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Early Church History: Inspiring and Educating the Faith of Millennials

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

EARLY CHURCH HISTORY: INSPIRING AND EDUCATING
THE FAITH OF MILLENNIALS



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	iii
List of Figures	v
Abstract	vi
Introduction	1
Discovery Phase	1
Design Phase	2
Delivery Phase	3
Points of Growth	4
Next Steps	5
Final Reflections	6
Doctoral Project	7
Introduction	8
Presentation of Project	8
The Home Page	8
The Main Attraction: Eight Brief Videos on the Early Church	9
Video four: The Destruction of Jerusalem	11
Video five: The Role of Women in the Early Church	17
Video eight: How Did the Church Grow?	22
Menu Tab: Daily Scripture Verse	27
Menu Tab: Timeline of Influential Christians	28
Menu: Resource Guide	28
About	29
Contact	30
Instagram Account	31
Assessment	33
Doctoral Project Description	37

Audience.....	37
Development Plan	37
Development Process	38
Appendix A– Milestone 1 The NPO Charter.....	39
Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay	51
Appendix C–Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report	71
Appendix D–Milestone 4 Design Research Report	86
Appendix E–Project Appendix Documentation	101
Appendix F–Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation.....	123
Bibliography	125

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Home Page.....	9
Figure 2: A Bibliography and Reading List of Additional Sources.....	10
Figure 3: Video Four, <i>The Destruction of Jerusalem</i>	11
Figure 4: The Jewish Wars	13
Figure 5: General Titus	14
Figure 6: The Western Wall is all that Remains Today.....	15
Figure 7: Video Five, <i>The Role of Women in the Early Church</i>	17
Figure 8: A Woman Being Healed by Jesus.....	18
Figure 9: Women in the Middle and Upper Classes Were Drawn to the Faith	19
Figure 10: A Mural of a Woman with Upraised Hands Giving a Blessing	21
Figure 11: Video Eight, <i>How Did the Church Grow?</i>	22
Figure 12: Martyrdom Further Spread the Faith	24
Figure 13: The Teachings of the Church Made a Difference.....	25
Figure 14: Christians Healed the Sick	26
Figure 15: Daily Scripture Verse Page	27
Figure 16: Timeline of Influential Christians.....	28
Figure 17: Resource Guide	29
Figure 18: About Page.....	30
Figure 19: Contact Us Page.....	31
Figure 20: Instagram Posting for January 1, 2023	32
Figure 21: Instagram Posting for January 25, 2023	32
Figure 22: The First Attempt: The Picture is the Small Inset	34
Figure 23: The Improved Result After Stakeholder Feedback	34

Abstract

This Project's NPO is: Evangelical Millennial Jesus-followers will be nurtured and inspired in their faith by learning from the experience of the Early Church. A key insight from the research is that Christians in the Millennial Generation (born between 1980 and 1996) are interested in Church history but they do not have the time nor the inclination to read textbooks explaining a subject that covers two thousand years. Research further attests to lower attention spans among Millennials compared to older generations. Therefore, this project's ambition is to make Early Church history accessible, relevant, and hopefully a source of spiritual renewal for the Millennial generation.

Another key insight is the Millennial's affinity for the digital space, and specifically, online learning. To take advantage of this new educational paradigm, this project is completely online. My vocational background involves website creation and hosting in an entrepreneurial, digital setting. Creating a Project Portfolio that utilizes this environment proved to be propitious.

This Project is a website that contains eight brief videos, each one explaining an aspect of Early Church history. The entire span of Church history is too large an undertaking for this project's parameters; therefore, the focus is limited to the Church's first three hundred years. The first video begins by examining the Book of Acts and the events surrounding Pentecost; the last video discusses the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Although the videos are the main attraction, the website is multifunctional: There is a scripture quote of the day, a timeline of Church history, and a reference guide with links to other useful Christian websites. The website address is www.TroyRappold.com. Because this project is wholly digital and existing on the internet, anyone can access the material anywhere in the world at any time.

Introduction

The goal of my project is to make Early Church history relevant and meaningful to the Millennial generation. My NPO statement is: Evangelical Millennial Jesus-followers will be nurtured and inspired in their faith by learning from the experience of the Early Church. Christian Millennials (born between 1980-1996) continually express a strong desire to learn about Church history, but they do not have the time nor the inclination to read lengthy textbooks on the subject. Furthermore, research on the Millennial generation has found that as a whole, they have a lower attention span compared to older generations. Millennials also have a growing preference to learn in the digital space—to receive education by online learning. These dynamics created an opportunity for my project to showcase Early Church history in an online, easy-to-understand format that holds the attention of Millennials. I created a website that contains eight brief videos, each one explaining an aspect of Early Church history. My ambition is to make Church history accessible, interesting, and relevant. Moreover, this project has the potential to become a source of spiritual renewal for the Millennial generation. Although the eight videos are the main attraction, the website also has a scripture quote of the day, a timeline of church history, and a reference guide with links to other useful Christian websites.

Discovery Phase

Church History captured my attention while I was working towards my Master of Divinity degree. The subject never let me go. Although I have never been in full-time ministry, I have been active in teaching Sunday School and Men's Bible studies for many years. The subject of Church history frequently arose during discussions in these small groups. When Dr. Cliff Berger described the Project Portfolio during the interview process for this program, I knew immediately I wanted to do a project that somehow included Church history. At the outset I thought my project would be able to cover the entire two-thousand-year history of the church. This is too large a span of history to cover and I changed this by the end of the first semester. I also did not have a well-defined audience. My initial ideas were vague—perhaps a project for all Christians or leaders within the church.

When the Discovery Phase of this three-year journey began in the Fall of 2020, I did not have a clear vision of the exact shape my Project Portfolio would take. I did not have a ministry context from which my project could naturally generate from and multiply to. Previously, I was a small business owner in the real estate industry.

In September, 2020, I administered the Discovery Workshop. I learned several key insights from the attendees. The first was to focus my audience away from Christians in the general population or Christian leaders, and specifically towards “Millennial Jesus-Followers.” This decision followed a lengthy debate on whether to keep Generation Z in mind as a secondary audience. The two demographics are similar and to only focus on Millennials was unnecessarily limiting to my project's

impact. This line of reasoning won the day and although the project's focus would still be towards Millennials, I decided to keep Generation Z as an auxiliary, secondary audience.

The second insight was to make this project wholly online and digital; there would be no printed materials. Because my previous vocational experience provided me with website creation skills, I naturally began leaning towards a project that occupied a digital space. The workshop attendees were unanimous about making the project digital. The third insight was to limit the era of Church history to the Early Church. The attendees thought the Early Church would be a compelling choice. I agreed because the Early Church and the contemporary church share many similarities. Both eras have had economic upheavals, precarious political situations, fears of war, and fast-paced cultural changes. The attendees thought these similarities would help my project become more relevant to the Millennial audience. At this stage I decided to begin with Pentecost and end with the Edict of Milan in AD 313. The fourth insight grew from the third: to make the videos relevant for today's audience. Do not make this project just another history lesson for the sake of history. Lastly, we borrowed an idea from The Bible Project: make the videos short—no longer than ten minutes.

The stakeholders were predominantly Millennials but one participant belonged to Generation X and another participant belonged to Generation Z. All participants were Evangelical Christians but with varying denominational affiliations. The participants proved extremely helpful in providing focus to the project. Significant decisions that would affect the rest of the project's development were made. These insights were brought out by the stakeholders during the Discovery Workshop and one-on-one follow up discussions.

Design Phase

During the Design Phase other important decisions shaped my project. Two of my three one-on-one interviews provided additional insight into my project. A Director for Fuller Seminary's online platform helped me understand how to make each video substantive yet succinct. The other interview was with a Church history professor. He shared what he believed to be the most interesting subjects and events are in the Early Church period—and therefore worthy to be included in the videos.

At the Design Workshop, three concept pitches were discussed at length. The first pitch was a basic website featuring videos on Early Church history. We talked about how many videos would be appropriate. The second pitch was a website plus using the TikTok platform to show one-minute videos of Early Church history. The third pitch was a website plus the use of Instagram to post quotes from either scripture or notable Christians in the Early Church. The strategy was to use an additional platform (TikTok or Instagram) to help drive traffic to the website, but it was unclear which would be best.

During the Design Workshop, the subject came up—again—whether to include Generation Z, in addition to Millennials, as part of the specific audience. It was determined that more research was needed to better understand the two demographics.

Based on all the feedback and discussion I decided the MVP is a website that includes eight videos on the Early Church. It was also decided that the ending date for the Early Church would be moved from the Edict of Milan in AD 313, to The Council of Nicaea in 325. The website will have other functions, such as a timeline, a reference guide with hyperlinks, a scripture of the day, and “About Us” and “Contact Us” pages. Instagram was chosen to be the supplementary platform because of its ease and quick ability to steer traffic to a website. Instagram’s audience is also better suited for my project.

Delivery Phase

During the Delivery Phase, the questions that remained outstanding from the previous semester were clarified. The NPO statement reached its finalized form by removing “Generation Z” and keeping “Millennials” for the specific audience. As a secondary audience, Generation Z is still to be kept in mind, for they share many similarities. I have limited the number of videos to eight, even though we had discussed ten and twelve. With more than eight videos, there is a risk of losing the attention of my audience. The other pages of the website were finalized and I decided the postings on Instagram would be Bible verses rather than quotes from significant individuals from the Early Church.

The first benchmark was to meet with the stakeholders after the first four videos were completed to gather feedback. This proved to be valuable and I implemented changes immediately. The narration and graphics were improved and the length of each video was shortened. Another benchmark was to achieve one hundred visitors to the website by March 1, 2023. This was accomplished; by February 10 there were over three hundred. A corollary to this benchmark was to have the average time of each visitor staying on the website for ten minutes or longer. With an average time of just over five minutes, this was not achieved. There is room to be optimistic, however, as the website was just recently completed.

The benchmark for the Instagram platform was set at receiving one hundred “likes” from my postings. Disappointingly, this goal has not been achieved. There are hundreds of Instagram accounts that post daily scriptures and thousands more who post scripture verses sporadically. Therefore, my postings do not stand out. A good first step to address this is to change my daily postings from Bible verses to famous quotes from the Early Church Fathers. The data on my website traffic is also easy to receive because my website hosting company provides this at no additional cost.

The long-term objective is to keep this website active and add to it additional church history videos. Perhaps covering the Middle Ages, the Reformation, then proceed century by century as I make my

way to the contemporary church. Switching from the Instagram platform to creating short-form videos for platforms (Reels or TikTok) might also be an option if my Instagram account continues to underperform.

