CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 72: How We Got Our History

The History of Recorded History: Did You Know?

Interesting facts about the history of recorded history.

Story time

Medieval historians assumed that their books would be read aloud, so they address their audiences as both "readers" and "hearers." One book, Ordericus Vitalis's ***Ecclesiastical History***, even contains symbols indicating where the reader should make changes in the pitch of his voice while reading.

Learning by rope

While most cultures adopted some form of writing to keep their records, the Incas solved this knotty problem with knots. Their system, called ***quipu*** (or ***quipo***) consisted of one long rope to which 48 secondary cords were attached; smaller cords in turn attached to these. The colors of the cords indicated their subjects, including land deals, economic figures, tribute accounting, and ceremonies. Knots represented ones, tens, and hundreds. Quipu did not preserve narratives, but it kept the Incan empire running smoothly at the national and local levels.

The dating game

Early Christian historians placed great importance in determining accurate chronologies. Historians in different regions calculated chronology independently, leading to contradictory liturgical practices (such as celebrating Easter on different dates) and confusion in comparing their histories. Later historians would even combine multiple chronologies in their historical works—Nennius's ***History of the Britons*** makes use of at least 28 different chronological systems. Bede was one of the first to use the ***anno Domini*** (A.D.) system, proposed by Dionysius Exiguus around 527, using the Incarnation as the central event from which all years are counted. Bede occasionally uses the designation B.C. (before the Incarnation) as well, but the B.C. count did not replace the old Roman system until the 1400s.

Retirement Age

When Christians had to find some way to account for the fall of the Roman Empire, many turned to Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue in Daniel 2 to explain the rise and fall of earthly empires. Following that biblical example, Christian historians created their own schemes of periodization. Augustine divides history into six stages that correspond to the six stages of the human life cycle, a system he seems to have appropriated from pagan philosophers such as Cicero and Seneca. According to his scheme, the coming of Christ marked the onset of humanity's old age.

The art of accounting

When written in cuneiform, even a farmer's accounting summary has aesthetic charm. This tally of sheep and goats displays Sumerian writing technique from around 2350 B.C. Though the subject matter seems mundane—as does most information recorded on extant cuneiform tablets—scholars of antiquity prize records like this as a window into the ancient Mesopotamian world.

Old-time religion

How old is Christianity? Pagans in the early church period scoffed that the upstart religion was too recent to be taken seriously, so early Christian historians, such as Eusebius, set out to prove them wrong. He proposed a chronology of world events that dated Moses' life and writings 400 years earlier than the Trojan War—the advent of Greek history and philosophy.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Christians faced a slightly different challenge as skeptics argued that the Bible was too recent to be taken seriously. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (fragment shown) in 1947 and following years greatly strengthened the Scripture's defense, enabling scholars to reconstruct the history of Palestine from the fourth century B.C. to A.D. 135 and show that New Testament accounts followed very closely behind the events they described.

Teaching texts

Lacking a linear sense of history, cultures of the Far East concentrated on communicating timeless ideas through stories. Their elaborately illustrated texts, such as this scroll of the Sri Bhagavata Purana with Sanskrit writing, mixed myths, legends, lives of great leaders, allegories, and chronicles of historical events in an attempt to explain the principles of religion to common people. The key lesson often centered on attaining virtue, through which a person could escape the cycles of history.

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History - Behind the Scenes: From the Editor

Elesha Coffman

Backstage passes. Insider accounts. "The making of." As much as people enjoy the show, whatever it may be, they seem to have a quenchless desire to peek at the gears and switches, to uncover the messiness behind the polished product. That's what this issue—our twentieth anniversary issue—is about.

The technical term for studying "the making of" history is ***historiography***. This discipline is less interested in historical events than in the people who recorded them—their backgrounds, their biases, the tools they used and the way they used them. Where history examines the hand holding the sword, historiography examines the hand holding the pen.

Historiography matters at the professional level because historians want to know how their craft has evolved. But the subject matters to casual readers of history, too, because we all take accounts of the past on faith. With history, as with rumors and recommendations, it's crucial to consider the source.

Christian History has never broached quite so technical a subject. In 20 years of publishing, we've mostly focused on stories—biographies, narratives, firsthand reports. We ask our writers, most of whom are professional scholars, to drop footnotes and add anecdotes, to skip the heavy theoretical questions and cut to the chase.

This approach grew naturally out of the vision of the magazine's founder, Ken Curtis: "to acquaint readers with significant events, personalities, movements and developments in the history of the church." The same vision drives Ken's work at Gateway Films. Originally, the magazine and the videos went together.

(That, in case you've ever wondered, is why issue 1 covered not Augustine or Martin Luther, but Zinzendorf and the Moravians. Ken had just finished a film on the Count and his crew.)

Ken's vision has served us well over the years. Features such as the Timeline, the Gallery, and "Did You Know?" have been around from the beginning, as have a few of our contributors and editorial advisers (and subscribers!). We still tackle just one topic per issue.

By treading lightly on theory, however, we've left out one important piece from our presentation of history: a primer on the critical lenses readers should wear at all times. Like the bucket of 3-D glasses in a theater lobby, this issue provides those critical lenses, then offers primary sources on which you can try them out.

Can you spot Eusebius's pro-Roman leanings? A hagiographer's doubts? Hieronymous Bosch's worldview? Anabaptist self-identity? Have a little fun with historiography.

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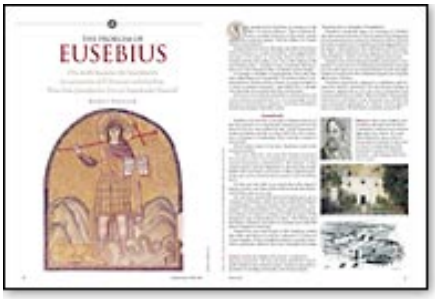
The Problem of Eusebius

His work became the foundation for centuries of Christian scholarship. Was that foundation firm or hopelessly flawed?

Everett Ferguson



The Problem of Eusebius

Many people know Eusebius of Caesarea as the "Father of Church History." But as Robert M. Grant, a modern historian of the early church period, provocatively asked, "Did the Father of Church History write history?"

Jewish historian Doron Mendels describes Eusebius's ***Church History*** as a "media revolution" and suggests that, because of his style of weaving short entries into a broader scheme, the author was "one of the fathers of the journalistic genre." Another writer concludes that Eusebius was "less a historian than a mediator of knowledge."

Or perhaps a mediator of propaganda. This is the man who called Emperor Constantine "most beloved by God," described the fourth-century church as being brought to "a state of uniform harmony," and called Jews "a people who had slain the prophets and the Lord himself."

However one evaluates Eusebius's achievement, his work remains foundational for our knowledge of the church in its first three centuries. And this foundation stands firm despite noticeable cracks.

Ground zero

Eusebius was not only a recorder of history, but one of the key players at a significant turning point for the church. His era was marked by the "Great Persecution" under Diocletian and his co-rulers (303-311), the conversion of Emperor Constantine (312), and the council of Nicea (325).

About many events of his time, Eusebius could write as an eyewitness:

"We saw with our own eyes the houses of prayer thrown down to the very foundations, and the divine and sacred Scriptures committed to the flames in the market-places, and the shepherds of the churches basely hidden here and there, and some of them captured ignominiously, and mocked by their enemies" (***Church History*** 8.2.1).

Yet the one who told us so much about the church's history and his own times did not tell us much about himself. Neither did anyone else.

He was born around 260 and presumably grew up in Caesarea of Palestine, where he came under the influence of Pamphilius, a learned teacher from Alexandria. Pamphilius, a devoted student of Origen, gathered an impressive library of Origen's writings, as well as copies of the Scriptures and commentaries on them. This library and the library of Bishop Alexander of Jerusalem provided the basis of Eusebius's learning.

Pamphilius was imprisoned in 308. Eusebius visited him often, and the two wrote five volumes of ***A Defense of Origen*** together. When Pamphilius died as a martyr, Eusebius, in gratitude, added to his name Pamphilii, becoming "Eusebius [son or disciple] of Pamphilius."

Eusebius's moderate stance on Arianism (a Christology denounced as heresy at Nicea) earned him temporary excommunication by a synod at Antioch in 324 or 325, but his zealous support of Constantine put the biggest blot on his legacy. Expounded in the celebratory ***Life of Constantine***, this awed admiration also appears at the end of the ***Church History***—where, to be fair, it makes some sense.

Eusebius had lived through terrible persecution. Constantine's conversion to Christianity promised to end such horrors and begin an era unprecedented church strength. Eusebius's support for the redeemed regime was a logical, albeit naive, reaction.

Eusebius enjoyed the emperor's confidence and became the family's chronicler. He also became bishop of Caesarea, apparently in 313, the year Constantine and Licinius issued the so-called "Edict of Milan" that granted toleration to Christians. Later, Eusebius was offered the more prominent episcopacy of Antioch, but he chose to stay in Caesarea. He died there sometime around 340.

Fighting for the faith

With his great passion for learning, Eusebius became an accomplished exegete, theologian, apologist, orator, statesman, and, of course, historian. But while he is best known for his historical work, one could argue that he was above all an apologist. His biblical works respond to problems in the text of Scripture, and his historical works argue for the truth of Christianity.

One of Eusebius's major apologetic works, ***Preparation of the Gospel***, uses quotations from Greek authors to refute the mythology, oracles, and philosophy of paganism. Another apologetic work, ***Proof of the Gospel***, shows that Christianity continues the religion of the Old Testament patriarchs and fulfills Judaic prophecy.

Apologetics motivated Eusebius's early historical work, the ***Chronicle***, as well. In it Eusebius lines up the principal events of universal and sacred history in order to prove that the Jewish people were older than other peoples. The works in praise of Constantine—the ***Life of Constantine***, ***Praise of Constantine***, and ***Constantine's Address to the Assembly of the Saints***—may be considered historical works but also have an apologetic thrust.

Holy history

His ***Church History*** shares a missionary purpose with Eusebius's more explicitly apologetic writings, but it abounds with historical details. The opening words state Eusebius's six interests:

"It is my purpose to write an account of the successions of the holy apostles;. ...

"to relate the many important events that are said to have occurred in the history of the church;

"to mention those who have governed and presided over the church in the most prominent parishes and

those who in each generation have proclaimed the divine word either orally or in writing;. ...

"to give the names. ... of those who through love of innovation have run into the greatest errors;. ...

"to recount the misfortunes that immediately came upon the whole Jewish nation in consequence of their plots against our Savior;

"and to record the ways and the times in which the divine word has been attacked by the nations and to describe the character of those who at various periods have contended for it in the face of blood and tortures, as well as the confessions that have been made in our own days, and finally the gracious and kindly succor that our Savior has afforded them all."

Eusebius later adds a seventh interest: the canon of the Scriptures. Yet he discusses none of these themes in the first of his 10 books.

Eusebius begins his ***Church History*** by describing the divine nature of the pre-existent Christ and the "scattering of the seeds of true religion" among human beings from the beginning of time. Many people throughout history rejected this divine teaching, but it was always available. This point was crucial to Eusebius because it answered a significant question from pagans: If Christianity is the only true religion, why was it so late in coming to the world?

Furthermore, the affirmation that Christianity began at Creation was central to Eusebius's theology of history. To bolster his claim that God's plan reached its climax in Christ, he had to trace that plan back through all time. On this basis, he could show how God continued to work through the church as well.

Eusebius wrote the ***History*** for ordinary Christians and interested non-Christians. This broad audience was not interested in doctrinal questions, so Eusebius gives such questions little attention. Instead, he concentrates on what would have popular—and enduring—appeal: sensational tales of martyrdom, juicy tidbits about famous leaders, lively quotations, and personal reflections.

Weaknesses and strengths

Eusebius had many defects, both as a writer and as a historian. He assumed, inaccurately, that the early church looked just like the church he knew. He displayed no sense of doctrinal or institutional development, especially in the Latin West, a region about which he knew little.

Eusebius can also be accused of whitewashing what he did know. As he introduced accounts of persecution in his day, he stated that he was including only what would be profitable:

"We shall not mention those who were shaken by the persecution nor those who in everything pertaining to salvation were shipwrecked. ... But we shall introduce into this history in general only those events which may be useful first to ourselves and afterwards to posterity" (***Church History*** 8.2.3).

