

Chapter 1 : History timeline of world religions and their founders

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The Greek Orthodox Church makes this claim. Some Protestant denominations make this claim. How do we know which church is correct? The biblical answer is "it does not matter!" The first church, its growth, doctrine, and practices, were recorded for us in the New Testament. Jesus, as well as His apostles, foretold that false teachers would arise, and indeed it is apparent from some of the New Testament epistles that these apostles had to fight against false teachers early on. What is given is repeated comparisons between what false teachers teach and what the first church taught, as recorded in Scripture. Whether a church is the "true church" or not is determined by comparing its teachings and practices to that of the New Testament church, as recorded in Scripture. For instance, in Acts 20:29-35, Paul tells them that false teachers will not only come among them but will come FROM them. Paul does not set forth the teaching that they were to follow the "first" organized church as a safeguard for the truth. Rather, he commits them to the safekeeping of "God and to the word of His grace." Thus, truth could be determined by depending upon God and "the word of His grace." This dependence upon the Word of God, rather than following certain individual "founders" is seen again in Galatians 1: As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. Another example of this dependence upon the Word of God is found in 2 Peter. In this epistle, the Apostle Peter is fighting against false teachers. Peter later tells them again to be mindful of "the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets and the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior" 2 Peter 3: Both the words of the holy prophets and the commandments Jesus gave to the apostles are recorded in Scripture. How do we determine whether a church is teaching correct doctrine or not? The only infallible standard that Scripture says that we have is the Bible Isaiah 8: It is true that the cults and sometimes orthodox churches twist the interpretation of Scripture to support their practices; nonetheless, Scripture, when taken in context and faithfully studied, is able to guide one to the truth. All of these are core elements of the Roman Catholic faith. If most of the core elements of the Roman Catholic Church were not practiced by the New Testament Church the first church and one true church, how then can the Roman Catholic Church be the first church? A study of the New Testament will clearly reveal that the Roman Catholic Church is not the same church as the church that is described in the New Testament. The New Testament records the history of the church from approximately A.D. 30 to the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries, history records several Roman Catholic doctrines and practices among early Christians. Is it not logical that the earliest Christians would be more likely to understand what the Apostles truly meant? Yes, it is logical, but there is one problem. Christians in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries were not the earliest Christians. Again, the New Testament records the doctrine and practice of the earliest Christians, and the New Testament does not teach Roman Catholicism. What is the explanation for why the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th century church began to exhibit signs of Roman Catholicism? The answer is simple "the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th century and following church did not have the complete New Testament. Churches had portions of the New Testament, but the New Testament and the full Bible were not commonly available until after the invention of the printing press in A.D. 1476. The early church did its best in passing on the teachings of the apostles through oral tradition, and through extremely limited availability to the Word in written form. At the same time, it is easy to see how false doctrine could creep into a church that only had access to the Book of Galatians, for example. It is very interesting to note that the Protestant Reformation followed very closely after the invention of the printing press and the translation of the Bible into the common languages of the people. Once people began to study the Bible for themselves, it became very clear how far the Roman Catholic Church had departed from the church that is described in the New Testament. Scripture never mentions using "which church came first" as the basis for determining which is the "true" church. What it does teach is that one is to use Scripture as the determining factor as to which church is preaching the truth and thus is true to the first church. That is the church that all churches are to follow, emulate, and model themselves after.

By the end of the early Christian period, the church within the Roman Empire had hundreds of bishops, some of them (Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, "other provinces") holding some form of jurisdiction over others. Jerusalem was the first church and an important church center up to

History of Religion in America Introduction The issue of religious freedom has played a significant role in the history of the United States and the remainder of North America. Europeans came to America to escape religious oppression and forced beliefs by such state-affiliated Christian churches as the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. Its history includes the emergence of utopian experiments , religious fanaticism, and opening the door to such exotic religions as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Taoism. Such has been the winding road of religious evolution in America. The role of religion among American Indians For untold generations before Europeans came to America, native peoples celebrated the bounty given to them by the Great Spirit. Across America, such Indian tribes as the Algonquians , the Iroquois , Sioux , and the Seminoles worshiped the Great Spirit, who could be found in animals as well as inanimate objects. As white colonists drove Indians onto reservations, the fervency of their religious practices increased, even as Christian missionaries made inroads that influenced their spirituality. Colonial religious splintering Religious persecution and iron-fisted rule by state-affiliated Christianity in Europe began to loosen its hold in the 16th century when, for the sake of debate, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany. In later attempts to free themselves from the tie of the state governmental system imposed by the Church of England Anglican Church , such denominations as the Reformed-Presbyterian churches and the European Free Church were formed. Those religious parents gave birth to the next wave of Christian denominations. Reforms were brought by the Puritans to the American colonies. As later cries for reform and renewal took place, further splintering occurred among the Methodists , Pentecostals, Fundamentalists and Adventists, each bearing a diminished resemblance to their original parents. Evangelical movement roots and branches Evangelism has played an integral part in the history of religion in America, from colonial times to the present, while its methods of dissemination have changed dramatically. During the Great Awakening of the s, white Protestant evangelists proselytized to black Americans. During the 19th century, Methodists held camp meetings in the frontier states. Evangelism turned to elaborate crusades in the 20th century when such preachers as Billy Sunday attempted to convince nonbelievers that they should "jump ship" from their ancestral Christian denominations. Tent revivals, broadcast by radio and television, were dynamic with charismatic preachers who captured the attention of millions of people. While they were relegated to cable TV networks, evangelistic websites slowly began to crop up on the Internet during the early s. Because of the anonymous nature of that interactive communication tool, people felt more comfortable sharing their personal beliefs and faith over the Internet with a large audience, or with one unknown person. Media evangelists incorporated multimedia presentations with sound, the written word, movies and video technologies. To prevent a return to a centralized, overbearing government, the Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution, without which ratification by Virginia and New York would not have occurred. To fully understand the impact of the spread of Christian denominations in America, it is important to look at them and their origins individually. Listed below is a brief summary of those denominations, beginning with a proto-denomination, the Puritans. Puritans The Puritans came to the New England colonies to escape religious persecution. The Puritans later gave birth to the Baptists and the Congregationalists. Using the New Testament as their model, they believed that each congregation and each person individually was responsible to God. Their belief that their destiny was predetermined, their self-imposed isolation, and religious exclusivity, would later lead to witch hunts beginning in The Puritans also were responsible for the first free schooling in America and established the first American college, Harvard College , in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Congregationalists Based on the Calvinist Reformed tradition and strictly opposed to external authorities, Congregationalists came to New England and established the Plymouth Colony in As part of the Separatist movement, Congregationalists broke from the Anglican Church and established independent congregations in

