papal Supremacy

Even after the division of the Eastern and Roman Churches, the Roman Pope was the default leader of the Church. So, when new Muslim leaders threatened the Holy Land, the Byzantine Emperor begged Pope Urban in Rome for help. The Pope wanted to heal the breach between the Eastern and Western Church and agreed to rally the troops. In 1095 AD, the Pope called for an expedition to free Jerusalem from the Muslim infidels. The launch, known as the Crusades, became the first of a 200-year effort to establish a Western Christian influence in the Middle East.

Thousands of people from all over Europe, and especially France, responded to the cause. In their zeal for adventure and devotion to the cause, the first Crusade drove the Muslims from Jerusalem and established a military power in the Middle East. Unfortunately, the Christian forces had not developed a long-term strategy for remaining in control of the land. The Muslims re-grouped to regain control of Jerusalem about 40 years later. The Pope called for a second Crusade, but it failed to recapture Jerusalem. With the third Crusade in the 1190's, Richard the Lion Heart, the king of England, finalized a treaty with the Muslim leader in which Jerusalem would remain under Muslim control; however, unarmed Christian pilgrims and merchants were allowed to visit the city. The failure to recapture Jerusalem led to the fourth Crusade in 1204.

At that time, a conflict between the European and Byzantium leaders led the Crusaders to declare war on Constantinople. They destroyed the city and brought shame to their cause. An embarrassed Pope Innocent III accused the leader of the campaign of 'turning away from the purity of his vow when he took up arms against his fellow Christians, preferring earthly wealth to celestial treasures.' Any hope of reunion between the Eastern and Western Churches was crushed. The spirit of the Crusades was lost. After two hundred years of fighting, Constantinople was in ruins, many Crusaders were enslaved, and the Holy Land was in Muslim control. Under threat of persecution, thousands of people transferred allegiance from the Jerusalem to Mecca.

While the Crusades were fought in the Middle East, power struggles between kings and clergy raged at home. The Pope tried to control the affairs of nations with church rules. Kings appointed clergy positions to family members and high bidders. Popes excommunicated kings and kings demanded that Popes step down from office. When King John of England had a disagreement with the pope, the church shut its doors to the people of England. This so devastated the people that they renounced their allegiance to their king until he signed the Magna Carta in 1215 AD. This document was the first of its kind in the history of the world, based on the equality of all men in the eyes of God. It reduced the power of the King of England and gave the people rights that the king could not take away, including the right to due process.

As the Crusaders returned home from their last battles in the late 1200's, they faced the challenges of neglected homes and families. Their own perspective on the world had changed after contact with new cultures, new tastes, Arabic science, literature, and religion. Increased taxes and the indulgence system had been put into place to pay for the wars, causing much resentment especially since Crusaders had put their livelihoods on hold to fight the Pope's battles. Faith in the authority of the Pope and the Church waned as their shortcomings came under scrutiny.

(An indulgence, according to the Roman Catholic Church, is a means of paying for the removal of the punishment for sins which have already been confessed and forgiven, but that have consequences in this life or in purgatory. In the Middle Ages,

Catholics could purchase indulgences and thereby pay to have their punishments removed for their sins or even for the sins of others in purgatory.)

Despite its failures, the Crusades did slow the advance of Islamic power in the East. Had they not been fought, Europe may have come under Muslim domination, and the world we know today would not exist. Instead, the Crusades set the stage for church reforms that were to come.

1300-1500: The Dawn of New Thinking

As kings and rulers jockeyed for power throughout Europe, the Roman Church constantly battled to maintain its power over national interests. People began to challenge the iron grip of control that the Church had over their lives. This was the era of the Spanish Inquisition and the Great Plague (or Black Death) that, in less than ten years, wiped out one third of the population, 25 million Europeans, from Iceland to India, including one-half of England. There was no understanding of the causes of illness, so many speculated that it was the wrath of God. The Church blamed the Jews and embarked on a 40-year Inquisition to exterminate the Jewish communities of France, Germany and England. Many of those communities disappeared under the pressure to convert or be burned to death.

It took over one hundred years for the population to recover from the loss of life during the Great Plague. During this time, however, seeds of reform were planted in the Church.

