

# MANY CHURCHES

BY MADISON TRAMMEL

## Where Have We Come From?

Every Christian congregation today, whether Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Baptist or Pentecostal, traces its roots to the same group of early believers in the New Testament. So how did we get from there to here? Is such diversity really what God intended? The answers lie in our Christian past.

In retrospect, Jesus' final words seem more like a promise than a command.

"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8)," he said before ascending.

Consider to whom he was speaking. As far as Jesus' small group of Jewish followers knew, the "ends of the earth" extended just slightly beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. Although they had met people from Asia, Africa and parts of Europe at Passover

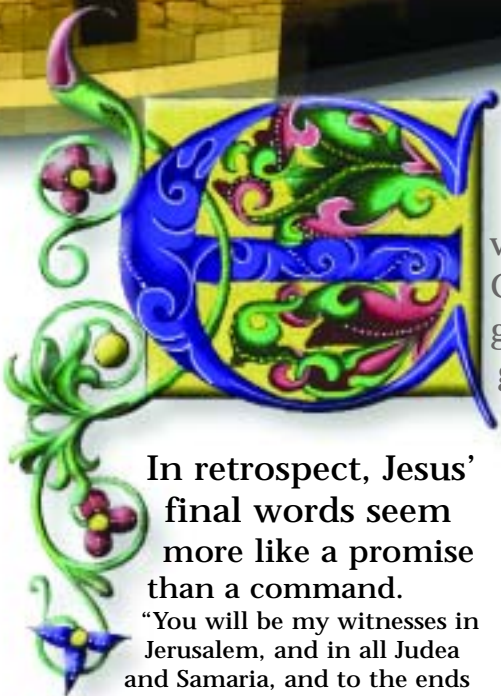
celebrations in Jerusalem, their maps included little of those continents and nothing at all in the Western hemisphere. They could never have foreseen the North American churches that many of us worship in today.

Nor could they have predicted the growth of the church to come. From only 11 disciples and a few hundred followers, Christianity has now grown to more than two billion adherents worldwide. The Bible has been translated into every one of the world's major languages and many of its minority languages as well. Christianity is, quite simply, the

largest religion on earth, with about 700 million more followers than its closest rival, Islam.

Yet Christianity has never been without struggles. Persecution, theological infighting, church splits and believers who worship Christ in word but not in deed—these troubles have marked the body of Christ from the very beginning. They still do today. Perhaps that's what makes the growth of Christianity so remarkable.

As Jesus told the Pharisee Nicodemus during their late-night meeting: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its





sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

On the surface, the story of the church’s past recounts the hopes and failings of people much like you and me. Nothing more. But beneath that story lies the mysterious work of God’s Spirit, moving through human hearts and time, bringing about his purposes.

Slowly but surely, he’s been fulfilling a promise.

### **THE EARLY CHURCH: HOPE FOR A GLORIOUS FUTURE**

Eusebius wrote the first surviving history of Christianity shortly after 300 AD. Well researched, with a passion and enthusiasm foreign to modern historians, Eusebius’

volumes followed the growth of Christianity through its difficult beginnings. In the end, Eusebius concluded that the worst of the church’s troubles now lay behind her.

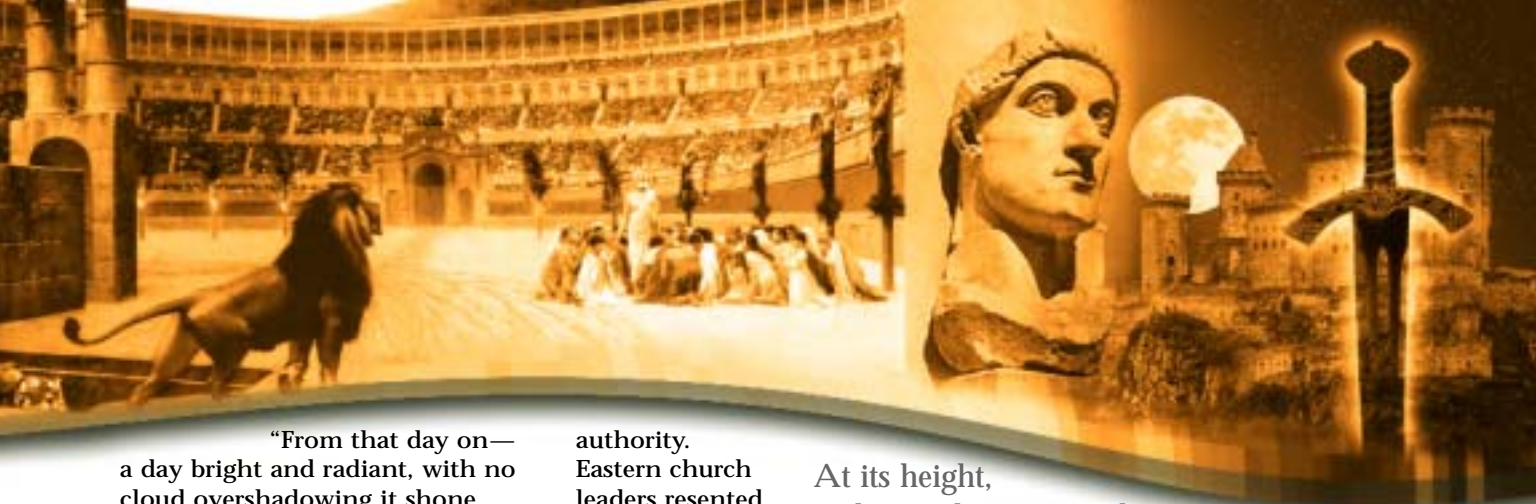
After all, the church had managed to thrive despite intense persecution. Nero, the first emperor to make Christianity a capital offense, had blamed Christians for a great fire in Rome and proceeded to burn them alive or throw them to wild animals. Both Peter and Paul were killed during Nero’s reign, Paul by beheading and Peter by crucifixion. Yet the church remained strong. According to tradition, Peter’s final request was to be hung upside-down, facing