Points of Growth

I have encountered a few obstacles during this research project. The first problem arose when I tried to assemble the group of eight Millennials for the Discovery Workshop. I asked fifteen, ten said they could help, eight confirmed for the day of the workshop, but only four attended. This was a disappointment especially since this was the first semester and my first attempt at understanding my project. Part of this disappointment in attendance I attribute to being a new church member at Northwest Christian Church. I was not yet well known and had not forged many strong relationships. I did not have strong friendships with any of the people I recruited. During this program, I came to be a part-time employee with the church and did come to know many people involved with the church. As a result, my later focus groups were better attended. However, the four participants that did show up at this first meeting were engaging, enthusiastic, and helpful.

Another obstacle was to determine how the videos were going to be produced. I wanted a professional-looking product with graphics and pictures. A full year transpired before I found Debbie Grout, the administrative assistant at NW Christian Church in Newberg. She is skilled at the Adobe software and she happily volunteered her time and expertise. Lastly, coordinating two part-time jobs while working my way through this doctorate program proved challenging, but not insurmountable.

The innovative nature of this project created some unforeseen shortcomings. One such area is in my website optimization. There are complex algorithms that search engines use to help people find the websites they are looking for. Web developers can take advantage of these algorithms so their website is at the top of a results search page. This is an increasingly complex field and I have not yet optimized my website in this way. This is preventing more people from finding the website. After graduation, I will have time to invest time and energy into this area.

Another gap is the quality of my narration. I have not done this activity before and my inexperience shows. I want to practice more and possibly hire a speaking coach who can help me do a better job telling the story of the Early Church. A third gap is in the writing of the transcripts. The prose sounds too academic—like a professor lecturing about history in a classroom setting. I want to improve the tone so it sounds more like an attention-grabbing TED Talk.

There were other viable alternative approaches to my NPO that I considered while doing this research. At the top of the list, and still worth pursuing, is writing a one-year devotion that includes both a daily quote from the Bible and a quote from a historically significant Christian. In between the two quotes would be a daily devotion, along the same lines of *Jesus Calling* by Sarah Young or *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers. This is appealing because it brings Church history

into the conversation but in a subtle way. Additionally, the format of a one-year, daily devotion never goes out of style. After graduation I am planning to develop this project. Another viable alternative was using the TikTok platform to make one or two-minute videos on Church history. I had considered this option but upon further research it was determined that the platform was not the best fit for this project. But as TikTok continues to grow (over one billion users), this approach could find an audience.

Key discoveries happened throughout my project. At the top of the list is the importance of keeping my audience in mind at all times. Soon after I decided to focus on Millennials, I learned I also had to keep in my Generation Z as a secondary audience because the two generations share a lot of similarities. My project exists completely in the digital space and this decision was made with this audience in mind. Because of the shortened attention span of these two generations, the brevity of the videos was always kept in mind.

The workshops, focus groups and one-on-one interviews were also instrumental in shaping this project. At the onset I imagined I would be doing all the research by myself—and creating the project by myself. But in every case where I included others in to the decision-making process, it helped give shape to the project. Instead of just learning about Millennial preferences in books and journals, I learned I can talk to them in person and ask them what they think.

Next Steps

In the first four videos I learned much about the filming, narrating, and editing process. I received feedback and implemented changes to the last four videos. After graduation I am going to remake the first four videos so they match the last four. I am planning on rewriting the scripts and re-filming all four. The post-production will not take much time or labor.

There are still areas where my project would benefit from further research and development. I am going to review all eight videos after graduation and edit all of them down so they are shorter. The average time of all eight is 7:38, but I am going to shorten them to between 6:00 - 6:30 minutes. Further research into improving the search engine optimization is needed. This involves working with my website host company, HostGator. Although there is an additional annual cost although it is minimal.

I am planning on continuing this project. I will proceed into the next era of Church history: the Middle-ages (AD 325 - 1500) and then the Reformation (1500 - 1700). Then century by century: eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth century. I can improve each new video by writing better scripts and a more sophisticated post-production that could include video and music.

Final Reflections

A few setbacks have happened along the way. I am disappointed with how few views of my scripture quotes are receiving on the Instagram platform. The platform is saturated with Bible verses. I already have plans to change this moving forward. I am going to try posting my collections of famous quotes from well-known Christians from the Early Church period. No one else—that I have seen—is doing this on Instagram. I was also disappointed with my narration abilities in the videos. I do not come across as experienced and professional as I would have liked. I have not done this before and my inexperience shows.

The joys came with the feedback groups and workshops I did with the Millennials. These turned out to be great conversations, with everyone participating enthusiastically. Another source of joy occurred each time I saw the final version of the videos for the first time. Debbie Groat always managed to put a polished, professional feel to each video. The graphics and rotating pictures were well done and I feel the message was delivered in a succinct, engaging manner. The heart of this project are the eight videos and watching each completed video on my website, with the link working without any technical difficulties, was a proud moment. A lot of effort went into each one.

The surprises were finding someone so talented to do the post-production of the videos for free. It was also surprising how easy it was to create a website. I am not a true expert in this field but I have always managed technology well enough to accomplish the task at hand. The hosting company, HostGator, has an easy step-by-step guide that walked me through the entire process. It took nearly a year to finish but I am pleased with the end result.

This three-year process of meeting a need, solving a problem, or taking advantage of an opportunity confirmed that I am not averse to risk taking and starting something from nothing. It is similar to creation *ex nihilo*; an activity that my heavenly father engages in. I am more of an entrepreneur than an academic but this degree program was the perfect combination of both to prepare me for the next chapter of professional endeavors. The degree program, especially the mantra, *Trust the Process*, matured my thinking and research methodology. I will take these skills with me into the future.

There is an offshoot of this project that I would also like to pursue. One of the three possible projects from the first semester was to write a one-year, daily devotional using quotes from well-known individuals throughout Church history. I have continued working on this idea during my spare time. I enjoy the writing process and I think this unique project is worthy to develop and try to get it published.

Doctoral Project

Introduction

My doctoral project is a multifunctional website whose goal is to make Early Church history relevant and inspiring to Millennials. My NPO statement is: Evangelical Millennial Jesus-followers will be nurtured and inspired in their faith by learning from the experience of the Early Church. Christian Millennials express a strong desire to learn about Church history, but they do not have the time nor the inclination to read lengthy textbooks about the subject. As a solution to this problem, I created a website that contains eight brief videos, each one explaining an aspect of Early Church history. Although the videos are the main attraction, the website also has a scripture quote of the day, a timeline of church history, and a reference guide with links to other useful Christian websites.

I will showcase my doctoral project beginning with the Home Page of the website and proceed systematically through the website, one page to another. The website address is www.TroyRappold.com. There are four tabs at the top of the website: *Home*, *Menu*, *About*, *Contact*. I will describe the contents of each tab with explanations and screen shots of each page for easy reference. Then I will describe my Instagram account that I created for this project. Instagram is an auxiliary platform I am using to help market the website and attract visitors. Each day I post a quote from scripture on Instagram. At the bottom of each post is my website address. The next section is the Assessment, and there I give a tentative evaluation of the doctoral project thus far. The evaluation will be based on the indicators I outlined last semester in the Doctoral Project Progress Report, in addition to new, relevant indicators provided by the website hosting company and google analytics. The last section is the Appendix, and it contains additional, supporting materials relevant to the development of this project.

Presentation of Project

The Home Page

The Home Page welcomes all visitors when they click on the website link (www.TroyRappold.com). The font, color scheme, and website layout are all designed to be attractive, easy to understand, and intuitive to navigate. The faded pictures on the left and right columns of the Home Page are reminiscent of the early church and the font complements the theme. The thumbnail pictures for all eight videos are also motifs of the early church and correspond to the subject of the video. The four tabs at the top are organized logically and help the visitor navigate to different pages quickly and easily (Figure 1).

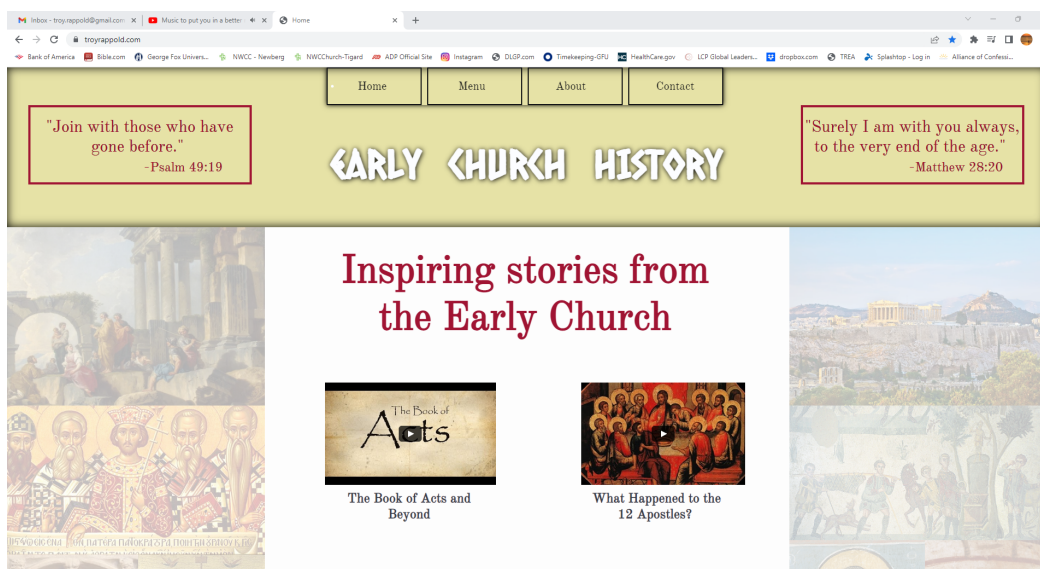


FIGURE 1: THE HOME PAGE

The Main Attraction: Eight Brief Videos on the Early Church

All the content and images are live and can be found at the website's address: www.TroyRappold.com. Having a prominent position on the Home Page and indeed the entire website, are the eight short videos. Each video is created to tell an important aspect of Early Church history. My approach has been to make these brief videos educational and relevant—all the while accomplishing the difficult task of holding the attention of my intended audience. There is a balancing act to be struck here: the goal is to present historically important material, but to do so succinctly within acceptable time limits. The average time of the eight videos is seven minutes, thirty-seven seconds. The eight videos are:

- The Book of Acts and Beyond
- What Happened to the 12 Apostles?
- Creating a Church Service and Liturgy
- The Destruction of Jerusalem
- The Role of Women in the Early Church
- The Edict of Milan, A.D. 313
- The Council of Nicaea, A.D. 325
- How Did the Church Grow?

At the end of each video there is a screen that stays visible for several seconds. This information acts as both a bibliography as well as a "For Further Reading" to assist the viewer pursue additional reading on the subject (Figure 2).

