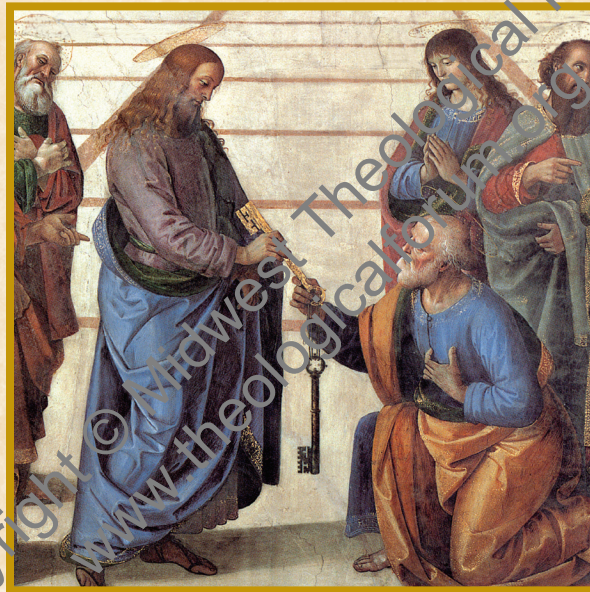


# The History of the Church



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ix	<b>Abbreviations used for the Books of the Bible</b>	29	Constantine: Official Toleration
ix	<b>General Abbreviations</b>	30	Constantinople as the “New Rome”
x	<b>Foreword</b>	31	Later Emperors
241	<b>Art and Photo Credits</b>	31	Conclusion
247	<b>Index</b>	32	Discussion Questions
1	<b>Chapter 1: The Foundation of the Church</b>	33	<b>Chapter 3: Church Fathers and Heresies</b>
2	Introduction	34	Introduction
3	The Chosen People	34	Deposit of Faith
4	Jesus Christ, the Redeemer	36	Doctrinal Review
4	Christ Calls His Twelve Apostles	37	The Nature of Heresy
5	<i>Map:</i> Palestine in the Time of Christ	38	Montanism
7	St. Peter, the “Rock” of the Church	39	Gnosticism
8	Teachings, Death, and Resurrection of Christ	40	Marcionism
9	The Apostolic Mission	40	Manichaeism
10	Awaiting the Promise	40	Docetism
11	The Birth of the Church	41	Confronting Heresy: Ecumenical Councils
11	Conversion and Journeys of St. Paul	42	The Church Confronts Arianism
12	<i>Map:</i> St. Paul’s Voyage to Rome, ca. AD 61-62	44	Other Early Heresies About Christ
13	The Council of Jerusalem	45	Early Dogmatic and Sacramental Heresies
13	Apostolic Succession and the Office of Bishop	46	Conclusion
15	Conclusion	46	Discussion Questions
16	Discussion Questions	47	<b>Chapter 4: The Conversion of Europe</b>
17	<b>Chapter 2: From Persecution to Toleration to State Religion</b>	48	Introduction
18	Introduction	48	Defenders of the Faith
19	<i>Maps:</i> Christian Communities by AD 100; Christian Communities by AD 300	50	The Barbarian Threat
20	Christians in a Hostile World	51	<i>Map:</i> The Barbarian Invasions, 4th and 5th Centuries
21	Persecutions of the First Century	53	Evangelization and Enculturation
21	Nero: The Burning of Rome and Circuses	54	Monasticism
22	Domitian: Claims of Divinity	56	Conversion of Western Europe
23	Trajan: Renounce or Die	56	Ireland
23	St. Ignatius of Antioch	56	France
24	<i>Pax Romana</i> and the “Good” Emperors	57	England
26	Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian	58	Italy
		58	Germany and the “Low Countries”
		59	Conversion of the Slavic Tribes
		59	The West Slavs
		59	Russia and Ukraine
		60	Islam
		62	Conclusion
		62	Discussion Questions