which God was the absolute authority. Prone to splintering, those congregations experienced a great number of local schisms during the first Great Awakening in the s. During the s, membership declined as their Methodist and Baptist cousins continued to gain strength. Unitarianism developed as an offshoot of COngregationalism, initially due to disagreement over the reality of the Trinity. Over the years, their resistance to dependence and external secular and clerical authority has lessened. Many Congregationalist churches have subsequently merged with other churches from the Reformed tradition. Today their membership in the U. Methodists The tap root of Methodism was a group of Oxford University students, amongst whom were its founders, John and Charles Wesley. Asbury promoted circuit riding and thus increased American Methodism to , by the time of his death in One of the more liberal Christian denominations, the United Methodist Church has become the second-largest Protestant denomination in America with 8. Lutherans In no other American Christian denomination did national origin play such an important role in its history as the Lutheran Church. The Lutherans settled on the East Coast and American Midwest, and celebrated worship services in their native tongues. From their first foothold in , Lutherans began to establish a sum total of synods. In the late 19th century, they began to merge as the Americanization process eliminated the language barriers that had previously kept them separate. After many previous mergers, three of the larger Lutheran bodies came together in to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ELCA , which currently counts more than half of the Lutheran membership in the U. A more conservative branch is the Missouri Synod. Presbyterians Bearing little resemblance to the liturgy, structure, and tradition associated with the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian and Reformed churches share a common origin in the teachings of John Calvin and the 16th century Swiss Reformation. By definition, the Presbyterian denomination is anchored in an active, representational leadership style for both ministers and lay members. Presbyterians mostly came from England, Scotland, and Ireland. William Penn , whose writings about freedom of conscience while imprisoned in England formed the basis of religious understanding for Quakers around the world. Penn established what would later be called Pennsylvania , an American religious sanctuary in the late 17th century. He believed in religious toleration, fair trade with Native Americans, and equal rights for women. They also shared an abhorrence of violence. Major liturgical denominations in the colonies The oldest Christian churches: Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, have left their unique stamp on the history of religion in America. They practice an allegiance to certain creeds or doctrines that originated in the early centuries of the Christian church, and profess a succession of leadership from the founding of the Christian church at Pentecost. Roman Catholicism Even though it was not the first to arrive in the colonies, Roman Catholicism ranks as the largest Christian tradition in the U. Arriving with the Spanish in what is now Florida in , and in the southwest and on the Pacific coast when Junipero Serra began to build missions in California , they received additional members when a group of colonists settled in Maryland in Roman Catholics had at one time held tightly to their cultural roots, but later joined the rest of American society. The American church has continued its allegiance to the pope, even though many of its members disagree with him on such issues as birth control, abortion, and women in the priesthood. Their worship services are similar in some ways to those of Roman Catholicism, and their clergy orders are the same: They espouse an inclusive policy toward membership. Orthodoxy in America consists of more than a dozen church bodies whose national origin is reflected by their names, such as the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. Eastern Orthodox beliefs are based on holy tradition, or doctrines from early Christianity, and the Bible. The decrees of church councils and the writings of early church fathers establish the authority of church beliefs. Their clergy consist of bishops, priests, and deacons. Their worship services are the most elaborate of all Christian traditions.

Chapter 3 : History of Religion in America

Employing the notion of religion as a "cultural sign language which promises a gain in life by corresponding to an ultimate reality," he plots the emergence of Christianity as a religion, with elements of myth, ritual, ethics, and an emergent symbolic system.

