

**Leader's Guide for
INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY**

The Story Begins, Part One

Discussion Questions

- Why is it important to understand the history of the Jewish people in order to understand the history of Christianity?
- Why do you think the message of Jesus was appealing to the people of his day? Why is it appealing to you?
- Jesus' message was ultimately rejected. Why?
- There is much controversy today about the political implications of Jesus' ministry. Do you think Jesus was revolutionary? If he was, what implications does that have?
- After the "defeat" of Jesus on the cross, the followers proclaimed "victory" due to their experience of the Resurrection. What do you think that experience may have been like?
- We say the Church was "born" on Pentecost. Why? Why don't we place the "birth" of the Church within the ministry of Jesus?
- What were the key differences between the "Jewish Christians" and the Hellenists? How did this affect the early Church?
- Describe the personality of Paul. Why do you think he had such an impact?
- The Council of Jerusalem settled the first controversy among Christians. Could this example from history help us in resolving some of our controversies now? How?

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The Story Begins, Part Two

Discussion Questions

- How would you characterize Paul's preaching?
- Why was Paul's outreach to the gentiles considered so "radical"?
- What do you think the community at Corinth was like? Would you feel comfortable in such a community?
- Before the Gospels were written, stories of Jesus were passed down by oral tradition. Does your family have stories that are passed down orally from generation to generation? What does that experience tell you about the oral tradition of the Christian community and the writing of the Gospels?
- Each of the four Gospels has a different emphasis. Which is your favorite Gospel?
- This video provided several reasons for the rapid spread of Christianity. Which do you consider the most important?
- In the early days of Christianity, conversion demanded a radical break from one's past. Has that been true in your life?
- If you could use just one or two words to describe the first one hundred years of Christianity, what would they be?

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Persecution and Social Acceptance, Part One

Discussion Questions

- What did you learn in this video about the persecution of Christians?
- Why were the Christians persecuted? How is this different from the persecution of Christians today?
- What does it mean to say “the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church”? Is that still true today? (Think beyond only physical martyrdom.)
- The early Church experienced numerous controversies. Does that surprise you? Does that help to give perspective on controversies in the Church today?
- Numerous Christian leaders were mentioned in this video. Who is your favorite or the one you would like to learn more about?
- Gnosticism was attractive to many in this era. Do we have anything similar to Gnosticism today?
- Numerous Christian symbols were seen in this video. Which ones are important to you?
- For many years Christian communities were small and met in homes. Is this type of Church attractive to you? What are the positives and negatives of a small Church.... of a large Church?

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Persecution and Social Acceptance, Part Two

Discussion Questions

- When Christianity gained social acceptance under Constantine, how did it change? In your opinion, were these changes helpful or harmful for the living out of the gospel?
- What do you think Christianity would be like today if it had not gained acceptance under Constantine?
- Do you see any similarities between being a Christian today and during the pre-Constantine era?
- Christianity was faced with profound theological questions in this era. How are these questions still asked in our time?
- Several “councils” of the Church were mentioned in this video. In your opinion, which one still has the most impact today? Why?
- How is the language used in these council statements about the person of Jesus and the nature of God different from our language? Is this language still meaningful today? Why or why not?
- What did you learn in this video about the development of the papacy? If you are Roman Catholic, what role does the pope have in your journey of faith? If you are not Roman Catholic, what role does the pope and your own church leaders have in your journey of faith?

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The Age of Christendom, Part One

Discussion Questions

- Several Church “fathers” were mentioned in this video. Which ones have the most impact today?
- Jerome translated the Bible into Latin. Why was this important? What translation of the Bible is your favorite?
- Why do you think Augustine was so important in his era? How is his spirituality still important today?
- The key insight of Augustine was “the restless heart.” Have you experienced this? Did it lead you closer to God?
- If Augustine could address us now, what would his message be?
- Why do you think monasticism became so popular? How can that way of life speak to us today?
- Monasticism was an attempt to live Christianity in a radical way. Where and how is Christianity lived in a radical way today?
- When Anthony went to the desert he was a “wonder.” When a community gathered around him, he was a “sign.” What does that say about the importance of community? How important is community to you?
- How can we develop a sense of community today?

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The Age of Christendom, Part Two

Discussion Questions

- What was positive about the “age of Christendom”? What was negative?
- How did Christianity “save” civilization?
- In this era, Christianity went from an urban religion to a religion of the countryside. What do you think it is today?
- How would you describe Celtic Christianity? Why is there so much interest in it now? Does it appeal to you?
- The monks of this era were pressed into service as missionaries. How do you think they felt about that? Have you ever felt called to be a missionary within your life situation?
- In this era, the Eucharist became a mysterious and sacred spectacle. Do you see a value in that? Would you prefer liturgy in your Church to have a greater sense of mystery? Or would you prefer it be “closer to the people”?
- In this era, popular religion stressed the veneration of saints. What is the value in this? What is the difficulty with this? What role do saints play in your spirituality? Who is a noncanonized saint in your life?

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Crusades and Reformation, Part One

Discussion Questions

- What were the goals of the Crusades? Were any of them achieved?
- The Crusades are generally considered an embarrassment in the history of Christianity. Why? Contrast the Crusades with the spirit of the gospel.
- How do the “crusading spirit” and missionary zeal differ?
- In the Crusades, Christians attempted to conquer Moslems. What do you know about Moslems now? Do we have our own myths about Islam?
- In this era the split between the Church of Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church widened. What do you know about Eastern Orthodox Christians? How are they similar to your denomination?
- In this video we learned of “dissenting Christians.” How do you think these people were treated? What can we learn from this? How is dissent addressed in your church? Is there a value to dissent? Is there a value to suppressing dissent?
- What did you learn about the Inquisition in this video? What lessons can we learn for our time from this era?
- This was also the age of Francis of Assisi. Why do you think Francis is called the “favorite saint”? What does he mean to you?
- Francis attempted to reform the church from within. Was he successful? How could we, within our own denominations, reform the Church? What would it mean to reform your Church?
- Francis rejected materialism. What would he say to us in our culture?
- Francis found God in simplicity and in nature. Is that possible in our time?

