

Church History

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Church History of the Lord's Body

When the Church was established by the apostles on the day of Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)), the church began to flourish. Under them, as well as the apostle Paul and many other faithful individuals, the church grew and grew. But, with this growth came troubles. In [Acts 20:28-30](#), the Church was warned of dangers ahead. Also, persecutions came. Jewish persecution attempted to corrupt the Church by their traditions and doctrines. Roman persecution came by the hands of Nero (65-68), Domitian (89-96), Trajan (who called Christianity a superstition) and Marcius Aurelius (161-180) who persecuted Christians like Polycarp because they put their faith in God and not Rome (Second Century Christianity by Robert M. Grant). And as a result, many Christians hid in places like the Derinkuyu Underground City (Turkey by Lynn A. Levine) which could house thousands of people and today we have found around 200 of these cities, who while not always large, but used to avoid persecutions and raids and to continue the Church that the apostle's established under the direction of Christ ([Matt. 16:16-18](#)).

Now, with the passing of the apostolic age, some Christians gradually drifted into a state of apostasy. People along the same thinking as Diotrophes ([3 John 9](#)), who wanted the pre-eminence, began to be seen. In the New Testament, we find the words elders, bishops, overseers, presbyters, pastors and shepherds which were title without distinction to rank or office. While people such as Polycarp (69-155), Justin Martyr (103-165), Quadratus of Athens (120), Theophilus of Antioch (180) desired to either be Christians or elders in the church, Ignatius of Antioch (1st century) and Zephyrinus (199-217) desired to have a "Bishop" office over the elders (Epistle to the Smyrnaeans: section 8). So, while the church was to be a united body during the 2nd century, we find this standing office of president within the eldership which also was given to Dionysius of Alexandria (2nd century) and Gregory Thaumaturgus (213-270) and were given the name of "The Bishop" (General History of the Christian Religion and Church by Augustus Neander). Despite this being contrary to [2 Peter 1:3](#); [Galatians 1:6-9](#) and [Jude 1:3](#), this Bishop was given his own authority and function (Irenaeus supported it), to do what he thought was best and was given a territory to rule over, called a diocese. Hippolytus of Rome was against such councils (The Eternal Kingdom by J.W. Mattox).

Now, during these same times, the theologians such as Tatian (120-180) who forbid marriage and meats, Tertullian who later became a Montanist (160-220) and Clement of Alexandria who began Gnosticism, all brought troubles to the Church (The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia by Phillip Schaff). Then, the clergy

were also exalted and gave themselves titles such as Reverend or Father and taught that people could only have access to God through them (The Great Apostasy by James Talmage). Also, through these men, strange doctrines were introduced: Holy Water (120), Penance (157) infant baptism (175) infant sin (248), purgatory (220) (History of the Church by Robert Brumback) and millennialism or a physical Kingdom of God on earth (2nd century) (The Eternal Kingdom by F. W. Mattox). And so, the church, much like that of the Corinthians had several problems to overcome.

With many things that needed to be overcome, it seems that the Church was split into two sections: those who want to follow under the Bishops and those who wanted to continue to keep the purity of the Gospel. Unfortunately, the head Bishop over the congregation, with his territory, soon found his job too big. New groups were made: Country Bishops (for surrounding areas) and City Bishops called Presbyters (A Dictionary of Religion and Ethics by Shailer Matthews). By the end of the 2nd century, we find traces of Synods and Councils. And, this increased their dominion and authority and other doctrines such as Asceticism and Ebionism which began to be taught in the church (History of the Christian Church by Philip Schaff).

Now, in 260 A.D. while Gallineus persecuted Christians, Christianity was legalized and persecutions stopped around 292 A.D. During the 3rd century, Christians began building large buildings and became rich while its members were worldly and contentious (The story of the Christian Church by Jesse L. Hurlbut). There also arose further contention between Bishops and Presbyters over the doctrines: Arius and Athanasius (History of the Christian Church by Philip Schaff). Bishops finally wanted supreme power and so they no longer counseled with the Presbyters. The Bishops assumed more authority until 325 AD when Constantine called the first General Council. Although not a Christian, but was the emperor of Rome, he nominated himself as Bishop of bishops and presided over this meeting. He invited all people from the churches of the Christian World, including those who were once hidden underground. It was this meeting that made an official creed that Christ was eternal with the Father. This creed formed a doctrine for the church instead of following the Word of God.

Now there were three main bishops back then: Rome, Alexandria and Antioch (Church History for Busy People by George Klingman). Two other councils were added later from Jerusalem and Constantinople. These councils loved the pre-eminence and always tried to show their superiority. Take for instance, the Word of God. As early as the days of the apostle Paul, the New Testament letters were being distributed. But while there was nothing wrong with it, these councils in 397 A.D., in Carthage, made a name for themselves and closed the New Testament canon, which at that time, every Christian knew which was Scripture and which was not. And so, there was definitely a separation in the church: you had the Bishops (later called the Patriarch or Chief Father), the Presbyters (who were similar but lost all power) and the members who were confused as to what to do with these two groups (Church History for Busy People by George Klingman). Many wanted to go by the teachings of Christ and the apostles.