Other complaints about Eusebius include his inattention to coherent narrative, his occasionally careless use of sources, and of course his belief that Christianity and the Roman state belonged together. But this negative picture can be exaggerated, and modern readers can be grateful for what Eusebius left us.

Whatever may be said about Eusebius's inability to organize his materials, he nonetheless had keen insight into themes that would have abiding interest for future generations. Who can forget the scenes recorded by Eusebius?

The apostle John fleeing the bathhouse upon finding Cerinthus, "the enemy of the truth," there.

Justin Martyr in a philosopher's cloak preaching the Word of God.

Polycarp confessing his faith before the governor: "Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and he has done me no wrong; how can I blaspheme my king who saved me?"

Blandina, the slave girl, hanging on a stake as if on a cross, but inspiring her fellow martyrs, "who saw the One who was crucified in the form of their sister."

Origen's father admiring his sleeping boy as one in whom the divine Spirit was enshrined.

Eusebius did not perfect the discipline of church history, but he took the crucial first step of considering world events from a Christian perspective. It is a tribute to his accomplishment that such scholars as Rufinus, Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, and Theodoret continued his pursuit—though none attempted to rewrite what he had written. For centuries, historians only took up where he left off.

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What a Difference a Reign Makes

Eusebius traces the Christian saga: from abuse to esteem in less than a decade.

Near the beginning of Book 8 of Church History***, Eusebius describes the Roman Empire, under Diocletian, launching its fiercest attack on Christians:***

In March of the nineteenth year of Diocletian's reign, when the festival of the Savior's passion [Easter] was approaching, an imperial edict was announced everywhere ordering that the churches be demolished and the Scriptures destroyed by fire. Any [Christians] who held high places would lose them, while those in households would be imprisoned if they continued to profess Christianity. Such was the first decree against us.

Soon, however, other edicts appeared ordering that the presidents of the churches everywhere be thrown into prison and then forced by every sort of device to offer sacrifice [to the Emperor].

Then it was that many church leaders endured terrible torments heroically, while countless others succumbed to the first assault, cowardice having numbed their souls. As to the rest, each was subjected to a series of various tortures: one was scourged mercilessly, another racked and scraped to death. People emerged from the ordeal in different ways: one man would be shoved at the loathsome, unholy sacrifices and dismissed as if he had sacrificed when he had not; another who came nowhere near any such abomination but was said to have sacrificed would leave in silence at the falsehood. Still another, half dead, would be discarded as a corpse, while a man who had sacrificed willingly was nevertheless dragged a long distance by his feet. One man would shout at the top of his voice that he had not sacrificed and never would, while yet another would proclaim that he was a Christian and glory in the Savior's name. These were silenced by a large band of soldiers, who struck them on the mouth and battered their faces. The overriding goal of the enemies of godliness was to appear to have accomplished their purpose.

By the beginning of Book 9, Emperor Diocletian had been succeeded by Galerius, who advanced the persecutions. But then Galerius fell ill with a horrible bowel disease and recanted the anti-Christian edicts. Eusebius celebrates:

When this had been done, it was as if a light had suddenly blazed out of a dark night. In every city, churches were thronged, congregations crowded, and rites duly performed. All the unbelieving heathen were astonished at the wonder of so great a transformation and hailed the Christians' God as alone great and true. Among our own people, those who had valiantly contended through the ordeal of persecution again enjoyed freedom with honor, but those whose faith had been anemic and their souls in turmoil eagerly sought healing, begging the strong to extend the right hand of rescue and imploring God to be merciful to them. Then, too, the noble champions of godliness, released from their misery in the mines, returned to their own homes, rejoicing and beaming as they went through every city, exuding an indescribable delight and confidence. Crowds of men went on their way, praising God with hymns and psalms in the middle of the thoroughfares and public squares.

Those who a little earlier had been prisoners, cruelly punished and driven from their homelands,

now regained their own hearths with smiles of elation, so that even those who had thirsted for our blood saw this unexpected wonder and shared our joy at what had happened.

— from Eusebius, Church History, 8.2, 8.3, and 9.1. Translated by Paul Maier (Kregel, 1999).

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Eusebius's Ancestors

First-century rivals for the title Father of Church History.

Elesha Coffman

Nearly 200 years before Eusebius was born, Luke announced his intention to "write an orderly account" of events related to Jesus Christ, based on careful investigation of "everything from the beginning" (see Luke 1:1-4). With this project, encompassing Luke and Acts, the physician established himself as the earliest church historian—in some eyes, anyway.

The Lucan books were considered reliable history almost universally before the nineteenth century. Then an influential school of thought centered at Tübingen University, Germany, attacked on several fronts: Luke's reports of miracles, his obvious theological aims, the suspicious similarity in voice and ideas among the author and everyone he quotes. A cadre composed mostly of British scholars fought back, and more recent investigations into the contours of ancient historiography have shown Luke to be more trustworthy than many of his contemporaries. Still, the place of his works in the biblical canon makes comparison with other historical works difficult.

First-century Jewish historian Josephus invites more comparisons with Eusebius: both befriended Roman emperors, both made broad use of sources no longer available, and, by modern tastes, both betray too much bias. Yet both are indispensible as reporters on their eras and traditions, because they give us information recorded by no one else.

Because Josephus switched to the Roman side as the Jewish revolt collapsed, Jews considered him a traitor. Christians, however, latched onto his work as independent corroboration of people, places, and events in their own tradition. Josephus's reports of the intertestamental and New Testament periods have earned his books a place beside the Bible on many Christians' shelves. Even so, it's a stretch to consider him an early church historian, because he hardly discussed the nascent church and mentioned Jesus, rather vaguely, only twice.

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In God's Country

Those who believe that God rewards righteous nations have Orosius to admire and Augustine to dispute.

Elesha Coffman

The idea of Christendom, a domain where Christian politics and ecclesiology entwined, captivated the medieval imagination. Yet Augustine, whose thought (especially as expounded in his massive ***City of God***) dominated the Middle Ages, never advocated such a system. Orosius, one of his students, did.

When Augustine began work on ***City of God***, in 412, Rome was suffering under its first hostile occupation in centuries. Some disillusioned Roman citizens blamed Christians and their God, who seemed less able to defend the city than the old pagan gods had been. Augustine refutes this claim in ***City of God***, especially the first five books.

The invasion of Rome drove many citizens to seek refuge in comparatively calm northern Africa, among them a young scholar named Orosius. Augustine welcomed him, describing him in a letter as a "young man ... who is in the bond of the Catholic peace a brother, in the point of age a son, and in honor a fellow presbyter—a man of quick understanding, ready speech, and burning zeal, desiring to be in the Lord's house a vessel rendering useful service."

Orosius stayed with Augustine for about a year. Augustine was at the time busy working on ***City of God***, combating the Pelagian heresy, and leading a large congregation. These duties left him no time to write a detailed, direct attack (beyond book three of ***City of God***) on pagans and their nostalgia for a golden age before the rise of Christianity. So, according to Orosius, Augustine asked his protégé to mount the assault:

"You [Augustine] bade me, therefore, discover from all the available data of histories and annals whatever instances past ages have afforded of the burdens of war, the ravages of disease, the horrors of famine, of terrible earthquakes, extraordinary floods, dreadful eruptions of fire, thunderbolts and hailstorms, and also instances of the cruel miseries caused by parricides [familial murders] and disgusting crimes."

As requested, Orosius described plenty of burdens, ravages, and horrors in his ***Seven Books of History Against the Pagans***. But he also not-so-subtly deviated from his mentor's view of political history. In earthly governments, where Augustine saw a gray mixture of human impurities and God's holiness, Orosius found evil blackness and holy light. Christian Rome, later revived as Christendom and the Holy Roman Empire, basked in the latter.

Just another city

Augustine was not so enamored with Rome. Though he did consider it the pinnacle of civilization to date, he did not believe that perfection could be reached this side of heaven—certainly not in Rome.

In book five of ***City of God***, Augustine demolishes Roman ideas of glory:

> "As far as I can see, the distinction between victors and vanquished has not the slightest importance for security, for moral standards, or even for human dignity. It is merely a matter

of the arrogance of human glory, the coin in which these men 'received their reward,' who were on fire with unlimited lust for glory, and waged their wars of burning fury.

"Is it the case that the conqueror's lands are exempt from taxes? Have the victors access to knowledge forbidden to the others? Are there not many senators in other lands, who do not know Rome even by sight? Take away national complacency, and what are all men but simply men? If the perverse standards of the world would allow men to receive honors proportional to their deserts, even so the honor of men should not be accounted an important matter; smoke has no weight. ...

"That City [heaven], in which it has been promised that we shall reign, differs from this earthly city as widely as the sky from the earth, life eternal from temporal joy, substantial glory from empty praises, the society of angels from the society of men, the light of the Maker of the sun and moon from the light of the sun and moon."

In the same book, Augustine also rejects the notion that God's favor guarantees a society's success, or that temporal success can be interpreted as a clear sign of divine approval:

"[W]e must ascribe to the true God alone the power to grant kingdoms and empires. He it is who gives happiness in the kingdom of heaven only to the good, but grants earthly kingdoms both to the good and to the evil, in accordance with his pleasure, which can never be unjust.

"We have already said something on this matter, as far as he has willed to make it plain to us. But to examine the secrets of men's hearts and to decide with clear judgment on the varying merits of human kingdoms—this would be a heavy task for us men, a task indeed far beyond our powers. ...

"This is true also in respect of individual men. The same God gave power to Marius and to Gaius Caesar, to Augustus and to Nero, to the Vespasians, father and son, the most attractive emperors, as well as to Domitian, the most ruthless tyrant; and (we need not run through the whole list) the same God gave the throne to Constantine the Christian, and also to Julian the Apostate. ...

"It is clear that God, the one true God, rules and guides these events, according to his pleasure. If God's reasons are inscrutable, does that mean that they are unjust?"

The most Christian empire

Whatever Orosius learned from Augustine, it did not include Augustine's ambivalence about earthly principalities. Orosius gushed about Rome, even suggesting, in his sixth book, that the city's history was a crucial part of God's plan for salvation:

"Now this one true God, on Whom, as we said, all schools agree even though differing in their interpretations, this God, Who changes kingdoms, orders the times, and also punishes sin, has chosen the weak of the world to confound the mighty and has laid the foundation of the Roman Empire by choosing a shepherd of the humblest station.

"After this empire had prospered for many years under kings and consuls and had gained the mastery of Asia, Africa, and Europe, He conferred all things by His decree upon a single emperor, who was preeminent in power and mercy. Under this emperor, to whom almost all nations rendered respect and due honor with mingled love and fear, the true God, Who was worshiped with scrupulous observance of rites by those who did not know Him, opened that great fountainhead of His knowledge.

> "For the purpose of teaching men more quickly through a man, He sent His Son to work miracles that surpassed man's power and to refute the demons, whom some had thought to be gods, in order that those very men who had not believed in Him as a man should believe in His works as of God. He did this also that the glory of the new name and the swift report of the promised salvation might spread abroad quickly and without hindrance in the midst of the state of great tranquillity and universal peace that prevailed and also that His disciples, as they passed through different nations and freely offered the gifts of salvation to all, might have security and liberty to go about and speak as Roman citizens among Roman citizens."

Given the difficulties Rome faced during his lifetime, Orosius could not pretend that nothing bad ever happened in the empire. But instead of attributing these hardships to the fallenness of the world and the inscrutability of God's ways, as Augustine did, Orosius presents calamities as aberrations in which God's purposes are nonetheless clear and his mercy never far behind.

For example, Orosius states that Alaric's invasion of Rome in 410 was "due to the wrath of God rather than to the bravery of the enemy." The invasion caused destruction, but also good, for "[i]n the sacking of the City the trumpet of salvation sounded far and wide." Moreover, the destruction was minor: "[The Goths] had, it is true, burned a certain number of buildings, but even this fire was not so great as that which had been caused by accident [during Nero's reign]."

Throughout his ***Seven Books***, Orosius comes across as a realist—more interested in political realities than in otherworldly speculations. Near the end of the work, he writes, "In view of these things I am ready to allow Christian times to be blamed as much as you please, if you can only point to any equally fortunate period from the foundation of the world to the present day." Because Orosius compares Rome to its imperial peers, and not to the heavenly city that figured so prominently in Augustine's thought, Rome appears to be the best of all possible worlds.

