**“Top 10 Christians Not One of us Could Live Without! Catholic or Protestant.”**

By:

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Protestants and Catholics have one thousand five hundred years of shared history before the Protestant Reformation began in the early 1500’s A.D.

Most historical narratives about the reformation begin in the 1300’s A.D. with John Wycliffe speaking out against the Pope. Still, what about the one thousand three hundred years before that? Some efforts have been made to fill in the gaps in history that Protestant lineage has.

A modern documentary produced by John Doerr called *“A Lamp in the Dark! The Untold History of the Bible,”*[[1]](#footnote-1) tried to fill in the thirteen-hundred years of missing narrative, while trying to steer completely clear of contributions by Roman Catholicism. The narrative seemed to seek out separatist groups throughout history that had their own customs and biblical translations that could be presented as plausible forbears of the reformers.

While it is a good documentary, the narrative poses all kinds of problems. For example, the narrator ties protestants to the Albigensians, which were a strange amalgamation of new age occultism, Gnosticism, and a mix of Christian ideas that culminated in a thirteenth century French sect. The documentary also tried to link Protestantism to a Northern Italian sect called the Boudva,[[2]](#footnote-2) separatist Christians that claimed their tradition went back to the Apostle Paul. They were later made famous by Peter Waldo and became known as the Waldensians. Throughout history these groups had been victimized by Rome as heretics. Popes had hunted them down because, according to the documentary, each had the true version of holy scripture, and the papacy wanted to keep Catholic power.

The issue with this narrative is that it does not represent shared Christian history. Further, for the reformers to claim sola scriptura[[3]](#footnote-3) as a foundational tenet, and then claim some lineage to the Romvnt Bible[[4]](#footnote-4) of the Waldensians is a major contradiction.

This list is put together with the goal of recapturing a shared heritage that not one Christian could live without; not Catholics, not Protestants, and not Evangelicals. This list will make some happy, some uncomfortable, and some angry. Please temper your emotions. ‘Truth First Christianity’ is uncomfortable.

This will allow protestants to regain characters from shared Christian heritage that should be celebrated and remembered. It is not a bad thing for all parties to sit at the table and try to strengthen the unity of Christians. No, hardliners, no one is saying return to Rome, but Christians in a post-Christian Country should share the table and get some things straight before it’s too late.

 **“Top 10 Christians Not One of us Could Live Without. Protestant or Catholic”**

1.) **Ignatius of Antioch**. Ignatius Theophorus was never a Catholic, he lived at least two centuries before a Roman state Church was organized. He died sometime between 108 and 140 A.D. Ignatius was the third Bishop of Antioch, following the Apostle Peter and another early Christian named Evodius held that post.

Ignatius was a very important documentarian of early church theology. He wrote seven famous letters about ecclesiology, sacraments, and the role of Bishops. He and Polycarp were pupils of John the Apostle, thus confirming a lineage of apostolic fathers after resurrection of Christ. His story tells us three things about Christianity during the early centuries. Christians were full of zeal, spoke about Jesus on threat of death, and were willingly persecuted via martyrdom. Normally Christian persecutions were local events. Historians and theologians are unclear why Ignatius was summoned to Rome for his. Making the most of it, Ignatius sent letters ahead to the towns they would pass on the way to Rome. He would then stop and talk with those that came out to inquire as to the destination of the well dressed and accoutered passersby. When the moment presented itself, Ignatius would preach. His bravery, the early date and provenance of his letters, and his lasting impact made his number 1 on the list for all Christians to remember.

2.) **Eusebius of Nicomedia**, not Eusebius of Caesarea, but Eusebius of Nicomedia,[[5]](#footnote-5) was the author of *“The Ecclesiastical History of the Church,”* written between the 320’s-340’s A.D. He was not catholic. That term was only developed in the middle of his life and his beliefs were not in line with the orthodoxy desired by the Alexandrian Christians under Athanasius.