But, these Patriarchs were trying to control everything. Well, it got so bad that in 588 A.D., John the Faster assumed the title of "Universal Bishop of the Church" which made Gregory the Great upset (Church History for Busy People by George Klingman). Many letters were exchanged, accusations were thrown and the title was stripped from John. In 606 A.D, Boniface III gave himself this which introduced papal supremacy and he became the head of the church (The Catholic Encyclopedia by Robert Appleton). This

date marks the beginning of the Roman Catholic Church. This conflict between Roman bishops and Constantinople bishops would ultimately lead to the Great Schism of 1054 A.D, but by that time, there was Latin mass (394), Extreme unction (588), Purgatory (593), Kissing the Pope's toe (709), Transubstantiation (1000) and Celibacy (1015) introduced which made the Church unrecognizable to any Christian or Christ. No longer was Christ the head of the Church. Since the 3rd century, the bishops had control.

Now, some say that the Greek Orthodox is the original Church which is why they broke away from Catholicism. However, by 1054, neither group could be called the church. In fact, The Greek Orthodox practices infant baptism, marked the body for the Holy Spirit, priest were able to forgive sins, a special priesthood was set apart from the church and many of their traditions stem from Catholicism, not from Christ or His apostles (A Journey of Fear and Joy by Oswin Craton). But, if this was not the Church the Lord established, where did it go?

Well, some say that we do not know. Others state that it disappeared after the first century and then returned under Alexander Campbell. But, it is recorded in history of Christians who were neither Catholic nor Orthodox, but were individual who went by the Bible as Alexander Campbell claimed to do and as the Church of Christ claims. So let's look at some history.

In 469 A.D, when the Saxons invaded Britain overthrowing Christianity, they killed the king Arthur the Great who was said to be a Christian and known for only go by the Bible (The World of King Arthur by Christopher Snyder). During the Catholic Crusades of 1073, to gain Jerusalem back from Mohammad and the Muslims, Christians such as Gundulphus 1025, Berengar of Tours 1088, Pierre de Bruys 1110 and Henry of Toulouse 1150 were being persecuted by the Catholic Church because they taught baptism for accountable people, that the bread and grape juice is not the real body and blood of Christ and taught much that was in harmony with God's Word (History of the Church by Robert Brumback). In 1115, more than 100,000 of the Albigenses were put to death for teaching only from the Bible and rejecting the church of Rome (History of the church by Robert Brumback). In 1170, the Waldenses were branded as heretics and savagely persecuted because they pleaded for a purified Christianity and first century teachings (History of the church by Robert Brumback). In 1179, all of Southern France was excommunicated and punished for being heretics of the Catholic Church (History of the Christian Church by William Blackburn). In 1229, the Bible was denied to all laymen and only priest or higher officials were permitted to read it. So, all the handwritten copies of the Bible were sought out and destroyed because the Catholic church knew that "their teachings were often different from the Bible and oftener still contrary to it" (National Library in Paris, Folio No. 1068, Vol. 2). Also during this time, there were Christians who were being persecuted by Muslims who hid in underground cities in Turkey.

Now in 1166, Christians were seen persuading Henry II and teaching autonomous congregations, practicing baptism for the remission of sins (which no other church did) and calling themselves the true church of Christ (A Student's History of England from the Earliest Times to 1885 by Samuel R. Gardiner). This church as well as the Church of Christ in Oxford 1157, the Hill Cliffe Church of 1357, the Wales church of Christ in 1417 and many others were established outside of Catholicism and before Martin Luther in the late 1490's, John Calvin 1500's, the continental Anabaptist movement of 1525, before the reformation of 1517, and before the English separation from the Catholic church in 1596 (Fox's Book of Martyr by John Foxe). Also a Catholic priest Abraham 1428, Thomas Begley 1431 from London, Richard

Wick 1439, Brabram 1499 were all charged with heresy for preaching the whole council of God and burned alive by the Catholic church (Fox's Book of Martyr by John Foxe).

Now more recent in history is John Wycliffe (1324-1384) who opposed the Catholic Church and after death, his body was exhumed and burned to ash (The Church, The Falling Away and the Restoration by J. W. Shepherd). John Huss (1369-1415) exalted the Scriptures above tradition and dogmas and was burned to death by the Council of Constance. Jerome Savonarola (1452-1498) denied the authority of the Pope and the Catholic Church and was burned to death in the square at Florence Italy in front of the church where he had preached for many years (Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature by McClintock and Strong). Year after year, people began to dislike the ideas of the Pope which led to Martin Luther Martin Luther (1483-1546).