the ground, because he felt unworthy to die as Jesus had.

Later Christians demonstrated similar courage. Polycarp, a church leader in Asia, had been arrested and thrown into the arena as an older man. When the Roman proconsul ordered him to curse Christ and save his life, Polycarp replied, “Eighty and six years I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

Early on, the Latin theologian Tertullian noted, “The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church.”

Eusebius himself survived imprisonment for his faith. So when the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, Eusebius’ hopes soared. Under Rome’s protection, he could see nothing further but peace and prosperity for God’s people.



“From that day on— a day bright and radiant, with no cloud overshadowing it shone down with shafts of heavenly light on the churches of Christ throughout the world,” Eusebius exulted. Little did he know what lay just ahead.

### **THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH: AN UNEASY MARRIAGE BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE**

In 410 A.D., German tribes sacked Rome, and the security of many Christians began to crumble. However, Rome’s marriage between cross and crown proved to be enduring. As the balance of power shifted to northern and central Europe, new kings longed for the legitimacy of a reign blessed by the church. On Christmas Day, 800 A.D., the Pope crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor.

The Frankish king was neither Roman nor an emperor, but his crowning symbolized the beginning of a new era for the church. The foundation of a united Christian Europe, called Christendom, was laid under his rule. For better or worse, it would determine the course of Christianity for the next millennium.

At its height, Christendom nurtured spiritual revivals, gave birth to modern universities and wielded unprecedented political and military power. Yet it also led to some of the greatest failures in church history.

To begin with, Christianity underwent its first major division in 1054 A.D., splitting between East and West. For many years the papacy, which ruled the Western church, had been expanding its

authority. Eastern church leaders resented the Pope’s claim to supremacy over them. They also differed with the Western church in areas of theology and church

practice (such as allowing priests to marry, for instance). After centuries of conflict, the churches separated, mutually excommunicating each other for good measure.

Shortly after this “Great Schism,” Pope Urban II preached a fateful sermon about the suffering of Christians under Muslim rule. European kings responded by organizing armies to retake the Holy Land. The ensuing Crusades lasted for nearly 200 years and succeeded in achieving none of the church’s goals. Along the way, the Fourth Crusade even veered off-course and sacked Constantinople, the historic seat of the Eastern Orthodox Church. So brutal were the Crusaders that Eastern Christians said later they would rather have been conquered by Muslims.

As it turned out, though, the Crusades were the beginning of an end. Never again would the union between church and state be quite so strong. Indeed, beginning with the writing of an obscure, overweight monk in Germany, the fabric of a united Christendom slowly began to unravel.

### **THE REFORMATION: UNEXPECTED CHANGES DIVIDE THE CHURCH AGAIN.**

Cambridge historian Owen Chadwick has written, “At the

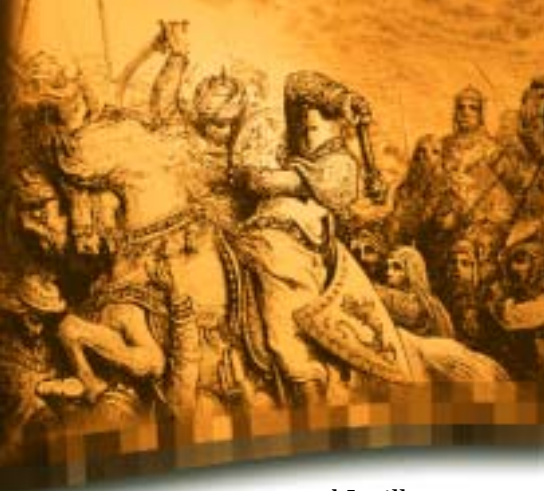
At its height, Christendom nurtured spiritual revivals, gave birth to modern universities and wielded unprecedented political and military power. Yet it also led to some of the greatest failures in church history.

beginning of the sixteenth century everyone that mattered in the Western church was crying out for Reformation.” What no one expected, however, was the course the Reformation took.