What is the origin of the Roman Catholic Church? The Catholic Church proclaims itself to be the church that Jesus Christ died for, the church that was established and built by the apostles. Is that the true origin of the Catholic Church? Even a cursory reading of the New Testament will reveal that the Catholic Church does not have its origin in the teachings of Jesus or His apostles. So, if the origin of the Catholic Church is not in the teachings of Jesus and His apostles, as recorded in the New Testament, what is the true origin of the Catholic Church? For the first years of Christian history, Christianity was banned by the Roman Empire, and Christians were terribly persecuted. Constantine provided religious toleration with the Edict of Milan in AD 313, effectively lifting the ban on Christianity. Constantine envisioned Christianity as a religion that could unite the Roman Empire, which at that time was beginning to fragment and divide. While this may have seemed to be a positive development for the Christian church, the results were anything but positive. Just as Constantine refused to fully embrace the Christian faith but continued many of his pagan beliefs and practices, so the Christian church that Constantine and his successors promoted progressively became a mixture of true Christianity and Roman paganism. Following are a few examples: Most Roman Catholic beliefs and practices regarding Mary are completely absent from the Bible. Where did those beliefs come from? The Roman Catholic view of Mary has far more in common with the Isis mother-goddess religion of Egypt than it does with anything taught in the New Testament. Interestingly, the first hints of Catholic Mariology occur in the writings of Origen, who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, which happened to be the focal point of Isis worship. The idea that bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the literal body and blood of Jesus transubstantiation is not biblical. For example, Saint Gianna Beretta Molla is the patron saint of fertility. Francis of Assisi is the patron saint of animals. There are multiple patron saints of healing and comfort. Nowhere is even a hint of this taught in Scripture. Just as the Roman pantheon of gods had a god of love, a god of peace, a god of war, a god of strength, a god of wisdom, etc. The idea that the Roman bishop is the vicar of Christ, the supreme leader of the Christian Church, is utterly foreign to the Word of God. The supremacy of the Roman bishop the papacy was created with the support of the Roman emperors. While most other bishops and Christians resisted the idea of the Roman bishop being supreme, the Roman bishop eventually rose to supremacy, again, due to the power and influence of the Roman emperors. After the western half of the Roman Empire collapsed, the popes took on the title that had previously belonged to the Roman emperors—“Pontifex Maximus. Many more examples could be given. These four should suffice in demonstrating the origin of the Catholic Church. Of course, the Roman Catholic Church denies the pagan origin of its beliefs and practices. The Catholic Church disguises its pagan beliefs under layers of complicated theology and church tradition. Recognizing that many of its beliefs and practices are utterly foreign to Scripture, the Catholic Church is forced to deny the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. The origin of the Catholic Church is the tragic compromise of Christianity with the pagan religions that surrounded it. By blurring the differences and erasing the distinctions, the Catholic Church made itself attractive to the idolatrous people of the Roman Empire. One result was the Catholic Church becoming the supreme religion in the Roman world for centuries. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Chapter 4 : A Look at the Early Church - AD Church History Timeline

photo source: Wikimedia Etchmiadzin Cathedral was the first cathedral built in ancient Armenia, and it remains the oldest Christian cathedral in existence. Originally, a church was built in the same site in AD, but it was replaced by the current church in AD.

The earliest followers of Jesus composed an apocalyptic, Second Temple Jewish sect, which historians refer to as Jewish Christianity. The first part of the period, during the lifetimes of the Twelve Apostles, is called the Apostolic Age. In line with the Great Commission attributed to the resurrected Jesus, the Apostles are said to have dispersed from Jerusalem, and the Christian missionary activity spread Christianity to cities throughout the Hellenistic world and even beyond the Roman Empire. Though early Christian apologetics certainly tackled the issue of Greek religion, the criticisms of early Christian early writers also extended to what The Oxford Handbook to the Second Sophistic describes as the "cultural privilege that was deemed to accrue from the mastery of the Greek language". Part of the unifying trend was an increasingly harsh anti-Judaism and rejection of Judaizers. Early Christianity gradually grew apart from Judaism during the first two centuries and established itself as a predominantly gentile religion in the Roman Empire. According to Will Durant, the Christian Church prevailed over paganism because it offered a much more attractive doctrine and because the church leaders addressed human needs better than their rivals. Early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr described these practices. Baptism in early Christianity Early Christian beliefs regarding baptism probably predate the New Testament writings. John the Baptist had baptized many people, before baptisms took place in the name of Jesus Christ. Many of the interpretations that would later become Orthodox Christian beliefs concerning baptism can be traced to apostles such as Paul, who likened baptism to being buried with Christ in his death Romans 6: On the basis of this description, it was supposed by some modern theologians that the early Christians practised baptism by submersion Matthew 3: This interpretation is debated between those Christian denominations who advocate immersion baptism exclusively and those who practice baptism by affusion or aspersion as well as by immersion. Yet the Didache, one of the earliest Christian writings on liturgical practices, mentions that baptism may occur by pouring water on the head three times using the trinitarian formula. The Orthodox Church continues this practice, submerging the baptized and then pouring water on the head in that formula. Infant baptism was widely practised at least by the 3rd century, [18] but it is disputed whether it was in the first centuries of Christianity. Some believe that the Church in the apostolic period practised infant baptism, arguing that the mention of the baptism of households in the Acts of the Apostles would have included children within the household. The Bishop Polycarp, himself a disciple of the Apostle John, stated at his martyrdom AD that he had been in the "service of Christ" for eighty-six years. Joachim Jeremias concludes the following from these facts: Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them. The 3rd century evidence is clearer, with both Origen calling infant baptism "according to the usage of the Church" [25] and Cyprian advocating the practice. Tertullian acknowledges the practice and that sponsors would speak on behalf of the children, but, holding an unusual view of marriage, argues against it, on the grounds that baptism should be postponed until after marriage. The early Christian writings mentioned above, which date from the 2nd and 3rd century indicate that Christians as early as the 2nd century did maintain such a practice. In the post-Apostolic church, bishops emerged as overseers of urban Christian populations, and a hierarchy of clergy gradually took on the form of episkopoi overseers, presbyteroi elders, [30] and diakonoi ministerial servants. This hierarchy emerged slowly and at different times for different locations. Clement, a 1st-century bishop of Rome, refers to the leaders of the Corinthian church in his epistle to Corinthians as bishops and presbyters interchangeably. The New Testament writers also use the terms "overseer" and "elder" interchangeably and as synonyms. Disputes regarding the proper titles and roles of church leaders would later become one of the major causes of schism within the Christian Church. Churches such as the Catholic and Orthodox use the word "priest" of all the baptized, but apply it in a more specific sense "ministerial priesthood" [33] to bishops and presbyters [34] and sometimes, somewhat loosely, treat "presbyter" and "priest" as synonyms, [35] applying both terms to clergy subordinate to bishops. In