No record remains of what Augustine thought of his pupil's composition. It is hard to believe he would have given it high marks. But heads of later Christian states loved Orosius's blend of providentialism and politics. Ninth-century West Saxon King Alfred the Great even translated Orosius's Seven Books into Anglo-Saxon, then grafted on recent accounts from northern Europe, indicating that God's hand continued to guide righteous kingdoms. In some ways, apologists for "Christian America" (or any other state) continue the project.

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When God Came to England

In Bede's view, the history of the English church—like the history of redemption—begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation.

Frank A. James III

The remote monastery at Jarrow, nestled on a spit of land extending into the river Tyne, was only a few years old when the plague hit in 686. Every monk succumbed to the pestilence except Abbot Ceolfrid and a "little lad" who had been made a ward of the monastery. Most scholars identify the "little lad" as Bede. The young survivor, if not yet "venerable," was resilient.

Relatively little else is known of Bede's life. Most direct information we possess derives from Bede's own abbreviated account of his life at the end of his most famous work, the ***Ecclesiastical History***. Beyond the fact that he was a "priest of the monastery of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul at Wearmouth and Jarrow," Bede offers only the following pithy autobiographical fragment:

"I was born on the lands of this monastery, and on reaching seven years of age, I was entrusted by my family first to the most reverend Abbot Benedict and later to Abbot Ceolfrid for my education. I have spent all the remainder of my life in this monastery and devoted myself entirely to the study of the Scriptures."

Based on the date given for the completion of the ***Ecclesiastical History***, Bede was born in 673. He spent his formative years in the cloister at the twin monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow, founded by Benedict Biscop in 674 and 681, at the mouth of the two rivers.

In many respects, Bede was a typical monk. Excavations have revealed that he probably lived in a small cell, with much of his day governed by the monastic office—meeting with his fellow monks seven times a day and once a night to sing or read the Scriptures. He saw these meetings as more than just a routine, for he once wrote in a letter, "I know that the angels are present at the canonical Hours, and what if they do not find me among the brethren when they assemble? Will they not say, Where is Bede? Why does he not attend the appointed devotions with his brethren?"

The rest of Bede's day was divided between work and study of Latin, Greek, Roman law, chant, mathematical calculation, and the zodiac. He spent considerable time writing, for in addition to the ***Ecclesiastical History*** he penned Old and New Testament commentaries as well as books on grammar, computation, and lives of saints.

One of the great legacies of Biscop was the library at Jarrow, with its biblical texts and commentaries by Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, and Gregory the Great. Jarrow also contained a Scriptorium, where Bede must have spent many hours copying manuscripts. Educated principally by the Latin Bible, he spent the best part of his life compiling commentaries from the Fathers.

Bede must have been a successful monk, for he was ordained a deacon at the uncanonical age of 19 and later became master of education at Jarrow. "It is always my delight to learn and to teach," he wrote.

Unlike his predecessors, he seems to have traveled rarely, though traveling abbots kept the libraries at the twin monasteries well-stocked. Their finds supplied Bede with important sources for his most famous historical work.

Bede was especially indebted to Eusebius of Caesarea, whose ***Church History*** set the standard for all church historians. Bede's aim seems to have been to do for the history of the church in England what Eusebius had done for the universal church.

Molded by Scripture

Like Augustine, Bede saw world history divided into six ages, which correspond to the six days of creation. Each age was marked by a major redemptive-historical person or event: Creation, the Flood, Abraham, David, the captivity of Judah, and the birth of Christ. The ***Ecclesiastical History*** is principally concerned with the sixth age, which was inaugurated by the birth of Christ. Therefore Bede employs the distinctively Christian dating system ***anno Domini*** (in the year of our Lord).

Bede's first book corresponds to the biblical book of Genesis in its focus on origins of English history. But Bede does not begin with human history. Rather, he begins with a geographic description of "Albion" (the former name of Britain), with its plentiful timber, pasture, birds, fish, and minerals, which has the effect of conjuring up an Edenic vision of an island paradise.

This book peaks with Bede's vivid account of the martyrdom of Alban, a pagan who offered protection to a Christian priest whose piety had deeply impressed him. When imperial soldiers came to arrest the priest, Alban donned the priest's cloak and surrendered himself in his place. Boldly defying his captors, he refused to offer sacrifices to pagan gods and was sentenced to death.

On the way to his execution, several miracles transpired. A river dried up to make a path for them to cross, water miraculously bubbled up from the ground when they were parched, and when the executioner's wicked duty was done, Bede records, "the martyr's head fell, [and] the executioner's eyes dropped out on the ground." These miracles hearken back to the Mosaic miracles in the Pentateuch—the parting of the Red Sea and the water from the rock at Rephidim.

Bede's second book closely parallels the era of the Gospels, recording the establishment of Christianity. Bede pays tribute to Pope Gregory, whom he designates the "apostle" to the English nation. He recounts how Gregory's desire for the salvation of the English was kindled by coming across some fair-skinned slaves being sold in a Roman marketplace. When told they were from the island of Britain and their race called "Angles," Gregory declared: "That is appropriate, for they have angelic faces, and it is right that they should become joint-heirs with the angels in heaven."

After becoming Pope, Gregory sent Augustine of Canterbury to convert the English, and inevitably Augustine's appointment as archbishop establishes the episcopate and a link to the apostolic era.

Books three and four replicate the Acts of the Apostles and Pauline Epistles with their description of the expansion and consolidation of the English church. In book three, Bede gives an account of the growth of the church under Christian kings and describes what he considers the watershed event in the early history of the English church—the Synod of Whitby, which asserted Roman authority over the Celtic churches in such matters as setting the date for Easter.

Book four opens with the story of one of the greatest bishop-saints in the history of the church in England, Theodore of Tarsus, whose reign as Archbishop of Canterbury saw the church of England come of age.

Of the saintly bishops who figured prominently during Theodore's tenure, none was greater than Cuthbert, who ministered both in life and in death. Bede links magnificent miracles to Cuthbert's tomb: a monk is cured of his paralysis, the diseased eye of a young monk is restored after he comes into contact with the "hairs of the holy Cuthbert's head," and Cuthbert's body is found to be without decay when exhumed 11 years after death.

All of these miracles seem to have a New Testament orientation, even a Pauline tone, as when Bede records of Cuthbert's body, "when they opened the grave, they found the body whole and incorrupt as though still living." It would seem that Bede shaped these materials to draw a link with the New Testament church and to display divine approval of the church in England.

Bede's final book reflects the eschatological tone of John's Apocalypse, complete with striking visions of the afterlife. One vision is shared by Drythelm, who was at death's door when a "man in a shining robe" appeared, pulled back the veil of the seventh age, and gave him a guided tour of purgatory.

Reminiscent of Dante, Drythelm observes a two-tiered purgatory, a valley of "burning flames and icy cold" and a "pleasant meadow filled with the scent of flowers." This dramatic portrait of the afterlife clearly parallels the New Testament Apocalypse, with its visions of judgment.

The Apocalypse of John also envisions a glorious harmony in the new heavens and the new earth, an idea captured by Bede in the final chapters of book five. In these chapters unification grows between the English church and the Roman mother church, particularly in the success stories of how dissident churches came to accept the Roman dating of Easter.

Continuing redemption

In Bede's view, English church history continued the story of the New Testament. As he did with the Jews of old and the Gentiles of apostolic times, God was redeeming the English people for himself. Like the biblical writers, Bede recounts the history of that redemption in order to remind the English of what God has done. All history is redemptive history.

As the first great historian of the church in England, Bede belongs to a world very different from our own. For him, history was never purely secular, but a temporal manifestation of the divine plan of redemption. Bede also believed that this divine plan worked through Christian kings and the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Some of Bede's Celtic contemporaries disagreed with these views. Many modern readers, too, find such a pro-establishment bias suspicious or even repressive.

Other critics have judged Bede a "second-rate scholar" because his ***Ecclesiastical History*** is largely derived from the works of previous church historians. However, this material has been carefully reshaped by a redemptive historical vision and made theologically coherent so that the sum is greater than its parts. "It takes a kind of genius to do this sort of thing well," judges one modern medievalist—a kind of genius that Bede undeniably possessed.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
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Oswald and Aidan

How an English king and a Scottish bishop teamed up to spread the gospel.

Bede

This excerpt from Bede's Ecclesiastical History (Book 3, chapter 3) ***primarily describes the evangelistic efforts of Northumbrian King Oswald, "a man beloved by God," and his bishop, Aidan, but references to the Easter date controversy and to the topography of Lindisfarne allude to Bede's broader interests.***

The same Oswald, as soon as he ascended the throne, being desirous that all his nation should receive the Christian faith, whereof he had found happy experience in vanquishing the barbarians, sent to the elders of the Scots, among whom himself and his followers, when in banishment, had received the sacrament of baptism, desiring they would send him a bishop, by whose instruction and ministry the English nation, which he governed, might be taught the advantages, and receive the sacraments of the Christian faith.

Nor were they slow in granting his request; but sent him Bishop Aidan, a man of singular meekness, piety, and moderation; zealous in the cause of God, though not altogether according to knowledge; for he was wont to keep Easter Sunday according to the custom of his country, which we have before so often mentioned, from the fourteenth to the twentieth moon; the northern province of the Scots, and all the nation of the Picts, celebrating Easter then after that manner, and believing that they therein followed the writings of the holy and praiseworthy Father Anatolius; the truth of which every skillful person can discern. But the Scots which dwelt in the South of Ireland had long since, by the admonition of the bishop of the Apostolic See, learned to observe Easter according to the canonical custom.

On the arrival of the bishop, the king appointed him his episcopal see in the isle of Lindisfarne, as he desired. Which place, as the tide flows and ebbs twice a day, is enclosed by the waves of the sea like an island; and again, twice in the day, when the shore is left dry, becomes contiguous to the land. The king also humbly and willingly in all cases giving ear to his admonitions, industriously applied himself to build and extend the church of Christ in his kingdom; wherein, when the bishop, who was not skillful in the English tongue, preached the gospel, it was most delightful to see the king himself interpreting the word of God to his commanders and ministers, for he had perfectly learned the language of the Scots during his long banishment.

From that time many of the Scots came daily into Britain, and with great devotion preached the word to those provinces of the English, over which King Oswald reigned, and those among them that had received priest's orders, administered to them the grace of baptism. Churches were built in several places; the people joyfully flocked together to hear the word; money and lands were given of the king's bounty to build monasteries; the English, great and small, were, by their Scottish masters, instructed in the rules and observance of regular discipline; for most of them that came to preach were monks.

Bishop Aidan was himself a monk of the island called Hii, whose monastery was for a long time the chief of almost all those of the northern Scots, and all those of the Picts, and had the direction of their people. That island belongs to Britain, being divided from it by a small arm of the sea, but had been long since given by the Picts, who inhabit those parts of Britain, to the Scottish monks, because they had received the faith of Christ through their preaching.

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Wide Angles and Zoom Lenses

Medieval chronicles showed Christians their place in God's world, from Creation to the end.

James D. Smith III

When people think of medieval history, they might think of legends about saints (see Great Lessons from "Bad" History, page 22) or entries such as these from the ***Annals*** of St. Gall:

710. Hard year and deficient in crops.
712. Great flood.
714. Pippin, Mayor of Palace, died.
718. Charles Martel devastated Saxony with great destruction.

Contrast those sparse lines with this passage from medieval chronicler Ordericus Vitalis:

> "When [William the Conqueror's son] Robert heard about this he was terrified. Seeing disasters all around him, he was brought low and forced to beg for mercy from the unconquered king [Henry I]. The stern king, however, remembering all the wrongs Robert had committed, resolved to hunt him down with a huge army, and press the attack until he recognized that he was beaten and submitted entirely to the king's judgment.
>
> "Robert, driven to despair by his wretched fate, took the advice of friends and went out to meet the king as he approached the town, confessed his treason, and handed over the keys of the town to the conqueror. The king confiscated Robert's whole honor [royally granted lands] as well as the estates of the vassals who had stood by him in his rebellion, but allowed him to leave unharmed with his horses and arms, and granted him a safe-conduct through England to the sea-coast.
>
> "All England rejoiced as the cruel tyrant went into exile, and many, fawning on the king, congratulated him saying, 'Rejoice, King Henry, give thanks to the Lord God, for you have begun to rule freely now that you have conquered Robert of Bellême and driven him out of your kingdom.'"