For centuries, spiritually sensitive believers longed to revive the church. A series of unprincipled, murderous Popes had reduced the church to little more than an earthly kingdom. Its officials routinely sold high offices or gave them away to undeserving relatives. Drunken priests and priests with live-in girlfriends were commonplace.

Instead of tackling these failings head-on, however, the Reformation sparked by Martin Luther dealt mostly with theology. An Augustinian monk and university professor, Luther’s criticisms of the Church grew out of his new understanding of salvation. After years of trying to achieve righteousness on his own, he came to understand from Scripture that a Christian’s righteousness came as a free gift from God alone.

As a result, Luther began to condemn church practices such as the selling of indulgences. Eventually, he even called the Pope the Antichrist. At the Diet of Worms, standing on trial before the Holy Roman Emperor, Luther refused to back down. “I cannot



retract, and I will not retract," he said. "Here I stand. I can do no other."

In the ensuing civil war, some German rulers sided with Luther's burgeoning Protestant movement, while others remained loyal to the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, more Protestant movements began to spring up throughout Europe. John Calvin's Reformed church flourished in Switzerland. The Protestant Huguenots fought for freedom in France. Not long afterward, King Henry VIII completely severed England's ties with Rome.

By the end of the Reformation era, Europe had four main churches instead of one: The Church of England, the Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Unity had been lost, but Reformation had been achieved. More importantly, many people had renewed their faith in Jesus.

As time went by, the weakening of government control over matters of faith also introduced a new freedom in Europe. It was out of this freedom that the modern world—including the churches with which many Americans are most familiar—was born.

### **THE MODERN CHURCH: DENOMINATIONS AND THE NEW DIVIDING LINE.**

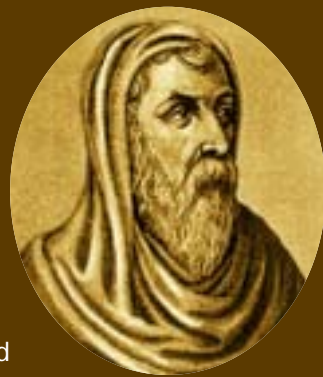
Our nation's colonial past is nowhere more evident than in the Christian landscape we inherited from England. The largest U.S.

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### **Athanasius: Defender of Orthodoxy**

Among the great leaders of the early church, none ranks higher than the vertically challenged Athanasius. Dubbed "the black dwarf" by his opponents—and he had many!—this native Egyptian bishop led the church's fight against what may have been its most potent heresy. While several emperors and numerous bishops accepted Arius's assertion that Jesus was created by God and not quite equal with him, Athanasius steadfastly refused. He endured exiles and excommunications, but in the end, he kept the church from abandoning the apostles' teaching about Jesus.



In addition, Athanasius also played a key role in shaping the New Testament. Ever since another earlier heretic named Marcion had edited the Gospels and created a shortened list of inspired books, Christians had needed a reliable guide for knowing which books were truly God's Word. In his Easter letter of 367 A.D., Athanasius listed the books that he considered to be apostolic in authorship and message. The church council of Hippo agreed, and in 393 A.D. Athanasius' list became the final standard, or canon, of the New Testament.

### **John Wesley: Founding Father of Evangelicals**

As imperfect as he was, John Wesley (1703-1791) may have shaped Christianity in America more than any other single person. Not only did he help fuel America's first revival, the Great Awakening, he also started the Methodist church, which would become America's fastest-growing for many years.