congregational churches , the title "priest" is rejected, keeping only "presbyter" or "elder". Some congregational churches do not include a role of bishop in their organizational polity. These men reportedly knew and studied under the apostles personally and are therefore called Apostolic Fathers. Each Christian community also had presbyters , as was the case with Jewish communities, who were also ordained and assisted the bishop; as Christianity spread, especially in rural areas, the presbyters exercised more responsibilities and took distinctive shape as priests. Lastly, deacons also performed certain duties, such as tending to the poor and sick. In the 2nd century, an episcopal structure becomes more visible, and in that century this structure was supported by teaching on apostolic succession , where a bishop becomes the spiritual successor of the previous bishop in a line tracing back to the apostles themselves. By the end of the early Christian period, the church within the Roman Empire had hundreds of bishops, some of them Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, "other provinces" holding some form of jurisdiction over others. Sabbath in Christianity According to Bauckham, the post-apostolic church contained diverse practices as regards the Sabbath. It is contested that worship on Sundays, as is now mostly common in the Christian movement, only shifted from Saturday because of Emperor Constantine. However, it seems clear that most of the Early Church did not consider observation of the Sabbath to be required or of eminent importance to Christians and in fact worshiped on Sunday. Below is a portion of the text: And on the day which is called Sunday there is an assembly in the same place of all who live in cities or in country districts; and the records of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are read as long as we have timeâ€¦ Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the day on which God, when he changed the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.

Chapter 5 : Religion - Encyclopedia of Arkansas

The early church nevertheless had many tensions and conflicts that called for ecumenical proclamations and pleas from the Evangelists and Apostles. Tensions arose between Jewish Christian churches and Gentile Christian churches, between Paul and the enthusiasts.

Some readers may find it surprising to learn that a woman shortage blighted the ancient world, with about men for every women. This is so because many female infants were left to die of exposure and because of the mortal risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Yet both Christians and their critics observed a marked overrepresentation of women in the early churches, a fact the critics used to their advantage: Not only did women show their strength in numbers, they did so in leadership positions as well. In Romans 16 Paul refers to women and men alike as partners in the gospel. Paul also refers to Junia as an apostle, a fact most English translations covered up until Romans His letters refer to several other prominent women, including Euodia and Synthyche, who likely led the church in Philippi Philippians 4: Moreover, both Acts and Paul refer to women who hosted church gatherings in their homes I hear many people blithely assert that women were "just property" in the ancient world. Overwhelming and oppressive patriarchy did characterize ancient cultures, but we also have many examples of powerful, creative, literate and accomplished women -- some in roles of patronage and community leadership. The work of Ross Shepard Kraemer has proven invaluable in this respect. As we have seen, some women of this class contributed to the early churches. On the other hand, early Christianity was no oasis of feminist liberty. While we observe some egalitarian impulses in the movement, it is impossible to quantify gender roles in the early churches. But some of his other admirers turned the tradition against women. For example, interpreters have long noticed that that the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, which share a common author, prominently feature female characters. Yet while Luke and Acts call attention to these significant women, they do not fulfill roles of authorized leadership in the movement. Our best evidence indicates that women played a relatively prominent role in the early Christian communities, compared to their larger social contexts, but the evidence is mixed. For one thing, the first century was a period of gender experimentation, as people debated whether women could study philosophy or join men at public meals. Moreover, while some early Christian women and men functioned as equals in leadership and authority, practices varied from one Christian community to another.

Chapter 6 : Which U.S. religious groups are oldest and youngest? | Pew Research Center

From the time of Nero (64 A.D.) until the conversion of Emperor Constantine and the Edict of Milan (A.D.), whereby Christianity was made legal, the Christian faith was officially regarded as a religio prava, an evil or depraved religion.