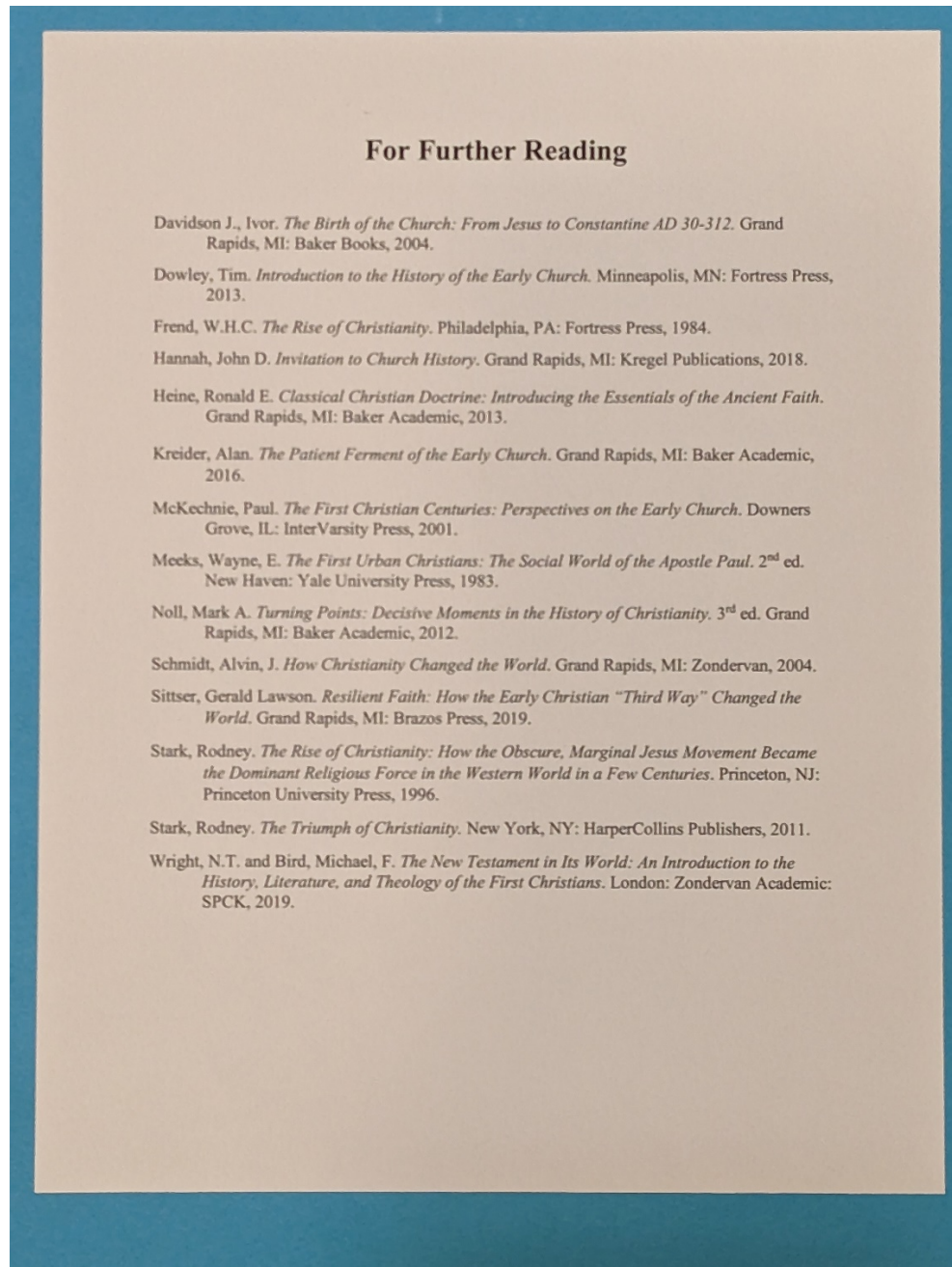


FIGURE 2: A BIBLIOGRAPHY AND READING LIST OF ADDITIONAL SOURCES

In this first section, there will be three videos featured, complete with the transcripts and pictures as seen on the website. All the content and images are live and can be found at the website's address: www.TroyRappold.com. All these videos were the last three created and uploaded; they are, in my opinion, the best of the eight videos. The Appendix contains the transcripts of the other five videos. Before continuing, I want to acknowledge the contribution by Debbie Groat, Executive Assistant at Northwest Christian Church in Newberg, Oregon. She is responsible for the postproduction for all videos. Without her time that she generously donated to this project, and her skill in using Adobe Editing Software, these videos would not have the sophisticated, professional appearance that they do. We begin with video four, *The Destruction of Jerusalem* (Figure 3).

VIDEO FOUR: THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM



FIGURE 3: VIDEO FOUR, *THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM*

(All the content and images are live and can be found at the website's address: www.TroyRappold.com.) Jerusalem is where Christianity began. Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem, Pentecost was in Jerusalem, and the very first house churches began in Jerusalem. In the Early Church, most Christians were Jewish and as the church grew and expanded across the Roman

Empire, Christians continued to look to the city of Jerusalem for leadership. When a debate occurred about which Jewish Laws needed to be kept by Gentile Christians, it was a council in Jerusalem that resolved the issue. And when a famine in and around Jerusalem broke out in AD 54, churches from all over the Roman Empire sent money to the Jerusalem churches to help their fellow believers. Jerusalem continued to be the epicenter of the Church for decades. So, when the city was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70—and then again in 135, Christians were shocked and horrified by the city's downfall.

During Rome's long history of expansion, its military conquered many nations and people groups along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It's been often said that the Roman Empire turned the Mediterranean Sea into a Roman Pond. Some people who lived on its shores were harder to conquer than others. The Jewish nation continually proved to be one of the most troublesome areas for Rome to govern.

Let's go all the way back to 63 BC That's when an independent Jewish kingdom came to an end. The Roman General Pompey successfully conquered and annexed Jerusalem and Judaea. From this point forward, these regions became just another one of Rome's client kingdoms in the eastern Mediterranean.

Judaea was a difficult region to maintain control because the Jewish people did not want to be under the authority of another country. They wanted to be self-governing and throughout their long history, they revolted violently against any nation who attempted to take away that autonomy.

In 37 BC Herod takes the reigns and he rules for 33 years as a vassal King under Roman authority until his death in 4 BC His job is to manage the tension that exists between the Jewish people and Roman authority. Herod pacifies the Jews by rebuilding the Temple and granting favors -- and he keeps the Romans happy by collecting taxes and maintaining the peace. But he ruled as a ruthless tyrant and the older he got, the more of a madman he became.

When he dies in 4 BC, his sons take over and together they ruled different parts of Judaea and Galilee for several years. They ruled poorly, using brute force frequently and infuriating the masses. As a result, civil unrest grew, and extremist groups arose.

Beginning in the year AD 6, the Romans changed their approach on how they administered the territory. They installed a ruler that had the title Prefect. A Prefect was one who ruled the area for Rome but did not have the title of King. A Prefect also collected taxes, but the Romans tried allowing a certain degree of local control and so a Prefect shared a limited amount of civil and religious power with the Jewish Sanhedrin. Pontius Pilate was the Prefect of Judaea for approximately 10 years: from AD 26 to 36. Christ was crucified approximately AD 30.

Most of the Prefects that Rome assigned to rule the region did not understand the Jewish Religion nor their sensitivities. The rulers were corrupt and some of them stole money from the Temple. It is easy to understand why violent extremists grew in popularity. These Jewish groups were ultra-conservative, militant, and their faith took a political emphasis.

Rebellion was in the air and a financial crisis hit all the Roman Empire because of the erratic behavior of Emperor Nero. The political relationship between Judaea and Rome continued to worsen. The powder keg was primed to explode and in the year 66 it did—and the first Jewish-Roman War began (Figure 4).



FIGURE 4: THE JEWISH WARS

It grew so large that Nero ordered his best general, General Vespasian, to put it down violently. Vespasian and his 60,000 troops worked their way down from the north towards Jerusalem, destroying everything in their sight.

Two years later, in 68, Nero commits suicide and a power struggle to decide who is going to be the next Emperor followed. The crown eventually goes to Vespasian. So, Vespasian orders his son, General Titus, to finish the rest of the campaign (Figure 5).



FIGURE 5: GENERAL TITUS

In the year 70, Titus arrives outside the city walls of Jerusalem—and five months later, Jerusalem falls. Because of the historical details provided by the historian Josephus, we know that the carnage was horrific: thousands died, and it became an absolute free for all with the plundering. Everything of value was taken. The event was catastrophic for the city of Jerusalem and the Temple-centric religion of the Jews ended abruptly. No more sacrifices, no daily offerings, no showbread, no Priesthood. Everything was destroyed with one exception and that was a portion of the city wall that faced to the west. Today it is known as the Wailing Wall (Figure 6).



FIGURE 6: THE WESTERN WALL IS ALL THAT REMAINS TODAY

For the many Christians that lived in and around Jerusalem they remembered Jesus' teaching to flee when you see the City of Jerusalem surrounded. The warnings are found in Matthew chapter 24 when Jesus said, "Not one stone here will be left on another. Let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains, for there will be great distress." And that is exactly what the Christians did. The result was to cause the Christian faith to spread and grow. A large church was in Antioch but mostly it was small house churches forming everywhere throughout the Roman Empire.

Of the Jewish survivors that fled Jerusalem, most continued to live in and around the rural areas of Judaea and Galilee. Jerusalem itself remained in a devastated condition for decades as the survivors tried to rebuild their lives. But more destruction was yet to come.

The Romans continued to rule Judaea with an iron fist and heavy taxation. And so predictably, 60 years later, another revolt occurred. This would be the last Jewish Revolt against Imperial Rome.

As with other revolts, this one started due to religious and political tensions reaching their breaking point. In the year 130 the Roman Emperor Hadrian visited the remains of Jerusalem and decided to build a Roman City on top of the ruins. The new city was named Ailia Capitolina and it was dedicated to the Roman God Jupiter. The construction of a pagan temple began on the site of the Jewish Temple. The regions of Judaea and Galilee were renamed Syria Palaestina, which is where we get the English word, "Palestine."

The Jews united against the oppression and the one who lead the effort was named Simon Bar Kochba. The name means, "Son of a Star." He deliberately takes this name as a messianic title and in the year 132, he declares that a new era of Jewish independence has begun.

In that same year, war broke out and at first, the revolt achieved success. The Jews were able to establish an independent state for three years. Simon Bar Kochba, took the title "Head of State" and many thought him to be the Messiah. When the Emperor Hadrian received word of these developments, he sent a large-scale force to invade Judea and in 135, the Romans crushed the revolt and killed Simon bar Kochba.