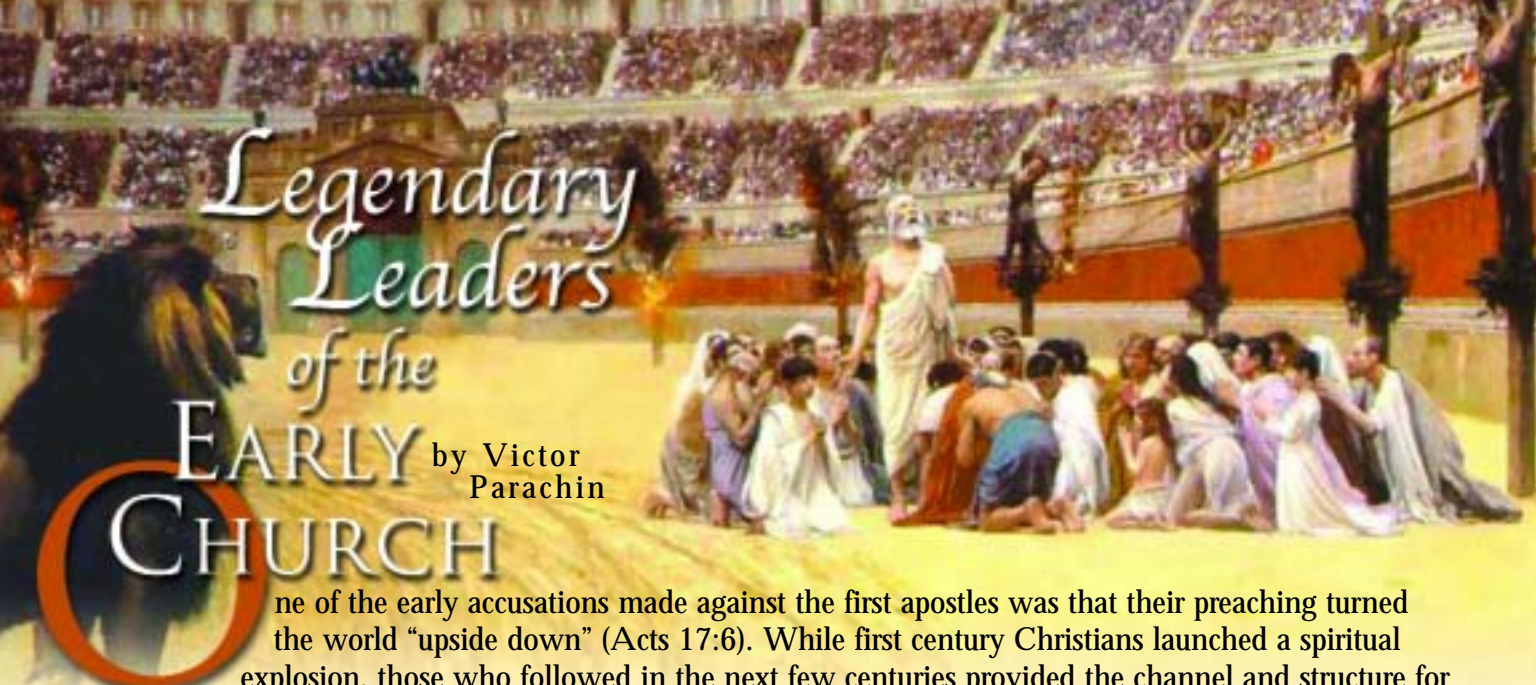


In addition, Wesley also influenced our popular Christian teaching.

When you hear a preacher today speak of repenting and "accepting Jesus into your heart," he is speaking Wesley's kind of language. Wesley believed that God could and would free believers from the power of sin, and his teaching on "perfection" led to the Holiness movement and, eventually, Pentecostalism.

During his lifetime, Wesley rode about 250,000 miles on horseback, preaching to anyone who would listen. His marriage was a failure, and he was accused of fostering inappropriate religious enthusiasm. However, as Edward Oakes has written: "...He kept doggedly on, never wavering, always preaching, always writing in his journal, always on the go, always interrogating his own soul, but never on that account cooling his zeal for the Gospel, which he preached in season and out."

In their lives and work, nearly all of our great American evangelists, from Charles Finney and D.L. Moody to Billy Sunday and Billy Graham, follow the model laid down first by John Wesley.



# Legendary Leaders

of the

# EARLY CHURCH

by Victor Parachin

One of the early accusations made against the first apostles was that their preaching turned the world “upside down” (Acts 17:6). While first century Christians launched a spiritual explosion, those who followed in the next few centuries provided the channel and structure for that movement. They laid the foundation of the church for the long haul and shaped the essence of the Christian faith for generations to come. Here is a look at some legendary leaders of the early church.

*A leader whose writings almost became part of Scripture*—Clement of Rome (died c. 100 A.D.). This beloved and highly respected leader of Christianity in Rome wrote a Pauline-type letter which almost made it into the New Testament. Written to the church in Corinth around 96, Clement urged Corinthian Christians to respect and restore some of the older leaders who had been replaced by younger Christians. Eighty years later it was still the custom in Corinth to read Clement’s letter at public worship along with readings from the apostle Paul as well as the gospels. In Clement’s writings, he quotes extensively from the Old Testament as “Scripture”—the only Bible he knew—and from the words of Jesus, using sayings found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. He also quotes from Romans, 1 Corinthians and Hebrews. Thus, Clement provides important evidence that books which later became part of the New Testament were circulating among the churches by the end of the first century.