Linda Woodhead Persecution in the Early Church In its first three centuries, the Christian church endured persecution at the hands of Roman authorities. This experience, and its resulting martyrs and apologists, would have significant historical and theological consequences for the developing faith. The article that follows explores the history of persecution of the early church, some of the reasons behind it, and two important Christian responses to persecution: Extent of the Persecutions The total number of Christians martyred in the early church is unknown. Although some early writers speak of "great "modern scholars tend to believe the actual number is not so great as is sometimes imagined. Out of the 54 emperors who ruled between 30 and , only about a dozen went out of their way to persecute Christians. Moreover, imperial decrees against Christians were often directed against church property, the Scriptures, or clergy only. The imperial policy was generally one of incorporation - the local gods of a newly conquered area were simply added to the Roman pantheon and often given Roman names. Even the Jews, with their one god, were generally tolerated. So why the persecution of Christians? In order to understand the Roman distrust of Christianity, one must understand the Roman view of religion. For the Romans, religion was first and foremost a social activity that promoted unity and loyalty to the state - a religious attitude the Romans called pietas, or piety. Cicero wrote that if piety in the Roman sense were to disappear, social unity and justice would perish along with it. Religious beliefs were valid only in so far as it could be shown to be old and in line with ancient customs; new and innovative teachings were regarded with distrust. The Roman distaste for Christianity, then, arose in large part from its sense that it was bad for society. In the third century, the Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry wrote: How can people not be in every way impious and atheistic who have apostatized from the customs of our ancestors through which every nation and city is sustained? What else are they than fighters against God? Though much of the Roman religion was utilitarian, it was also heavily motivated by the pagan sense that bad things will happen if the gods are not respected and worshiped properly. On a more social, practical level, Christians were distrusted in part because of the secret and misunderstood nature of their worship. History of the Persecutions At least since the fifth century, it has been customary to count ten major persecutions in the early church, a number that nicely parallels the ten plagues of Egypt. Persecution under Nero c. Traditional martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. Persecution under Domitian r. Persecution under Trajan Christianity is outlawed but Christians are not sought out. Persecution under Marcus Aurelius r. Persecution under Septimus Severus Persecution under Decius Christians are actively sought out by requiring public sacrifice. Could buy certificates libelli instead of sacrificing. Martyrdoms of bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch. Persecution under Valerian Persecution under Maximinus the Thracian Persecution under Aurelian r. Severe persecution under Diocletian and Galerius Persecution in the early church occurred sporadically almost since the beginning, but it was first sanctioned by the government under Nero. In 64 AD, a great fire ravaged Rome. Nero took the opportunity provided by the destruction to rebuild the city in the Greek style and begin building a large palace for himself. Nero was quite insane, and is reported to have tortured Christians with great cruelties for his own enjoyment. According to the Roman historian Tacitus: Besides being put to death they [the Christians] were made to serve as objects of amusement; they were clad in the hides of beast and torn to death by dogs; others were crucified, others set on fire to serve to illuminate the night when daylight failed. Nero had thrown open his grounds for the display, and was putting on a show in the circus, where he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or drove about in his chariot. All this gave rise to a feeling of pity, even toward men whose guilt merited the most exemplary punishment; for it was felt that they were being destroyed not for the public good but to satisfy the cruelty of an individual. However, it was the first official persecution and marked the first time the government distinguished Christians from Jews. Tertullian referred to persecution of Christians as institutum Neronianum, an institution of Nero. Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher on the throne, was a well-educated, just, kind, and amiable emperor, and reached the old Roman

ideal of self-reliant Stoic virtue, but for this very reason he had no sympathy with Christianity, and probably regarded it as an absurd and fanatical superstition. He had no room in his cosmopolitan philanthropy for the purest and most innocent of his subjects, many of whom served in his own army. He was flooded with apologies of Melito, Miltiades, Athenagoras in behalf of the persecuted Christians, but turned a deaf ear to them. Only once, in his Meditations, does he allude to them, and then with scorn, tracing their noble enthusiasm for martyrdom to "sheer obstinacy" and love for theatrical display. His excuse is ignorance. He probably never read a line of the New Testament, nor of the apologies addressed to him. Belonging to the later Stoical school, which believed in an immediate absorption after death into the Divine essence, he considered the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul, with its moral consequences, as vicious and dangerous to the welfare of the state. At all events his reign was a stormy time for the church, although the persecutions cannot be directly traced to him. The law of Trajan was sufficient to justify the severest measures against the followers of the "forbidden" religion. Later, there is record of "new decrees" making it easier for Christians to be accused and have their property confiscated. In 160, 48 Christians were martyred in the amphitheater in Lyons modern France. During his visit, Pliny encountered Christians, and he wrote to the emperor about them. The governor indicated that he had ordered the execution of several Christians, "for I held no question that whatever it was they admitted, in any case obstinacy and unbending perversity deserve to be punished. The emperor responded that Christians should not be sought out, anonymous tips should be rejected as "unworthy of our times," and if they recanted and "worshipped our gods," they were to be freed. Those who persisted, however, should be punished. Also responding to a request for advice from his governor, this time in western Asia Minor, Hadrian decreed c. 130. Significantly, therefore, being a Christian was no longer sufficient in itself to merit arrest. Moreover, "slandorous attacks" against Christians were forbidden, meaning that anyone who brought a case against a Christian but failed would suffer serious consequences. Perpetua was martyred during this time, as were many students of Origen of Alexandria. In January of 260, Decius issued an edict requiring all citizens to sacrifice to the emperor in the presence of a Roman official and obtain a certificate libellus proving they had done so. Forty-four of these libelli have survived. One surviving example reads: To those appointed to see the sacrifices: From Aurelia Charis of the Egyptian village of Theadelphia. I have always continued to sacrifice and show reverence to the gods, and now, in your presence, I have poured a libation and sacrificed and eaten some of the sacrificial meat. I request you to certify this for me below. Many Christians chose to defy the edict outright, refusing to buy a certificate, and were arrested or executed. Among those martyred under Decius were the bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch. However, the bishop of Smyrna performed the sacrifice, as did many others. How should those who had bought a certificate or actually sacrificed be treated? It seems that in most churches, those who had lapsed were accepted back into the fold, but some groups refused them admission to the church. This raised important issues about the nature of the church, forgiveness, and the high value of martyrdom. A century and a half later, St. Augustine would battle with an influential group called the Donatists, who broke away from the Catholic Church because the latter embraced the lapsed. Under Valerian, who took the throne in 253, all Christian clergy were required to sacrifice to the gods. In an edict, the punishment was exile; in 257, the punishment was death. Christian senators, knights and ladies were also required to sacrifice under pain of heavy fines, reduction of rank and, later, death. Finally, all Christians were forbidden to visit their cemeteries. Among those executed under Valerian were St. According to a letter written by Dionysus during this time, "men and women, young and old, maidens and matrons, soldiers and civilians, of every age and race, some by scourging and fire, others by the sword, have conquered in the strife and won their crowns. It is known as the "Great Persecution. In any case, Diocletian published four edicts of The emperor ordered the burning of Christian books and churches, but promised not to spill any blood. In actuality, the Diocletian persecution turned out to be extremely violent. This violence "did not succeed in annihilating Christianity but caused the faith of the martyrs to blaze forth instead. This did not make Christianity the official religion of the empire that happened under Emperor Theodosius in 380, but granted it legal status. The Glory of Martyrdom and Apologetics In the face of persecution, many Christians chose to die before they would deny their Lord. Those who did so came to be called martyrs, which means "witnesses. It was Tertullian who famously declared, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. A second response