However, we would know nothing about Constantine the Great, the Christian Church of the time, or the narrative view documenting the events of the Council of Nicaea if it were not for Eusebius. He was a member of Constantine’s Court after the capital was moved to Constantinople and had direct firsthand access to serious historical and personal events.

Eusebius recorded Constantine’s great deeds, failings, and his life as a Christian. He also captures Christianity, what it was, and which relevant arguments and debates to document. He himself was a follower of Arius the presbyter from Palestine. Today an Arian is what would be called non-trinitarian, or a Oneness Modalist. Modalism was the prevailing view of Christians during his life and the changing orthodoxy to trinitarian belief took a long time. Eusebius was detail oriented in documenting events and people. He tried to share all sides and preserve them for posterity. Without him Christians today would not have much information about this era.

3.) **Socrates of Constantinople**, AKA Socrates Scholasticus put forward an excellent Historia Ecclesia[[6]](#footnote-6) that covered events up through the early 400s A.D. It is a greatly cleaned up history than that of Eusebius. It offers an unbiased version of the Church history that Eusebius provided. More importantly because of a little-known academic subject about biographies called prosopography,[[7]](#footnote-7) historians are able to glean information about Constantinople in Socrates’ work that lends credibility to it. As an interesting aside, much is made to say the Catholic Church began via the council of Nicaea, but the two first primary historians of the events were from east, Constantinople, and Nicomedia, in Asia Minor – modern day Turkey. Something to think about when we hear about any type of perceived dominance in the Western Latin Catholic Church, or when we hear the tired old *“we have a 2,000 unbroken history back to Peter the first Pope.”*

4.) **Athanasius of Alexandria**. Well-known to have been a dark skinned African, contrary to his portrayal in later fifteenth century Italian renaissance art, he wrote the most lasting and impactful work on the trinity ever to have existed.[[8]](#footnote-8) His work was so important that if it were not for him our view of God the Son today would state that God the Father is one, and that Jesus the Son, while divine, while resurrected, while truly Lord, was a unique creation of God. This Modal Monarchianism was the prevailing view of Christians before the Council of Nicaea. At Nicaea, Athanasius won by vote arguing for what would become the orthodox trinity. Yet, immediately after the Council, the doctrine was reversed back to the oneness modalism that categorized Jesus as a special creation. Athanasius spent the rest of his life being exiled, arrested, criticized, and torn down; fighting for what we know is the orthodox trinity today.

Athanasius got the last word though. Centuries later after Rome rose from the ashes and Christianity rose to prominence in the west again, it was Athanasius’ view of the trinity that formed the foundational doctrine for Christian Europe and Asia.

This passage from Historia Arianorum, written in 358 A.D., reveals some of the challenges experienced by Athanasius during his lifetime.

*“…How many excused themselves who had accused him falsely. How many who formerly hated him now shewd affection for him. How many of those who had written against him recanted their assertions. Many also who had sided with the Arians (Arius the presbyter from Alexandria) not through choice but by necessity, came by night and excused themselves. …these men appeared bodily on their side, yet in their hearts they held communion with Athanasius.” Vol 4 Athanasius Selected works and letters” p. 279 Historia Arianorum.*

5.) **Benedict of Nursia** – The sixth century Italian Benedict of Nursia wasn’t quite a catholic either; at least not how we identify them today. He was the inventor of monasticism. Instead of creation by some great vision from God, Benedict invented monasticism by necessity. After Rome fell, he had sense to go around and pick up the burnt pieces of the Church and organize them. He gathered Christian ideas, documents, and people to preserve them in a monastery and reestablish routine practices. It must be clearly understood that the Church after the fall of Rome was dead in the west. Gone! Maybe some sectarian groups thrived in certain places, but the Church went from being a part of the bureaucratic structure of the Roman state, well-funded, and well sponsored, to ashes.