Afterwards, the Romans did not allow the Jews to re-enter Jerusalem. There was only one exception and that was for religious purposes one day a year. Besides that, the death penalty was enforced if they were caught inside the city limits on any other day. The surviving Jews came to view Simon bar Kochba as a deceiver and a charlatan.

The result of this destruction was even more devastating than the destruction in 70. The Jews either died, became slaves, or fled Judea entirely. Many moved to North Africa, further east into modern day Iraq and Iran, Northeast to modern day Russia, or northwest to European lands. This Jewish dispersion lasted for the next 1800 years.

This destruction was also important in the differentiation between the Christian and Jewish faiths. Up until 70 and even up to 135, Rome viewed Christianity as a sect of Judaism. But Christians did not fight against Rome in either 70 or in 135. Christians weren't even there; they remembered Jesus' prophetic words and fled the region. But after the Bar Kochba Revolt, the Romans viewed Christianity as an entirely different religion. And as Christianity spread out over the Roman Empire, the faith grew among all classes. (End of Video Four).

VIDEO FIVE: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH

FIGURE 7: VIDEO FIVE, *THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH*

(All the content and images are live and can be found at the website's address: www.TroyRappold.com.) There has not been an organization, institution, government, or movement in the history of the world that has done more for women's rights than the Christian Church. In fact, it is not going too far to say that the death of Jesus was the turning point in human history for elevating the status of women.

Women had extremely low status among the Roman, Greek, and near east cultures. A Roman or Greek wife had nearly no freedom and was deemed inferior to man. Women were denied many basic freedoms that today all of us take for granted. Jewish culture was better, but even then, women were not viewed as equal to men.

Nonetheless, the role of women in the Christian Church overflows with controversy and so this video will briefly describe some of the changes that occurred during the church's first three hundred years.

Let's go back to Jesus' ministry because he spoke to women with a grace and dignity that was uncommon in his day (Figure 8).



FIGURE 8: A WOMAN BEING HEALED BY JESUS

He continually broke with social and religious customs when it came to women. Jesus spoke to the Samaritan women at the well when that wasn't acceptable. And when he taught, he didn't just teach men, but he also taught women and he did so on equal standing. He taught that a just society takes

care of widows at a time when widows were not being cared for. And when a group of men were ready to kill the woman caught in adultery, Jesus saved her life and the men slinked away.

It was a polygamous culture that Jesus entered. But he never lent any support to polygamy. Whenever Jesus spoke of marriage, he did so in the context of one man and one woman. Christ's view of marriage as being monogamous complemented his high regard for women. Polygamy invariably lessens the inherent dignity of women. As Christianity gained ascendancy, monogamy became the marriage norm wherever the church spread.

The early Christians not only included women in the life of the church, but they also gave them a freedom and status unknown at that time (Figure 9).



FIGURE 9: WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASSES WERE DRAWN TO THE FAITH

From the beginning, there were more women in the church than men. The women were also more active in the life of the early church. Following Jesus' example, the early church broke the ancient expectations that kept women secluded and silent (as in the Greek culture), subservient (as in Roman culture) and segregated (as in Jewish culture).

Jesus' emphasis on taking care of the widows was taken seriously by the church and they followed his lead. The culture took notice because no one else took care of widows. No government programs, no hand-outs from pagan temples, no social security net. It was the church that led by example. Wherever the church spread, this testimony of taking care of others followed and the church grew because of it.

In the early church, women were prominent not just in attendance but also in leadership roles. Women were evangelizing, teaching, reading scripture, and functioning as leaders in home churches. These are influential and leadership activities. Women also had equal participation in the church's two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. They not only received these two sacraments, but they administered them to others as well.

Women in the upper classes of society often converted to Christianity due to the respect the Christian faith afforded women. Women received the same instruction as did a man and women prayed and sang alongside men in the same worship setting. All of this was new and considered radical in its day.

Women were deacons and elders in the early church, and it would have been rare for a woman to have a position of leadership in their Greco-Roman Culture. There are even a few scattered references to women in the role of priest. There are walls in the Roman catacombs that have pictures of women with their hands raised in the manner of a Bishop (Figure 10).



FIGURE 10: A MURAL OF A WOMAN WITH UPRAISED HANDS GIVING A BLESSING

Another reason why women were more plentiful in the church than men is due to the common pagan practice of exposing unwanted female infants---abandoning them to certain death. Baby girls were not as desirable in the Patriarchal society of the Roman Empire as baby boys--and if a girl was born to a couple, often the parents would bring the newborn into the wilderness and leave the baby to die of exposure. This practice is called infanticide and it was a common practice in Roman culture. Christians did not participate in this killing, and they also saved and adopted these babies. Christian women were also less prone to have abortions. The growth of the church was due in part because of these two dynamics. As a result, Christian women outnumbered Christian men, perhaps as big a difference as 60% to 40%.

We have in scripture a great many names of women that were in leadership roles in the early church. One such leader was Phoebe. In Romans chapter sixteen, Paul refers to her by her title "deacon" which was a leadership position.

Paul also makes note of Apphia as a leader in a house church in the city of Colossae and Nympha in the city of Laodicea. Paul mentions a woman named Priscilla who was one of his “fellow workers” in the letter to the Romans. We learn in the book of Acts of a woman named Lydia. She was a Jewish businesswoman. She met Paul and became a believer and follower of Jesus. She was baptized and became a leader in the church.

Women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. The proclamation of the resurrection was entrusted to a woman, making Mary Magdalene the very first evangelist. Ever since then, women played an indispensable leadership role in the rapid growth of the church across the Roman Empire, especially in the first three centuries. But Christ didn’t come to implement a new political movement, he came to change the hearts and minds of people. But whenever that happens, prejudices, injustices and inequalities are stamped out. (End of Video five).

VIDEO EIGHT: HOW DID THE CHURCH GROW?

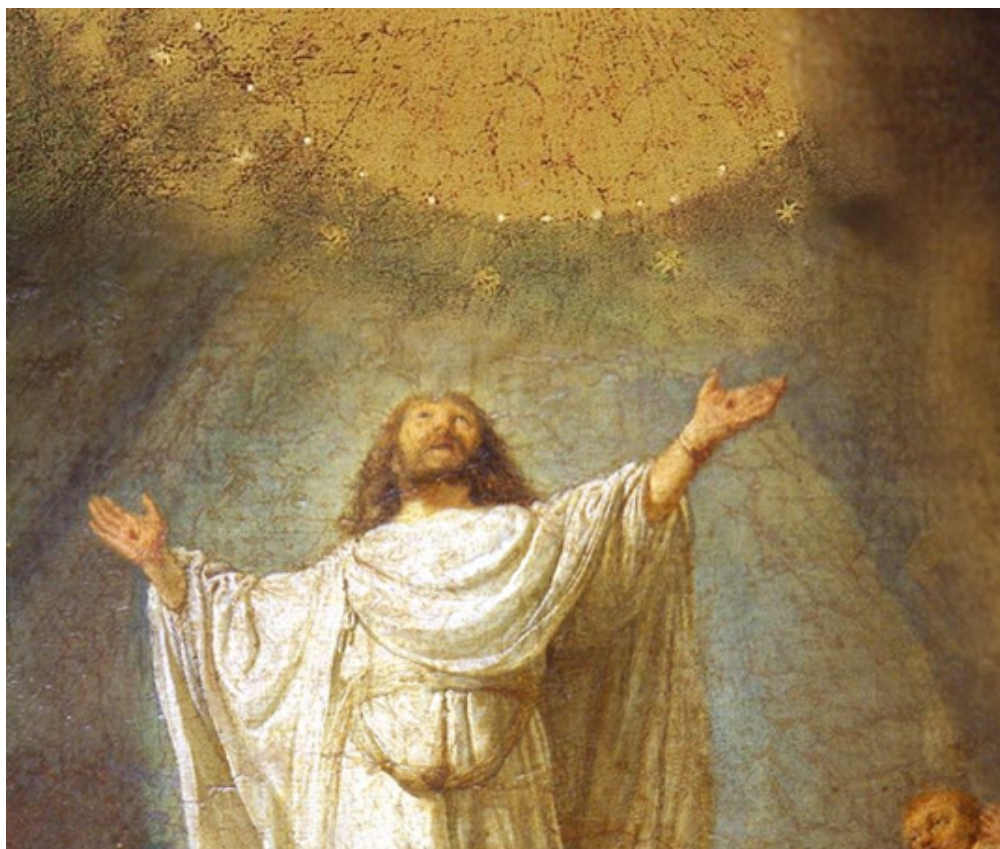


FIGURE 11: VIDEO EIGHT, *HOW DID THE CHURCH GROW?*

(All the content and images are live and can be found at the website's address: www.TroyRappold.com.) How did Christian Church grow? How did a small band of believers in Jesus dislodge the paganism of the Roman Empire and become the dominant faith of western civilization and indeed, the entire world? If we combine all the Christian denominations together - Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant - there is nearly two and a-half billion Christians in the world today, about one-third of the global population.

This video looks at how the growth of the faith happened during the first 300 years. The growth of Christianity was perilous, and at times, seemed doomed to failure. This is especially true in the early years. Our starting point is chapter one in the Book of Acts. It says after Jesus died, there were 120 believers in Jerusalem. Several days later, Peter gave his famous sermon, and 3,000 new believers joined the movement. Two chapters after that, scripture gives an estimate of 5,000 believers. The church was already growing quickly.

The first reason Christianity grew quickly is that Paul and the other early evangelists went directly to cities and not the rural areas to preach and teach their message. The top 7 largest and most important cities of the Roman Empire during the first century were: Rome, Ephesus, Antioch, Carthage, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Thessalonika. Christians planted churches in everyone one of these cities in only a few short years after Pentecost.

As these house churches grew, they became an urban sanctuary. Greco-Roman cities were crowded and teemed with disease, poverty, theft, and frequent murder. Against all these social ills, Christian communities provided charity and hope. In so doing, people saw something virtuous in the church's activities and it made them want to be a part of it.

The rapid growth in the cities was aided by the relative peace that the Roman military created throughout the Empire. Even though it was an iron-fisted peace, it allowed for free and safe travel between cities. Trade and commerce flourished, and the Christian message spread quickly and easily.

From the beginning, most of the Christian growth came from the middle, upper, and nobility classes in large cities. By the year 250, there were an estimated 1 million Christians living in the Roman Empire.

The second reason for the growth is Christianity attracted women in large numbers to the faith. Women had low status among the Roman, Greek, and near east cultures but the Christian faith empowered women.

Jesus spoke to women with a grace and dignity that was uncommon for his day. He continually broke with social and religious customs when it came to women. The early Christians followed his lead and included women in the life of the church, breaking cultural expectations that kept women either secluded or subservient. There were more women in the early church than men and the women were more active in the life of the church.

