



# Pagans, Popes, Peasants, & Presbyterians

**WHAT DOES A 1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PAGAN, A 10<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY POPE,  
A 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PEASANT, AND A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
PRESBYTERIAN HAVE IN COMMON?**

33 AD

2016AD



## Why it matters what happened in between...

- Clarifies context in which contemporary problems exist
  - Past suggests the future
- Understand who we are, what we believe, and why
  - Past affects today's decisions/beliefs
- Understand the irreducible Christian character
  - Not repeat mistakes
- Offer gratitude...God saves the Church despite the Church's best efforts to destroy it

# THE WAY 33- 500 CE

- ❖ Church began at Pentecost with apostolic leadership in Jerusalem—persecution from outside and dissension from within
- ❖ Paul (and others) take Good News westward to Jews and Gentiles moving from law to love
- ❖ In the face of ridicule and persecution, gospel spread through hospitality, love in action for a hurting world
- ❖ Post-apostolic leadership in monastic movement, church fathers/mothers, councils creating doctrine
- ❖ Christian emperor, marriage of church/state

# THE CATHEDRAL 500-1450

- ❖ Church rising in power/prestige married to state, imperfect popes—murder plots, adultery, “where the bishop is the Church is”, simony
- ❖ Rise of Islam
- ❖ Crusades
- ❖ East/West schism
- ❖ Monastics and mystics

# THE WORD 1450-1650

- ❖ Church needed reforming: priests often uneducated, doctrine not being communicated to congregations, liturgies and Scripture in Latin only, buying/selling church offices, indulgences
- ❖ Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to door, standard debate invitation, wanted to reform Church not start a new one
- ❖ Bible translated into common language, separation of church and state, beginning denominations (Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism)
- ❖ Enduring gifts: saved by grace through faith, authority of Scripture, priesthood of all believers, sovereignty of God, engagement in world, democratic governance

# THE QUEST 1650-1945

- ❖ Post-reformation issues: authority of Scripture-whose interpretation correct, conflicting viewpoints, those in authority contradict each other, erased traditional authority and views allowing questioning---wars/splits
- ❖ Global expansion, introduction varied cultures, U.S Church prestige
- ❖ Modernity/enlightenment assume a universal “Truth” about the universe, humanity, & God—knowing “Truth” could anticipate/fix problems
- ❖ Modernity more interested in pursuing knowledge about God than about pursuing God
- ❖ Re-worked theology, de-emphasized supernatural, rebased faith on morality over doctrine, celebrated tolerance, rise of one aspect faith

# THE RIVER... TODAY

“What keeps gnawing at me is this question—what is Christianity, who is Christ actually for us today?...Even those who honestly describe themselves as religious aren’t really practicing that at all. They mean something quite different by religion.”

1944 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, personal correspondence from prison

# THE RIVER... TODAY

Religionless Christianity

Post-Christian Society

Spiritual But Not Religious

Christianity is changing in ways not seen since the reformation

Modernity is slipping into past as did the middle ages—giving birth to postmodernity

## MODERNITY

- ❖ Solid church thriving on structure, measured by #/\$, resist stress by strengthening doctrine, presumed needs which worked for generation bound by duty/tradition
- ❖ Jesus Seminar, social gospel, savvy PR campaigns, historical Jesus, stripping of divinity, refuting of miracles, affirming Jesus vs a commanding God
- ❖ Evangelicalism reached maturity during height of modernity, worked fervently to legitimize faith to science and reason culture

## POSTMODERNITY

- ❖ Liquid church embraces mystery & suffering truth of humanity, allows personal expression while maintaining treasures, seeking authenticity, relationship, no pre-packaged
- ❖ Search for whole “T” is futile, only opposing interpretations & created realities
- ❖ Interpretation is possible but never absolute
- ❖ Proclamation is post-individualistic, community-centered

# THE RIVER... TODAY

Christianity no longer the unifying story  
Church no longer holds its position of power/prestige

Religious pluralism

Belief in God different today than in 1500

Rise of the “none”

U.S. division is commonplace— politics, have & have nots, race, religion, F-150 or  
Ram, Eagles or Cowboys

BUT

Is it possible for Christians to overcome division around a common table that  
excludes no one?

Despair or Hope or Both?



“If religion is only garb in which  
Christianity is clothed—and this garb  
has looked different in different  
ages—what then is religionless  
Christianity?”

--Bonhoeffer

# 1 PETER 2:12, 4:7-11

**FOR THEM**

**FOR US**

Good lives

The end is near

Alert and of sober mind

Love each other deeply

Offer hospitality

Serve utilizing your gifts

Mindful of where serving gifts come from

# Despair or Hope or Both?

Radical example of Christ changed the world.

Jesus subverted systems, liberated and loved the oppressed, and offered future hope.

His followers continued to be counter-cultural, subversive, and transformative

The Church today can continue.....love when hate is the impulse, embrace when ostracizing is the norm, grow community and interpersonal relationships when technologic anonymity is the norm



.....**BOTH**

HOPE IS NOT NAÏVE.

IT IS THE INVITATION TO CREATIVELY  
TOIL WHILE WAITING

TRUE HOPE ACKNOWLEDGES THE  
REALITY OF DESPAIR AND MOVES  
FORWARD IN SPITE OF IT

In April 2008 Matthew Felling of WAMU radio interviewed Dr. Gordon Livingston, a psychiatrist who has studied human happiness for the past 30 years. Livingston was asked, “What makes people happy”? He responded, “meaningful work, meaningful relationships, and a sense of hope for the future.” The first two are self-explanatory but how is hope for the future achieved?

Livingston answered, “By having a realistic sense of history”. He insisted that seeing the past on its own terms—not through the romantic gaze of nostalgia—is intrinsic to human flourishing. Nostalgia, he declared, is the enemy of hope. It tricks people into believing that their best days are gone. A more realistic view of history envisions the past as a theater of experience, some good and some bad, and opens up the possibility of growth and change. Our best days are ahead, not behind. Hope for the future.

Butler Bass, Diana. *A People's History of Christianity*. 2009. Page 307.