- John Wycliffe helped to transform Oxford into the spiritual center of England, especially after overseeing the translation of the Bible into English in 1382. Although his work was condemned by the Roman Catholic Church, people hungry for new insight and truth, devoured the new Bible translations as they spread rapidly throughout Europe.
- Jan Hus, a Catholic priest in the early 1400's, followed the writings of Wycliffe and began preaching in Prague against the Roman Catholic Church's practices of Latin liturgy, indulgences and purgatory. He was burned at the stake for his faith, but his church later became the popular Moravian Church.
- Jerome Savonarola, an Italian priest was persecuted for publicly denouncing Church and state corruption in the late 1400's.
- In 1440, German inventor Johannes Gutenberg invented a printing press process that allowed for the first time the mass production of printed books, the most popular of which was the Bible first printed in 1456. Demand for Bibles spread like brushfire through Europe. By 1499 print-houses had become established in more than 2500 cities in Europe.
- Astronomer Nicolas Copernicus identified the concept of a heliocentric solar system, in which the sun, rather than the earth, is the center of the solar system.

Publishing in 1543, his ideas were bitterly opposed by the religious authorities of his time, but his views were confirmed by most astronomers within 200 years.

Meanwhile, the events that were taking place in the Middle East began to have an important impact on the European countries attempting to reform their faith as well as their population. The Muslim Ottomans had come to power in Eastern Europe and were quickly taking over Orthodox lands in Asia Minor, Greece, the Middle East and Africa. The church leaders in Constantinople, once again, called for assistance from the Roman church. However, the Roman church, weakened from the economic losses of the plague, was unable to provide the assistance needed.

Finally, the Ottomans laid siege and conquered Constantinople in 1453, marking the end of Orthodox Church rule. Christians and Jews were relegated to second class citizenship if they did not convert to Islam. For the next four hundred years, the Orthodox Church was confined within a hostile Islamic world and, as a result, was never exposed to the Reformation that would take place in Europe.

1500-1650: The Age of Reformation

The spirit of the Renaissance soon inspired reforms in learning, science, politics, literature, art, music and social life throughout the Middle East and Europe. A new philosophy of humanism spread from scholars to the common people. Humanists saw people not as condemned sinners whose destiny was to suffer on earth as preparation for heaven, but rather as future saints who could enjoy life while here on earth. Human dignity and human rights were for everyone instead of just the nobility and clergy.

Humanist ideals began to pervade religious art, music, and literature. The religious art of Leonardo di Vinci, Albrecht Durer, and Michelangelo dominated the culture. Exploration to establish new trade routes and spread Christianity inspired new developments in navigation. Portugal's Prince Henry sent out expeditions to discover a new trade route to the East.

The reforms in the Church, however, were the ones that affected the eternal destiny of much of the world. In 1516, the Dutch scholar Erasmus oversaw a translation of the New Testament into a readable form of Greek and Latin, which inspired many others, not only to read it, but to translate it into other languages. Having the Bible in the language of the people made people aware for the first time of the truth of their faith, and of Church tradition and practices that were unbiblical. By the time Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church in Germany in 1517, the people were open to changes.

Protestant Reforms

In 1519 Luther denied papal primacy and the infallibility of church councils. By 1520 he opposed clergy celibacy and advocated that baptism and communion are the only two sacraments of the church. He opposed the division between clergy and laity; advocated the freedom of the believer from doing works to receive righteousness; emphasized the sufficiency and authority of the Scriptures; and taught that salvation came through faith alone.

People throughout Germany, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Austria, and England wanted reforms within the Church, but intense opposition from bishops and popes caused them instead, to break away and establish separate regional churches. The Swiss reformers Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin went even further in their reforms, condemning the practices of praying to dead saints for help, church teachings about purgatory and the use of images. They were strong advocates of lay participation in the church. The numbers of new groups grew as Luther translated the Scriptures into German and Tyndale translated them into English in the 1520's.

The Reformers became known as Protestants. Reform spread to Western Europe. In 1534, King Henry VIII had his marriage annulled and declared himself the head of the Anglican Church in England. Later, when denominational divisions threatened unity in England, King James I had the King James Bible published in 1611, which continues to be used today. Ironically, the translation used about 70% of William Tyndale's work for which he had been executed 70 years earlier.