of the church to Roman persecution was to write apologies, or defenses, of the Christian faith. The bishops and leaders who wrote these defenses are known as the Apologists. Thus they often addressed their works to Roman emperors. The Apologists also sought to show that Christianity was equal or even superior to pagan religion and philosophy, and good for the Roman state.

Chapter 7 : What was the first / original church? Is the original / first church the true church?

The Power and Presence of Women In The Earliest Churches The answer is, simply, that the early churches did value women's contributions. Not only did women show their strength in numbers, they did.

The law of the land from mandated that white Virginians worship in the Anglican church Church of England and support its upkeep with their taxes. Where religion was an integral part of everyday life in Virginia, the lines blurred between religious and civil authority. Virginia gentlemen, who supported establishment but disliked centralized church authority, gained control of parish vestries and county courts to secure their power over religious matters. Protestant sects resented legal restrictions placed on them Despite establishment, the religious life of white Virginians was not without diversity. Dissenters from many Protestant sects had settled in the colony from early on " and had long resented the legal restrictions placed on their own practice of religion. Finally, after about , evangelical Christians precipitated a struggle for religious freedom parallel to and often reciprocal with the wider struggle for political independence. Anglicans mistrusted religious views of Native Americans and Africans Although Anglicans tolerated Protestant dissenters, they found the traditional religious views of Native Americans and Africans beyond sanction. But English colonists made only fitful and often grudging efforts to bring blacks and Indians into the established church. The Powhatans and Indians further inland proved resistant to Christianity. For blacks, the oppression of slavery inevitably forced them to abandon a purely African world view. Still, they did not come to Christianity in great numbers until evangelicals began gathering converts of both races after the midth century. Anglican faith was a private family affair The Anglican gentry in Virginia long had a reputation for shallow faith and attendance at church born more of habit and a desire for social contact than piety or zeal. Historians have begun to reevaluate this oversimplified view. Faith was ultimately a private and family affair. The pervasiveness of religion in 18th-century life inspired the motifs used in the design of some household furnishings. Inscriptions on the pot pictured here encouraged the hostess, as she poured coffee, to "keep her conversation as becometh the lord" and her company to remember the comforting words of the twenty-third psalm, "the lord is my Shepherd I shall not want. While accepting disparity in social rank, they came to expect a certain civility and recognition from the gentry that likely extended to the parish church and churchyard. Slaves drawn to Evangelical Christianity The seeds of faith planted in Anglican homes and churches often lay dormant under routine worship and complacency, but later flourished under the influence of evangelical preachers. These men remodeled familiar biblical themes into a compelling message of spiritual renewal and of a personal God who intervened in human affairs. Slaves in unprecedented numbers were drawn to evangelical Christianity, particularly the Baptist sect. As the Revolution approached, they formed an unlikely partnership with apostles of the Enlightenment among the Revolutionary generation. Both were bent upon disestablishing the Anglican church in Virginia. Religious revolution mostly peaceful The diversification of religion in Virginia up to and through the Revolutionary period was relatively peaceful. Anglican agents sometimes forcibly broke up evangelical meetings in the s, and the sight of Baptist ministers preaching from their jail cells galvanized James Madison to give full support to disestablishment. But it seems as if the very multiplicity of religious groups in Virginia and America precluded the religious persecutions and sectarian warfare that had plagued England and the rest of Europe for centuries. Virginians proved to be less tolerant of non-Christian faiths, however. Most notably, slavery constituted a form of violence that deprived Africans of their traditional religious systems. Native Americans resisted conversion to Christianity Native Americans clashed with colonists not only over land but in resisting conversion to the Christian faith. As settlers pushed back the Indians and as Anglican parishes spread out over Virginia, the gentry were able to gain control of the established church on the local and county levels as well as in the colonial legislature. Anglican elites proved to be tough opponents to evangelical Christians and the Revolutionary leaders who joined them in supporting disestablishment. African Americans also made common cause with the evangelicals after Before that time, few blacks had joined the Christian fold. In the 17th century, small numbers of slaves had recognized that they could gain their freedom through baptism, but the General Assembly closed this loophole in Over the next