Medieval chronicles drew upon several sets of annals, plus oral traditions, to compose a comprehensive account. Many chronicles even begin with Jerome's Latin version of Eusebius's ***Chronicle***, connecting local events with the span of history from creation forward.

Whether the story of a medieval town (e.g. London or Florence), an event (e.g. a crusade), an abbey, or an ethnic group, each chronicle provided an informative, purposeful, unrefined world view in which readers—or hearers—could find their identity. These four history writers produced some of the most notable chronicles of the High Middle Ages:

Ordericus Vitalis (1075-1142?)

Ordericus was an English-born monk who, after being sent by his parents to Normandy at age 10, became the foremost medieval historian of that region. He billed his ***Ecclesiastical History*** as a universal account ranging from Christ's time to his own, but he focused on life after the Norman

Conquest, with special emphasis on political and diplomatic history.

Ordericus pivoted his history on biblical eschatology, describing the church's role in salvation. Current events fit into God's plan as well.

In another era, Ordericus might have been a newspaper journalist. Under his pen, William the Conqueror emerges both as a patron of churches and a man who spent his final hours struggling with a troubled past. The First Crusade is undertaken "by the inspiration of God" as Christians of the West, "from the ends of the earth and the isles of the sea," formed a united army to free the East. His personal interviews, colorful vignettes, and frequent digressions are unforgettable.

Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1142)

Probably Flemish, possibly a Saxon, Hugh became an Augustinian monk and came to the French monastery of St. Victor in about 1115. He became director of the abbey school and wrote extensively. His most influential work, ***On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith***, sought to apply contemporary learning to worship and the ***lectio divina*** (the art of contemplative prayer).

Unlike most medieval thinkers, Hugh believed that the literal sense of Scripture was as least as important as the allegorical and metaphorical senses, and that the literal meaning must be grasped first. Because of this mindset, Hugh emphasized history as the foundation of sacred learning and virtue. Through history, he saw God's work of salvation.

On the Sacraments follows a historical, rather than theological, structure. Book One moves from Creation to Incarnation, while Book Two moves toward the Last Things. World history coincides with the history of God's people: "From the beginning to the end, no period lacks its faithful to Christ."

Otto of Friesing (1114-1158)

Born into a ruling German line, Otto became his land's finest medieval historian. Following training in Paris, he joined the Cistercian order in 1133, entering the abbey of Morimond in Champagne, where he became abbot. He was appointed Bishop of Friesing in 1137, helped reform his diocese, and took part in the disastrous Second Crusade (1147-1148).

Written at the end of his life, Otto's ***Deeds of the Emperor Fredrick I*** offered an optimistic, almost fatherly interpretation of his era. His most far-reaching work, however, was the ***Book of Two Cities***, or ***Chronicle of Universal History.***

Two Cities offers the first important medieval philosophy of history. Following Augustine and his younger colleague Orosius (see page 13), Otto pits the "City of God" against the "City of the Devil." In eight books, he traces this struggle from Creation to his own year—1146. The final book depicts the Last Judgment and the world to come.

Pursuing this grand scheme, Otto devalued some secular and pagan elements, becoming careless or overly rhetorical in use of detail. Yet his attention to cause and effect, his attempts to explain the present by understanding the past, and his concern "not to lose the thread of history" are consistently thought-provoking.

Anselm of Havelberg (ca. 1100-1158)

Anselm was one of the first members of the Premonstratensian order, a group dedicated to asceticism, contemplation, and active ministry. In about 1129 he was consecrated Bishop of Havelberg,

in northeastern Germany on the Slavic frontier. In 1155 he was transferred to Italy, where he served as Archbishop of Ravenna.

In addition to visiting the courts of both German Emperor and Roman Pope, he journeyed at least twice to Constantinople, advocating ecclesiastical unity and political accord. The first of these journeys inspired his principal theological work, ***The Dialogues***.

Confronted with a foreign culture, Anselm developed, as theologian Walter Edyvean has shown, "an active consciousness of human history." In Book One of his ***Dialogues***, he uses three different schemata to advance his apologetic for the one, true church throughout the course of history. As none of these is wholly original, Anselm emerges as a student both of history and historians.

Anselm's view of history is apologetic rather than apocalyptic—unlike the view of his more-famous countryman, Joachim of Fiore (1132-1202). Presenting the grave concerns of his time, Anselm finds hope in the presence of the Spirit of God, who is able to give life and renewal to his people in any age. "With the ancient fathers," Anselm wrote, "in manifold ways by the one Faith the one God has been served."

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Maggie, the Dragon Slayer?

Sometimes even hagiographers wondered if their stories were too good to be true.

Elesha Coffman

In the process of adaptation, hagiographic legends often changed, and it is interesting to study what authors omitted from or changed in their traditional sources. Various Lives of the virgin martyr St. Margaret (known as St. Marina in the East) reflect attempts to rein in the more outrageous aspects of her immensely popular legend.

A Middle English text composed between 1200 and 1230 tells this tale of Margaret's encounter with a dragon:

He stretched himself and steered toward the meek maiden, and with his jaw gaping at her threateningly, he began to crane his neck and draw back as if he would swallow her completely. If she was terrified by that horrible demon, it was not much wonder! Her face began to grow pale, because of the horror that gripped her, and because of fearful terror, she forgot her prayer that she might see the invisible demon, nor did she think that her prayer was granted, but she promptly fell to the earth on her knees and lifted her hands up high toward heaven and spoke this prayer to Christ:

"Invisible God, full of every good thing, whose wrath is so fierce that the inhabitants of hell and heaven and all living things quake before it; help me Lord, against this terrible creature, so that it not harm me."

And then she drew on herself from top to bottom and then across, the beloved sign of the dear cross that Christ rested on. At that moment the dragon rushed to her and set his horrible, greedy and huge mouth over the top of her head, and reached out his tongue to the soles of her feet, and swallowing, swung her into his wide belly—but for his evil fate, and to the glory of Christ. For the sign of the cross with which she was armed quickly delivered her and was instantly his slayer; his body burst open in the middle, and that blessed maiden came out of his belly all unharmed, without any stain at all, praising on high her Savior in heaven.

Jacopo da Voragine, writing later in the thirteenth century, renders the story quite differently:

[Margaret] prayed to the Lord, that He make visible her enemy who was fighting against her, and an enormous dragon appeared there, but when he came to devour her, she made the sign of the cross and he disappeared. Or, as one may read elsewhere, it opened its jaw over her head, and stretched out its tongue under her heels, and swallowed her up; but as it was trying to digest her, she defended herself with the sign of the cross and by the power of the cross the dragon broke open and the virgin came out from there. What is said, however, about the dragon devouring her and then breaking open, is considered apocryphal and frivolous.

Eventually, the Holy See judged everything about Margaret apocryphal and frivolous. Her cult was suppressed in 1969.

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The Best of History

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
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Church History's Biggest Hoax

Renaissance scholarship proved fatal for one of the medieval papacy's favorite claims.

Peter E. Prosser

What does the fall of Constantinople in 1453 have to do with the exposure of a famous forgery?

For a half century before Turks took the city, the capital of the eastern Roman Empire, church scholars traveled often between Constantinople and Italy. Fearing Turkish invasion, scholars brought more than 230 ancient manuscripts back to Italy, rescuing the texts from oblivion and feeding the Renaissance with "new" ideas.

The discovery of these books led to a tremendous interest in languages and historical and contextual criticism. It also fed a new interest in discovering whether ancient documents were genuine.

Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457), a specialist in Latin translation and philology (the study of words), took an interest in examining ancient and modern authors and their style of writing. Thus he became, unwittingly, one of the first scholars to examine ancient documents for their authenticity.

Early in his career, Valla made a critical study of Jerome's Latin Vulgate, the official Bible of the Roman Catholic church. He raised troubling questions about some of Jerome's word choices, such as Latin ***paenitentia*** ("penance") for Greek ***metanoia*** (better rendered "repentance"). Valla essentially suggested that the Catholic church's entire system of penance and indulgences rested on a mistranslation! Later critics of that system, including Erasmus, used Valla's textual notes and praised his work.

Alfonso, king of Aragon, Sicily, and Naples, as well as a patron of scholarship, hired Valla as his secretary in 1435. Alfonso wished to expand his territory by annexing papal lands, so in addition to admiring Valla's intellect, he probably hoped to use the scholar as a secret weapon against the church.

In 1440, under the king's protection from Pope Eugenius IV, Valla wrote his most famous disputation: ***On the Falsely Believed and Lying Donation of Constantine.*** He labeled the work a "ridiculous forgery" and sneered, "A Christian man who calls himself the son of light and truth ought to be ashamed to utter things that not only are not true but are not even likely."

The Donation of Constantine granted far-reaching property and privileges to the papacy, including ecclesiastical supremacy over the sees of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople; oversight of lands in "Judea, Greece, Asia, Thrace, Africa, and Italy and the various islands"; the Lateran palace; and several items of imperial regalia. Constantine had supposedly bestowed such lavish gifts on Pope Sylvester I to thank the pope for curing his leprosy.

Almost everyone accepted the donation as valid from the ninth century to the fifteenth. Still, Valla was not the first scholar to find the story fishy. Nicholas of Cusa had exposed the falsity of the donation in 1433, but it was Valla's lucid historical and linguistic criticism that devastated the document's defense.

Valla knew his arguments would get him into trouble. Regarding the church loyalists who judged Valla's earlier work as subversive, he wrote, "How they will rage against me, and if opportunity is afforded how

eagerly and how quickly they will drag me to punishment! For I am writing against not only the dead, but the living also, not this man or that, but a host, not merely private individuals, but the authorities. And what authorities! Even the supreme pontiff."

Still, Valla pressed on, determined to expose an error he judged "an enormous one, due either to supine ignorance, or to gross avarice which is the slave of idols, or to pride of empire of which cruelty is ever the companion."

Valla's argument hangs on philological study, through which he shows that the language of the donation dates not to the fourth century, but most likely to the eighth. By that time, the papacy had established its territorial ambitions. The borders drawn in the false donation merely outlined the lands that papal forces had sought to conquer through military and political maneuvering.

The forgery was so obvious, and so recent, that Valla could advance only two reasons why dozens of popes had accepted it: "either they have not known that the Donation of Constantine is spurious and forged, or else they themselves forged it, and their successors walking in the same way of deceit as their elders have defended as true what they knew to be false, dishonoring the majesty of the pontificate, dishonoring the memory of ancient pontiffs, dishonoring the Christian religion, confounding everything with murders, disasters and crimes."

Valla held the papacy in such low regard that he naturally leaned toward the latter explanation. Deeper into his critique, he scoffed, "Even were the Donation authentic, it would be null and void, for Constantine could have not power to make it, and in any case the crimes of the papacy would already have annulled it."

In his analysis of the effects of this historic hoax, Valla stated that from that papacy's usurpation of the temporal power had come the corruption of the church, the wars of Italy, and the "overbearing, barbarous, tyrannical priestly domination." Valla called on the people of Rome to rise up and overthrow the papal government of their city, and he invited the princes of Europe to deprive the popes of all their territorial possessions.

In the face of such an attack, the papacy could not remain silent. Besides, it controlled the Inquisition. Valla was summoned and accused of heresy. But King Alfonso ordered the Inquisition to leave Valla alone, and the case was withdrawn.

Valla continued his attacks on the church. He showed, by using basic historical and linguistic rules, that the Apostles' Creed was not composed by the apostles, but by later church leaders. Other critiques followed, but then Alfonso began to move toward reconciliation with Rome.

Valla, ever the deft politician, decided that he had better make peace also. He addressed a letter of apology to Pope Eugenius IV, reaffirming his orthodoxy and asking for pardon. Eugenius ignored the request, but when the next pope, Nicholas V, was looking for scholars for his new library (now the Vatican Library), he forgave Valla and made him a papal secretary in 1448. Valla finished his career as a canon of St. John Lateran (the pope's own church) and died in 1457.