Over one-third of the population of Europe embraced a Protestant faith. As the Protestant Reformation spread throughout Europe, the Catholic Church launched its own Counter Reformation in the mid-1500's with the Council of Trent. It upheld traditional Catholic belief and rejected all Protestant changes in the church, except the sale of indulgences, one of the most contentious issues. The Council also established new religious orders, among them the Jesuits, to spread and establish the Catholic Church in the New World, Africa, and Asia. This Counter Reformation was successful in reconverting many in Northern Europe back to Catholicism, but it also led to several religious inquisitions which persecuted and tortured Protestants.

Colonization in the World

The religious persecutions in Europe of the Spanish, French, and English sent waves of colonists to the New World who chose to relocate to for religious freedom. While the Spanish set up Catholic missions in New Spain and the French in New France, the Anglicans set up parishes in the English colonies in Virginia, naming their first colony Jamestown in 1607. (The building they built in the 1640's can still be seen there today.)

In 1620, Pilgrims from Plymouth England sailed on the Mayflower and landed at Cape Cod. Before going ashore, they signed the famous Mayflower Compact, a church covenant in which they agreed to submit to the authority of God, their future laws, their elected leadership in the colony, and the King of England. Their goal was "a great hope and inward zeal for the propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world." For the next fifty years, the Mayflower Compact kept the Pilgrim community from anarchy, and it became an important precedent for the idea of a written American Constitution at the Convention of 1787. It's ironic that the character of American government was established by those who were originally criminals and exiles from their native countries.

1650-1800: The Age of Expansion

Since there was no state religion, religious practice in the colonies became diverse. Waves of European immigrants established Anglicanism, the Baptist Church, Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, Lutheranism, Quakerism, the Dutch Reformed, Mennonite and Moravian Church in the American colonies. Persecuted Catholics established Maryland. Both Protestants and Catholics hoped this new land would serve as a "redeemer nation."

As African slaves were imported in increasing numbers to the American colonies during the 18th century, Baptist and Methodist missionaries introduced Christianity to the slave population. Although the churches were controlled by the slaveholders, there arose an indigenous Christianity created and controlled by the slaves. This slave religion wove Christian language and beliefs into African culture and their experience of slavery.

The Great Awakening

The desire for authentic personal piety opened the way for the First Great Awakening, a Protestant revival movement that took place within the Church in the 1730's and 1740's. The movement began with Jonathan Edwards, a Massachusetts preacher who emphasized itinerant preaching to backcountry areas and slave communities to bring people to a Biblical faith. British preacher George Whitefield and others continued the movement, traveling across England and the colonies with such effective outdoor preaching that religious fervor in the colonies increased significantly. The spirit of revival affected John and Charles Wesley who started the Methodist movement in England and sent missionaries to America to spread their faith. Many Protestant denominations set up Sunday school programs to train a new generation of Christian leaders.

Shortly after this, an intellectual and cultural movement spanning roughly from 1685 to 1815, emerged from Europe and dramatically reshaped global politics, philosophy, and science. It challenged absolute monarchies and religious dogmas, laying the foundational concepts for modern western democracies. Known both as the Age of Reason and The Enlightenment, people began to question Biblical explanations and defer to scientific explanations regarding the universe. Scholars began to subject the Bible to historical and rational scrutiny rather than accepting it as literal or divine truth without question.

Having witnessed and being devastated in the wars of religious intolerance between Catholics and Protestants, Enlightenment thinkers argued for the separation of church and state and the freedom to practice one's faith without state interference. This influence on Christianity has lasted until today. The ideas of the Enlightenment directly fueled major global upheavals, including the American Revolution coming in 1776 and the French Revolution soon after in 1789.

The American Revolution

The American Revolution in the late 1700's was a time of great testing for the American Churches. The Revolution split some denominations, especially the Church of England, whose ministers supported the king. After the war was over, the Anglicans reorganized and became the Protestant Episcopal Church. After the American Revolution, one of the most contentious issues was whether the new government would support the church financially, and if so, which denominations? Jefferson summed up the First Amendment's original intent, which he claimed was to establish a "wall of separation between church and state." Largely unknown in its day, this phrase has since become an example for the world to allow religious freedom for all people.