In 1517, he nailed 95 errors of the Catholic Church onto the doors of the church in Wittenburg, Germany. He was excommunicated, but sadly taught justification by "faith only" and led many astray because of it. John Calvin (1509-1564) began to reform the Catholic Church as did John Knox (1505-1572) who created the Presbyterian Church, but all attempts failed. Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) attacked the Catholic Church by abolishing all that could not be proven by the Scriptures (History of the Reformation vol. 3 by J. H. Merle D'Aubigne). In fact, he said, "I will never cease to restore the primitive unity of the church of Christ" (Ulrich Zwingli, *Ego Veterem Christi Ecclesiae unitatem instaurare non desian*, Vol. 3).

Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) sought religious harmony based on the Bible, but found himself sentenced to life imprisonment when he taught against Calvinist (On the Truth of the Christian Religion 1627). John Drury (1595-1680) spent 50 years stressing the oneness of the church and to get back to the Bible. Henry Denne was a preacher for the Church of Christ in the mid 1600's (<http://churches-of-christ.ws/denne.htm>). In 1669, in the furness district of Lancashire, in Northwest England, there existed 8 congregations calling themselves the Churches of Christ practicing baptism by immersion, celebrating the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day, and had elders and deacons (Dr. Robinson, principal of Overdale College, Birmingham, England). In 1691, a book was written entitled, 'Believers Baptism from Heaven and of Divine Institution' by Hercules Collins, a minister of a church of Christ in Wapping (Hayden Roger, ed., *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol, 1640-1687*. Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1974), England who stated that the church of Christ had been practicing baptism for the remission sins for the past two centuries which was before the Catholic Church labeled the Anabaptist who rebelled against the church because of their differences in baptism.

In 1701 a picture is seen labeled the church of Christ in Monksthorpe (<http://www.traces-of-the-kingdom.org/>). Other Churches of Christ have been found at Loughton (1663) and the Wall End church of Christ 1662 who still worships there today (<http://churches-of-christ.ws/Tottlebank.htm>).

Now, all of these churches mentioned is documented in believing that: the body of Christ is the universal church, that it was founded by Christ and must wear a name that honors him, Christ is the only creed and that the Bible is sufficient to govern the church, went by the organization as stated in the Bible, each congregation is autonomous and partake in the 5 commands of worship, no clergy or laity was allowed and that Gospel preachers do not wear religious titles. They further taught that water baptism was the final act of the new birth of water and spirit, faithful local churches encourage members to live godly

lives upholding biblical standards for morals and pleaded for complete obedience to Christ, seeking unity based upon the apostles teachings including stopping religious error from flourishing. This description is exactly the teachings of many Churches of Christ today.

Now as to Alexander Campbell, sure he did a lot to restore New Testament Christianity. But the church did not start back up with him. In fact, in 1735, John Davis, in the Fife District of Scotland, was preaching New Testament Christianity 25 years before Thomas Campbell (Alexander's father) was even born" (Dr. Robinson, Principia of Overdale College Birmingham, England). In 1755, Robert Sandeman began to restore NT Christianity and by 1763, he established the Lord's church in Boston, Massachusetts, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Danbury, Connecticut (The Search for the Ancient Order by Earl West). There was also a church of Christ in Dungannon, Ireland in 1804 and in Allington, Dengigshire.

So, as the 18th closed and the 19th century began, men appeared and in the name of religion, they began to make pleas to return to the old paths ([Jeremiah 6:16](#)). It was this plea that recognizes Christ as the supreme authority in religion and the New Testament as the only rule of faith and practice, no creed books, who has a proper distinction between Old and New Testaments who recognizes the New Testament pattern of the church and has autonomy of the local church and the unity of all Christians. Now, Churches of Christ have always traced their origin to the first century. And, while the restoration movement does owe credit to the fervor and leadership of men like Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone and others, before Alexander Campbell came to America, in 1800, we find the Church of Christ performed marriages (The Disciples in Kentucky by Alonzo W. Fortune), William Rogers, on his grave marker stated that he united with the churches of Christ at Cane Ridge in 1807. We also find men such as James O'Kelly (1735-1826), Abner Jones (1772-1841), Elias Smith (1769-1846) and others who sought to restore the New Testament order. The Old Philadelphia church of Christ in Mississippi began in 1804. In Arkansas, there are state records for Davidsonville County which have registered a church of Christ in 1806 as well as another church of Christ in Randolph county. They all pleaded that, "We speak where the Bible speaks and we are silent where the Bible is silent."

So no, the Church of Christ did not end in the first century and begin again with Alexander Campbell. In [Matthew 16:18](#), Jesus said, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The Church has always been here, perhaps, not as bright and bold as it is today. Nevertheless, it has been proven in several documents, photos, church records and many other writing throughout history that the church, while at times, extremely small, has always been here.

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