Benedict of Nursia is so important because if there are no monasteries there are no monks, if there are no monks, and there are no writings documenting events throughout our important Church history. There would also not be any empirical evidence documented about Christian practices and how far one can take them when the sounds of the world are removed if not for Benedict.

6.) **Justinian** - the Emperor from the East. While Benedict was saving records in the west, Justinian was creating the stable structure needed to have Christianity thrive in the meantime. When Rome fell, he was the strong hold of the faith until Charles the Hammer Martel stabilized Europe several hundred years later. So much is made of how the Western Latin Catholic Church has made supremacy claims for housing the authentic church. It is hard to see that in history sometimes. Truthfully, Justinian and his wife Theodora strengthened what was left of Catholicism and housed it in the east. They transformed Roman ashes into Byzantine Orthodoxy.

7.) **The Martels of Europe**! If it weren’t for Charles the Hammer, Pepin, and Charlemagne, Europe’s transition to Islam would have happened over a thousand years ago. By 732 A.D. when the Battle of Tours – also known as the Battle of Poitiers – occurred, Spain had long since fallen to the Muslims.

Charles the Hammer Martel stopped the Muslim advance near the border between Spain and France for good. Europe was finally able to breathe a sigh of relief and settle, build, establish commerce, grow food, and prosper.

The Battle of Tours represents the conclusion of Muslim advance that had been taking place since the 630s A.D. Muslims had taken and renamed Spain Al Andalus and sat on the doorstep to France raiding villages. In the east Muslims were still closer to what we now know as Turkey but being held back by the Byzantines. All the cities settled by Christians during the first 300 years of the Great Commission[[9]](#footnote-9) had fallen to Muslim control.

Feeling safe under Martel leadership, Europe began to thrive. Charles the Hammer and the Latin Catholic Church were the only two power brokers in Europe. At times they butted heads and at other times they found mutual self-interest allowed them to work together.

Martel’s grandson Charlemagne grew up watching this with great interest. He had devised a way to increase his own power, Europe’s power, and to gain the supporters from the Church. The plans made the church more powerful too because unlike many who ruled, Charlemagne and Pope Leo III worked out power sharing arrangements. Those arrangements allowed Christianity to continue to thrive.

The western Church at the time had picked up some territory that it called papal states. They were early iterations of Nation-states with taxing, infrastructure, and protection rackets. By Leo conceding to Charlemagne and his military prowess, and by Charlemagne conceding to Leo and the 150 years of rebuilding by the Latin Church in the west, it was a win for Europe, and good politics. The Pope had a hammer, and Charlemagne had support for his secular crown from the Church. Without these events, Christianity does not make it to the twenty first century.

8.) **Pope Urban II**. Pope Urban II established the entire Crusades program FROM his office. He merged the Church’s Spiritual and Temporal functions in a way his predecessors only dreamed of. So Christians, for the first time, adopted a concept that existed since day one in Islam, *Jihad*. A Holy War! Muslims had mastered it over four hundred years before Christians even considered it. At that time the Christain churches in the west and east did not really get along owing to doctrinal differences that had been present from the start.

It was with these facts in mind that the Emperor from the East, Alexios Kamnenos, discovered he had a problem of magnificent proportions. At the end of each days mix of politics and pageantry, he would walk from his Throne Room to his private suite. He would always go out onto his balcony--The beautiful view of Constantinople! Only now when he looked across the river Bosporous into Turkey he could literally see the Muslim Seljuk Turks preparing to attack them. Some nights he even thought he could see the lights from the Selkjuk leader Killij Arslan’s tent. So he sent emissaries to Pope Urban II, the leader of the Latin Church in the west, to send help.

At that time the Church didn’t have a military mechanism in the west. Who could they send to help in a military matter but men in robes? Perhaps the Pope could talk secular leaders into going along with him. How could Urban help then?