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

63	<b>Chapter 5:</b> <b>Byzantium and the West</b>	102	Church and Culture
64	Introduction	103	The Mendicant Orders
64	The Glory of the Byzantine Empire	103	St. Francis of Assisi
65	East-West Tensions	104	St. Dominic
67	The Impact of Emperor Justinian I	105	The Road to Avignon
68	The Iconoclast Controversy	106	The Avignon Papacy
69	The Independent Papacy	107	Conclusion
70	Charlemagne	108	Discussion Questions
71	<i>Map:</i> The Empire of Charlemagne, 768-814	109	<b>Chapter 8:</b> <b>The Renaissance</b>
72	A Schism in the Making	110	Introduction
73	The Photian Schism and the <i>Filioque</i> Controversy	110	War and Plague
75	The Great Schism of 1054	110	The Church Advocates Peace
76	<i>Map:</i> The Great Schism of 1054	111	Conflict Between England and France
77	Conclusion	113	The Black Death
78	Discussion Questions	114	St. Catherine and the End of the Avignon Papacy
79	<b>Chapter 6:</b> <b>Collapse, Corruption, and Reform</b>	115	Conciliarism and the Western Schism
80	Introduction	116	<i>Map:</i> The Western Church Schism, 1309-1417
80	The Collapse of the Carolingian Empire	117	An Era of New Errors
81	Corruption Among Bishops	118	The Fall of Constantinople
82	Cluny and Monastic Reform	119	A Chance for Reconciliation
83	The Holy Roman Empire	120	Humanism
85	Pope Innocent III	123	The Renaissance Popes
86	A Faith Revived	123	Conclusion
87	The Crusades	124	Discussion Questions
87	The First Crusade	125	<b>Chapter 9:</b> <b>Protestant Reformation and Catholic Renewal</b>
89	Later Crusades	126	Introduction
89	The Military Orders	126	Martin Luther
90	The Inquisition	127	Preaching on Indulgences
91	The Albigensian Heresy	128	Luther's <i>Ninety-Five Theses</i>
92	The Spanish Inquisition	129	Luther's Fundamental Agenda
93	Conclusion	130	The Peasant Rebellion
94	Discussion Questions	131	John Calvin
95	<b>Chapter 7:</b> <b>The High Middle Ages</b>	132	The Anglican Schism
96	Introduction	134	Anglican England After Henry VIII
96	The Universities	135	The Council of Trent and the Catholic Renewal
98	Scholasticism	136	<i>Map:</i> Popular Religions in 1560
99	St. Thomas Aquinas	137	Application of the Tridentine Reform
100	The "Five Ways"	139	Conclusion
101	Other Contributions	140	Discussion Questions

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

141	<b>Chapter 10: Bloodshed and Evangelization</b>	171	The Suppression of the Jesuits
142	Introduction	172	Conclusion
142	Philip II and the Low Countries	172	Discussion Questions
143	The Huguenot Wars in France		
144	<i>Map:</i> The Revolt of the Low Countries Against Spain, 1559-1592	173	<b>Chapter 12: The French Revolution and Napoleon</b>
145	<i>Map:</i> The Huguenot Wars in France, 1562-1593	174	Introduction
146	The British Isles	174	The End of the Old Regime
147	Martyrs for the Faith	175	The Three Estates
148	The Spanish Armada	176	The Debt Crisis
148	Catholic Ireland	177	The Fall of the Bastille
149	The Thirty Years' War	177	<i>The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen</i>
150	<i>Map:</i> After the Wars...The Catholic Recovery, 1650	178	<i>The Civil Constitution of the Clergy</i>
151	The Evangelization of Asia	178	The French Republic
151	Missionary Journeys of St. Francis Xavier	178	The De-Christianization of France
152	China	179	Robespierre and the Reign of Terror
153	Japan	180	The Directory
153	India	180	The Rise of Napoleon
154	The Philippines	181	The Consulate and the Concordat of 1801
154	The Evangelization of Africa	182	Emperor Napoleon vs. the Pope
155	The Evangelization of the New World	182	The Napoleonic Code
155	Latin America	183	The Rogue "Concordat of Fontainebleau"
156	North America	183	The Fall of Napoleon
158	Conclusion	184	The Church in the United States
158	Discussion Questions	186	Conclusion
		186	Discussion Questions
159	<b>Chapter 11: The Church and the Enlightenment</b>	187	<b>Chapter 13: The Church in the Nineteenth Century</b>
160	Introduction	188	Introduction
160	Absolute Monarchy in France	188	The Growth of Liberalism
161	Errors of the Day	189	The Post-Napoleonic Era
162	End of the Huguenots	191	Church Developments
162	Catholic Repression in England	192	The Industrial Revolution
163	Irish Persecutions	193	Social Consequences of Industrialization
164	Catholics Barred from the Crown	193	From Economic to Political Revolution
164	Gallicanism in Germany and Austria	194	Pius IX and the Rise of Nationalism
165	The Scientific Revolution	194	The Revolutions of 1848
165	Descartes and Bacon	195	<i>Map:</i> Centers of Revolution, 1848-1849
166	A New Model of the Heavens	196	German Unification and the <i>Kulturkampf</i>
167	Galileo Galilei and the Scientific Method	197	Effects on the Catholic Church
168	Theories of Evolution	198	Ultramontanism and Infallibility
169	The Age of Enlightenment	198	The Immaculate Conception
170	Deism and Freemasonry	198	The First Vatican Council



