

# History of Christian Movements and Theology

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## Why Study Christian Movements and Theology?

1. Every church tradition (even those now “out of date”) was once contemporary and appealed to the broad Christian community.
2. We are not the first generation to face the issues we do. Former generations were, more or less, just like us (cf James 5:q7). We can learn from then (read Job 8:8-10; Hebrews 11).
3. Beliefs we take for granted have not always been so. Historical creeds of the church came out of (often prolonged) political and theological debate, introspection and conflict.
4. It is important that we recognise that not everyone has our doctrinal framework, and that his has been the case almost from the beginning.
5. God has used men and women, from a range of circumstances and world views; they can teach and inspire us (1 Corinthians 10:11; 11:1). We are not alone (Hebrews 12:1).
6. When we look at the span of Christian history, the struggles the church has endured, its survival, we can see that God is bigger than political movements, cultural strongholds and historical forces that threaten to undermine faith.
7. Christian history gives us context for understanding God, his character (Hebrews 13:8) and His ways (Psalm 44:1), and interpreting the New Testament and the meaning of the Old Testament.
8. Christian history contains vital lessons and warnings against embracing false doctrine, so that we do not repeat mistakes made in earlier times. Errors that emerged in the first centuries after Christ keep coming up, albeit with different names.
9. Studying the work of God over the centuries gives us a fillip to step out in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit and accomplish greater things for God than we would have imagined possible.
10. Understanding the historical context of our faith enables us to answer those who ask us why we believe and practice what we do.
11. Positioning our church age in the broader context of the entire Christian story can help stop us from becoming proud of our generation, achievements and knowledge.

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## Gaining a Correct Understanding

Focusing on theology alone and seeking to understand the history of the world Christian movement through this lens alone is faulty and incomplete.

We also need to get a contextual grasp of:

- New Testament society:
  - Jewish
  - Hellenic (east of Rome)
  - Latin (Rome and west)
  - Others (Asia Minor and beyond)
- How the participants interpreted history
  - Jewish
  - Hellenic
  - internal/external past, present
  - the impact of the philosophers and the Roman Republic/Empire
- Cultural values - and where and how cultural clashes occurred
- How the actors approached the simple and complex issues of life
- Synagogue/temple/church and state mix (“disestablishment”)
- Languages - and nuances then and now
- Multiplicity of world views in cities such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, Corinth, Athens, Rome
- How they viewed military events, political movements, newcomers (eg Islam)
- Scientific and political developments and emerging disciples, especially during recent centuries

There are many Christendoms, eg:

- 3 million Roman Catholics at Copacabana Beach, Brazil for the World Youth Day on 28 July 2013
- Hillsong, in Paris
- Fusions of faiths in Indonesia and Central Africa
- Church in China in the context of a notionally Communist society

We all bring a world view to the discussion. We are all judgemental and “I-centred”. What is important is not how we re-shape the message to the context, but how the message penetrates the cultural strongholds.

God does not change. His eternal, perfect plan does not change, but is being outworked in the human story. God is not Jewish, Hellenic, American or African. He is neither male nor female. He is not Labor, Liberal, capitalist or communist. He is not black, white, or any other colour. His plan includes establishing and population His Kingdom. It is important to see Christian movements and theology in terms of redemption in human contexts and His hand in history.