He rode around France for a month, thinking, writing, and speaking. Pope Urban II developed this concept of restoring Christian lands, ideas, and geographical supremacy. At the same time, he relieved the suffering of Christians in the Muslim world of the time. Under sharia law, Christians lived lives of subjugation, inequality, and slavery.

So Urban developed his idea – Military Sacrifice for Spiritual Benefits. God would be pleased if one saved fellow Christians. Dues Vault[[10]](#footnote-10)- we must restore Christian lands. Now for those who might say- ‘Like… God would not condone violence.’

OK, So you are admitting Islam is a false religion? That’s all they did for four hundred years.

Are you saying that invaded peoples cannot defend themselves and advocate for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?

Anyway, Urban developed this idea of the *suffering servant*, a notion very familiar to Catholics who view the endurance of suffering as a process to draw us unto God.

Christians would now ‘take up the cross’ and go to Constantinople and help our Christian Brothers and Sisters throw back Islam.

The ultimate prize of Pope Urban II’s bold plan? Jerusalem! The City of God himself, would be returned to Christians. When the war is over, individual Christian Crusaders, warriors, will walk the Mount of Olives, bow down, and forgiven of their sins. Pope Urban II’s plan was ultimately successful and changed history.

Most are unaware that there were nine Holy Land Crusades over about two hundred years. While the later crusades were debacles - *with a few nods to good expansions in global trade, diplomatic relations, and mild interdependency around the eastern Mediterranean* - during the early crusades Christians took back every single Christian city that had been taken by Islam during the previous four centuries. Without Pope Urban II, this just doesn’t happen. And the idea of Evangelical National Patriotism today? It would have never existed.

9.) **Pope Innocent III**. I will concede that Pope Innocent III was in some ways notorious – he led a local crusade against the Albigensians and killed between eight thousand and sixty thousand.

Yet, the church grew in influence during his papacy, Franciscans were established – he had the sense to bring them into the Church. Dominicans were established – he had the sense to bring them into the Church. He convened Church Councils to establish the specific supernatural status of sacraments. He even wielded great secular power by being the adopted father of the child Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II.

The Fourth and Fifth Crusade happen on his watch – both debacles – but: He succeeded in getting political power to flow back to the western church from the east and from the hands of Frederick II for a time. So, while it’s totally cringeworthy, he has to be on the list because he begins a period of renaissance in the church.

*The Tenth Spot Was a Tie between Two Figures*

10.) A **John Wycliffe** – He was the morning Star of the Reformation,” in modern parlance. John Wycliffe might be what we call the very first ‘whistle blower.’ Wycliffe was brutal in his condemnation of what the church was becoming. John Wycliffe was a catholic priest; but he had had enough of what he felt was priests and canon rules keeping the average everyday believers in darkness. To illustrate this point, which comes from a narrative predating the printing press, it is said that each town had one bible in their church if they were lucky and was kept chained to the dais.

He thought priests should be allowed to teach laypeople, and to question the clergy. He wanted to provide soul care to those whose spirits he was charged to aid. Since there were no bibles in the homes of those he sought to help, Wycliffe took matters into his own hands. He translated the bible by hand into a common form of English that people could read. Then John began teaching them.

As a regular part of his teaching day, some doctrinal lessons from the bible would come up as more people read. At times this increase in knowledge led to moments of confrontation with Catholic clergy. This led John to begin speaking out about the many sins and vices of the papacy.

Naturally, Rome kicked him out of the priesthood for his work. He was not alone though. God saw to that. Wycliffe was followed by an ever-growing group of Christians who had been saved by God from the bibles he made them. They became known as Lollards.

The church, now with a military mechanism to its power arsenal thanks to the crusades that produced the warrior monks; Radicals went around England killing Lollards and burning John Wycliffe’s teachings. They also burned his beautiful hand translated bibles.