century, most slave owners and Anglican ministers ignored the spiritual lives of African Americans. Virginia gentry controlled religious matters Throughout the colonial period, the established church was supported and reinforced by other formal and informal institutions. Virginia lacked a bishop. Hence, control of religious matters was largely left in the hands of local institutions dominated by the gentry. Vestrymen became the dominant influence on church affairs by the end of the 17th century. They paid the clergy, built and repaired church buildings, and provided support for the needy. Justices of the peace, sitting on the bench of county courts, heard cases having to do with attendance at Anglican church services, illegitimacy, adultery, and other moral offenses. In consolidating control over civil and religious matters on all levels, the leading men of the county further enhanced their power, and at the same time imparted their authority to the church. It enforced laws that penalized dissenters: It was in the legislature that the battle over disestablishment was waged and eventually won, but informal institutions also supported the religious lives of Anglicans and dissenters alike. Families transmitted values and religious teachings. Reflecting the evolution of family relationships, by the midth century, white women had become the primary guardians of the religious lives of their families. For dissenters, itinerant preachers and local congregations played an important role in affirming their faith.

Chapter 8 : The Original Christian Church - Questions & Answers - Orthodox Church in America

The Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodox Churches, and Assyrian Church of the East are all apostolic churches, were all equally part of the One, Catholic and Orthodox Church of the early centuries, until geographic, linguistic, philosophical, political, and occasionally theological motives divided them - but in each case, the breaks are the parting of equals.

In the early years of what later became the United States, Christian religious groups played an influential role in each of the British colonies, and most attempted to enforce strict religious observance through both colony governments and local town rules. Most attempted to enforce strict religious observance. Laws mandated that everyone attend a house of worship and pay taxes that funded the salaries of ministers. Although most colonists considered themselves Christians, this did not mean that they lived in a culture of religious unity. Instead, differing Christian groups often believed that their own practices and faiths provided unique values that needed protection against those who disagreed, driving a need for rule and regulation. In Great Britain, the Protestant Anglican church had split into bitter divisions among traditional Anglicans and the reforming Puritans, contributing to an English civil war in the s. In the British colonies, differences among Puritan and Anglican remained. Between and Anglicanism and Congregationalism, an offshoot of the English Puritan movement, established themselves as the main organized denominations in the majority of the colonies. In some areas, women accounted for no more than a quarter of the population, and given the relatively small number of conventional households and the chronic shortage of clergymen, religious life was haphazard and irregular for most. The fear of such practices can be gauged by the famous trials held in Salem, Massachusetts, in and As we might expect, established clergy discouraged these explorations. In turn, as the colonies became more settled, the influence of the clergy and their churches grew. Slaveryâ€”which was also firmly established and institutionalized between the s and the sâ€”was also shaped by religion. If they received any Christian religious instructions, it was, more often than not, from their owners rather than in Sunday school. Local variations in Protestant practices and ethnic differences among the white settlers did foster a religious diversity. Wide distances, poor communication and transportation, bad weather, and the clerical shortage dictated religious variety from town to town and from region to region. With French Huguenots, Catholics, Jews, Dutch Calvinists, German Reformed pietists, Scottish Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers, and other denominations arriving in growing numbers, most colonies with Anglican or Congregational establishments had little choice but to display some degree of religious tolerance. Only in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania was toleration rooted in principle rather than expedience. The meetinghouse, which served secular functions as well as religious, was a small wood building located in the center of town. People sat on hard wooden benches for most of the day, which was how long the church services usually lasted. These meeting houses became bigger and much less crude as the population grew after the s. Steeples grew, bells were introduced, and some churches grew big enough to host as many as one thousand worshippers. After the s, with many more churches and clerical bodies emerging, religion in New England became more organized and attendance more uniformly enforced. In even sharper contrast to the other colonies, in New England most newborns were baptized by the church, and church attendance rose in some areas to 70 percent of the adult population. The New England colonistsâ€”with the exception of Rhode Islandâ€”were predominantly Puritans, who, by and large, led strict religious lives. The clergy was highly educated and devoted to the study and teaching of both Scripture and the natural sciences. The Puritan leadership and gentry, especially in Massachusetts and Connecticut, integrated their version of Protestantism into their political structure. Government in these colonies contained elements of theocracy, asserting that leaders and officials derived that authority from divine guidance and that civil authority ought to be used to enforce religious conformity. Their laws assumed that citizens who strayed away from conventional religious customs were a threat to civil order and should be punished for their nonconformity. Despite many affinities with the established Church of England, New England churches operated quite differently from the older Anglican system in England. Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut had no church courts to levy fines on religious offenders, leaving that function to the civil