The success of the American Revolution reverberated throughout Europe at the end of the 1700's. Everyone wanted the freedoms of life, liberty, and religion. Enlightenment thinkers of their day appreciated the value of religion in promoting moral and social order, but they no longer wanted the Church ruling over them. One of the idealistic hopes of the Enlightenment was that man would finally be free from God and the various biblical, pre-Enlightenment ideas that held man captive. In 1789, the French Revolution divided Catholics and Protestants since the Catholic Church did not support constitutional freedoms that the people now demanded. When the French Revolution finally ended, France broke its ties to the Catholic Church and adopted a secular public sector.

The Age of Expansion was so titled because the Protestant Church expanded far beyond its original borders to the New World. However, it also signified the expansion of man's thinking. The power of man to reason for himself, discover scientific ideas, develop artistic skills, rebel against the Church, and the established forms of

government, now began to challenge the sovereignty of God and the need for His authority. Time was ripe for a new revival; and it came in the 1800's.

1800-1900: Revivals and Missions

Second Great Awakening

While the First Great Awakening of the early 1700's revived the spirituality of established congregations, the Second Great Awakening that began in the late 1700's focused on the personal salvation of unchurched people. Charles Finney was a Methodist revivalist whose work began in New York and quickly spread throughout Kentucky, Tennessee, and southern Ohio. The Methodists had an efficient organization that depended on itinerant ministers, known as circuit riders, who sought out people in remote frontier locations where they held revival camp meetings. Singing, praying out loud, with women sometimes leading (a new "first"!) and preaching were the main activities for several days, in addition to the newly established "altar call" where those becoming Christians could receive prayer. These revivals placed greater emphasis on the free will of the people in receiving salvation, and it included greater public roles for women and the Black community.

Slaves in the Church

In the Southern states, increasing numbers of slaves converted to evangelical Methodist and Baptist faiths. Many clergy within these denominations actively promoted the idea that all Christians were equal in the sight of God, a message that provided hope and sustenance to the slaves and prepared the way for the abolition movement. After the slave trade was abolished in England in 1807 and in the U.S. in 1810, the native-born slave population developed a unique worship style encouraged by the revival movements. The pews in the back corners of churches became a segregated meeting section for African American worshipers. But when the White Church did not embrace them as equals in their congregations, the Christian slaves eventually formed their own congregations where they could worship more freely and express their hopes and their passion for freedom.

Although many slaveholders were Christian, important opponents of slavery were also Christian. The issue of slavery was a cause for several church divisions:

- When the Methodists formed the Wesleyan Methodist Church in protest of slavery in 1841, the southern Methodists withdrew to form the Southern Methodist Church in support of slavery.
- Baptists formed the American Baptist Anti-Slavery Society in 1840, and southern Baptists withdrew to form the Southern Baptist Convention.

- Presbyterian synods agreed that slavery should end and worked to influence the government in that position.

The Civil War

While theologians debated the scriptural justifications for or against slavery, the United States violently divided in the Civil War. Union and Confederate clergy both called upon God to aid their respective causes. Military camps hosted revival meetings, and soldiers sometimes marched into battle singing hymns. Supporters of the Confederacy and Union, including President Abraham Lincoln, framed the war as a time of testing. For many northerners, victory in 1865 proved that the test had been passed and that God truly blessed America and its mission in the world.

After the war, black and white leaders of Presbyterian, Congregational, and Episcopal churches from the North sponsored missions, opened schools for freed slaves, and aided the general welfare of southern Blacks. This resulted in the dynamic growth of independent Black churches in the Southern states between 1865 and 1900.

Overseas Missionaries

While Catholics had been intentional about missionary work since the Counter Reformation, the Second Great Awakening saw the beginning of Protestant missionary activity into areas where colonial expansion was taking place. Christians were divided over colonialism. While many European Christians believed in the civilizing mission of their cultures, others were uncomfortable with the injustices that accompanied the establishment and maintenance of colonies in India, Africa and Asia.

Nevertheless, the 1800's became known as "The Great Century" of modern religious missions following the work of Englishman William Carey in India. Despite much opposition, Carey laid an impressive foundation of Bible translations, education, and social reform in India which became a model for all missionary activity coming from developed countries. Organizations such as the British and Foreign Bible Society, the American Bible Society, and the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions were established to spread the Gospel. They supported thousands of missionaries who left Europe and the United States to work in China, India, and Africa. Hudson Taylor in China and David Livingstone in Africa were among many who left lasting legacies in missionary activity to develop independent, self- governing, self-supporting, self-propagating churches.