Nicholas V effectively admitted the forgery of the donation when he hired Valla to be his secretary. Still, authorities suppressed Valla's disputation for decades. The first print edition did not appear until 1517, when Martin Luther and other Reformers would make great use of it.

The false donation gradually receded from prominence, though its authenticity continued to be debated in some circles until the eighteenth century. The papacy held onto the lands in central Italy granted by Pepin, in 755, until 1861, when nearly all of the peninsula united as the new Kingdom of Italy.

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Battle For the Past

As traditions clashed during the Reformation, history became hotly disputed territory.

Timothy George

Two perennial theological questions—"What must I do to be saved?" and "Where can I find the true church?"—took on special urgency in the Reformation era as the Christian world experienced an unprecedented crisis of authority. This crisis and its various resolutions all had roots in Renaissance learning.

As Copernicus and Galileo opened the heavens, and Columbus and Magellan mapped the world, humanist scholars such as Petrarch and Bruni encouraged a new interest in the study of history, especially the history of ancient Greece and Rome. The motto of all Renaissance scholars was ***ad fontes***, "back to the sources," and the heart of this enterprise was the careful study of documents and texts. Sometimes these studies led to a radical critique of the institutional church and traditional theology (see "Church History's Biggest Hoax," page 35).

By the time of the Reformation, Desiderius Erasmus was applying the same kind of scholarly analysis to the Scriptures themselves. He produced a new edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516, and Luther used a copy in his famous attack on the practice of indulgences. Thus it was said that "Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched."

Luther would later part with Erasmus on crucial theological issues, but the textual and historical studies of humanist scholars enabled the Reformers to challenge many church practices and teachings in their efforts to restore "the true and ancient face" of biblical Christianity.

Reclaiming a hidden tradition

The role that history would play in subsequent Reformation debates was foreshadowed by Luther's 1519 confrontation with the Catholic theologian John Eck at Leipzig. Eck accused Luther of echoing Jan Hus, the Czech Reformer who had been burned at the stake at the Council of Constance in 1415. Luther was forced to admit that Hus had been right in some of his disputes with the church. Some of Luther's revolutionary ideas were not exactly new.

The principle of ***sola scriptura***, Luther argued, also had a history—it had not been invented in the sixteenth century but had been taught by faithful witnesses through the ages. This position could not merely be asserted, however; it had to be argued and proved by historical analysis. The Reformation required a new Protestant historiography.

In his debate with Eck, Luther quoted Cicero's definition of history as "the mother of truth." This did not mean, of course, that history or tradition was the ***source*** of truth—only the revelation of God in Christ and the Bible could be that—but rather that history was the arena in which biblical claims could be understood and justified. In this sense, the Reformation was as much a battle for the Christian past as it was a struggle for the true interpretation of the Bible.

French Reformer John Calvin agreed. Calvin saw the world, including the realm of history, as "the theater of God's glory," and he urged Christian scholars to peruse the past in order to discover patterns of divine

providence and spiritual blessing.

Calvin advocated a kind of historical scholarship that was both critical and providentialist, one in which the line between sacred and secular history was intentionally blurred. He wrote:

"It is not enough to have our eyes open and to note well and mark what God does during our lives, but we must profit from ancient histories. In fact, this is why our Lord has wanted us to have some notable judgments left in writing, so that the memory of them would remain forever. And we should not only profit from what is contained in Holy Scripture, but when we hear what is spoken by the histories written by the pagans, we should also have the prudence to apply to ourselves what God has done."

Rival visions

Johannes Sleidan (1506-1556) was one of the first historians of the Reformation epoch. Sleidan, a lawyer and diplomat trained in the disciplines of German humanism, lived through some of the seminal events of the sixteenth century: he was a secretary to a Catholic cardinal in France, a counselor to the Protestant city of Strasbourg, a correspondent of John Calvin, and an observer at the Council of Trent.

Sleidan was especially interested in the political shape of the Reformation, and his careful research resulted in a masterful survey of these events. His ***Commentaries on Religion and the State in the Reign of Emperor Charles V***, published in 1555, became one of the most widely read narratives of the age.

Although personally committed to the Protestant cause, Sleidan tried to be impartial in retelling the saga of the Reformers and their opponents. His history of the Reformation had a lasting impact on the modern writing of history, but his perspective was skewed in several respects. By focusing so narrowly on Luther and Germany, he neglected other important centers of reform. Further, by concentrating so strongly on politics and statecraft, he gave an inadequate account of the religious vision and spiritual passion that framed so many of the events he described.

A far more ambitious, partisan, and comprehensive project was undertaken by the Lutheran theologian Matthias Flacius Illyricus and his colleagues in the city of Magdeburg. Historian Philip Schaff declared this 13-folio history of the church, known as the ***Magdeburg Centuries***, "the first general church history deserving of the name."

Flacius and his co-workers scoured the libraries and archives of Europe, "from Scotland to Constantinople," collecting manuscripts and primary historical sources for their vast undertaking. The aim of the ***Centuries*** was clearly polemical: to show that the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, including claims for papal supremacy, deviated from the path of the early church.

The ***Magdeburg Centuries*** rendered history a potent weapon in the arsenal of Protestant theologians. In response to the frequently asked question "Where was your church before Luther?" Protestant apologists could point to this impressive compilation of historical sources and argue that they, not their Catholic opponents, were the true church of biblical and patristic antiquity.

The ***Centuries*** remain a landmark in Reformation historiography. In the words of British historian A.G. Dickens, "They helped transfer the Reformation dispute to the historical forum." The very word "century" as we use it today derives from the structure of this work, which covered precisely 100 years in each of its 13 volumes.

On the negative side, the ***Centuries*** perpetuated Luther's language about the pope as Antichrist and also repeated certain myths about the Catholic past, such as the legend of Pope Joan. The pugnacious tone of

the ***Centuries*** thus helped to harden the confessional divide between Protestants and Catholics on the eve of the Wars of Religion.

The Catholic church could not ignore the challenge of the ***Centuries***. A work of similar magnitude and erudition was required to respond to the charge that the church of Rome had departed from its apostolic origins.

The church asked Caesar Baronius (1538-1607), an Italian cardinal and historian, to prepare a counter-history. Between 1588 and 1607, Baronius published 12 volumes of his ***Ecclesiastical Annals***, a sweeping survey of the history of the church from its early days to 1193.

Like his Lutheran counterparts, Baronius collected many primary sources and documents to buttress his case. In addition to written materials, he also drew on archaeological evidence provided by the discovery of the catacombs in Rome in 1578.

The ***Annals*** offered major historiographical support for the Council of Trent. In various translations and abridged editions, this seminal work of the Counter Reformation influenced Roman Catholic interpretations of the Christian past well into modern times.

A gifted historian and researcher, Baronius brought to life many new facets of patristic and medieval church history. At the same time, his critical judgment sometimes "surrendered too easily to what he believed ***should*** have been true," especially where the ecclesiastical or temporal interests of the Church were concerned. For example, Baronius defended the authenticity of the Donation of Constantine, even though Lorenzo Valla had exposed it as a fraud more than a century earlier.

Writers from other traditions weighed in with less expansive, but still influential, histories of their own. Heinrich Bullinger, Ulrich Zwingli's successor at Zurich, wrote a popular history of the Swiss Reformation up to 1532. John Knox, the fiery Scottish Reformer, did the same thing for his native land in ***History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland*** (1587). Calvin's writings abound with historical references, too.

Dead men's (and women's) tales

The Reformation was an age of unprecedented religious violence and martyrdom. The writing of martyrologies became a major vehicle both for encouraging believers to remain faithful under pressure and for conveying to the next generation a compelling vision of Protestant identity and history.

In 1660 the Dutch Mennonite pastor Thieleman van Braght published ***Martyrs Mirror***, a compilation of dramatic narratives and martyr stories from Anabaptists of an earlier generation. Refusing to swear oaths of allegiance or bear the sword, they embraced suffering and death as part of Christian devotion. By 1660 the persecution of Mennonites and other radical Reformers was largely over, but the Anabaptist vision of nonviolent discipleship continued to shape later generations through the reprinting and retelling of martyr stories.

The most influential of all the Reformation martyrologists was John Foxe (1517-1587). Along with the English Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, Foxe's ***Book of Martyrs*** decisively shaped English Protestantism.

While living in exile at Frankfurt and Basel during the reign of Mary Tudor, Foxe began to collect stories and documents about persecuted Protestants back in England, whom he called "the true professors of God's Gospel." Among the several hundred persons put to death during the Marian persecution, some were martyrs of rank and influence—Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, Bishops Hugh Latimer, Nicholas

Ridley, and John Hooper, Reverend John Bradford—but others were martyrs of the rank and file, including women, children, and common laborers.

In 1563 Foxe's magnum opus—with the full title A***cts and Monuments of These Latter and Perilous Days***—appeared as a folio volume of 1,800 pages, including graphic woodcut illustrations. Foxe continued to revise and expand his book throughout his life. In 1583 he dedicated an updated version to Queen Elizabeth.

Perhaps because he had studied and seen the effects of persecution so closely, Foxe became an advocate for religious toleration and leniency. He appealed to Elizabeth to spare the lives of two Dutch Anabaptists accused of heresy, but to no avail.

What made ***Foxe's Book of Martyrs*** so appealing? First, he ably placed the recent events of the English Reformation in the context of the church's entire history. He claimed that the English had first been converted to Christianity not by Augustine of Canterbury, who was sent to England by Pope Gregory I in 596, but rather by Joseph of Arimathea, who supposedly visited England during the days of the apostles. Thus true English Christianity antedated the Roman mission to England and the corruptions that flowed from it.

Second, Foxe provided a convincing periodization of church history, dividing the centuries since the time of Christ into five distinct ages. In the first age, the apostles had guided the church as it was purified by persecutions from without. The second age involved the definition of true doctrine against various heresies and schisms. The third age witnessed the rise of the papacy and the suppression of the true gospel. The fourth age was introduced by John Wycliffe, "the morning star of the Reformation," and his Czech counterpart, Jan Hus, both of whom Foxe depicted as Reformation forerunners. The fifth and final age was that of the Reformation itself, the climactic epoch of church history that would end with the glorious return and reign of Christ on earth.

Third, Foxe was able to adapt this apocalyptic view of history to the age in which he lived. Whereas the Anabaptists marked the fall of the church with the rise of Constantine in the fourth century, Foxe depicted Queen Elizabeth as the new Constantine—the English Judith, Deborah, and Esther—called to establish the true Christian faith in God's "elect nation." One of Elizabeth's counselors went so far as to claim that "the Lord hath vowed himself to be English!"

Foxe died in 1587, but his vision of church history as the record of God's providential dealings with his people through cycles of decay and revival would long outlive him. Later Puritans and Separatists appealed to Foxe when it seemed to them that the official church had abandoned the principles of the Reformation. Foxe's ***Book of Martyrs*** was among the first volumes brought to America by the Pilgrims. "In those vast unpeopled countries of America," as Governor William Bradford referred to the Pilgrims' new homeland, Foxe and his book would help to shape the worldview of a new civilization.

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Model Martyrs

A feisty English Protestant and a meek Dutch Anabaptist take their faith to the flames.

William Flower, 1555

from ***Foxe's Book of Martyrs***

Being at home upon Easter Sunday morning, he came over the water from Lambeth into St. Margaret's Church at Westminster; when seeing a priest, named John Celtham, administering and giving the Sacrament of the altar to the people, and being greatly offended in his conscience with the priest for the same, he struck and wounded him upon the head, and also upon the arm and hand, with his wood knife, the priest having at the same time in his hand a chalice with the consecrated host therein, which became sprinkled with blood.

Mr. Flower, for this injudicious zeal, was heavily ironed, and put into the gatehouse at Westminster; and afterward summoned before bishop Bonner and his ordinary, where the bishop, after he had sworn him upon a Book, ministered articles and interrogatories to him. ...

On April 24, St. Mark's eve, he was brought to the place of martyrdom, in St. Margaret's churchyard, Westminster, where the act was committed: and there coming to the stake, he prayed to Almighty God, made a confession of his faith, and forgave all the world.

This done, his hand was held up against the stake, and struck off, his left hand being fastened behind him. Fire was then set to him, and he burning therein, cried with a loud voice, "O Thou Son of God receive my soul!" three times. His speech being now taken from him, he spoke no more, but notwithstanding he lifted up the stump with his other arm as long as he could.