*A Christian who developed an early form of Braille for the blind*—Didymus the Blind (c. 313-398). This remarkable Christian was installed as head of the School of Alexandria, the most important center of learning in the early church. Although blind from the age of four, Didymus had enormous intellectual gifts, becoming a prolific writer and Bible commentator. He also gained wide respect as a prophet and spiritual ascetic. Didymus is credited with inventing a system of raised writing for the blind. Because of his compelling persona and talents, students came to him from all over the Roman Empire. Among those who studied under him were Jerome, who would later gain fame as translator of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into Latin, and Rufinus who wrote a compelling commentary on the Apostles’ Creed.

*The most influential family of the early church*—Macrina the Elder (c. 340). This outstanding Christian family originates with Macrina the Elder who converted to Christianity. During a time of severe persecution she was forced to hide with her family in mountain caves. Macrina the Elder’s grandchildren included these three siblings:

◆ Basil the Great (c. 330-379). Originally a monastic who lived in a hermitage, Basil was persuaded to leave his hermitage, eventually becoming bishop of Caesarea. Basil developed the Rule of St. Basil which continues to be the main structure for Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

◆ Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394). Basil’s brother was a theologian and bishop who was instrumental in helping the early church develop what came to be the doctrine of the Trinity.

◆ Macrina the Younger (c. 327-379). Macrina was the older sister of Basil and Gregory. After the death of her fiance, she established a monastery on a family estate, together with her mother Emmelia and former slaves.

*A disciple of the apostle John*—Polycarp (70-155). Polycarp was one of the most revered of the group called “Apostolic Fathers,” that generation of leaders who received their faith directly from the original apostles. Born into a devout Christian family, Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John. He became a priest and bishop of Smyrna. In his old age, he was arrested for being a Christian and ordered by Roman authorities to declare that “Caesar is Lord.” Polycarp refused saying: “Eighty-six years have I served him (Christ), and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” The Roman proconsul had him burned at the stake. Polycarp became one of the early Christian martyrs.

*The woman who set 8,000 slaves free*—Melania the Younger (383-439). Here is one of the great women of the early church. She passed through many roles during the course of her life—wife and mother, monk and hermit, pilgrim and spiritual director—all of which had an underlying theme of a call to a deep spiritual life. Melania was born into a wealthy Roman family. She was named from her grandmother, Melania the Elder. As a child, she expressed her desire to consecrate herself entirely to God. However, her family arranged her marriage at the age of fourteen. She bore two children, both of whom died in infancy. Eventually she won the consent of her husband, Pinian to follow her calling. So committed was she,

PAINTING: THE CHRISTIAN MARTYRS LAST PRAYER BY JEAN LEON GEROME

that her husband and her widowed mother joined her in this spiritual journey. They adopted Melania's life of prayer and charitable works. Together the three of them divested themselves of their enormous wealth, setting 8,000 slaves free and distributing the proceeds of their several estates to the poor. By 417 Melania, still accompanied by her husband and mother, relocated to the Holy Land, where they settled in Jerusalem. Fourteen years later both her husband and mother died. Melania buried them on the Mount of Olives and established a monastic cell nearby. It became the center of a growing community of Christian women. In 439 Melania went to celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem where she became seriously ill. Sensing her life was ending, she sent for her sisters, bidding them farewell by saying: "I am going to the Lord." She died on Sunday, December 31, uttering as her final words: "As the Lord willed, so it is done."

*The bishop who sold off church property to feed the hungry*—Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386). Cyril was well known for his moderate and conciliatory personality. Unfortunately he lived in a time of violent controversies among Christians. As a result of those controversies, Cyril found himself exiled several times for views which clashed with various church positions. Born in Jerusalem, he was ordained a priest and became a bishop in 349. Early in his service as bishop he came under investigation by a local synod. Their charge: Cyril had sold church property, which had been gifts of the emperor, in order to feed the famine-stricken poor. He was found guilty, condemned and forced into his first exile. During the Arian controversy, members of each side accused Cyril of being too sympathetic to the other. Of his 35 years as bishop, nearly 16 were spent in exile. He died in 386 at the age of 70 and is remembered for his Catechetical Lectures, talks delivered to instruct adults who were embracing Christianity. His lectures represent one of the first systematic accounts of Christian theology. Their popularity may stem, in part, from the fact they sound much like Scripture: "Let us, then, my brethren, endure in hope. Let us devote ourselves side by side with our hoping, so that the God of all the universe, as he beholds our intention, may cleanse us from our sins, fill us with high hopes from what we have in hand, and grant us the change of heart that saves. God has called you, and you have your calling."