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

199	Vatican City and the Roman Question	223	The Postconciliar Years
200	Renewed Evangelization in Africa	224	The Church in the United States after Vatican II
201	Conclusion	225	<i>Humanæ Vitæ</i>
202	Discussion Questions	226	The Restoration of Confidence and Hope
		226	Pope St. John Paul II and the Contemporary World
203	<b>Chapter 14:</b>	227	St. John Paul II and the Church
	<b>The Church in the Modern World—Part I</b>	229	Pope Benedict XVI
204	Introduction	230	A Church Rocked by Scandal
204	The Church Confronts a Changing World	230	Papal Resignation and a New Pope
204	Papal Encyclicals	232	Conclusion
205	Issues at the Turn of the Twentieth Century	232	Discussion Questions
206	Catholic Social Teaching		
207	Pope St. Pius X	233	<b>Chapter 16:</b>
208	Modernism		<b>Challenges to the Church's History</b>
209	War, Revolution, and Persecution	234	A. Doesn't Church history prove the Catholic Church
209	The Rise of Soviet Communism		is evil?
210	<i>Map:</i> Europe Before and After World War I, 1914-1923	235	B. So, what about the Crusades, etc.?
211	The "Roman Question" Resolved	237	C. What about all those "bad" Popes?
212	Persecution in Mexico and Spain	238	D. Doesn't the Church deserve to be persecuted for
213	The Church and the Rise of Nazism		all the evil she has done?
214	The Church in the United States	238	E. Why are there so many Christian denominations?
216	Conclusion	238	F. Of all the bodies which claim to be Christian,
216	Discussion Questions		how do we know the Catholic Faith is the one
			true one?
217	<b>Chapter 15:</b>	239	G. Hasn't the Church practiced cultural imperialism,
	<b>The Church in the Modern World—Part II</b>		subjugating indigenous peoples?
218	Introduction	239	H. Isn't the Church against learning, science,
218	The Pontificate of Pope Pius XII		and culture?
219	Key Encyclicals of Pius XII	240	Discussion Questions
220	The Church and Communism		
221	The Second Vatican Council		
222	The Council Continues Under a New Pope		

*“Among these [Apostles], Peter alone almost everywhere deserved to represent the whole Church.”*  
— St. Augustine

## CHAPTER 1

# The Foundation of the Church

## INTRODUCTION

### OPENING ACTIVITY

For many centuries, the Jewish people had been looking for the Messiah, the Redeemer whom God had promised to send. When Jesus Christ began his mission on earth, however, many Jews—even many Jewish leaders and scholars—did not recognize him and rejected him. Why is that? Discuss.

### BASIC QUESTION

This chapter attempts to answer the following Basic Question:

- ✦ Why and how did Jesus Christ establish his Church on earth?

### KEY IDEA

The Key Idea of this chapter is:

- ✦ The Church reflects God’s original plan to draw people into communion with himself so as to share in his divine life. He prepared his Chosen People and called them together to unite as one. In the fullness of time, he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem sinful humanity. Christ established his Church to continually call everyone to redemption and union with God. He entrusted the Church, headed by the successors of St. Peter and the Apostles, with his message of salvation to be taught to all generations.

**I**n the days following the Death of Christ, the Apostles and disciples were afraid. Their Master had been crucified, and they now feared for their own lives. Christ’s Death left them confused and uncertain of the future.

