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CHURCH HISTORY MONTHLY

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Timeline of Topics

-Quote:

- Bernard of Clairvaux, 1100s
- Early Church
- The First Church Council
- American Church History
- How the Church of England became the Episcopal Church in America (hint: public perception is everything)
- Global South
- An example of Christian groups working together in India in a unusual way

THE FIRST CHURCH COUNCIL: WHO REALLY WAS JESUS?

The first Christianity-wide church council was held in Nicaea in present-day western Turkey in the year 325. The central question was what to do with Arius, who taught the Father created the Son (Christ). This means he took the phrase “Son of God” literally, meaning that Christ has not always existed but had a beginning. (This also means Christ could not be God.). This is an example of interpreting a couple of verses without looking at the entire Bible. The Council pointed out that viewing the whole Bible teaches Christ as always existing and being God. Nevertheless, this is still a concern today. I am convinced many Christian youths today believe that the Father created the Son (I know because in class, some, who have gone to their church their entire lives, have wanted to argue that with me that the Father created Jesus.). You might want to check and make sure Christian youth you know do not carry this Arius belief.

GLOBAL SOUTH: AN EXAMPLE OF GROUPS WORKING TOGETHER IN AN UNUSUAL WAY

Throughout my study of Church History, I have learned about many Christian groups (missions organizations, churches, denominations, etc.). They each seem to have a central “theme.” Missions organizations focus on missions, Bible translators do that, denominations start churches, etc. Sometimes these groups work with other groups to complete their “theme.” Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) focuses on flying, while aiding other groups that do not have an aviation program. So, MAF might fly missionaries to a remote location, with the missionaries being from a small group that does not have airplanes. But then there is a different level of interchange between groups that I have only seen a few times: one group will start something that aligns with their “theme,” and, once they are successful, they will hand it off to another group to manage and maintain.

We have such a case with a small missions organization in India, the Friends Missionary Prayer Band (FMPB) (They are not part of the Quakers, who are also called “Friends.”). This group has a beginning that you would not expect: It started out of Vacation Bible Schools in the 1950s that took place in SE India. These VBS’s produced youth who were very concerned about bringing others to Christ. They soon organized as the FMPB. They gathered together for prayer and Bible study with a continued concern about evangelism and missions. They eventually sent a missionary in 1967 to a small village. From this one missionary the group has grown (www.fmpb.co.in). But their focus was on evangelism and missions. Once you start leading people to Christ, you need a place for them to go, meaning a church. Therefore, FMPB began churches. But that was not their focus, it was not their “theme.” Therefore, once they started many churches, they looked for an Indian denomination who could care, minister, and develop those churches. They settled on the Evangelical Church of India (ECI). In 2005, they transferred 430 churches to the denomination in Jharkhand (a state in eastern India). Since then, the number of churches there has increased to 600 churches with 70,000 members.

[Note: Another of my top three favorite quotes from all of Church History: 4 stages of love.]

(1.) At first, man loves himself for his own sake. That is the flesh, which can appreciate nothing beyond itself.

(2.) Next, he perceives that he cannot exist by himself, and so begins by faith to seek after God, and to love Him as something necessary to his own welfare. That is the second degree, to love God, not for God's sake, but selfishly.

(3.) But when he has learned to worship God and to seek Him aright, meditating on God, reading God's Word, praying and obeying His commandments, he comes gradually to know what God is, and finds Him altogether lovely. So, having tasted and seen how gracious the Lord is, he advances to the third degree, when he loves God, not merely as his benefactor but as God. Surely he must remain long in this state.

(4.) I know not whether it would be possible to make further progress in this life to that fourth degree and perfect condition wherein man loves himself solely for God's sake. Bernard of Clairvaux (died 1153), "Loving God"

Wait, Episcopalians originated from the Church of England?

Believe it or not, Anglicans are the largest denomination in the world, numbering around 77 million.

When they started in the 1500s, Anglicans were known as the Church of England, and the headquarters is still in Canterbury, England. In America today, though, they are called Episcopalians, but why? For that, we must go back to colonial America.

As England developed the American colonies, many different English Protestants arrived: Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Quakers. Nevertheless, Anglicanism was the dominant faith. By the mid-1700s, Anglicanism was the established faith in 5 ½ colonies: Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland, South Carolina, Georgia, and the southern part of New York.

But there was no Anglican bishop in the colonies, which was a problem. Why? Because in the Anglican tradition, only a bishop can ordain a priest. So, if you were a colonist and wanted to become an Anglican priest, you had to travel to England, be ordained under a bishop, and return to America.

But the Anglican churches in the colonies suffered from a greater problem in the second half of the 1700s: it was connected to England.

In 1775, the American Revolution began. And guess who was stuck in the middle? The Anglican churches. Why? The head of these churches was the King of England, the very king who was now your enemy!

After America won its freedom, those churches decided that a name change was needed. At a meeting of 3 clergy and 24 lay delegates on November 9, 1780 in Chestertown, Maryland, the decision was made that "the Church formerly known in the Province as the Church of England should now be called the Protestant Episcopal Church."

Why Episcopal? Because the denomination used bishops, and "Episcopal" is from the Greek (overseer) and Latin (bishop). Finally, in 1967, the General Convention decided to delete the word "Protestant" from their title.

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