By the end John Wycliffe was so hated for rejecting catholic sacramental doctrines, such as transubstantiation,[[11]](#footnote-11) and for straight up ditching papal authority, that the Catholics performed a secret ceremony called “Bell, Book, and Candle.” They burned him, and spread his ashes instead of giving him a respectable burial. His gravest sin? Having said, *“We should listen to no man unless he speak the word of God. If any man of earth, either angel from heaven, teacheth us contrary to the Holy Writ, we should flee from him as from the foul fiend of hell and hold us steadfastly to the truth and freedom of the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ.”*

10.) B **William Tyndale** was born in 1494 in England just on the doorstep of the Protestant Reformation. By college he was a young priest with a desire to learn Greek. William was by all accounts an average guy.

Tyndale left Oxford University though. Instead, he went to Cambridge University because he didn’t like Oxford’s Latin only curriculum - First world problems, right? - While the evidence is lacking, tradition says that Erasmus himself taught Tyndale. Imagine it! With his Greek knowledge solidified, Latin became an inadequate way to teach people the truths of the gospel. He saw this fact acutely, and as a result developed an overwhelming passion to teach common people the gospel in English.

One event recorded about William Tyndale reveals his bold and unapologetic attitude about his life’s work. He was at a work function/dinner attended by the powerful Catholic Cardinal, Cardinal Wolsey. Tyndale kept correcting the cardinal to his face when the tipsy Cardinal misquoted magisterium and scripture. A big no-no- for a lowly priest back then. Wolsey, embarrassed and angry, doubled down on his facts and stated something along the lines of, “I will remind my passionate young friend that the word of the Pope is the authority!” It would have done Tyndale great good to remember the Cardinal Wolsey was also a courtier to King Henry VIII.

Tyndale began to see sinister motives at play in the way that word of God was seemingly spoon fed to people eager for more and capable. Bishops were treated like Lords over the everyday people. Since the time of Pope Innocent III, it had been Canon Law that a commoner could not own a bible or read it to others in public. Inspired by what Martin Luther was doing in Germany, William Tyndale took his message public.

Another invaluable Christian Whistleblower, being well established in the English language, William Tyndale stood up against the Canon Law. If he took on Canon Law and lost, he could be put to death. William Tyndale stood before the people and said, *“that it was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except ye scriptures were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue.”*

This act ruined his professional reputation. He retired to a place called Old Sodbury Manor, and set out to translate the Holy Bible into English. He also wrote letters to the Public that stoked the fire more,

William Tyndale said! *“I oppose the Pope and all his laws, if God spare my life, I will cause the boy that driveth the plow to know more of the scripture than though dost.”*

As a result of his arrest Tyndale was locked away in Villvorde for sixteen-months. He was eventually killed in a public execution.

Over time the translations of scripture experienced an ever-improving progression of detail, but Tyndale had the most lasting influence.

Most of us never consider just how hard it was to take something in one language, retain its divinity and intent, but put it in memorable language that people enjoy, like to say, and can remember.

We owe so much to Tyndale – “God said, Let there be Light, and there was light,”

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” “

“How Art Thou Fallen From Heaven, O Lucifer,…”

“Blessed are the Poor in Spirit,”

He didn’t just write it down from one language to another. He understood what it meant, and told us in English so we can understand what is means.

When Tyndale was hung and burned alive, he is recorded in “Foxes Book of Martyrs” as having screamed out, *“Lord, Open the King of England’s Eyes.”* It is said that in time the English Monarchy did in fact sanction a Holy Bible in the English Language

(Dis) Honorable Mention – **Alesandro Farnese, Pope Paul III**! had literally held most inner circle advisory papal offices by the time he became Pope. Farnese was the link that brought the papacy from the renaissance era – aka The Renaissance Papacy - into the post reformation era.

Farnese was raised from boyhood to manage vast holdings and help rule over the affairs of the Roman Catholic Church. He had been de-facto mayor of two cities. Alesandro was in the College of Cardinals from a young age. That is to say: he got into the College of Cardinals when powerful families bought their way into it. So how can he be on this list? He sounds so wicked.