Social Gospel Groups

During the 1800's missionaries were also active on the home front with the rise of the social gospel approach to problems in the community. Millions of poor Catholic and

Jewish immigrants began to arrive from eastern and southern Europe. The Protestant Church began several programs that reached out to help combat the social problems that developed during this time.

- George Williams in London, a farmer-turned-department store worker, helped organize the first Young Men's Christian Association, (YMCA) in 1844. Years later, a marine missionary, Thomas Sullivan noticed a similar need in Boston and formed the first YMCA in Boston in 1851. Dwight Moody's early work involved the YMCA in Chicago.
- William Booth's Salvation Army was founded in England in 1865 and was sent overseas to South Africa, Australia and the United States.
- His son, Ballington founded the Volunteers of America in 1896.

These groups tied the gospel with meeting the needs of people to deal with abolition, temperance, women's rights, and prisoners in a manner that had not been seen in the church since the first century.

Railroad Chapels

Out in the Wild West of the United States, towns sprouted overnight and were sometimes abandoned just as quickly. Most frontier migrants were rugged and unchurched. To meet this challenge, Episcopal Bishop William D. Walker raised funds to outfit railroad cars as mobile chapels, pulling them over 70,000 miles during the 1890s.

Soon, Baptists and Catholics outfitted their own specialized cars to join the outreach in remote areas lacking permanent churches. Although many locals initially visited these "Chapel Cars" out of curiosity or boredom, many ultimately embraced the Christian faith, helping to establish permanent roots in the developing West.

Liberal Thought

Throughout the social turmoil of the 19th century, Christianity faced unprecedented intellectual challenges. The publication of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in 1859 undermined the traditional Genesis account of creation. Concurrently, the rise of modern science raised doubts about biblical miracles, suggesting for the first time to a wider audience that Scripture might not be the literal Word of God. Theological liberals adapted by viewing the Bible as a valuable, though not necessarily infallible, historical and spiritual book. They shifted focus toward Jesus' humanity and moral example, aspiring to build the Kingdom of God on earth through social progress. All of changes in the 1800's laid the groundwork for the next waves of change in our look at Church history.

1900-present: The Age of Ideologies

The most prominent feature of the 1900's was the dizzying variety of different ways to practice, teach, and communicate Christianity. The inventions of the telephone, automobile, airplane, radio, television, movies, the internet and artificial intelligence have forever changed the way the Gospel is spread.

During the 20th century, Christians were on all sides of major world conflicts: two world wars, the rise of Nazism, military conflicts in Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Latin America and the Middle East, isolationism, and the use of nuclear bombs. Marxist governments enforced atheism in China, Cuba, and areas where the Eastern Churches once thrived. Islam as a theocracy has targeted religious freedom in ways unseen since the Crusades. Immigration threatens national sovereignty in many nations including our own. Israel's status as an independent nation has become a ticking time bomb.

In this final look at Church history, we will trace several movements and show how they have affected the Church. That is why this last section is 'The Age of Ideologies.'

An *ideology* is a set of conscious and unconscious ideas that constitute one's goals, expectations, and actions. It gives you a comprehensive vision and world view for much of your thinking. Creationism is one example of an ideology that affects your world view. The problem with ideology is that it often begins with a sound premise and then, over time, evolves into something completely different. For example, respecting the absolute authority of your national leader is a worthy ideal, as it may have been in England during the time of King Henry VIII, until he told his minions to cut off the head of his first wife so that he could marry another.

There are many ideologies or movements that began in the early 1900's that have greatly affected the Church today, but ones that we will look at today are Pentecostalism, Ecumenism, Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, and Liberation Theology. Each of these brings a different understanding to Christianity in the world today.

Pentecostalism

Christians in the early 1900's experienced, once again, an unusual spiritual awakening. In 1901, modern Pentecostalism exploded at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, spreading rapidly through the student body. Soon there were spirited stirrings at California's Azusa Street Mission and from there across America. In these early years, zeal sometimes outstripped propriety. Many began trusting inner guidance rather than the words of Scripture. Pentecostal groups began to teach that the only evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was speaking in tongues. This revival led to the founding of the Assemblies of God in the United States in 1914.