*The first Christian philosopher*—Justin (c. 100-165). Born into a non-Christian home, Justin had an insatiable quest for religious truth. As a young man, he devoted himself to the study of Greek philosophical schools. After many years of study, he was introduced to the Hebrew Scriptures (the only "Bible" available at the time) along with early Christian writings. The reading of those texts prompted him to embrace Christianity which he regarded as the "true philosophy" toward which Plato, Aristotle and other philosophers had been reaching. He traveled throughout the Graeco Roman world philosophically expounding the Christian faith before finally settling in Rome. He authored several works defending Christianity against charges that followers of Christ were "godless" and "immoral." During a time of persecution, Justin was arrested and tried before authorities in Rome. When he refused the order to sacrifice to the gods, he was beaten and beheaded. During his trial he reportedly declared: "You can kill us, but you cannot do us any real harm!" □

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denominations to this day, including Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists, were all started in the British Isles. So, too, were the early revivals that marked American Christianity and the missionary movements that accompanied them.

The Baptist missionary William Carey, for instance, left England for India in the late 1700s. Although he saw no converts for seven years, Carey persevered. Eventually he started schools, translated the Bible into several languages and left a legacy of Christianity in India. On his deathbed, Carey is reported to have said, "When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey. Speak (only) about Dr. Carey's God."

The example of Carey, often called the father of modern missions, spurred generations of Christians to overseas evangelization. By 1900, hopeful missionaries even predicted that the 20th century would become the world's "Christian century." In some ways they were right—Christianity grew exponentially during the next 100 years. Yet a new challenge also came to the forefront during that time.

In France and Germany, modern thought had long been accompanied by skepticism about Christianity. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, this skepticism began to creep into churches everywhere. In America, two camps formed in response.

On one side, fundamentalists upheld traditional Christian beliefs, including Jesus' resurrection and the divine inspiration of the Bible. On the other side, liberal theologians argued that the Bible was full of errors and that Jesus was just a moral teacher. For a time, some fundamentalists retreated to the safety of their own schools and denominations. However, in the 1950s, men like Billy Graham and Charles Fuller, host of *The Old Fashioned Revival Hour*, began calling on conservative Christians to re-engage the culture.

A new movement started to take shape. Called neo-evangelicalism or simply evangelicalism, it would become the most significant Christian influence in the nation.

Today, because of the evangelical-liberal debate, most American Christians no longer identify themselves primarily by their denominations. Instead, the new dividing line cuts through denominations, separating those who hold to traditional Christian teaching from those who don't. In light of what's at stake, all other differences seem pale in comparison.

## **THE CHURCH OF TOMORROW: WHERE ARE WE GOING?**

If history has proven anything, it's that no one can predict the course Christianity will take. Yet

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# Who's Who

# in the Reformation?

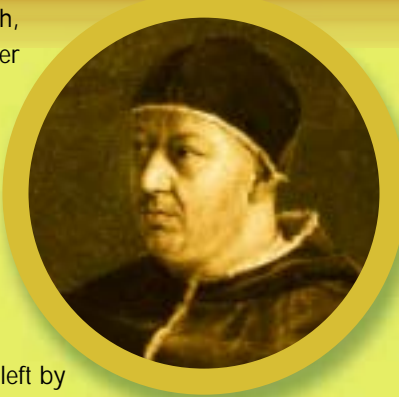
by Victor Parachin



During the sixteenth century, a reform movement broke out across Europe with surprising intensity. Lasting from 1517 to 1648, it shattered the power of the pope, giving birth to four major movements of Protestantism: Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist and Anglican. In an attempt to contain or expand the spirit of reform, bloody and violent struggles arose between Catholics and Protestants. European countries became engulfed in religious wars which cost many lives. The wars ceased only when it became evident that western Christianity was permanently divided and that Christianity would be partitioned along denominational lines. Here is a quick glimpse of "who's who in the Reformation."

## Pope Leo X (1475-1521).

It all started on his watch, and Pope Leo had neither the wisdom nor insight to recognize the vast disconnect between Vatican edicts and the views of many people all over Europe. Shortly after becoming Pope (1513-1521), he



squandered the fortune left by his predecessor, Pope Julius II. As a result, Leo resorted to selling indulgences to finance various papal projects, an issue which led to Martin Luther's famous 95 theses and ushered in the Reformation. Indulgences were promoted by the clergy loyal to the pope who claimed that in exchange for contributions, donors would be given an "indulgence" from the pope which would apply beyond the grave and free souls from purgatory. A popular jingle these clergy often cited was, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." When Leo died suddenly of malaria, he left Italy in political turmoil, northern Europe in growing religious disarray and the papal treasury deeply in debt.

## Martin Luther (1483-1546). Ordained a Catholic priest in 1507, this intellectually gifted

man became a professor of Scripture at the University of Wittenberg, a post he held from 1508 until his death in 1546. By studying the Bible, he came to be critical of various aspects of Catholic Church teachings and practices. His anger, however, was roused by the sale of indulgences to

re-supply the papal treasury. Incensed, Luther wrote and publicly posted 95 theses or propositions for theological debate. Included was a direct critique on the doctrine of indulgence. His propositions were not well received by the church authorities and aroused great hostility. Pope Leo X eventually excommunicated Luther when he refused to change his views. But Luther had already gained much popular and political support for reform. Bearing his name, the Lutheran movement spread quickly with congregations emerging all over Germany.

## Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531). An ordained Catholic priest and army chaplain, Zwingli's

reading of the New Testament in the original Greek led him to move away from his Roman Catholic roots. He became leader of Protestantism in Switzerland. While serving as a priest in Zurich, he began the reform movement by persuading the city council to evaluate religious issues only by Scripture. Based on his leadership and preaching, rapid



changes took place in the city from 1522-1525: A translation of the Bible into the language of the people was started, Lenten fasts were banned, celibate clergy ended and the city council broke away from the bishop's control. In addition, monasteries were dissolved, images inside churches were removed, church services were simplified and a plain communion service replaced the Latin Mass. Lavish church adornments of all types were removed. Not all areas around Zurich supported Zwingli's views. A civil war broke out, and Zwingli was killed in 1531 during a battle. Although Zwingli did not have the same impact as Luther, he nevertheless succeeded in extending the



Reformation into parts of Switzerland.

John Calvin (1509-1564) is generally recognized as a seminal figure in the development of Western culture. The Protestant reformer was born in France to a prosperous family who made certain he received the best education available at the time. When he was 14, Calvin was enrolled at the University of Paris. Upon completing a Master of Arts degree, his father instructed the son to leave his theological studies and begin a study of law. Dutifully, the son went to Orleans, where France's best law faculty was located. There he proved to be a brilliant student and earned a doctorate in law. He abandoned law when his father died in 1531, and early in 1534 Calvin experienced a religious conversion which led him to embrace the emerging Protestant movement. By 1536 he completed and published the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, his famous compendium of Protestant theology. Persecution forced Calvin to flee to Basel. Eventually he settled in Geneva where he worked with the city council to turn the city into a model Christian community. By the time of his death, Calvin had considerable political and religious power in Geneva. His theological impact was felt all over Europe and the British Isles.

John Knox (1513-1572) was trained as a notary. He was greatly influenced by John Calvin, becoming a British activist trying to nudge England in the direction of Calvinism. He was forced to flee England overnight when, in



1533, the country became officially Catholic again as Mary I became Queen. Her vicious and systematic persecution of Protestants earned her the label "Bloody Mary."

When religious civil war broke out in Scotland (1559), Knox went to Scotland where he began to reform the Scottish church along Calvinist lines. Although there were many challenges and setbacks, Scotland became and remained the most devoutly Calvinist country in the world. A devout Christian, Knox, however, acknowledged that he was in constant need of spiritual growth and maturity. "In youth, in middle age and now after many battles, I find nothing in me but corruption," he wrote.

Menno Simons (1496-1561) was an Anabaptist leader in Holland and northwest Germany whose followers became known as Mennonites. Originally ordained as a Catholic priest, Simons came to embrace reformation thoughts, particularly believers' baptism. That meant an outright rejection of infant baptism which was usually done within a week of birth. Simons, like all Anabaptists, opted for the view that only people of consenting age should be baptized. For nearly a quarter century, Simons actively traveled the Netherlands and Germany, preaching and establishing churches. He



wrote 24 books and booklets including *Foundations of Christian Doctrine* (1539).

