

Appendix 5: Bringing History Together



This selective review of history is intended to describe the development of the Traditional, Pragmatic, and Emerging methods. It is impossible to provide a single summary of 2000 years of Church history with any integrity, so instead, four contrasting historical developments are summarized:

- ◇ Six Paradigms of Church History (Robert Webber)
- ◇ Views of the Atonement (Gustav Aulen)
- ◇ The Splintering of Western Protestantism (Robert Webber and David Wells)
- ◇ A Timeline of Key Historical Events

Six Paradigms of History¹⁴⁴

Biblical period (0-100). The predominant philosophy was an *holistic* understanding of the world, where God was at work, as recorded in the Old Testament. The emphasis was on the history, rites, and rituals handed down from God to the Jews, a community out of which the Church was birthed at Pentecost and apostolic faith established.

The Ancient Period (100-600) was formed by Platonic thought, namely that universals are of another world and this world is a shadow of that other reality. The Church emphasized the mystery of how the Church represents the reality of heaven. The Eastern Orthodox tradition has stayed consistent with the practices of the Ancient Period, and finds its identity in connecting with the aspect of “mystery” that was emphasized in that age.

Jesus Cropped from the Picture

The Medieval period (600-1500) embraced Aristotle's philosophy that universals are seen in creation, and that the Church was visible as an institution. The Roman Catholic Church embodied this belief, with its emphasis on institution and organization, which continues today.

The Reformation (1500-1750) was based on nominalism, the belief that Truth is found in the mind. The mind was recognized as the highest faculty of man, who is created in God's image. People began to believe less in Aristotle's inherent universals, and more that something was true because "God said it was true." As individuals were able to read, and the authority of the Roman Catholic institution diminished, the Bible took center stage as the primary source of authority. The Church turned to the Bible as an object of study, allowing individuals to interpret what they were reading. It can be inferred that individualism began during this period.

The view of God shifted from a "God who acts in history as Christus Victor" (the predominant view of the Church for the first 1000 years), to a "God who speaks through his written Word." The Bible began to be understood as "the mind of God" in written form. Truth was known as the human mind met God's mind, through the Scriptures. The Bible began to be understood as a set of observable data leading to rational answers, which could be described using propositional statements.

In reaction to abuses within Catholicism, the Reformation contributed to a high view of Scripture and personal salvation by grace, through faith. With a new understanding of the Church,

Bringing History Together

Protestants turned away from the Church as the *presence of God in history*, and concentrated on its calling to proclaim the gospel. The Reformed traditions were founded during this time and continue today.

The Modern period (1750-1980) was based on reason, illustrated by Descartes who famously said, “I think, therefore I am.” This period also coincides with the era known as the Enlightenment, which emphasized empirical data through scientific methods, leading to rational answers to mysterious questions. This carried into the Western church, so that by the 1800s Protestants split into two groups over the proper application of reason: liberals (who denied the supernatural on scientific grounds) and conservatives (who used reason to develop a proof-oriented faith). The development of the scientific method resulted in dramatic improvements in the human condition, widespread missionary activity, and accessible biblical scholarship. Liberal (or Social Action) traditions, as well as Conservative (Fundamental and Evangelical) traditions were formed during this time. This is the time frame where the Traditional and Pragmatic methods were born.

The Postmodern period (1980-present) formed out of the breakdown of confidence in reason and science. There is greater value placed on subjective experience than objective data and analytical methods. Postmoderns believe that the link between propositional statements and the meaning behind them has been severed, so objective truth should be viewed with suspicion. Therefore, the language of “truth” needs to be explored by each individual. The Emerging Method comes out of this paradigm of history.

Jesus Cropped from the Picture

In all six periods, Christian faith has been partially *formed* by the cultural philosophy surrounding it, while the church has also *affected* the surrounding culture. There has never been a time where the Bible has been lived out in a cultural vacuum. But sometimes culture encroached so far (syncretism) that corrective action was required.

Views of the Atonement¹⁴⁵

There are three historical views of Jesus' atonement that have shaped later views.

The Classic View (Christus Victor) was held by the Church for the first 1000 years of its history, which included the apostles and Church fathers. Its focus was on Christ, the Victorious Champion, where men and women were the prize to be won from the clutches of the powers of evil. It was written in dramatic, narrative style, emphasizing all the works of Christ to defeat the enemy including his birth, death, temptation, miracles, resurrection, ascension, and Second Coming. For the believer, salvation was only the beginning of a life doing battle against the enemy. Baptism was an act of entering into the community of Jesus, joining with the rest of the Church to engage in conflict against the kingdom of darkness.