Women in the upper classes of society often converted to Christianity due to the respect they received from the Christian faith. Women received the same instruction as did men and they prayed and sang alongside men in the same worship setting. All of this was new and considered radical in its day. Women were deacons and elders in the early church, and it was rare that a woman would have such position of leadership and influence in the Roman Culture.

A third reason for Christianity's growth is due to the faithful witness of the martyrs (Figure 12).



FIGURE 12: MARTYRDOM FURTHER SPREAD THE FAITH

The courageous faith displayed by Christians had the opposite of the intended effect. Even though the persecutions were rare and not long-lasting, instead of extinguishing the faith, it caused it to grow. The total number of Christian martyrs in the early church probably numbered less than 1,000 -- but when persecutions did break out, people took notice. Public sentiment eventually turned against the persecution because of the inhumanity of it.

A fourth reason is the theological teachings of the Church (Figure 13). In short: the doctrines of the church mattered. The cross, death, and resurrection of Jesus captivated people and it affected them deeply.



FIGURE 13: THE TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH MADE A DIFFERENCE

Christianity did not enter a religious vacuum. Religious pluralism typified all ancient cities, and they were entrenched into the culture. Dozens of religions were on the menu for everyone to choose from and in the end, paganism collapsed because it was practiced simply as a civic duty, and it did not speak to the deepest part of the human spirit.

Above all the other options stood the simple phrase, "For God so loved the world..." This idea was groundbreaking, and people listened. The ideas of redemption, love, and eternal life won out and as a result, the church grew. Christians came to have a higher moral code because of these doctrines and given the dark, brutal world that was the Roman Empire, people were attracted to this higher way of living. Then, as now, a light shines brighter when it is surrounded by darkness.

A fifth and final reason has to do with the devastating consequences of the epidemics that occurred in the Roman Empire during the early church period (Figure 14).



FIGURE 14: CHRISTIANS HEALED THE SICK

These epidemics were disastrous to the population and hundreds of thousands died. Paganism could not confront the death and suffering like Christianity did. The Church enabled the population to persevere through these tragedies.

One example is from AD 165 during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. A cruel epidemic - most likely smallpox - swept through the Roman Empire and it lasted for 15 years. During this time, nearly one-third of the empire's population died from the disease.

Paganism proved itself incapable of helping with human suffering nor did pagan temples provide compassion for the sick and the dying.

On the other hand, churches offered a hopeful outlook to the future. The communities of faith provided support and benevolence during these epidemics. Christians were willing to give food and water to the sick and that was often the only thing needed. The growth of the church and the decline of paganism parallel exactly the years of the epidemics that occurred in the Roman Empire.

The Roman world was cruel, capricious, dark, and violent; Christianity gave hope, a reason for living and a revitalizing energy to individuals and society. In short, it wasn't miracles or eloquent preaching that most influenced pagan society--but everyday Christians doing everyday things with

great faith, hope, and love. Organized communities—house churches—deserve chief credit for the evangelization of the Roman Empire. (End of Video eight).

Menu Tab: Daily Scripture Verse

All the content and images are live and can be found at the website's address: www.TroyRappold.com. Moving one tab to the right on the Home Page is the tab entitled, "Menu." When a visitor rolls their cursor over this tab a drop-down menu appears and the first item on that list is "Daily Scripture Verse." Figure fifteen below shows the new window that appears.

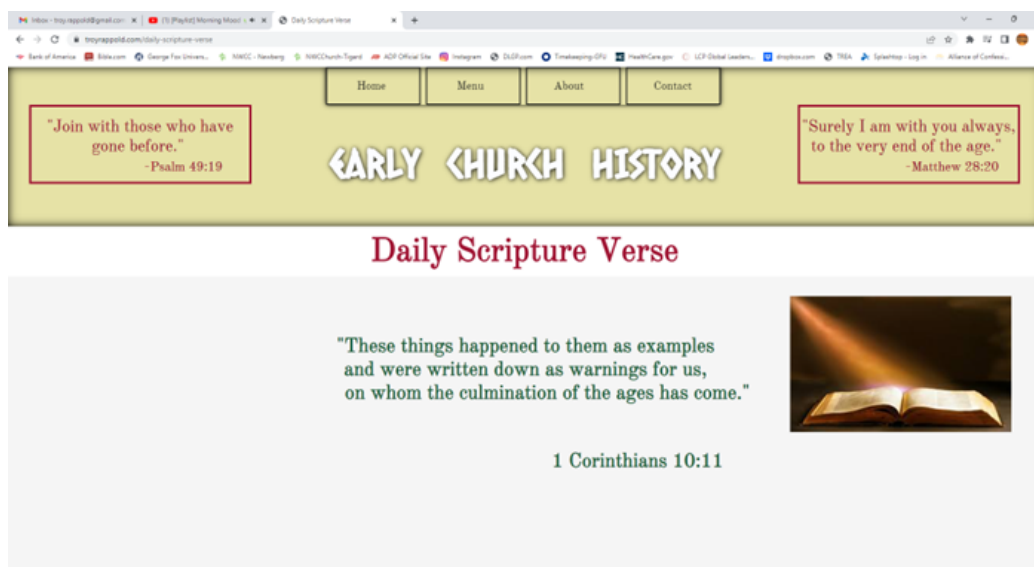


FIGURE 15: DAILY SCRIPTURE VERSE PAGE

This is a simple, straightforward page without videos. The only content is the picture of an opened Bible and a scripture verse that changes daily. The verse is different than the verse on the Instagram platform, and I rotate the selection from the Old and New Testaments. I collected three hundred sixty-five verses from Genesis to Revelation that are inspiring but perhaps not the most well-known verses in the Bible.

Menu Tab: Timeline of Influential Christians

All the content and images are live and can be found at the website's address: www.TroyRappold.com. The next selection on the drop-down menu from the "Menu" Tab is "Timeline of Christians." Figure sixteen below shows the new window that appears when a visitor selects this option. This timeline is a list consisting of two hundred ten Christian men and women. The list begins with the Apostles and proceeds chronologically, providing interesting facts in bullet-point format for each individual. Many individuals from antiquity are depicted in well-known paintings, icons, and mosaics. Modern individuals are portrayed in photographs. Individuals from the early church are featured heavily but the timeline continues through the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and into the twenty-first century.



FIGURE 16: TIMELINE OF INFLUENTIAL CHRISTIANS

Menu: Resource Guide

All the content and images are live and can be found at the website's address: www.TroyRappold.com. The last option on the drop-down menu under the "Menu" tab is entitled "Resource Guide." This page consists of Christian organizations and their websites for reference and their hyper-links for convenience. The list has four categories: *Evangelical Organizations and Associations*, *Non-Profit Charitable Organizations*, *Christian Colleges and Universities*, and *Christian*

Publishing Houses. Figure seventeen below shows the window that appears when a website visitor selects this option.

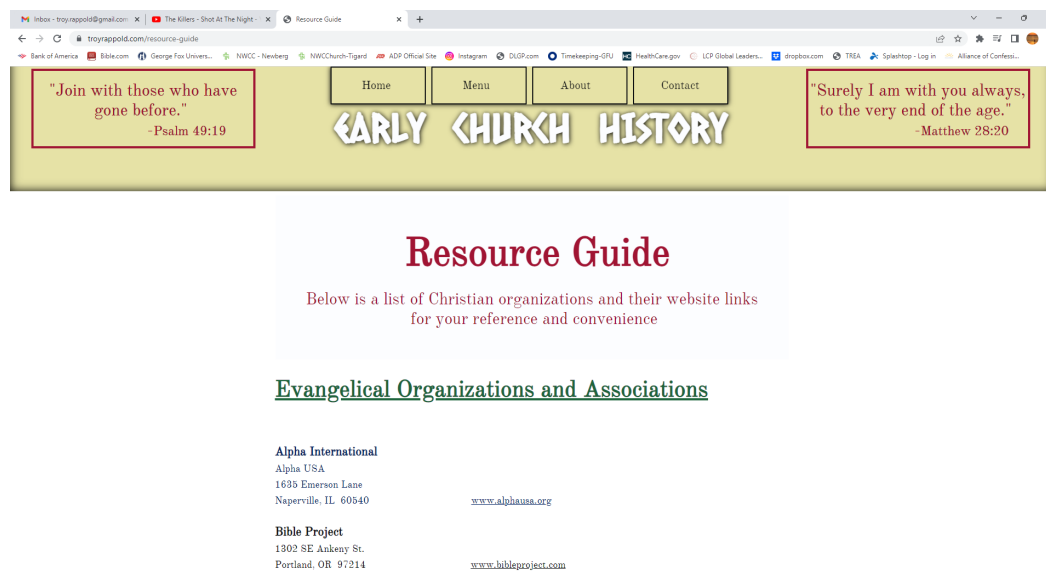


FIGURE 17: RESOURCE GUIDE

About

All the content and images are live and can be found at the website's address: www.TroyRappold.com. Moving to the right from the "Menu" tab is the tab entitled, "About." When a visitor rolls their cursor over this tab and clicks it, a new window appears. It is a short introductory page about the website and my background. It is a typical "About" page found on websites to give a quick overview of the website and the individuals or the company who administer it. Figure eighteen below shows the window that appears when a visitor selects this option.

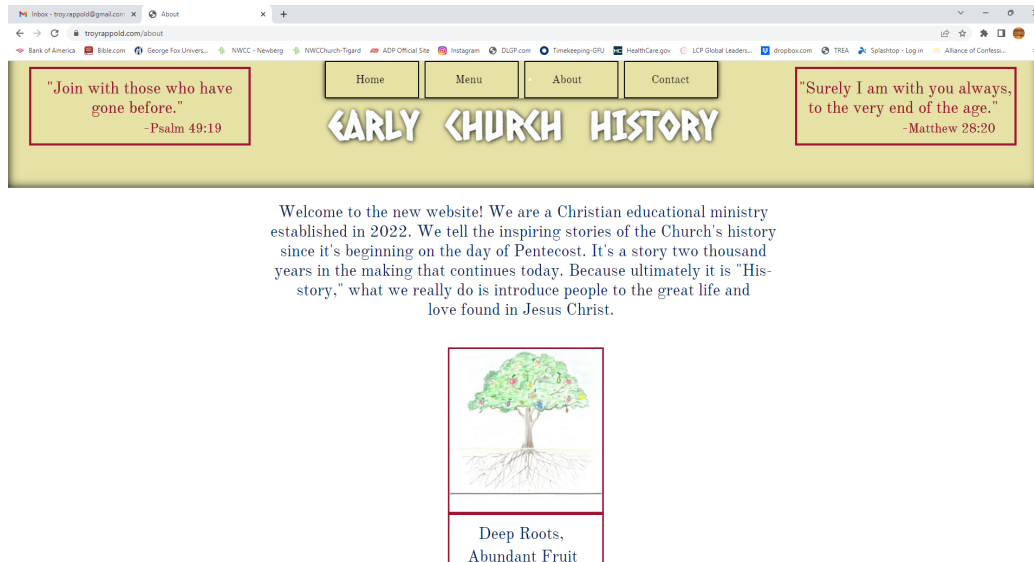


FIGURE 18: ABOUT PAGE

Contact

All the content and images are live and can be found at the website's address: www.TroyRappold.com. Moving to the right from the "About" tab is the tab entitled, "Contact." When a visitor rolls their cursor over this tab and clicks it, a new window appears. It is an informational page that informs the visitor how to contact me with questions. No phone number is given, nor is there an address, but email, LinkedIn data, and Instagram data are provided. Figure nineteen below shows the window that appears when a visitor selects this option.