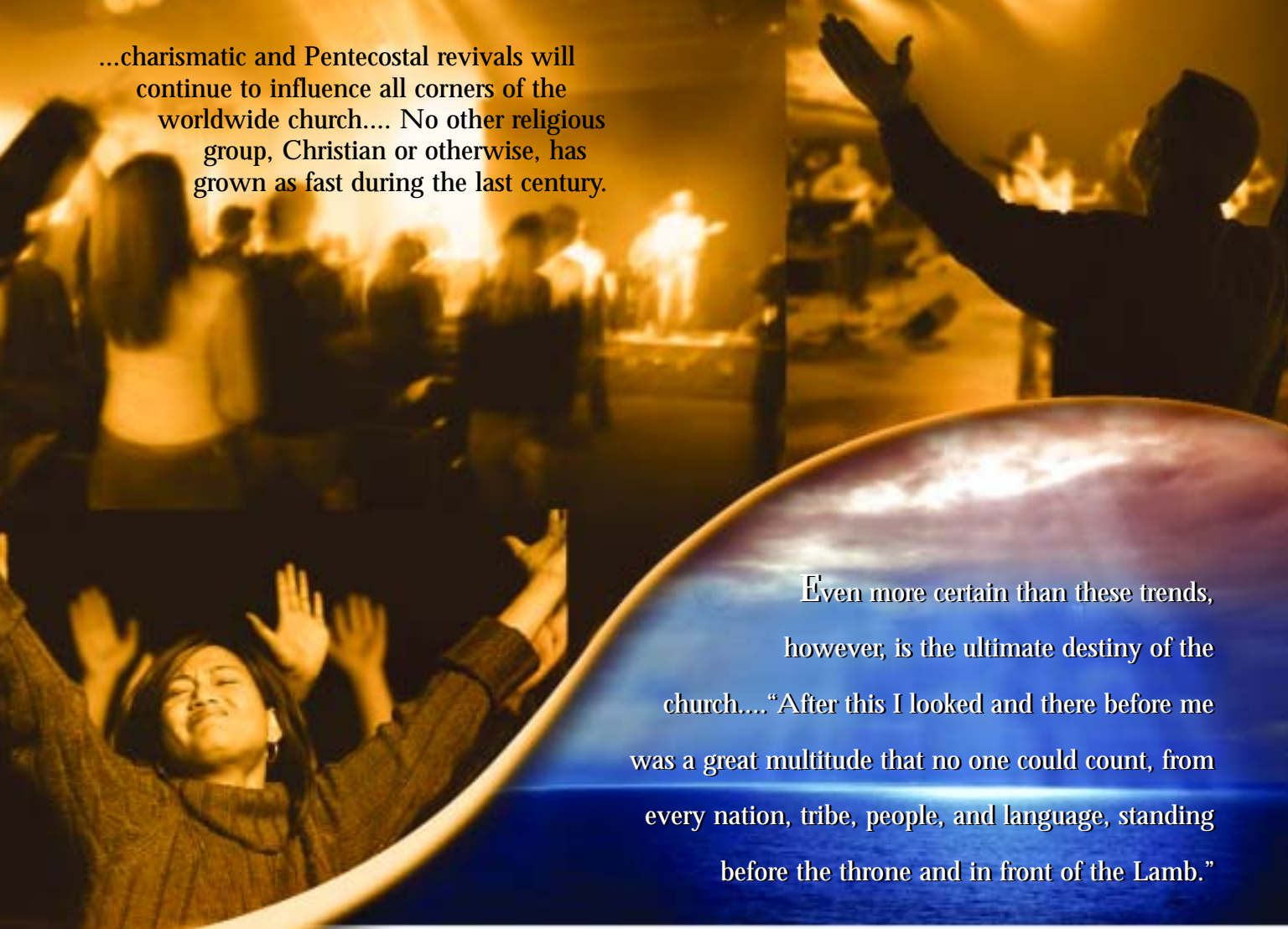
Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) was an intellectual giant in his day. A person of immense learning, his personal library was larger than that of Cambridge University. He could read Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Italian and German. Cranmer found favor with Henry VIII by providing intellectual and theological support for the King's divorce campaign. In 1532 Henry rewarded Cranmer for his support by making him Archbishop of Canterbury. As Archbishop, Cranmer ordered (1538) that an

English translation of the Bible should be placed in every church and read aloud regularly. Cranmer also produced the *Forty-Two Articles* which defined the faith of the new Church of England along Protestant and Reformation lines. He was

also instrumental in transforming the Church of England when he compiled *The Book of Common Prayer*, published in 1549. It replaced the complex medieval Latin services with the language of the people. *The Book of Common Prayer* services also moved congregants from being merely onlookers to participants of worship. He was arrested and executed when Mary Tudor ascended the throne. □

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Even more certain than these trends, however, is the ultimate destiny of the church....“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”

Christianity will likely become more global than ever. Already, most Christians live outside of Western Europe and North America. The world's largest congregations now worship in countries like South Korea, Chile and Nigeria.

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a couple of trends seem certain to shape the church of the future.

First, Christianity will likely become more global than ever. Already, most Christians live outside of Western Europe and North America. The world's largest congregations now worship in countries like South Korea, Chile and Nigeria. Seoul's Yoido Full Gospel alone, for

instance, has about 775,000 members and nearly 1,000 staff members. As the West grows more secular, Latin America and Africa may become the new seat of Christianity.

Second, charismatic and Pentecostal revivals will continue to influence all corners of the worldwide church. From its historic beginning on Azusa Street in 1906, Pentecostalism can now claim nearly 500 million believers. No other religious group, Christian or otherwise, has grown as fast during the last century. Charismatic worship songs and styles have already become widely popular, and the impact of Pentecostalism can only increase in the years to come.

Even more certain than these trends, however, is the ultimate destiny of the church. In Revelation 7:9, the apostle John wrote:

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”

While the church's failures and divisions may confuse and distress us, they have never deterred God. In his time, in his way, he has continued to bring about his plan for the body of Christ. Someday, John's vision will come true.

When it does, the history of the church will end, and a new world will begin. □

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