Pentecostalism has changed the face of Christianity, bringing to the forefront the gifts of the Holy Spirit and teachings about the active work of God in healing, prophecy, and other spiritual gifts. In the 1960's, Pentecostalism crossed into several denominational lines as the charismatic renewal movement began to bring a sense of excitement *to* and unity *between* churches. As the charismatic movement spread across the world, internal theological battles gave rise to church splits and non-denominational congregations which emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in the world today. These non-denominational groups laid the groundwork for the Jesus Movement in the 1960's and 1970's that brought many young people to Christ and changed the mainline denominations forever.

Fundamentalism

The intellectual ideas of the late 1800's regarding inerrancy of the Bible, the origin of species, and changing morality became mainstream after World War I. The enlightened ideas of humanism infiltrated academia and evolved into atheism and communism. The introduction of the theory of evolution to school curricula in the early 1900's was a threat to the authority of the Bible. Liberal wings of denominations were on the rise, and many seminaries taught from a liberal perspective as well.

In 1909, there was heated debate in the New York Presbytery about whether to ordain three men who refused to assent to the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus. Theological conservatives responded in 1910 by issuing five propositions that became known as the "Five Fundamentals." Those who agreed to hold to them became known as Fundamentalists.

Those five fundamental doctrines deemed as "necessary and essential" to the Christian faith were:

- The inerrancy of Scripture.
- The virgin birth of Christ.
- Christ's death as atonement for sin.
- The bodily resurrection of Christ
- The historical reality of Christ's miracles

Fundamentalism was adopted in many Protestant communities by 1920. The 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial brought national attention to Fundamentalism as a world view. The pulpit-pounding fundamentalist country preacher became a caricature on the American scene.

The stereotype gradually shifted when Billy Graham came on the scene in 1948. His style of preaching popularized evangelicalism, a more moderate view of fundamentalism. The fundamental ties that bind Evangelicals today are still apparent:

the authority of Scripture, belief in the Deity of Christ, the Trinity, salvation by grace through faith, and the bodily resurrection of Christ.

Evangelicalism

The 1950's saw a boom in the Evangelical church in America. Church buildings were erected in large numbers, and the Evangelical church's activities grew along with this expansive physical growth. The rise in the evangelical wing of Protestant denominations and non-denominational churches has corresponded with a decline in the mainstream liberal churches.

Some of the trends that have resulted from the rise of evangelicalism are:

- Dramatic changes in worship styles and music which has become nearly universal.
- The influence of Christian music and media which has by-passed the Church to reach every corner of the world.
- The rise of the mega and multi-site churches.
- The hunger for Biblical truth, resulting in an explosion of Bible studies and new translation methods, has put the Bible into the languages which can reach 95% of mankind

Ecumenism

Ecumenism is the desire for Church unity, and it dates to the first Jerusalem council in Acts chapter 15 where the apostles met to decide the issue of circumcision of the Gentile believers. The First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325 was called by Constantine to decide on the divinity of Christ, among other issues. Since then, hundreds of Councils have determined the direction, both right and wrong, for the Church. The 20th century modern ecumenical movement was launched in 1910 at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference. The rise of nationalism in the Third World provoked criticism that missionaries were teaching only Western ways and ignoring the indigenous culture. The 1910 conference developed new strategies to help nationals reach their own people, a strategic change in the approach to missions that continues today.

The goal of unity among church denominations has led to several international church councils. The British Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S. were formed so that various Protestant groups could work together on issues of common interest. The World Council of Churches was founded in 1948 and since then, Ecumenism has watered down Christian theology in exchange for cooperation among all religions, and especially regarding efforts to include Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus. Have you ever seen those "Coexist" bumper stickers on cars? That's what ecumenism is all about.

Liberation Theology

Liberation theology arose early in the 1900's as a Christian response to poverty and the suffering of people at home and abroad. It began when The Methodists decided to call attention to the plight of industrial workers in 1908 and it spread to helping migrant farm workers. Christian groups soon fought for child labor laws, establishment of labor unions, equal rights for women, and grape and lettuce boycotts, calling for all people to stand with Jesus on the side of the poor and the oppressed. After World War I, liberal theology became a dominant theme in the American church and continued to fight for social causes in the U.S. and in Latin America.

The post-World War II era saw the explosion of Liberation Theology which extended to feminist liberation theology, African liberation theology, and immigration theology and many other controversial issues. What began as liberation theology has become the cultural progressive causes of today: abortion, euthanasia, homosexual and trans-sexual lifestyles which have disregarded or distorted Biblical truth to accommodate cultural norms and political agendas.