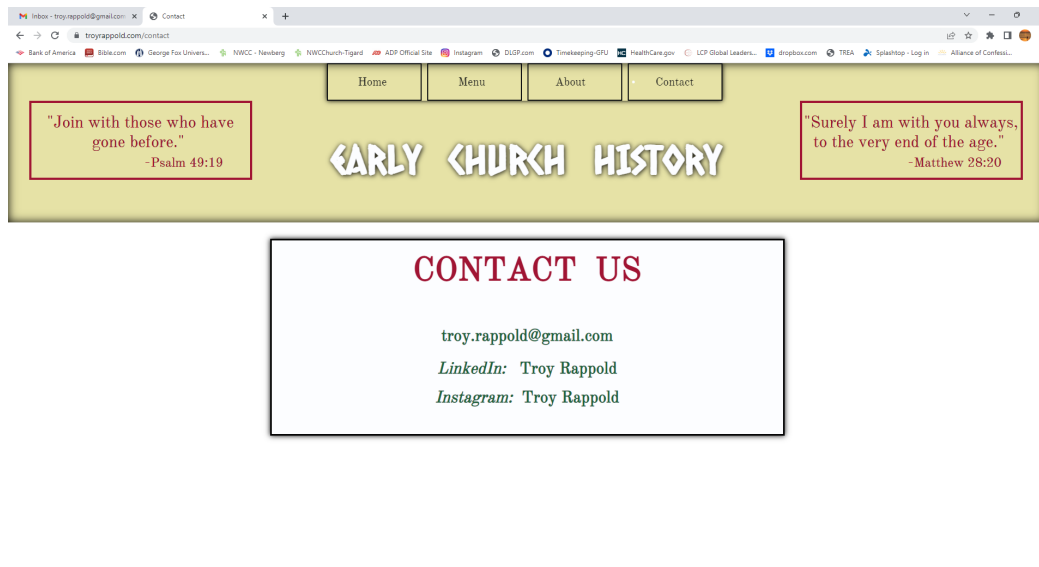


FIGURE 19: CONTACT US PAGE

Instagram Account

Beginning January 1, 2023, I started posting a daily verse from scripture on the newly created Instagram account. At the bottom of each posting is the website address: www.TroyRappold.com. The address is there to market the website and hopefully be an avenue that drives traffic to the website. The picture is the same each day but the verse changes daily. Figure twenty shows the Instagram posting for January 1, 2023. It is Psalm 147:3, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Figure twenty-one shows the Instagram posting for January 25, 2023. It is Galatians 2:20, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."



FIGURE 20: INSTAGRAM POSTING FOR JANUARY 1, 2023



FIGURE 21: INSTAGRAM POSTING FOR JANUARY 25, 2023

Assessment

To properly give an assessment of the project thus far, I will begin with a brief timeline of the development of the website. The website went live on January 1, 2022, but this early version was a basic, skeleton version that needed to be filled out. Over the next six months I added the About and Contact pages, expanded the Christian Timeline, and added more entries to the Resource page. As expected, there was not much visitor traffic during these first six months. The work on creating the videos started in earnest on June 1, 2022. Research and writing of the transcripts took most of my time during the summer break. The first videos to be completed and uploaded were *The Council of Nicaea* and *The Edict of Milan*: both were uploaded on September 6, 2022. *The Tradition of the 12 Apostles* was next, uploaded on September 9, 2022. These were followed by *The Book of Acts and Beyond*, on October 31, 2022; *Creating a Church Service* on December 23, 2022; *The Destruction of Jerusalem* on December 29, 2022; *The Role of Women in the Early Church* and *How Did the Church Grow?* both on January 23, 2023.

I can see a marked improvement with each new video. In the first four videos my headshot was prominent in the video while the pictures I had chosen to feature in the video (to complement the subject being presented), would come and go as I spoke. The pictures were small and inset into the top right corner. See Figure twenty-two below. Based on feedback from my stakeholders (see Appendix), this format was too academic, too formal, and a little boring. The video did not hold the attention of the audience and I agreed with their analysis. I changed the last four videos to incorporate this feedback by shrinking my headshot and placing this as an inset in the lower left corner. Then I increased the size and number of the pictures that complement the subject and made these pictures the prominent part of the video screen. The result is a more dynamic video that does a better job of holding the attention of the audience and looks more professionally produced. See Figure twenty-three below.



FIGURE 22: THE FIRST ATTEMPT: THE PICTURE IS THE SMALL INSET

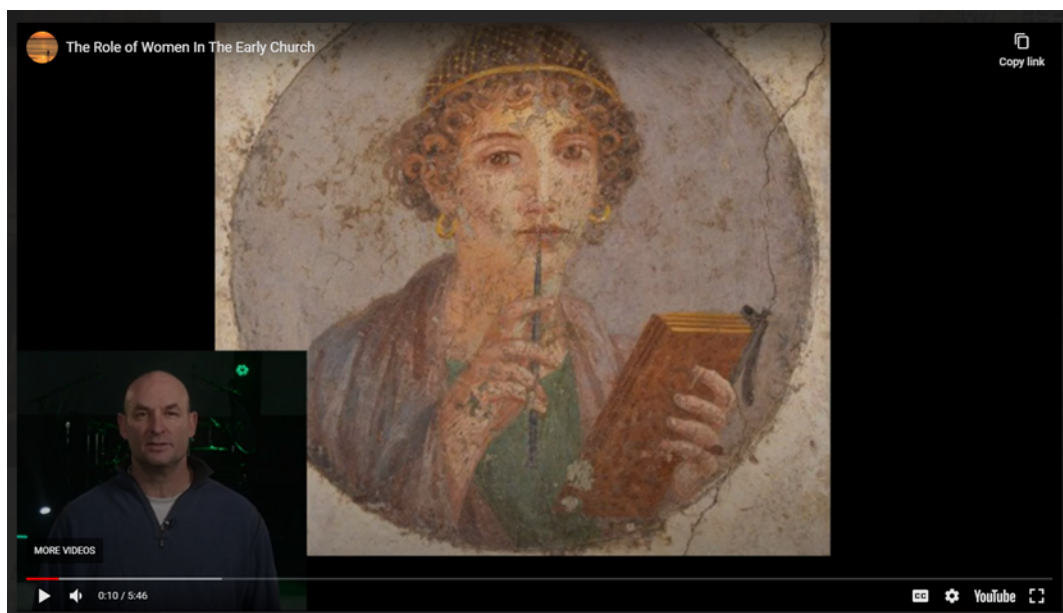


FIGURE 23: THE IMPROVED RESULT AFTER STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

The benchmarks from last semester are informed by the acronym SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound). My first benchmark stated a goal of having one hundred visitors to the website by March 1, 2023. A corollary to this first goal is to have 50% of these visitors stay longer than ten minutes. This statistic is important because it most likely means they saw one complete video and lingered on the website to investigate the other content. As to the first part of this goal, I easily met the goal of one hundred visitors. Beginning with a start date of September 1, 2022, and continuing to January 30, 2023, I have had 367 unique visitors. However, as to the second part of this goal, I have fallen short. The average time a visitor stays on my website (called *session time* by analytics), is only five minutes and thirty-seven seconds. The analytics helps explain why: people are not watching the whole videos. A pattern has emerged where a visitor will watch one video for a couple of minutes, then stop it and go to another video and watch that video for a couple of minutes. The most watched video is *The Edict of Milan*, with sixty-one views, but the average view time is 3:52. This equates to just a little over half the video is watched and then the viewer stops. The other videos have similar results. Perhaps the videos are still too long. I will continue to watch these results of the two most recent videos I uploaded on January 23, 2023 to see if they perform better. I intentionally made the last two videos shorter than the average of the first six videos (The average length of the first six videos is 8:34; the last two videos are 5:47 and 6:26). These improvements give me cause for hope that a visitor's attention will stay with these last two videos to the end.

The second benchmark stated from last semester is to achieve one hundred views of all videos on my website by March 1, 2023. This is measurable by YouTube analytics and as of January 28, total views of all eight videos comes to 252. I will have met this goal and easily surpassed it. The best performing video is *The Edict of Milan* with a total of 219 views, while video entitled *Creating a Church Service and Liturgy* has yet to tally a single view. It is still a little early to get an understanding of how the two most recent videos will perform (uploaded on 23 January), but already *The Role of Women in the Early Church* has collected three views.

A third benchmark is to get one hundred "likes" from followers on my Instagram account. This will help in marketing my website and making a connection from one social media platform to another. In this area, my project has fallen short and, disappointingly, this goal has not been achieved. As of January 28, 2023, I have five "likes". Obviously, this is not having the impact that I had hoped. There are hundreds of Instagram accounts that post daily scriptures and thousands more who post scripture verses sporadically. Therefore, my postings do not stand out. As of 2023, there 2.35 billion monthly active Instagram users. This makes Instagram the fourth most popular social media in the world, measured by monthly active users (MAUs).¹ This type of data is easy to collect thanks to the analytics Instagram provides. Starting with scripture verses was a good first step but a switch needs to be made in order to stand out. I will change my daily postings from Bible verses to famous quotes

¹ Daniel Ruby, "71+ Instagram Statistics for Marketers in 2023 (Data & Trends)," *Demand Sage*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.demandsage.com/instagram-statistics>.

from the Early Church Fathers in April. I will try this for two months and then evaluate if this has been a successful change. To be considered a successful change, I will watch the number of “likes” for a two-month period and if there are one hundred or more “likes” I will keep the strategy going.

The fourth benchmark was to gather feedback by a group of Millennials on the first four videos and implement changes they suggest in the last four videos (their feedback is in the Appendix). This strategy turned out to be extremely helpful; I agreed with their suggestions and implemented the changes for the last four videos. Among their suggestions that I am still considering is to include a timeline for each video at the beginning so the viewer can get their “historical setting” in mind. Another notable suggestion was to include background music at a low volume. This might add a desirable texture of drama, but it would need to be done with care so as not to drown out the narration. Copyright issues with the music is another factor to be considered. Lastly, as I move forward with this project after graduation, I will continue to make the videos shorter. Eight or nine minutes is still too long. In the future, I will make all videos between 5:00 and 5:30. The complete results from this feedback are in the Appendix, figures thirty-one and thirty-two.