Dirk Willems, 1569

from ***Martyrs Mirror***

In the year 1569 a pious, faithful brother and follower of Jesus Christ, named Dirk Willems, was apprehended at Asperen, in Holland, and had to endure severe tyranny from the papists. But as he had founded his faith not upon the drifting sand of human commandments, but upon the firm foundation stone, Christ Jesus, he, notwithstanding all evil winds of human doctrine, and heavy showers of tyrannical and severe persecution, remained immovable and steadfast unto the end. ...

Concerning his apprehension, it is stated by trustworthy persons, that when he fled he was hotly pursued by a thief-catcher, and as there had been some frost, said Dirk Willems ran before over the ice, getting across with considerable peril. The thief-catcher following him broke through, when Dirk Willems, perceiving that the former was in danger of his life, quickly returned and aided him in getting out, and thus saved his life.

The thief-catcher wanted to let him go, but the burgomaster very sternly called to him to consider his oath, and thus he was again seized by the thief-catcher, and, at said place, after severe imprisonment and great trials proceeding from the deceitful papists, put to death at a lingering fire by these bloodthirsty, ravening wolves, enduring it with great steadfastness, and confirming the genuine faith of the truth with his death and blood, as an instructive example to all pious Christians of this time, and to the everlasting disgrace of the tyrannous papists.

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Modern Pioneers: Philip Schaff

Father of American church history

Stephen R. Graham

In the development of the discipline of church history in the United States, few scholars played a more important role than the Swiss-born, German-educated immigrant Philip Schaff.

Known best for his multi-volume ***History of the Christian Church***, which is still in print, Schaff spent his career arguing for and demonstrating the importance of studying the Christian past. Along the way, he founded the discipline of American church history.

Born in Chur, Switzerland, on New Year's Day in 1819, Schaff had a difficult childhood. He experienced poverty and life in an orphanage, where he was sent after his father died and his mother remarried. Fortunately, a series of benefactors cared for him and provided warm Christian nurture that would shape the rest of his life.

As a student at the boys' academy in Kornthal, Schaff experienced a dramatic spiritual rebirth that delivered him from intense anguish of soul and allowed him, as he wrote in ***Personal Reminiscences***, "to realize for the first time what it is to have peace with God through the atoning blood of Christ which washes away all sin." This experience would characterize Schaff's piety throughout the rest of his life and would also influence his understanding of the role of the church historian.

Schaff studied at the University of Tübingen, one of the most dynamic institutions for theological study in the world at that time, and at Halle before moving on to the University of Berlin, where he found an intellectual home in the mediating theology of August Neander. Schaff called Neander "the most important church historian of our time" and "the father of modern church history."

Schaff also appreciated his mentor's deep faith and the Christian devotion that pervaded his work. Schaff noted that "the most enduring merit of Neander's church history consists in the ***vital union of the two elements of science and Christian piety.***"

Early in his teaching career, Schaff received an invitation that would change his life and the future of the discipline of church history. Two delegates appeared from tiny Mercersburg Seminary, in the isolated hills of south central Pennsylvania, and offered Schaff a position there, on the recommendation of his professors. The young scholar wrestled with the opportunity and eventually came to see it as a "Macedonian call, 'Come over and help us!'" to which he had to respond.

He arrived in Mercersburg in August 1844 and was pleasantly surprised at his compatibility with his only colleague at the seminary, John Williamson Nevin. Together, historian Schaff and theologian Nevin

developed a system known as "Mercersburg Theology," which emphasized the church's heritage and traditions in the face of the prevalent American anti-historical sense. The two men established Mercersburg as an unexpected center of American theological scholarship.

By 1863, Schaff believed that his work at Mercersburg was completed. He spent five years as secretary of the New York Sabbath Committee, then accepted a position at Union Theological Seminary as

"Professor of Theological Encyclopedia and Christian Symbolism." That title reflects the astounding breadth of Schaff's scholarship and teaching.

During his time at Union, Schaff became involved in numerous ecumenical and scholarly projects, including organizing the international meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in New York in 1873, serving as president of the American Committee of Revisers of the Authorized Version of the Bible through the project's completion in 1885, founding the American Society of Church History in 1888, and writing and editing a number of multi-volume works of biblical scholarship and church history.

Where opposites unite

Schaff was guided by a number of principles in his study of history. He was convinced, for example, that church history courses in the few seminaries that even offered them conformed to a "dry, lifeless style" that failed to probe the "main thing in history, the ideas which rule it and reveal themselves in the process." Most church history education likewise failed to foster a sense organic development, leaving students unable to understand their own or their movement's place in the overall history of the church.

Following philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, who posited that cycles of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis raise what is preserved to a higher level, Schaff maintained that "spiritual growth is likewise a process of annihilation, preservation, and exaltation." An example of this process in Christian thought and practice was the emergence of the Protestant Reformation out of the medieval Catholic Church.

"The practical piety and morality of Roman Catholicism," said Schaff, "is characteristically legal, punctilious, unfree and anxious; but distinguished also for great sacrifices, the virtue of obedience, and full consecration to the Church." The Protestant Reformation brought a needed corrective through a faith that "is evangelically free, cheerful and joyous in the possession of justification by grace."

The abuses of medieval Catholicism were abolished, and the best of the catholic heritage of the Church was maintained, while the Protestant principle of renewal and reform brought about a higher and fuller form of Christianity. In turn, the weaknesses of Protestantism, in particular its tendency to fragment the unity of the Church—especially notable in the American context—would be corrected through the emergence of "evangelical-catholic" Christianity in the future.

For Schaff, though, it is important to note that development never moved beyond the essential character of Christianity that was present at its beginning. The acorn becomes an oak, but never an apple tree.

A project that Schaff envisioned, but did not live to see to completion, was a series of American denominational histories to be produced under the auspices of the American Society of Church History.

The authors of the volumes were to be ecumenically minded, first-rate scholars whose work would portray their own denominations objectively while also recognizing the virtues of other groups. The studies were to be "decidedly irenical in spirit," and Schaff hoped that the volumes would help Christians understand and appreciate both their distinctive contributions to the Christian tradition and their common heritage.

Schaff viewed the project and its resulting volumes as "a means of bringing the different churches into closer union and ultimate cooperation." This vision clearly illustrates Schaff's sense that the study of history serves the life and future of the church.

Some of Schaff's assumptions about the study and writing of the history of Christianity have been superceded. His model of careful, accurate, comprehensive, and irenic scholarship, though, remains worthy of admiration and emulation.

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Modern Pioneers: Kenneth Scott Latourette

Historian of six-continent Christianity

Andrew F. Walls

Kenneth Scott Latourette was the first, and until recent years, almost the only major historian to write the history of Christianity in a way that dealt seriously with its presence in all six continents. He is now mainly remembered as a historian of missions. In his view, though, it was mission that determined the nature and meaning of Christian History.

Latourette was born in Oregon City, Oregon, in 1884. He majored in science at his local college, then went on to Yale, where he studied history. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on American relations with China—an unusual topic for the period.

The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions was then in full flow, and Latourette became an enthusiastic volunteer. He served as a traveling secretary for the movement for a year, visiting colleges and universities to promote the cause of missions, before, in 1910, being appointed as a missionary himself.

Latourette joined Yale's mission in China, which intended to combine Christian teaching with excellence in higher education. But Latourette's service was brief and frustrating, as illness forced him to return home in 1912.

On his recovery, he taught history, first at Reed College, and later at Denison University. He was also ordained as a Baptist minister. Then, in 1921, Yale claimed him again as professor of missions in the Divinity School. He kept that post, as well as a dual appointment in the history department, until his retirement in 1957. He died in his native city, following a road accident, in 1968.

Latourette redirected Christian scholarship by presenting missions as the history of Christianity itself, not as an appendix to "church" history. He also made breakthroughs in the field of Asian history, a topic few American universities addressed in his day. His work in this "secular" field helped him to correct the Eurocentric bias common among church historians.

Mission marches on

Latourette's best works are his multi-volume global studies: ***A History of the Expansion of Christianity, Christianity in a Revolutionary Age***, and ***A History of Christianity***. At the time of their publication, these works represented the most comprehensive attempt to cover Christian History in all parts of the world and in all its traditions.

The ***History of the Expansion of Christianity***, Latourette's great monument, charts the periods of Christian advance and recession up to the end of World War II. The first volume examines the early spread of Christianity outside, as well as inside, the Roman Empire. The second, titled "The Thousand Years of Uncertainty," argues that the fate of Christianity hung in the balance for a millennium, as eclipse in Asia and the earliest centers of Christian strength paralleled advance among the barbarian peoples of Europe.

A third volume focuses on the period 1500-1800, which he sees as "Three centuries of advance," though with intervals of hesitation and retreat. He then devotes three volumes to what he calls "the Great Century," the nineteenth, looking at each continent in turn. The final volume, after surveying the first half of the twentieth century, discusses the Christian story as a whole.

For Latourette, Christian History is not about institutions; it is the story of the spread of the influence of Christ on earth. In the course of that story, people who have taken or been given titles such as Marcionite or Montanist, Nicene or Arian, Nestorian or Chalcedonian, Catholic or Protestant or Orthodox have all been part of a Christian movement. Waiving questions of orthodoxy, Latourette asks each group how far it advanced the influence of Christ.

Latourette has been accused of superficiality in his concept of expansion, of theological naiveté, and of an essentially secular optimism. Still, his analysis of Christian expansion has some depth.

He sees Christian expansion in three dimensions. In addition to the statistical and geographical dimension, he is concerned with the number and quality of movements of renewal, and with the influence of Christ on individuals and civilizations. His optimism derives from his faith in God's providence and Christ's ultimacy, and he freely points out that Christian History is marked by recession as well as advance.

The principal defect of his work for today's readers is not his fault. He wrote before much research became available on Christianity in the non-Western world. Therefore, Latourette's "Great Century" centers on the efforts of Western missionaries, rather than on movements among Africans and Asians and Latin Americans and Pacific Islanders. But if any historian prepared readers for the situation of the early twenty-first century, in which non-Westerners constitute the majority of Christians, it was Kenneth Scott Latourette.

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Modern Pioneers: Christopher Dawson

Champion of Christian culture

Caroline T. Marshall

When noted eighteenth-century scholar Edward Gibbon studied the history of civilization, he concluded, "As the happiness of a ***future*** life is the great object of religion, we may hear, without surprise or scandal, that the introduction, or at least the abuse, of Christianity had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman empire."

When Christopher Dawson examined the same subject about 150 years later, in ***Progress and Religion: An Historical Inquiry***, he came to the opposite conclusion: "The secularization of a society involves the devitalization of that society. ...[T]he passing of a religion is not a sign of progress but a token of social decay."

Dawson became one of the twentieth century's most forceful defenders of Christianity and western culture. In response to sentiments like William Butler Yeats's famous quote, "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold," Dawson offered a vision of transcendent unity through faith—specifically the faith of the Roman Catholic church.

Henry Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) was born into a pious Anglo-Catholic family whose roots rested securely in the English gentry. Following a childhood plagued by illness and a year or so at the great public school at Winchester, he was placed under the tutelage of an Anglican parson for university preparation. During this period, Dawson met Edward Watkins, another high church Anglican, who entered Trinity College, Oxford, with him and whose personal religious pilgrimage would greatly influence Dawson's own.

While at Oxford, Dawson regularly attended Anglo-Catholic religious services, even though he was not a member of the "spikes" (university slang for high churchmen). Then Watkins converted to Roman Catholicism, and Dawson made a cultural pilgrimage to Italy. Around the same time, Dawson fell in love Valery Mills, a Catholic. All of these experiences conspired to seal his own conversion to Catholicism in 1909.

Physically unfit for active service in World War I, Dawson served in the Admiralty Intelligence Division. He worked briefly for the Conservative Party and continued his education in Sweden under a prominent economist.

In 1916 Dawson married Mills, with whom he had three children. He settled down to country living and the writing of history. He received some financial support from his family, and he periodically gave lecture series at universities, but Dawson was one of a rare breed of scholars who make a living without being tethered to an academic institution.

