

Introducing *History of Christian Movements and Theology*

By Allan Davis

This short series is designed to provide a brief overview of the history of Christian theology, in the context of Christian movements that emerged over time, from the Apostolic period until the 21st century. It supplements more detailed treatments of individual theological topics that are available elsewhere on this site.

I have studied Christian belief most of my life. I have lived in various parts of the world, where the understanding and application of Christian doctrine have been strongly influenced by local histories, personalities, languages and traditions. I have been privileged to visit many of the places mentioned, and participated in some of the events described. (While not detracting from our conviction that it is the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit) the Bible was written in a range of cultural milieus; this is also the way it is applied today.

We are heirs of those who have gone before us. In order to understand *why* we believe *what* we do and why “our” style of Christian living functions the way it does, it is important to delve into the history (or histories) of Christianity and how the various movements that make up the kaleidoscope of the world Christian movement came about.

The material is couched in “evangelical” meanings. I have attempted to deal with “higher” traditions in an unbiased way. I have genuine Christian friends in all denominational settings. In every era of Christian history God has had His People, who have remained faithful to the Gospel; in this respect I believe that some of the more generalised (negative) claims about the validity of “Christian” witness at various stages of church history are erroneous, or partial at best. The Message continues to impact the world today not because of past or present structures, movements or individuals, but because the church belongs to Christ and the Gospel is life-changing and eternal (theologians would add “salvific”); “warts and all”, we are called to proclamation.

One of the challenges involved in covering such a large topic in a short series is establishing an appropriate balance between different periods, movements, doctrinal streams and individuals. It is impossible to go into substantial depth. I have given some events, people and strands of belief more emphases than others; many have not been included, due to limited space and time. This is intentional. As I have delivered the material I have gone into greater detail in actual teaching settings. The notes provide scope for others who may wish to teach the lessons to do the same. Each lesson contains a range of additional resource materials; the lists are brief; vast amounts of resources are available to the reader or teacher.

Use the material to bless others. Add to it. Make it relevant to your situation. But please keep it Christ-centred and Biblical. Seek an informed understanding of the way your millions of genuine brother and sisters in Christ believe the way they do. Study and develop your own calling and gifts. Play the part God has called you to, in his plan of redemption. Others will come after you, as the story of the church and theology continue to unfold and fulfil His eternal purpose, but only you can impact your world in your way, with God’s strength and wisdom. To Him be the glory.