Most don’t know the half of it. Farnese was even papal treasurer for “Pope Alexander VI Rodrigo Borja.” Alesandro Farnese along with Cesare Borgia were the contemporaries Nicolo Machiavelli had in mind when he wrote “The Prince.”

Alesandro watched from the inside as the totally corrupted papal institution of the late 1400’s and early 1500’s collapsed. Farnese came through the renaissance papacy alive and with his respect relatively intact. He watched the reformation go through Europe and decimate the Catholic Church from a front row seat. Then, almost two decades after the beginning of the Protestant Reformation – Alesandro Farnese became Pope Paul III.

Pope Paul III convened a very serious Ecumenical Church Council. The Councils of Trent would be the most serious since the Lateran Councils of the eleven and twelve hundred, or maybe the Councils of Lyon from the more recent past. The Counter-Reformation took place during one church council that literally met for eighteen years, to fix their broken church. After convening the Council, Pope Paul III presided over the first four years.

Pope Paul III should be given some props because the church and all her library ‘s housed in the Vatican, were not burned down by reformers. Farnese knew violence would only destroy the church and any vestige of Christianity. He sat and listened to the people of Europe during the reformation, he took those complaints behind closed doors with the Bishops and Cardinals at Trent. – Eighteen Years. There was no war, no retaliation, just God seeing fit to have Christianity grow on two branches instead of one.

The split caused great mourning in Rome, Martin Luther himself fell into vanity and hated that his movement had been commandeered by German politicians using it to vie for power in the high stakes game of European Chess.

We are a still a broken church today, and that is still cause for mourning. However, the individual talents of each denomination reveal God’s glory and that He is very much in charge. Good luck matching the zeal of the Christian Charismatics. Or, match the soul care abilities of a Catholic Priest – on the front lines of births, deaths, burials, and proper care of the sacraments. I dare anyone to try and match memory verses with an Independent Fundamental Baptist, and Calvinists? We love you too – just don’t get hyper. Our Methodists and Episcopalians show us that there can be structure formed by denominations under protest and thrive. Our confessional denominations remain steadfast adherents to their teachings and lead the missionary work of the present. As for you Lutherans – we are all going to blame you because you started it. And praise God that you did.

Yes, God has a big broken family who each have the skills to advance the kingdom. As it says in scripture, we are many parts and all one body.

1. A Lamp in the Dark! The Untold History of the Bible” Executive Producer John Doerr, Adullam Films Release [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Waldenses, also spelled Valdenses, also called Waldensians, French Vaudois, Italian Valdesi, members of a Christian movement that originated in 12th-century France, the devotees of which sought to follow Christ in poverty and simplicity. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sola scriptura is a theological doctrine held by some Protestant Christian denominations that posits the Christian scriptures as the sole infallible source of authority for Christian faith and practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Anglo-Saxon Versions of Scripture” (AD 600-1150) http://www.bible-researcher.com/anglosaxon.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In another project I put forward the theory with more than ample evidence that Eusebius from Nicomedia is the one who wrote the Church History and that if Eusebius of Caesarea existed he was a middle ages invention to make sure the history of the Church was not in the hands of a modal Monarchian like Eusebius of Nicomedia. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Historia Ecclesia” is in Volume 2 of 14 of the “Pre and Post Nicene Fathers” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Prosopography is an investigation of the common characteristics of a group of people, whose individual biographies may be largely untraceable. Research subjects are analysed by means of a collective study of their lives, in multiple career-line analysis [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Athanasius of Alexandria “Select Works and Letter” from Volume 4 of 14 of the Pre and Post Nicene Fathers. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. New Testament, Gospel of Matthew Chapter 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A saying among the soldiers of the first crusade that means, “God Wills It” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Transubstantiation - the conversion of the substance of the Eucharistic elements into the body and blood of Christ at consecration, only the appearances of bread and wine remaining. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)