When Dawson visited Rome, on Easter Sunday, 1909, he conceived the idea of writing a great cultural history. "I believe it is God's will I should attempt it," he wrote in his diary.

In 1928, he fulfilled his Easter pledge with his first major work, ***The Age of the Gods***. In the 1930s he published ***St. Augustine and His Age***, ***Christianity and the New Age***, ***The Making of Europe***,

Enquiries into into Religion and Culture, ***Religion and the Modern State***, and other studies of religion, history, and culture.

During World War II he wrote for several journals, including the prestigious ***Dublin Review*** and T.S. Eliot's ***The Criterion***.

At the close of the decade, he published two of his best books, ***Religion and Culture and Religion and the Rise of the West***. In 1958, his scholarly prestige peaked when he was invited to become the first Stillman Guest Lecturer of Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard. Two books, ***The Formation of Christendom*** and ***The Dividing of Christendom***, were gleaned from these lectures.

While in America, he attempted to initiate a course of study in Christian culture at Notre Dame, but his health was declining. He returned to England, where he died on the feast of St. Bede (May 25) in 1970.

The center holds

Dawson's theory that religious culture lies at the heart of civilization is based on his intense belief in the innate spiritual intuition of human beings—an instinct for the divine that is universal among our species. Indeed, history is the product of the interaction between man and God, that subtle communion in which we apprehend spiritual truth and attempt to integrate it into our material and imperfect world.

"In all ages the first creative works of culture are due to religious inspiration and dedicated to a religious end," Dawson wrote. All religions struggle toward spiritual truth, but only Christianity has achieved the ultimate breakthrough in understanding. The purpose of redemption is to reclaim not just the individual, but all of history: "it is a universal, cosmic change—the life of the world to come."

Dawson's thought centers on the Incarnation, God's personal entrance into history to redeem and perfect his creation, and on the Resurrection. He wrote, "The history of the human race hinges on this unique divine event which gives spiritual unity to the entire historical process."

As a Roman Catholic, Dawson placed great value on spiritual continuity. He believed that there must be an uninterrupted agent of the divine in history. Also, like many medievalists, he had great difficulty when he arrived at the twin disruptions of Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Dawson dismisses Luther as a theological lightweight and a tool of German nationalism. Calvin, on the other hand, he takes seriously as an intellectual and the founder of a new "iron discipline" that follows a logical, if incorrect, vision of human history.

Dawson deemed Protestant culture sincere, but impoverished when compared with Catholicism: "The sermon took the place of the liturgy. Bible reading took the place of religious art and symbolism; the communal character of the medieval festivals and pilgrimages was replaced by an individualistic type of piety, which was, however, very different from that of the medieval hermit and ascetic."

Of his many contributions to Christian History, Dawson's observations on his own times may be the most useful. He consistently identified nationalism, secularism, and materialism as the enemies of Christian culture. Thus he decried not only Marxism, but also bourgeois capitalism, and declared that if Communism had failed as a replacement for the Christian vision of history, then so had classical liberalism.

His refusal to embrace the modern secular state and its capitalist order made it difficult for many American conservatives to embrace him, although he was, beyond question, the ultimate cultural conservative.

In spite of his doubts about modern society, Dawson's thought is hopeful, because the kingdom of God continues its unfolding. Invested in a real communion of saints in heaven and on earth, the relationship between man and God proceeds toward its glorious fulfillment in this world and beyond.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 72: How We Got Our History

Modern Pioneers: Herbert Butterfield

Scientific and Christian

C.T. McIntire

"It was the fallacy of Whiggish history!" The student concluded her history paper triumphantly, and the history professor, nodding in agreement, gave her an A. For decades the accusation resounded in colleges and universities of the English-speaking world to refute the dominant way of doing history. Little did most of the accusers know that they were calling on the rhetorical power of Herbert Butterfield (1900-1979).

Butterfield's ***Whig Interpretation of History*** made his name as a historian. When he published it, he was a Cambridge fellow, barely 31, slight of build, and very shy. His book, really just a rambling essay, was similarly unimposing. Readers found it difficult to fathom, yet somehow provocative and compelling. The very strangeness of the phrase "Whig interpretation of history" lodged in the memory.

Butterfield defined Whiggish history this way: "What is discussed is the tendency of many historians to write on the side of Protestants and Whigs, to praise revolutions provided they have been successful, to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present."

Though Butterfield had in mind the English Whigs who drew a straight line from the Magna Carta to their own sense of liberty, his observation also fit others: capitalist historians who justify the domination of the industrial West, American historians who chronicle the sure rise of the United States to world power, liberal social historians who trace the triumph of the middle classes, and evangelicals who deem themselves the direct descendents of Paul, Martin Luther, or any other key figure.

In place of the straight-line story, Butterfield modeled historical study as the analysis of complex interactions over time among diverse people and movements. For instance, the achievement of greater freedom of religion in Britain derived not from Protestant doctrines or the progress of the Reformation, but from the interactions of Catholics, the several Protestant groups, and Anglicans. If heroes could be found, they were the Dissenters and Catholics who continued to worship God their own way in the face of domination by the Church of England.

There is the clue to Butterfield's own religion. Butterfield was a Dissenter, a Methodist to be precise, and when he wrote ***Whig Interpretation***, he was still spending several Sundays a year preaching in Methodist chapels around Cambridge. Although he never said so, he had constructed his criticism of "Whiggish history" from the perspective of his religious experience outside the center of the English state and religion.

Inconsistent dualist

Butterfield strove to keep his religious and academic worlds separate. He wrote and lectured astutely on European history, eighteenth century Britain, and the history of political thought. His ***Origins of Modern Science*** (1949) helped define the field of the history of science. But he told no one of his weekend preaching. He counted the relationship with God as just about the most intimate thing there was in life, something you do not go on about in public.

All of this changed when, in 1948, the faculty of divinity at Cambridge asked him to deliver a series of lectures on history. He would have to go public in his own university about the intimacies of religion. In an environment where many historians were derisive of any linkage of history and religion, he felt he was ruining himself for life.

But all was not lost. The lectures attracted 1,000 students over two months, and the bbc arranged for him to re-present them on national radio. The book version, ***Christianity and History*** (1949), helped stimulate a renewal of Christian views of history in the twentieth century.

Butterfield's statements about religion and history were not straightforward. In the opening lecture, he offered a harsh doctrine of historical study, one that seemed to turn historians into technicians. Historians, he said, properly restrict themselves to tangible evidence, concrete details, and matter-of-factness. From there they look for possible relations among the many facts, and, by the use of imaginative sympathy, seek to reconstruct human personality and reclaim the wholes from which they abstracted the details.

He called this style of historical study variously "technical history" and "scientific history." Its findings, he asserted, "must be equally valid whether I present it to Christian or atheist, Whig or Tory, Swede or Dane." Such history "is independent of philosophy, race or creed," and belongs to a realm quite distinct from religion and even morality. He seemed to posit a stark dualism between religion and history.

The remainder of the lectures then unfolded a view that seemed exactly the opposite of this doctrine. He depicted the unity of religion and history. He claimed the utter centrality to history of a biblical idea of Providence. He affirmed the rationality of the universe as expressed in historical laws, and he believed such laws actually illuminated the ways of God.

He stressed the universality of human sin, for which he used the picturesque word "cupidity." He stood against divorcing the Christ of the theologians from the Jesus of history. He urged the need for a lively sense of charity and the greatest possible elasticity of mind.

Above all, he underscored the absolute validity of human persons both in history and in the outlook of historians as they study history. He acknowledged the role of presuppositions about all these things when historians study history. Again, we see that his religion drives his understanding of history and the way he studies it.

Scientific and Christian

As if to remove his own doubts as well as ours, Butterfield soon published a collection of essays under the title ***History and Human Relations*** (1951). His dualism is still there, but then he suggests that the cardinal points of his historical approach are Christian: the features and limits of historical study, the high view of persons, insistence on human freedom and responsibility, imaginative sympathy, the exercise of charity, the perception of rationality in the universe, elasticity of mind.

Scientific history is not neutral after all, but specifically Christian, and Christianity is not an addition, but embodied in his approach to historical study.

Butterfield went further the following year. Speaking before 1,000 youth in Bangor, Wales, he offered his highest statement of the integrity of his religion and his historical study. In the published version, titled ***God in History*** (1952), he identified three ways of looking at history. Each way by itself offers a valid understanding of history, but historians who adopt all three ways at once see history more fully.

The first is the "biographical" way, in which we see human beings freely choose and take responsibility for their actions. The second is the "scientific" way, in which we see history as a realm of law necessitating what happens. The third is the "theological" way, in which we see God at work in history through both

personalities and processes. The proposal represented his most careful statement of the integration of Christianity and history.

Though Butterfield always framed his ideas in ways the broad historical community could accept, his repeated, and almost naive, proclamations of historical study as a neutral science dissolved under the authenticity of his religious convictions. He summarizes the point in the final sentence of ***Christianity and History***: "We can do worse than remember a principle which both gives us a firm Rock and leaves us the maximum elasticity for our minds: the principle: Hold to Christ, and for the rest be totally uncommitted."

The contours of Butterfield's approach to history—Dissenting, personalist, spiritual, and flexible—represent one option out of the many available, which we may take or leave. But his practice as historian and his eventual self-awareness about the role of his religion in his work induce a deeper understanding of what is going on in historical study. Historians' deepest convictions inexorably steer their work, even when they do not realize it.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY
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How Could You Forget...

More notable names from the field's recent past.

Adolf von Harnack
(1851-1930)

Harnack believed that the church had so obscured Jesus's message, only a ruthless criticism could possibly uncover it. Layer by layer, he peeled back church doctrines—ideas like the Resurrection, Christ's divinity, and the inspiration of Scripture—to find "the Gospel in the Gospel." Harnack's father believed his son had undermined Christianity altogether, and many of Harnack's peers agreed. For decades, though, his ***What is Christianity?*** was considered the definitive statement of liberal Protestantism.

Georges Florovsky
(1893-1979)

Because Florovsky, a native Russian, worked from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, it took awhile for his thought to impact of the West. Yet his insistence on finding meaning in history and his emphasis on the continuing relevance of the church fathers combined to form a unique, and now influential, theology of history. "[P]recisely because history was apprehended as 'God's history,'" he wrote, "the 'history of man' was made possible."

Roland Bainton
(1894-1984)
& Heiko Oberman
(1930-2001)

In ***Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther***, Bainton focuses on the Reformer's convictions: "Luther's principles in religion and ethics alike must constantly be borne in mind if he is not at times to appear unintelligible and even petty." Oberman makes more of context in his ***Luther: Man Between God and the Devil***: "Luther is to be regarded not so much as a lonely prophet—let alone as the Hercules of the humanists—but as a leading member of the Wittenberg team which, in keeping with the motto of the university, initiated its program 'in the name of St. Paul and St. Augustine.'" Both books are essential reading on Luther, as both authors (in these books and in other work) contributed mightily to Reformation studies.

Hubert Jedin
(1900-1980)

Did the Council of Trent represent a reactionary "Counter-Reformation" or a proactive "Catholic Reformation"? Jedin, a Catholic scholar, explored the question by investigating source materials and utilizing modern critical tools. His even-handed approach lifted this contentious subject out of polemics and opened a path for serious new consideration of the Reformation era.

Stephen Neill
(1900-1984)

Missionary experience in India (where he faught with the legendary Amy Carmichael) and deep personal

involvement in ecumenical causes led Neill to challenge the notion that Christianity belongs to the West. Like Kenneth Scott Latourette, he is known primarily for writing missions history (especially ***A History of Christian Missions***, still used as a standard textbook), but he also added to New Testament studies and interfaith dialogue.

George Williams
(1914-2000)

Williams believed that church history stood apart from other history, but he freely crossed many other boundaries. After Williams's death, his former student Timothy George wrote for the ***Harvard Divinity Bulletin***, "A Unitarian who did not deny the Holy Trinity, [Williams] dared to write about 'sectarian ecumenicity,' 'wilderness and paradise,' 'evangelical rationalism,' 'Catholic liberalism,' and 'benignant Calvinism,' not to mention 'radical reformation.'" Williams made his most significant contributions writing on the last topic—his name for Anabaptism.