After his Resurrection, Christ appeared to his disciples to teach them and reassure them, but he only remained forty days before ascending into Heaven. He did not leave them alone, however. Before departing, Christ declared to his disciples that they would soon receive the Holy Spirit. Ten days later, on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples and emboldened them in the mission Christ had given them. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church of Christ with St. Peter as Christ’s vicar—“the rock” upon whom the Church would be built—would stand throughout all time as a living sacrament of his love, truth, and power.

In the years following the Resurrection, the first Christians, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, boldly set about the great task of building the Kingdom of God. They proclaimed the Good News that the long-awaited Messiah had come and that by his Death and Resurrection he had paid the price for the redemption of all mankind. Christianity began to spread quickly through this first evangelization, which carried the message of salvation all over the known world.

Thus begins the history of the Church—a unique history that, simply stated, reflects Christ’s constant presence in the Church that engages humanity at all times. The history of the Church is a record of the life and actions of men and women under the guiding light of the Holy Spirit acting in the Church. This narrative about the growth of Christ’s Kingdom on earth is developed as the Church interacts with and responds to every culture and historical situation.



*Sermon on the Mount* by Olrik.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church stands throughout all time as a living sacrament of Christ’s love, truth, and power.





*Moses on Mount Sinai* by Gerome.

One of the unique characteristics of the Chosen People was their belief that there is only one God, and that he is a personal God.

### THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

Although it was Jesus Christ who established his Church on earth, the history of the Church really dates to the moment of creation. In creating man, God desired that all of humanity would share in his divine life and exist in communion with him. The Church is this communion, the gathering of God's people—those who respond to the divine invitation—into one body so that they may receive salvation. The Church, then, is prefigured in the original harmony of creation. After the Fall of humanity into sin, the Church began to take visible shape as God called together his faithful ones and formed them into his Chosen People.

The Jewish people had a special role in God's providential plans. In a world plunged in paganism and polytheism, one of the unique characteristics of the Chosen People was their belief that there is only one God, and that he is a personal God. A long history of suffering and oppression served to mold a people who looked in expectation for the promised Redeemer. Being cognizant of their obligation to worship the one true God and keep his Commandments, they were called to shun the religious and immoral ways of the pagan cultures around them. Although his people often fell into sin, God always called them back to repentance and continued to prepare them for the Redeemer.

The world in which Christ lived was a crossroads of cultures, creating a Jewish culture different than the earlier one depicted in the Old Testament. Influenced by Greek thought and ideas, many groups of scholars, priests, and ascetics developed new schools of Jewish theology. Although Jews had freedom to worship, they otherwise were subordinate to Rome. Roman law, not the Law handed down from Moses, governed Palestine, which during the life of Christ was rife with religious and political tensions and expectations.

Many Jews were waiting for the Messiah—a Hebrew term for “the anointed one”—who had been promised by the prophets. They expected this Messiah to free Israel from the Roman occupation. Few, if any, were expecting the Son of God himself to be born as the child of a poor family, then grow to adulthood and preach about love, mercy, and repentance. Thus many devout Jews did not recognize Christ—from the Greek word for “messiah”—for who he was.

#### Focus Question 1:

How is the Church prefigured in creation?

#### Focus Question 2:

How did God prepare his Chosen People for his Church?

#### Focus Question 3:

What kind of Messiah were many of the Jews expecting?

#### Focus Question 4:

Although he was born in poverty and simplicity, did anyone recognize the significance of Christ? Explain.

### VOCABULARY

#### COMMUNION

From the Latin for “mutual participation” or “oneness together,” a bond of union between God the Father and God the Son, and/or with other faithful Christians in the Church.

#### MESSIAH

Hebrew for “anointed.” This is used in reference to Christ because he accomplished perfectly the divine mission of priest, prophet, and king, signified by his being anointed as Christ.

### VOCABULARY

#### REDEEMER

From a word that literally means “being bought back,” a title given to Jesus Christ, who through his sacrificial Death on the Cross set us free from the slavery of sin, thus redeeming or “buying us back” from the power of Satan.

### GUIDED EXERCISE

Read the first two chapters of the Gospel according to St. Luke. Also read the second chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. These are the only accounts in Scripture about the early life of Christ. Using these chapters, construct a timeline listing the events in the life of Christ from the time of the Incarnation to the time he began his public ministry at about the age of thirty (see Luke 3). What does your timeline tell you about our knowledge of Christ’s childhood and young adulthood? Discuss for a moment what the early life of Christ might mean for us today.



