

Life Notes

THE HISTORY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH PART 2 Key Moments and Personalities

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#23. The Flow of Christianity

In Part One of our studies in church history, our approach was a broad sweep of events century by century. In Part Two, we will go into a little more detail, but we will do so by taking a step back and evaluating the seven eras of Christianity to date.

Our approach will be to describe the key trends and events within each era, also to introduce some key personalities who helped shape the Church in that day. The dates are approximate, since periods overlap.

Remember that our purpose is not detail, but an overview.

Here are the seven eras I would like to address:

1. The Birth and early years of Christianity (6 BC - 70 AD)

In this era the ministry of Jesus formed the foundation for the Church. It originated with Him, and to Him the Church owes its existence and survivability. He appointed the Twelve, known as Apostles ("sent ones") to begin world-wide evangelization. Though technically the age of the original apostles lasted until the death of John in the mid-nineties, most of the original apostles were dead years earlier, all of them suffering martyrdom. Another reason to end this period at 70 AD is because of the destruction of Jerusalem and The Temple. This was a clear break in the story of the church becoming more Gentile and less Jewish.

2. The Age of Christian Unity (70-312)

In this second era, the church advanced throughout the world, but more or less retained a sense of oneness and commonality. This is where the idea of "catholic" emerged. The word implied universal and united, and the Church was highly successful in the face of persecution and social unrest. In many ways, the Roman Empire was at its best for a few decades.

3. The Holy Roman Empire (312-590)

In this era Christianity became tolerated, and eventually favored throughout the Roman Empire. Though the Empire would begin to disintegrate due to the Barbarian infiltration, the Church continued to grow and the Roman world would eventually be influenced and sometimes ruled by the leaders of Christianity.

4. The Church in the Middle Ages (590-1517)

In the throes of the decline and fall of Rome, the Church stepped up and filled many societal vacancies. There were noble moments, as well as episodes that brought shame on the Church. Though superstition and trouble made these years difficult, they were not as "dark" as some historians would have us believe.

5. The Reformation (1517-1648)

Much of what we recognize as Christianity today was recovered during this time. Though the movement was not perfect, it did return many in the Church to confidence in Scripture and access to God that had been marginalized for centuries. Salvation "by grace through faith" is the significant emphasis of the Reformation.

6. The Church in the Age of Reason (1648-1789)

Much of the western world rebelled against Christianity during the era of The Renaissance and The Enlightenment. In earlier days, scholasticism and mysticism were seen as two sides of the same coin, but in this era, faith and logic were seen by some as mutually exclusive.

7. The Age of Modern Christianity (1789-Present Day)

In a more detailed study, students would find this era would likely be divided into at least four sub-units, but events of the past two and a half centuries have brought the Church to another type of universal commonality. In this chapter we will look at where we are, and consider our options as we continue our mission.