Since the 1960's, liberation theology has evolved into post-modernism. Postmodernism includes the idea that truth cannot be known for certain, that there is a plurality of acceptable ideas, and tolerance for all of them.

This is very different from Christianity where Jesus claimed that the only way to be saved is through Him. Today, post modernism has become known as Critical Theory, which completely denies God and the authority of Scripture. It has become pervasive in Western culture. According to proponents of Critical Theory, Christianity fosters unsafe ideologies and institutions which engage in anti-scientific thought, intolerance for certain sexual behaviors, patriarchy, and a punishing authoritarianism for any who do not conform to their values. It has become increasingly obvious where Critical Theology has led; the Church struggles with conflicting views on immigration, the ordination of women, the ordination of homosexuals, environmental protection, animal rights, climate change, and gender equality in all its perverted forms. When the Church is extensively infiltrated by distinctively secular ideas, the salt and light that seasons the culture becomes ineffective in maintaining the boundaries of wickedness, violence and corruption.

That is what we are seeing across the world today. In addition, the increasing use of AI (artificial intelligence) is controversial. New research from Barna finds that the Christians most open to AI are often the same ones most unsettled by it. About 25% of adults consider AI's spiritual guidance as trustworthy as a pastor's. And pastors themselves face pressure to use AI for sermon preparation and counseling questions. This requires much prayer for discernment as the technology becomes more widespread.

Where the Church is today

The typical Christians today do not live in the United States. Rather they live in a developing country, speak a non-European language, and exist under the constant threat of persecution. Historical records indicate that from AD 33 to 1900, approximately 14 million Christians were martyred for their faith. This toll escalated dramatically in the 20th century, which saw more than 26 million documented cases of Christian martyrdom—surpassing all previous centuries combined.

Today, an estimated 388 million Christians endure severe discrimination and intense persecution globally. Thousands are killed for their faith each year, with the highest concentration of violence and hostility occurring in nations such as Nigeria, South Sudan, North Korea, China, India, Pakistan, and across the Middle East.

Throughout the world, the rising tide of Islam overwhelms political efforts at fairness, tolerance, and due process. Here in the United States, freedom of religion has led to the Islamization of many communities. Their stated goal is to take over Western cultures by infiltrating government leadership to establish Sharia law throughout the world. Islamification is the main cause of today's Christian martyrdom.

Despite these challenges, the Church continues to grow, living out the ancient truth that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global life, its spiritual aftermath is complex. Long-term indicators of Christian growth—such as consistent church attendance, the prioritization of faith in daily life, and active evangelistic engagement—have not yet fully rebounded. However, the crisis also created a unique global space for existential questions, driving a renewed pursuit of meaning worldwide.

This has led to some of the trends that give us optimism today.

- Visions and dreams among Muslims leading individuals to Christ give rise to unique underground and insider faith communities
- Rebirth of Orthodox churches in the Middle East and Eastern Europe
- The growing Christian population in Israel (34,000 in 1948 to over 180,000 today)
- The Church recognizing their responsibility to fight against corruption and immorality in today's culture
- A historic demographic shift: for the first time in decades, younger adults who identify as Christian are showing remarkably high levels of spiritual commitment, Bible reading, and consistent attendance compared to previous youth generations at their age. Within this younger demographic is also a divide, with many simultaneously flocking to both highly traditional liturgical practices in the Catholic and Orthodox churches, or to the booming contemporary mega churches.

Church history over the last millennium provides a profound roadmap of how believers before us navigated trials, suffering, and deeply confusing cultural eras. In their stories, we discover how Christians responded when their faith was criminalized;

how they engaged the political spheres of their day; and how they actively shaped their cities, families, and literary culture. Ultimately, their legacies offer us a clear window into a practical, resilient faith that remains deeply meaningful across all cultures today.

The mission of the Church is not yet fully accomplished, but global movements remind us that spiritual hunger remains deeply resilient. By fully engaging in the study of the Word of God—as we have been doing in *People of the Word*—you become a discerning Christian equipped to stand firm against prevailing cultural shifts that threaten to erode civilization. We know how history will end. This overarching story gives us unwavering confidence that, despite every effort of the enemy, the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!