Jaroslav Pelikan
(1923-)

Pelikan takes this quote from Goethe's Faust as his life motto: "What you have as heritage, Take now as task; For thus you will make it your own!" Pelikan applied this motto to his five- volume series, ***The Christian Tradition***, which surveys church history from the first century to the twentieth—an audacious project in an age of scholarly specialization, but one that historian David Lotz (and many others) believes "commands the field" of present-day historiography.

Martin E. Marty
(1928-)

The leading scholar of American public religion, Marty keeps a close eye on subjects like church-state interaction, civility, and fundamentalism. In three volumes on ***Modern American Religion***, with a fourth coming, he privileges no group, focusing instead on the breadth of religious experience that has flourished in American society. His warmth toward pluralism upsets some evangelicals but accurately and often insightfully describes current trends in religion.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 72: How We Got Our History

The Link: Christian History Today

Combining Christian convictions and scholarly conventions, two historians create very different blends.

editors

C.S. Lewis wrote, "History is a story written by the finger of God." But can we spot God's fingerprints?

Christian historians who answer "yes" fit broadly under the heading "providentialist." Those who aren't so sure frequently wear the label "ordinary." This is far from the only issue being debated in Christian historical circles, but it is a flashpoint. Christian History ***wanted to see what light the sparks from this debate might shed on the church's historical tradition—from Eusebius to the present.***

First, we spoke with George Marsden, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame. He works primarily as an ordinary historian, playing by the rules prescribed by the mainstream academy.

Next, we spoke with John Woodbridge, research professor of church history and the history of Christian thought at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and a corresponding editor of Christianity Today***. A providentialist, he believes that Christian historians should question scholarly conventions and at least try to identify God's work in history. Welcome to the discussion.***

—The Editors

Christian History: How does a Christian scholar approach history differently than a non-Christian? Will a Christian historian's convictions be apparent to the reader?

George Marsden: You can be either explicit or implicit about it. The topics you choose, the questions you ask about them, interpretive theories that you adopt, your evaluative standards, and so forth may all be shaped by your Christianity, but you might or might not say that in any explicit way.

When Herbert Butterfield wrote about the scientific revolution, to my knowledge he didn't say, "I'm doing this as a Christian historian." The kinds of questions he asks, however, are informed by, among other things, his Christian perspective.

Your faith isn't the only thing that shapes your work. You're trying to uncover the facts of what happened, and many of your perspectives will be shared by other observers. As I am shaped by being a Christian, I am also shaped by being a white American male of a certain era and social class and certain political opinions. Those sorts of things shape my approach to history and make my history, in many respects, like history written by other people who share those traits and moral standards.

When you're dealing with matters of fact, your interpretive perspective might not show through. But in other respects, it can make a big difference.

For instance, when I wrote about the history of religion in American universities, I was asking the question, ***Why did religion, which once had such a prominent place in American universities, lose that place?*** That question wasn't asked in that way very often before, because most historians just saw the shift as an inevitable part of progress—they assumed, "of course religious sectarianism would wither away as more professional sensibilities prevailed." But as a Christian, I thought it was a problem.

When you're applying specifically Christian sensibilities to a topic, and you know some people might not share

those sensibilities, what do you do?

It depends on the audience. If I'm writing primarily for the church, or ***Christian History***, then I can take certain points of view for granted. But if I'm writing for a university press and trying to address a wide audience, then I'm constantly thinking, ***Here are my several audiences. What do they need to know? What do they care about? How can I present what I'm doing so they'll understand it?***

To the secularist I'm trying to say, "Take the religious side seriously." To religious people, I'm often trying to say, "Even great religious thinkers have their flaws."

I typically try to identify my own perspective. I've written in most of my books, "This is my perspective and you should know about it, and you can discount it if you care to. But I'm not pretending to write as a neutral observer."

One way to address several audiences is to be critical as well as sympathetic of one's own tradition. I see the calling of a Christian historian, with respect to serving the church, as trying to help Christians see how the culture has shaped their understanding of the Christian heritage. And that inevitably involves some criticism of things that Christians may have taken for granted, or things that they take to be eternal truths but that the historian may expose as cultural creations.

If you do that honestly, I think it opens what you do to a more secular audience as well, because they appreciate that you're investigating a religious heritage and not just celebrating it.

Partisan history often turns people off because the writer is seen as completely uncritical of whatever group he represents and critical of everybody else. Christian historians, particularly, should be willing to see the flaws in their tradition.

We can overdo that, of course, and can write history in a way that undermines the beliefs of ordinary Christians. We have to balance criticism with the positive.

Are miracles a big sticking point for Christian historians who write for a broad audience?

Miracle stories raise some hard questions. You want to acknowledge that miracles can happen, but then, in particular cases, what if you think they didn't happen? What if you're writing about Jim and Tammy Bakker?

You ought to make some distinction between how you treat miracle stories that you find credible and those about which you find some evidence of deception. So I think it is appropriate to be critical of certain religious claims to miracles.

I can't articulate exactly what the rule should be, because it depends on whether you're writing about your own tradition or about somebody else's tradition. You might be respectful of another person's tradition because it would be indiscreet not to be. The general rule in the academy is not to criticize anyone's story. You talk about their experience and leave it at that.

Many of the historians discussed in this issue also were uncritical of miracle stories, though for completely different reasons. What does a modern historian make of figures like Eusebius and Bede?

We still can learn from that kind of history. It's a source concerning the faith of the church—the only source we have on some subjects.

If you have modern historical sensibilities, you might be suspicious of some of the claims made in the stories or realize that the stories are not complete records of what actually happened. Nonetheless, these are the best sources we have, and some of the material, such as martyr stories, can be very inspiring.

That said, there's a big difference between writing church history as a cleric, in the era before there were professional historians, and being a professional historian today who is a Christian.

If you're a professional historian, you're trying to analyze historical development in relationship to other observable things that happen in the culture. And that's not at all the enterprise of the traditional church historian.

When Jonathan Edwards was writing history, he presented it from the perspective of how God is acting in history. He was doing theological history, not professional history as we currently define it. Those are really different enterprises, but they're both good. Both could be done today.

At what point did "professional history" begin to affect the telling of Christian History?

I think maybe with Philip Schaff in the mid-1800s. At that point you're dealing with someone who has some critical sensibilities and is going to the sources, and who also believes that God is working through the history of the church. But he's not laying out a history in which God is the principal actor.

That's where you get the break from those who, when writing history, are talking about how God is acting. In the Bible, history is written from that perspective. ***Here are God's many works with the people of Israel, or Here's what God was doing in the church***. Christian writers continued that approach up through Jonathan Edwards, in the eighteenth century.

But by the nineteenth century, you're getting historians who are looking at how people shape the church. They don't specify exactly how God may be acting in history, even though they allow that God does. Instead they're concentrating on how the church developed and what church leaders did.

So can a Christian scholar today responsibly say anything about God's hand in history?

In the epilogue of my book on the history of fundamentalism, I raise the question of recognizing God's actions. I quote Richard Lovelace, who said that writing Christian History is like talking about a football game in which half of the players are invisible. You know God is acting, but what you can write about is the human side of the story.

It seems to me that's a helpful sensibility to have. Modern historians have the tools to do some interesting things, identifying how the human actors behaved and what forces were shaping them, but we have to be more reticent about naming God's specific purposes.

Christian History: What does it mean to write Christian History?

John Woodbridge: Non-Christians often write about the history of Christians. But if you mean by "Christian History" work that is shaped by Christian perspectives, that is a different kind of enterprise.

Those of us who are historians and also Christians must face questions like this: Will we have different presuppositions and do our work differently than secular scholars? If theological beliefs are not appreciated in the larger academic community, do we play by all of its rules? Does our Christianity inform what we research and write in a significant way?

Some very fine Christian historians function well in the secular community by doing "ordinary" history—giving explanations that are essentially horizontal. These historians would say, at the same time, that by the choice of their subject matter they are bringing their theological views to bear, and that by being scholars of integrity and by telling the truth, they're also being Christian.

I can see legitimacy in that sort of work, as long as their ordinary history is "open." "Closed" ordinary history denies the work of God in history and leads to naturalism, but "open" ordinary history leaves room for the work of God in people's hearts. That's perfectly appropriate.

We face a dilemma. Around 1860, when the professionalization of the historical discipline began to take place in Europe and the United States, issues of God's providence, and the Incarnation as the center point of history, dropped out of most scholarly discourse.

If you were going to retain your status within the community of historians, you had to keep religious judgments out of your work. And so Christian historians have had to decide how to relate their deep, personal convictions to the present discussions.

What do secular historians, or Christian historians who choose to play by their rules, lack when it comes to writing about the church?

In molecular biology, Michael Behe talks about the "irreducible complexity" of nature—some cell functions require complex interactions that can't be explained by evolutionary, step-by-step development.

I believe there's an irreducible complexity of human experience. Many secular theories of explaining what you and I would think of as a work of God don't have enough power to explain human experience. Are economic theories sufficient to explain why people are willing to become martyrs? Can a study of socio-economic factors account for the First Great Awakening?

If we, as Christian historians, are unwilling to talk about God at work in history, it's very difficult for me to see in what way we

are significantly different from secular historians. I think we need to question the prevailing naturalism of secular historians—the assumption that all things can be explained horizontally. If we accept that premise, then we're going to have real difficulty explaining the Incarnation. And we're not going to be especially helpful to Christian lay people listening in.

In the past, when historians have tried to move beyond the horizontal, they often have arrived at dubious conclusions. Eusebius is an example. How can finite humans write about the works of God?

Yes, the track record for this type of history is troubling. Biases of all kinds have entered in. But the bad illustrations are not a sufficient argument to suggest that Christian historians shouldn't enter into discussion once again, to try to work together with biblical scholars and with other Christian historians to reconsider the issue of identifying God's work in history.

Christian historians must know that the church's tradition has been to see God at work in history. We're biblically instructed to do so, and historians up to around 1860 did so! This new type of historiography, which limits everything to horizontal explanations, is a radical departure.

While appreciating advances in historical methodology, we can learn much from figures like Jonathan Edwards. In ***History of the Work of Redemption***, Edwards says explicitly that God doesn't leave us without some sense of what he's doing in the world—we have criteria in Scripture for identifying God's work in history.

We, as evangelical historians, need to reconsider how we do business. If we end up in a historical agnosticism, in which we can never talk about God at work, then we're in a different world than the world of John Calvin or Martin Luther or John Wesley, who speak about God's providence as something that can be discerned, at least in some circumstances.

Calvin says something like this: ignorance of providence is the greatest of all miseries, and the knowledge of it is the highest happiness. Well, if we're Christian historians and we don't want to talk about God's providence, or we're not allowed to, and we leave people in ignorance about it, we're not being very helpful.

Can Christian historians in the mainstream academy be so bold in talking about providence?

I don't embrace the radical distinction that some of my colleagues make between public and private views. Christianity happens to be a public religion. You can't privatize it.

If I'm in a classroom at the University of Chicago, and someone asks, "What do you think history is?" I can't say, "Well, I don't know. Beats me." Christian historians throughout the centuries have said that Jesus Christ is at the center of history, and that history is going somewhere. Now, do I say that publicly? I think I have to, if asked.

In order to have the best witness possible, we want to be winsome and irenic, but we need to be forthright about what we believe. We need to offer careful documentation and sound reasoning, especially if we make the claim that God was specifically involved in a historical event. All kinds of irresponsible claims have been put forth in the past, and it's understandable that people are concerned about that. But that is not sufficient grounds to exclude talking about God in history.

We need careful reflection here. Like Bill Murray in ***What About Bob***?—we're taking baby steps toward addressing these matters.

What is at stake for Christian scholarship in this area?

If young, Christian professors accept the premise that bringing the divine to bear on a discipline will destroy their credibility as scholars, then that becomes the end game for their working out of a Christian world view.

Christian colleges and other Christian academic ventures need to get Bible scholars, theologians, historians, psychologists, and others working together. If we don't start doing this, we could see the day when any work that references God will be disqualified as sectarian. The next generations will have a heavy burden because we did not question the naturalistic premises that undergird much contemporary scholarship.

Some historians are already beginning to ponder this. For too long, we have not been as explicit as we should have been about our Christian beliefs. And what would more explicitly Christian scholarship look like? I think it could be some of the finest scholarship around, because it could explain human experience better than purely materialist arguments can.