Doctoral Project Description

My NPO statement is: Evangelical Millennial Jesus-followers will be nurtured and inspired in their faith by learning from the experience of the Early Church. My Doctoral Project seeks to make Early Church history relevant and inspiring to Millennials by creating a multifunctional website. The research demonstrates that Christian Millennials have an interest in church history but they do not have the time to read lengthy textbooks about the subject, nor are they interested in protracted academic arguments on miniscule details of what they perceive to be of little importance. Millennials are interested in the broad strokes of *who*, *what*, *where* and *why*—and to learn that information as quickly as possible. As a solution to this problem, I created a website that contains eight brief videos, each one explaining an aspect of early church history. Although the videos are the main attraction, the website also has a scripture quote of the day, a timeline of church history, and a reference guide with links to other useful Christian websites. Acting as a supplement to the website and to help drive traffic to the website, a secondary platform for this project is an Instagram account where I post daily scriptural quotes. The bottom of each Instagram posting contains a direct link to the website.

Audience

My target audience is Jesus-following Millennials (born 1980 - 1996) who want to be inspired and educated in their faith. In studying this demographic however, I learned that Generation Z (born 1997 - 2012) will be a secondary audience because they share many qualities and tendencies with Millennials. I have been deliberate in the design of this project to engage successfully with my intended audience. The material is accessible on the internet and the succinct yet informative videos hold the viewer's attention. The resource guide is helpful and contains hyperlinks to other websites of interest. There is a visually stimulating timeline with easy-to-follow bullet-points for each entry. All of these features were created deliberately with the learning tendencies of these two similar generations in mind.

Development Plan

I completed the website design, along with four of the eight videos in December, 2022. The last four videos were completed and uploaded on January 28, 2023. Based on the stakeholder feedback, the last four videos are an improvement over the first four. Consequently, my audio/visual specialist will edit the first four videos so they are like the last four. This revision will take place in the summer of 2023.

To act as a marketing tool for the website, I began an Instagram account on January 1, 2023. I upload a scripture quote daily on Instagram that contains my website address at the bottom of each posting. I will continue this in perpetuity but I will need to analyze the traffic that Instagram provides their account holders. Based on that feedback, I will adjust as needed. I have learned there are thousands of accounts on Instagram that post daily scriptures and my account is not receiving a lot of traffic. As of January 15, the account only has one follower and three views. If this lack of activity continues, I will change posting strategies and instead post insightful quotations and sayings from well-known Christians of all eras of Christian history. I am tracking the Instagram analytics daily and if this change is warranted, I will make this adjustment on March 1, 2023.

After graduation, a new phase of the website will begin. I plan on making more videos on Church history with the goal of covering all periods of Church history. The first step is to create videos on the Church during the Middle Ages. Next are videos on the Reformation, the Age of Missions in the 17th and 18th century, the Church in the 19th century, and the 20th century. Lastly, the series could finish with a video about the status of the Church today.

Development Process

The benchmark from the Doctoral Project Progress Report from the fall semester 2022, stated the goal is to have one hundred website visitors by March 1, 2023. After one year, in March of 2024, the next realistic goal is to have at least one thousand visitors. The number of website visitors are easily tracked by the website hosting company, HostGator. Other analytics, such as what pages of the website visitors go to and how long they stay on each page are important and will also be tracked.

The eight videos are linked to my YouTube channel and the number of “likes” for each video are tracked by YouTube Analytics. These metrics provide immediate feedback on what videos are well received and which ones are not. The metrics also reveal exactly how long a visitor watched the video. This feedback provides the opportunity for continual improvements in the writing and video production.

Another benchmark from the Doctoral Project Progress Report from last semester stated a goal of acquiring at least one hundred “likes” on the Instagram account by March 1, 2023. These statistics are immediately compiled in the analytics portion of my account and allow for quick and easy tracking of my progress. For this project to continue and be a success, it is important that the Instagram account grows with it. Acquiring two hundred followers and one thousand “likes” by March 1, 2024, is an acceptable, incremental goal that would keep this project moving forward to an even greater success.

Appendix A— Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

PERSONAL RESEARCH MANIFESTO

I will approach my subject matter with an eager willingness to learn: I will listen to different voices, guard against biases, and consider unique solutions.

NPO STATEMENT

Evangelical Millennial Jesus-followers can better demonstrate the power of the Gospel by drawing examples from Christians of the Early Church.

NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS

For a website that presents Early Church History videos to be effective, many components need to function correctly. A domain name needs to be secured and there are annual website hosting costs—approximately \$250/year. There are website development and video production skills needed. Although I have many of these technical skills, increased proficiency is needed. Additionally, there are choices to make about which historical persons and events to emphasize. Despite my knowledge of Early Church history, a deeper understanding is required to write dynamic, inspiring transcripts for the video narration.

NPO CONTEXT

The ministry setting for this project is a website created for Millennial Christians. Thus, it is online and digital. Because this project is internet-based, geographical considerations are not applicable. Demographically, I envision the visitors to the website to be English speaking, Evangelical, Millennials (born between 1980-1996) with some spill-over into Generation Z (born after 1995). There will be an effort to make the videos free from denominational bias and optimistically, visitors to this website will learn how much they have in common with believers in other Christian traditions. The videos will highlight people and events during the early Church period, from Pentecost up to and including Constantine's Edict of Milan in A.D. 313. To provide additional value for the website visitors, other pages will be considered, such as a scripture quote of the day, a weekly devotional, and resource links to other Christian websites and ministries.

ROOT CAUSES

I am approaching this Portfolio Project as an opportunity and not as a problem. However, during the workshop and subsequent interviews it became clear that there are several root causes as to why this opportunity has not been successfully developed before. The first is the widespread

opinion that history is boring. It is viewed as purely academic—a subject only to be studied in school. Therefore, taking time to study history is not seen as a priority. The second cause is that it is not considered to be necessary for spiritual growth in a person's faith. Christians attend church, perhaps take time for daily scripture reading, or attend a Bible Study during the week. Reading church history is not considered as important for developing a person's spirituality. Lastly, as one member of the workshop observed, our modern world is so different from most of Church history that it is difficult to draw lessons from the past while living in today's sophisticated, global culture.

DISCOVERY WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS

Four individuals, ranging in age and experience, attended the workshop.

- A retired Methodist pastor.
- A senior executive in a Christian non-profit organization.
- A minister who also served as a missionary to Korea.
- A youth group leader.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

- President of an Evangelistic association.
- Church History Professor.
- Baptist Church Pastor in Louisiana.
- Pastor of a Church in Utah.

5 KEY BIBLICAL TEXTS

The following verses inspire me to look back at our shared history, join with fellow believers that have gone before, and inspire all believers living today.

- 1.) Hebrews 12:1, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."
- 2.) Psalm 49:19, "Join those who have gone before."

- 3.) 1 Corinthians 10:11, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come."
- 4.) Jude 3, "Contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."
- 5.) Psalms 112:6 "Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever.'

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

There is no shortage of academic resources on every era of Church history, including the Early Church. Consulting these materials is a good starting point, but examining histories written for a lay audience such as *Church History in Plain Language*, by Bruce Shelley is also needed. Additionally, I need to consult the newest research about online education and educational video production. Lastly, a clearer understanding of how Millennials best learn and what inspires them needs to be gained. I will consult the many recent articles in scholarly journals and dissertations that have researched this subject.

NPO CHARTER APPENDIX

DISCOVERY WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

I held the Discovery Workshop on Thursday October 8th, 2020, from 9:30 am -12:45 pm. Northside Community Church in Newberg, Oregon happily reserved a conference room for me, as long everyone practiced social distancing. I provided coffee, juice, tea and pastries to all attendees. I gave everyone a handout with the day's itinerary and the goals I set out for the group to accomplish.

I had eight confirmed attendees, planning on a last-minute cancellation or two. However, one day prior, I received phone calls and texts from four people informing me they would not be able to attend. Although I was disappointed, the four people that did attend contributed insightfully to the conversation. (To make up for this first focus group shortfall, I conducted four instead of three telephone interviews). The following individuals were in attendance:

- 1.) A retired Wesleyan minister/church board member.
- 2.) A senior executive in a Christian non-profit missionary organization.
- 3.) An experienced youth group minister and former missionary to Korea.
- 4.) A part time youth group leader and seminary student pursuing a M.A. in Spiritual Formation.

The workshop followed the predetermined format as provided to us in our DMIN 795 syllabus. All four attendees came prepared to discuss the NPO Statement I emailed them the week before. After a fifteen-minute ice-breaker exercise, I presented the research subject in greater depth and gave an explanation of the importance of the workshop. Everyone said they found this helpful to better understand the critical nature of this step and how it shapes the project's trajectory.

DISCOVERY STATEMENT

At the conclusion of the workshop, we reached a consensus for a new Discovery Statement.

Considering North American Millennial Jesus-followers (audience)

We've discovered an opportunity to make Church history relevant and inspiring (NPO)

Which is caused by a view that Church history is boring and not essential (root cause).

If solved, it would mean a deeper understanding of the Christian faith and how God works through the Church to effect change (outcome). While this Discovery Statement had all the right components to it, it took another three weeks thinking through the results of the workshop to compose my final NPO Statement.

CRITICAL INSIGHTS FROM DISCOVERY WORKSHOP

The Discovery Workshop revealed new and unexpected insights:

- Change audience from Christian leaders to "Millennial Jesus-followers."
- Everyone agreed that an on-line format/video is best for this project. The future will continue to see more on-line education of all varieties.
- Don't depict influential Christian "saints" in the past as flawless individuals. They must be portrayed as "real" and relatable.
- It is difficult to make history relevant to people today because our modern world is so different and fast-paced, non-stop change keeps happening. If this project is going to be successful, it will have to show important lessons from the past that have immediate and direct bearing on events happening in today's world.

The consensus said creating something similar to "The Bible Project," could work. The similarity lies not in the animation, but in the approach of a brief yet careful overview of a topic. It was agreed upon that four to ten minutes is the right amount of time needed to accomplish this. Fundamentally we all agreed that the goal should be to reveal God, glorify Christ, and demonstrate how the Church has lived out her calling to be a light to the world. Although there will be some Christians who think

"The Bible is all we need," if this project is done well, it will demonstrate that Church History can also inform our faith and even guide our actions. Questions remain about how to best organize the subject material.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW DISCOVERIES

Interviewee #1: He agreed that the audience should be Christian millennials and not just Christian leaders. Church History should not be "dumbed down." Challenge the audience and show the beauty of the church despite her failings in fulfilling her mandate.