magistrates. In those colonies, the civil government dealt harshly with religious dissenters, exiling the likes of Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams for their outspoken criticism of Puritanism, and whipping Baptists or cropping the ears of Quakers for their determined efforts to proselytize. The Toleration Act, passed by the English Parliament in 1794, gave Quakers and several other denominations the right to build churches and to conduct public worship in the colonies. Mid-Atlantic and Southern Colonies Inhabitants of the middle and southern colonies went to churches whose style and decoration look more familiar to modern Americans than the plain New England meeting houses. They, too, would sit in church for most of the day on Sunday. After 1790, as remote outposts grew into towns and backwoods settlements became bustling commercial centers, Southern churches grew in size and splendor. Church attendance, abysmal as it was in the early days of the colonial period, became more consistent after 1790. Much like the north, this was the result of the proliferation of churches, new clerical codes and bodies, and a religion that became more organized and uniformly enforced. Toward the end of the colonial era, churchgoing reached at least 60 percent in all the colonies. The middle colonies saw a mixture of religions, including Quakers who founded Pennsylvania, Catholics, Lutherans, a few Jews, and others. The southern colonists were a mixture as well, including Baptists and Anglicans. In the Carolinas, Virginia, and Maryland which was originally founded as a haven for Catholics, the Church of England was recognized by law as the state church, and a portion of tax revenues went to support the parish and its priest. Virginia imposed laws obliging all to attend Anglican public worship. Baptist preachers were frequently arrested. Mobs physically attacked members of the sect, breaking up prayer meetings and sometimes beating participants. As a result, the 1790s and 1800s witnessed a rise in discontent and discord within the colony some argue that Virginian dissenters suffered some of the worst persecutions in antebellum America. With few limits on the influx of new colonists, Anglican citizens in those colonies needed to accept, however grudgingly, ethnically diverse groups of Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers, members of the Dutch Reformed Church, and a variety of German Pietists. Maryland was founded by Cecilius Calvert in 1700 as a safe haven for Catholics. Clergy and buildings belonging to both the Catholic and Puritan religions were subsidized by a general tax. Their faith influenced the way they treated Indians, and they were the first to issue a public condemnation of slavery in America. In retrospect, the Great Awakening contributed to the revolutionary movement in a number of ways: In a surprising way, these principles sat very well with the basic beliefs of rational Protestants and deists. They also helped clarify their common objections to British civil and religious rule over the colonies, and provided both with arguments in favor of the separation of church and state. The political edge of this argument was that no human institution—religious or civil—could claim divine authority. At the core of this rational belief was the idea that God had endowed humans with reason so that they could tell the difference between right and wrong. Knowing the difference also meant that humans made free choices to sin or behave morally. The radicalization of this position led many rational dissenters to argue that intervention in human decisions by civil authorities undermined the special covenant between God and humankind. Many therefore advocated the separation of church and state. Taken further, the logic of these arguments led them to dismiss the divine authority claimed by the English kings, as well as the blind obedience compelled by such authority. Thus, by the 1790s, they mounted a two-pronged attack on England: Once the link to divine authority was broken, revolutionaries turned to Locke, Milton, and others, concluding that a government that abused its power and hurt the interests of its subjects was tyrannical and as such deserved to be replaced. Bonomi, *Under the Cape of Heaven*: Oxford University Press, 2001; Bonomi, *Under the Cape of Heaven*, John Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*: Harvard University Press, 2001; Ragosta, *Wellspring of Liberty*: Oxford University Press, 2001, 3. Ragosta, *Wellspring of Liberty*.

Chapter 9 : Our History | American Baptist Churches USA

The first written records of Egyptian religious practice come from around BCE in the Predynastic Period in Egypt (ca BCE). Deities such as Isis, Osiris, Ptah, Hathor, Atum, Set, Nephthys, and Horus were already established as potent forces to be recognized fairly early on.

The church and its history The essence and identity of Christianity At its most basic, Christianity is the faith tradition that focuses on the figure of Jesus Christ. As a tradition , Christianity is more than a system of religious belief. It also has generated a culture , a set of ideas and ways of life, practices, and artifacts that have been handed down from generation to generation since Jesus first became the object of faith. Christianity is thus both a living tradition of faith and the culture that the faith leaves behind. The agent of Christianity is the church, the community of people who make up the body of believers. Few Christians, however, would be content to keep this reference merely historical. Although their faith tradition is historical. While there is something simple about this focus on Jesus as the central figure, there is also something very complicated. That complexity is revealed by the thousands of separate churches, sects, and denominations that make up the modern Christian tradition. To project these separate bodies against the background of their development in the nations of the world is to suggest the bewildering variety. To picture people expressing their adherence to that tradition in their prayer life and church-building, in their quiet worship or their strenuous efforts to change the world, is to suggest even more of the variety. Given such complexity, it is natural that throughout Christian history both those in the tradition and those surrounding it have made attempts at simplification. Modern scholars have located the focus of this faith tradition in the context of monotheistic religions. Christianity addresses the historical figure of Jesus Christ against the background of, and while seeking to remain faithful to, the experience of one God. It has consistently rejected polytheism and atheism. A second element of the faith tradition of Christianity, with rare exceptions, is a plan of salvation or redemption. That is to say, the believers in the church picture themselves as in a plight from which they need rescue. For whatever reason , they have been distanced from God and need to be saved. The agent of that redemption is Jesus Christ. It is possible that through the centuries the vast majority of believers have not used the term essence to describe the central focus of their faith. The term is itself of Greek origin and thus represents only one part of the tradition, one element in the terms that have gone into making up Christianity. Essence refers to those qualities that give something its identity and are at the centre of what makes that thing different from everything else. To Greek philosophers it meant something intrinsic to and inherent in a thing or category of things, which gave it its character and thus separated it from everything of different character. Thus, Jesus Christ belongs to the essential character of Christianity and gives it a unique identity. If most people are not concerned with defining the essence of Christianity, in practice they must come to terms with what the word essence implies. Whether they are engaged in being saved or redeemed on the one hand, or thinking and speaking about that redemption, its agent, and its meaning on the other, they are concentrating on the essence of their experience. Those who have concentrated from within the faith tradition have also helped to give it its identity. It is not possible to speak of the essence of a historical tradition without referring to how its ideal qualities have been discussed through the ages. Yet one can take up the separate subjects of essence and identity in sequence, being always aware of how they interrelate. Page 1 of