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Crusades and Reformation, Part Two

Discussion Questions

- The Renaissance offered a hopeful, optimistic view of humanity. Is that our view today?
- What does it mean to be a “humanist”? Does that conflict with the gospel?
- Was Savonarola a great prophet or was he disloyal?
- Today, Roman Catholics and Protestants agree that the Church of the 16th century was in need of reform. Is your church in need of reform?
- Martin Luther is a controversial figure. What do you think of him?
- Luther emphasized a return to the Bible. What does the Bible mean in your life of faith?
- What does “justification by faith” mean?
- It is said, “The devil can quote Scripture.” How can we read the Bible intelligently?
- John Calvin was an important figure in the Reformation. What do you think of him?
- The Anglican Church attempted to be a *via media*. Is that true today?
- Are churches today growing closer together or are we moving farther apart? What could you do on a local level to promote ecumenism?
- Some say the division of the churches is a scandal. Others say diversity within unity is important. If Christianity were to be united again, what should this unity look like? Should it be uniform or diverse within unity?

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The New World and Revolution, Part One

Discussion Questions

- Ignatius of Loyola was the pivotal figure of the Catholic Reformation. How would you describe him? Why do you think he attracted so many followers? Who exhibits his passion today?
- Ignatius founded the Jesuits. Have Jesuits influenced your journey in faith?
- What is “Ignatian spirituality”? Why is it enjoying a resurgence now?
- How would you describe the mysticism popular in Spain during this era? What is “practical mysticism”? What are “mystical” experiences?
- The first *Book of Common Prayer* was written in this era. What is the importance of that book (or other prayer books) in your life? What is the value of “common prayer”? Why is community prayer important?
- What does it mean to say that the Anglican Church is shaped by Scripture, tradition and reason?
- In this era science and religion came into conflict. Are they in conflict today? Should they be?
- What good and what harm did missionaries to the New World do? What was their contribution? What opportunity did they miss?
- Should Christianity adapt to the culture of a region? Have missionaries ever brought Western civilization instead of the gospel? Does that happen today?
- What was the key insight of Bartolome de Las Casas? What could he contribute to our world now?

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The New World and Revolution, Part Two

Discussion Questions

- What are the contributions of “rationalism”? Does it conflict with the gospel?
- Many of the people who came to the New World were fleeing religious persecution in Europe. How did this impact the character of the United States? Does it still have an impact today?
- How would you describe Jonathan Edwards? Does the description given by Michael Himes differ from your image of the Puritans?
- What could you gain personally from the theology and spirituality of Jonathan Edwards?
- John Wesley spoke of a “warming of the heart.” Is this something you have experienced?
- This was an era of “revivalism.” What do you think of revivalism? Does it serve any purpose in our world today?
- Why were the revolutions in the 13 colonies and in France so different? Is there anything to be learned from that for us today?
- In the Age of Reason, Christianity was met with new challenges. Meeting these challenges led to a new dedication to the poor and to experiencing the life of the Spirit within each person. In our time, Christianity is challenged. What is our response?

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Christianity Challenged, Part One

Discussion Questions

- The 19th century witnessed the industrial revolution. We are in the midst of the information revolution. Does history provide us with any insights for this time of revolution?
- The price of progress in the industrial age was high. What is the price in the information age?
- In the late 19th century, many Christians became more concerned with the social gospel than with the old dogmatic one. Was that a good development? Is it closer to the spirit of the gospel? Is it true today?
- Engagement in social justice might have led to a decline in church membership. Do you think this is true? If so, is it worth the price?
- The 19th century is marked by Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution. Are evolution and Christianity incompatible?
- Biblical literalism was questioned in the 19th century. How have developments in biblical studies enhanced your journey of faith? Is there an effort to go back to biblical literalism today? How do you respond to it?
- Africa was important missionary territory in the 19th century. What did the missionaries contribute? In what ways were they harmful? What could we learn from this?
- What are the contributions of David Livingstone and Cardinal Lavignerie?
- What one phrase would you use to describe the 19th century?

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Christianity Challenged, Part Two

Discussion Questions

- “May you live in interesting times,” goes a Zen saying. Are these interesting times?
- According to Thomas Merton, the most important spiritual event of the 20th century was World War II. Why would this be so?
- Is Christianity “otherworldly”? Is it “the opium of the people”?
- Describe Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What would he say to us today?
- The response of many to the atrocities of the 20th and 21st centuries is despair. What could you say to them?
- The response of many to the atrocities of the 20th and 21st centuries is a blind materialism, a submer-
sion into “getting more stuff.” What could you say to them?
- In the 1960’s the United States lost its innocence. What have we learned from this era?
- The Second Vatican Council generated tremendous enthusiasm in all churches. What has happened to
this enthusiasm?
- Christianity in Latin America has stressed liberation. Some see this as a development consistent with
the gospel. Others disagree. Where do you stand?
- Our video ends with the question: “Will Jesus be the prophetic Son of God who challenges us to live in
the Reign of God or will we ‘tame’ him into a nice man who lived many years ago?” How would you
answer this question?

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