The Latin (Objective) View came into wide acceptance during the medieval period, with the writings of Anselm (1033-1109). He provided "a logical explanation for the necessity of Jesus Christ's death on the cross. He used a framework and imagery taken, not from the Bible, but from the feudalistic system of his day ... He sought to interpret the cross with images easily intelligible to the people of his era."¹⁴⁶

Bringing History Together

Anselm emphasized Christ's substitution at the cross as a debt owed to God by sinful humanity. This legal approach was consistent with contemporary ideas about jurisprudence.

The Subjective (Humanistic) View of Abelard (1079-1142), coincided with Anselm (Latin View). While Anselm's Latin View recognized a payment of debt (an objective transaction outside of humanity), Abelard's Subjective View emphasized the change *inside* a person because of Jesus' sacrificial work at the cross. "For Abelard, the cross was not so much about removing an objective barrier between God and humans but rather a demonstration to humanity of God's matchless love."¹⁴⁷ Christ was seen as the loving servant-teacher. Instead of a legal transaction where man exchanged repentance for justification, Abelard emphasized that man should offer repentance in order to be empowered lead a good life. This view took root in liberalism in the 1900s and continues in the Social Justice tradition today.

Later One-Dimensional Views

Anselm and Abelard presented two different "one-dimensional" views of the work of Jesus. Each one presented a single reason for Christ's work, rather than highlighting it as *one of the many victories* of Christ. Theologians who came later continued this "one-dimensional" approach and postulated other views of the atonement, such as the penal substitution view (Charles Hodge, 1797-1878).¹⁴⁸ Variations of Hodge's view have persisted to the present day.

Since Anselm and Abelard, the Classic View (Christus Victor) fell by the wayside, although Luther attempted to give it new life¹⁴⁹ (see the lyrics of *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*). But the Christus Victor view became a

Jesus Cropped from the Picture

footnote to the Reformation and never regained prominence. In the West, Jesus' death on the cross has represented the atonement ever since.

The Splintering of Western Protestantism

David Wells¹⁵⁰ and Robert Webber¹⁵¹ provide excellent historical analysis regarding the development of the Traditional, Pragmatic, and Emerging methods (see Figure 22).

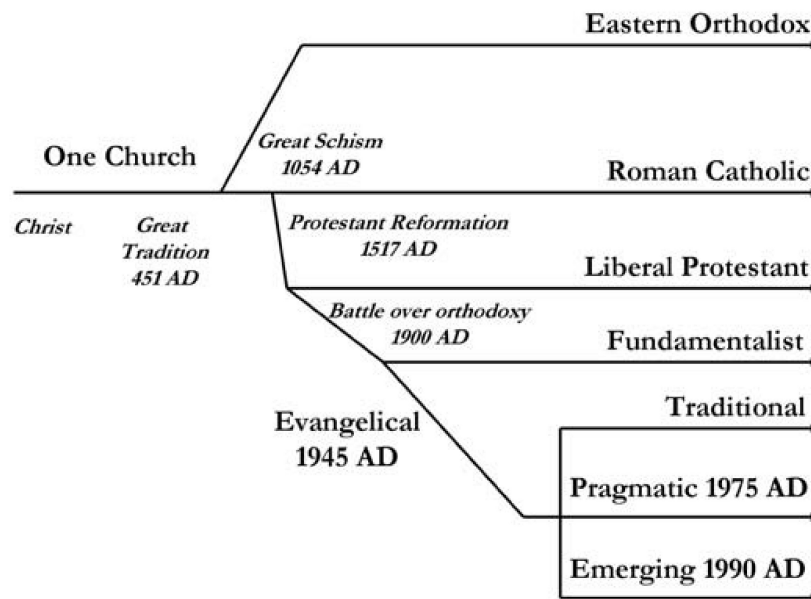


Figure 22: The Three Methods

In the mid-1800s, “The Battle Over Orthodoxy” ensued over the application of Rationalism. Liberals attempted to make Christianity palatable to the cultural elite and the highly educated. Overwhelmed by the fear of being irrelevant to the Enlightenment culture who were respected in the universities, literature, arts, and sciences, liberals sought an intellectual truce. From this compromise, a synthesis of

Bringing History Together

Christianity and secular humanism was born.¹⁵² Liberals used Rationalism to question the trustworthiness of the Bible, and emphasized the love of God and Jesus' moral teaching over his substitutionary work at the cross (Abelard). They viewed Christianity as more about life than doctrine; more about deeds than creeds.

Conservatives reacted against liberalism, retaining a high view of Scripture, and emphasizing the wrath of God that was satisfied in Jesus' death on the cross (Anselm and Hodge). They viewed liberalism as a dangerous blending of cultural Rationalism with Christian practice (syncretism).