*Presentation in the Temple (detail) by Champaigne.*

When Joseph and Mary brought the child Jesus to the Temple to be consecrated to God in compliance with Jewish Law, the prophet Simeon recognized him as the Messiah.

## JESUS CHRIST, THE REDEEMER

The Gospels amply record how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the messianic prophecies even from his Birth. He was born in Bethlehem, the birthplace of David, and he was a descendant of David, from whose line the Messiah was to come. The Gentile wise men came from afar to worship the infant Jesus, which signified that Christ was the newborn King of all people, both Jew and Gentile, and that all peoples would be invited into his Kingdom. When Joseph and Mary brought the child Jesus to the Temple to be consecrated to God in compliance with Jewish Law, the prophet Simeon recognized him as the Messiah (cf. Lk 2: 22-39). Later, his preaching ministry and his Passion, Death, and Resurrection would fulfill the Old Testament prophecies in ways even the Apostles would not fully understand until after his Ascension into Heaven.

The Gospels give us few details about Christ’s childhood and early adulthood, but it is safe to assume he led a normal life for a first-century Jew, obedient to his parents, faithful in his religious observance, and industrious in his labors. He would begin his public ministry at around the age of thirty. After his baptism by St. John the Baptist and forty days of prayer and fasting in the wilderness, Christ began to reveal himself publicly, teaching openly and gathering his Apostles.

## CHRIST CALLS HIS TWELVE APOSTLES

From the start of his public ministry, Christ’s preaching and healing of the sick attracted great crowds of people. Some sought signs and wonders; others perhaps were just curious. Many others, however, were sincerely attracted to his message and came to believe in him. The Gospels refer to these people as Christ’s disciples, from a Greek word meaning “student” or

*Christ was the newborn King of all people, both Jew and Gentile.*



PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF CHRIST



The mountains and cliffs of Upper Galilee.



### Focus Question 5:

What is an Apostle?

### Focus Question 6:

What is the significance in the number of the Apostles?

### Focus Question 7:

Respond to this statement: In selecting his Apostles, Christ chose only the best, brightest, and most impressive men he could find.

### DISCUSSION

Imagine you are in charge of running a business and that you supervise a number of employees. From among this group, you select several individuals, take them aside, and present them with specialized instructions in order to educate them about the business and how it runs. What might be your reasons for doing this? What kinds of plans might you have for these select individuals? Discuss.

### Focus Question 8:

Why did Christ take care to explain the deeper meaning of his teachings to his Apostles?

### VOCABULARY

#### APOSTLES

From the Greek for “one sent forth.” It refers primarily to the Twelve chosen by Christ during the course of his public ministry to be his closest followers.

“one who learns from the teacher.” These disciples—hundreds of men and women of all ages and backgrounds—often followed Christ, traveling with him as he went from town to town.

This growing number of disciples offers the first glimpses of the Church taking shape. We can observe both the invisible spiritual communion between the disciples and Christ as well as the visible form of the community itself.

From among his disciples, Christ called forth twelve called Apostles, whom he appointed “to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.”<sup>1</sup> The word “apostle” comes from a Greek word meaning “one who is sent.” Although they were ordinary men—among them fishermen and a tax collector—they would become the leaders of his Church whom he would send forth to preach the Good News of salvation to all nations.

The number of the Apostles is highly significant. The Chosen People traced their ancestry to the twelve sons of Jacob (also named Israel), and so were divided into the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The prophets of the Old Testament had written of how the Messiah would bring about the restoration of Israel and its Twelve Tribes. How was this to happen? Christ told his Twelve Apostles they would sit in judgment over the Twelve Tribes (cf. Mt 19: 28; Lk 22: 30). In calling together the new People of God, with his Apostles as its leaders charged with continuing his saving mission to all nations, Christ was fulfilling this prophecy of a restored Israel in his Church.

Because of their special role, it was only to the Apostles that Christ explained the deeper meanings of his teachings and purpose. Much of his teaching in the Gospels, in fact, was given to the Apostles alone. In doing this, Christ was equipping these twelve men to provide the foundation for his Church on earth.



*The Calling of St. Matthew* by Terbrugghen.

Although they were ordinary men—among them fishermen and a tax collector—they would become the leaders of Christ’s Church.