By the early 20th century, after separating themselves from liberalism, conservatives started a new dialogue among themselves regarding the degree to which they should specify the limits of definitive, authentic, biblical faith. Some thought historic orthodoxy should affirm a long list of fundamentals, and were more willing to retreat within themselves rather than be polluted by the world. Others thought there should be more outreach to the world and openness to differences within Christian traditions. Those who pressed for more flexibility became known as evangelicals, and those who stayed committed to a longer list of fundamental principles were called fundamentalists. By World War II, evangelicals had significantly separated from fundamentalists.

In the decades after World War II, evangelicals split into three competing groups, each reacting against the previous one. In general, Traditional evangelicals are those who came to faith from 1950-1975. They maintain that Christian faith "makes sense," focusing on Josh McDowell-style apologetics (*Evidence That Demands a Verdict*). Their

Jesus Cropped from the Picture

paradigm of church is institutional, neighborhood-oriented, and civic in nature. Sometimes being a good citizen is equated to being a good Christian. The leader is the pastor-preacher, the “man in the pulpit.” For them, youth ministry is church-centered, with education coming primarily from Sunday school or youth group. Spirituality is defined by “keeping the rules,” and music preferences include hymns or choruses from the 1700s-1960s.

Traditional evangelicals became the foil against which Pragmatic evangelicals reacted. Pragmatics came to faith from 1975-2000, with a commitment to a Christianity “that works,” (instead of the Traditional’s view that it “made sense”). Pragmatics emphasized that God had meaning for an individual’s life, with a “plan for your life.” The church was market-driven and consumer-oriented, moving from “neighborhood” church to “mega church,” where a variety of programs could be offered to attract people. Pastoral leadership moved from the “pastor-preacher” to the “effective manager.” Youth ministry shifted from “Christian education” to “fun activities designed to keep young people out of trouble.” Target groups were segmented so their felt needs could be met. Spirituality moved from “keeping the rules” to “experiencing blessing and success.” The worship style become more contemporary, keeping with the popular music style of the 1970s and 1980s.

In general, Emerging (Younger) evangelicals are those who came to faith after 2000, reacting to both Traditional and Pragmatic evangelicals. Their theological commitments were formed out of a hunger for relevance in Postmodern culture. They care less about reason or pragmatism, but are on a quest for personal meaning

Bringing History Together

through a missional lifestyle. They opt for small, inter-cultural communities of faith over large, homogenous ones. They also prefer less hierarchical leadership structures and value participation. Youth ministry is more outreach focused, with education offered through informal and inter-generational contact. Their worship is more reflective and personalized, seeking authentic spirituality.

A Timeline of Other Historical Developments

313 **The Ascent of Emperor Constantine:** Constantine was the Emperor of Rome from 306 A.D., and the undisputed holder of that office from 324 until his death in 337. In 313, he ended many years of official persecution toward the Church, proclaimed religious toleration throughout the empire, and professed personal faith in Christ. No longer under siege, the Church was abruptly propelled into prominence. Some Christians assert that the Church was healthy and vibrant before Constantine, but became stagnant after Constantine legitimized and institutionalized it. Some Christian leaders point to Constantine as a turning point in Church history from which the Church has yet to recover.¹⁵³

0-451 **The Great Tradition:** The Great Tradition represents the central core of Christian belief and practice, derived from the Scriptures, that runs from the time of Christ to the middle of the fifth century. Most of what has been proven essential and foundational to theology, spirituality, and witness was articulated by the Church in its life together, its canon (Scripture), creeds, and councils. All the later expressions of Christian faith have their roots in the Great Tradition (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical, Emerging, Social Justice, Charismatic, Fundamentalist, Sacramental).

Jesus Cropped from the Picture

1000-1100 **Anselm and Abelard** suggested differing views regarding a *single* purpose of Jesus' atonement, beginning the process of neglecting the Christus Victor view as the Church's primary hermeneutic.

1500-1750 **The Reformation** focused on the Bible and salvation by grace through faith as corrections to Roman Catholicism.

1730-1840 The Great Awakenings in America (**Frontier Revivalism**) focused on personal salvation and inner-reflection.

1850-1945 Protestants split between **liberal and conservative** traditions.

1945-1975 **Evangelicalism** formed and the *Marketing Concept* took hold in American culture.

1975-1990 The **Pragmatic Method** formed in an effort to more effectively market Christian faith. Those who resisted pragmatic assumptions could be included in the Traditional Method.

1990-Present The **Emerging Method** formed to contextualize Christian faith in a Postmodern environment, rejecting many of the Traditional and Pragmatic assumptions and methodologies.