Interviewee #2: Enthusiastic for the project. Teach Millennials how the Church changed the world—the impact that can only be attributed to God's Spirit working among people. Engage with people's faith so lessons from the past can be applicable to the difficult issues we face today.

Interviewee #3: Believes strongly that there is a way to briefly yet compellingly address Church history in a series of videos, each lasting five to eight minutes. It's critical to present historical figures as human--foibles and all; don't paint them as perfect saints. Don't make it a laundry list of facts and dates and accomplishments of certain individuals. Show how the Gospel transformed society/culture.

Interviewee #4: He said focus on issues in history that have immediate relevancy to our culture today, e.g., justice, inequality, prejudice, immigrants. Show how the church wrestled with similar issues in the past and how society benefited from the Church's insight. Also, leave space for the Eastern Church tradition—the non-white, non-Western European parts of the world.

SYNTHESIS

Everyone participating in-person workshop agreed that the audience should be Christian Millennials, not just Christian "Leaders." All four interviewees also thought the audience best served by this project would be Christian Millennials—but there would be interest by the older members of Generation Z as well. Everyone agreed that there is a big difference between Christian and non-Christian Millennials and this project should assume the audience will be Christian. Although there will be varying degrees of maturity, a foundation of faith would be helpful as a starting point. There was a consensus that the word "Evangelical" should not be used on the website itself or for any future marketing materials because of the negative connotations that segments of our culture has with the term. Yet, everyone was quick to add that it is an accurate description of who would visit this website.

There was consensus that a typical presentation should last between four and ten minutes. Within this range lies the balance of being brief enough to hold the audience's attention but also long

enough to present a subject thoughtfully. A thorough knowledge of the material, presented in dramatic fashion, using an economy of words, should be the guiding principles. The videos should give a better understanding of the dire conditions that the Early Church faced, and how they overcame them. Another point of strong agreement was the sentiment that this project needs to be immediately relevant and inspiring to Christians—not just an academic exercise on a social media platform. Lastly, everyone agreed that a website was needed to serve as a “home base” for this project. Compared to having just a channel on YouTube, or a blog on Instagram, a website would have more to offer, with a potential to expand.

NEXT STEPS

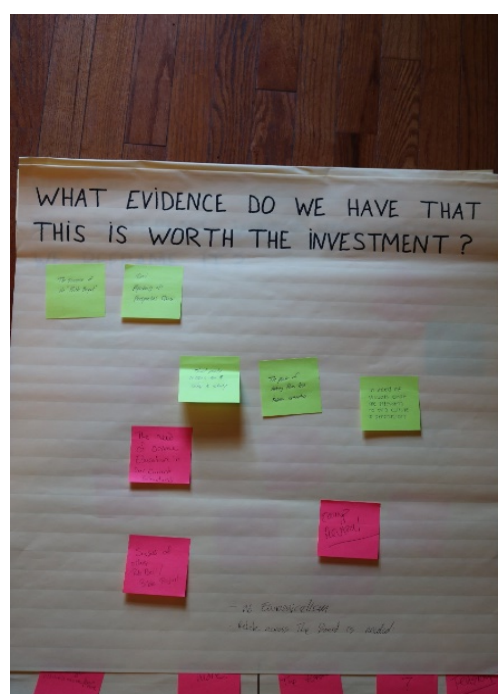
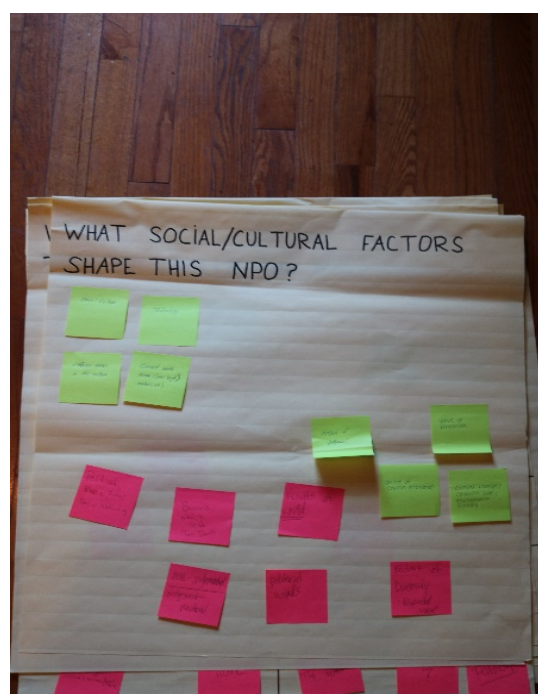
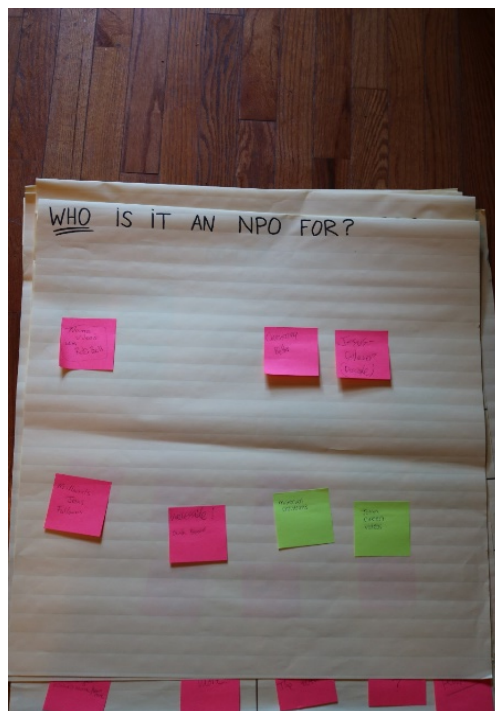
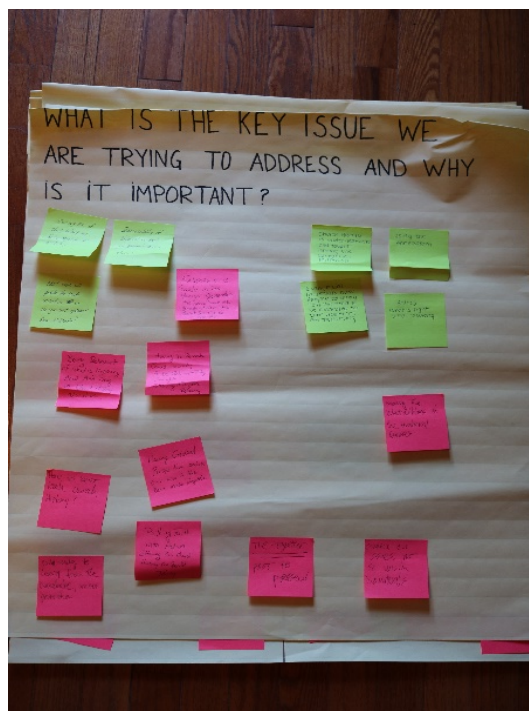
After the workshop and interviews, and after consulting with my Faculty Sponsor, I realized the two-thousand-year history of the Church is too broad. Neither the workshop nor the interviews addressed this issue. However, it is critical to focus the scope of a Portfolio Project, and narrowing the time frame is one way to do this. Otherwise, the subject could quickly become unmanageable. I decided to focus on the Early Church, from Pentecost to the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313. During this time period, there was violent opposition to Christians, political instability, and economic unpredictability—conditions that Christian Millennials can relate to

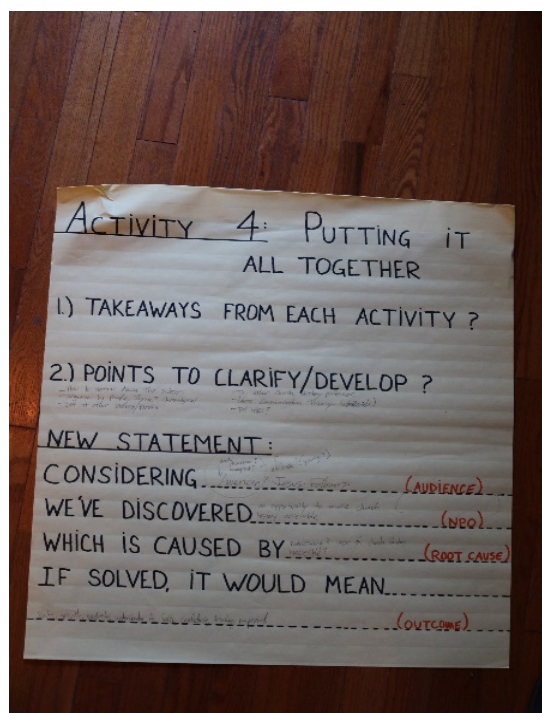
I also need to start thinking about the best way to organize the material. Is it best to proceed chronologically? Another option is to organize the material biographically, presenting important individuals that made a prodigious impact. Still another approach would be doctrinally—demonstrating how theological controversies shaped the early church. Perhaps there is a way to combine the different approaches.

Lastly, there are a myriad of technological questions to face. The work of securing a domain name, choosing a website hosting company, and website development will need to be undertaken. As my Portfolio Project takes shape, there will be many decisions needed about the contents and form of the website. Although these steps require computer and information technology abilities, the expense needed to create such a website is minimal.

DISCOVERY WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

Pictures of the workshop attendees notes and comments are below.





ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

Dear Workshop Participants:

Thank you for your participation in my workshop on Thursday, October 8th. I have spent the last several days organizing our notes and drawing preliminary conclusions. Below is a summary of our insights and the new (but still tentative) NPO Statement:

New NPO: "Church history provides an opportunity to inspire and teach Millennial Jesus-followers about God's character and how his Church positively influences society.

Summary of Activity One: NPO Definition and Audience

Changed audience from Christian leaders to Millennial-aged Jesus Followers. Omitted 'Evangelical' due to possible negative connotations. The teaching of Church history HAS to be made immediately relevant to the audience.

Summary of Activity Two: Empathy Map

- Think: A transition from unnecessary historical facts to relevant ideas that affect me.
- Feel: Challenged by other's faith and curious to know more
- Do: Able to teach others better; able to read the "signs of the times" better.

-Say: Speak or preach with more wisdom and a broader/deeper perspective

Summary of Activity Three: Finding the Root Cause – The 5 Why's

-The concluding answers had similar sentiments: to "Bring Glory to God" or "Bring more people into the Kingdom" or "Bring unity within the Church."

Summary of Activity Four: Putting it All Together – NPO Statement

"Considering...**Millennial-aged Jesus followers**...(audience)

we've discovered...**an opportunity to make Church History relevant and inspiring**...(NPO)

which is caused by...**the idea that history is boring and non-applicable**...(root cause)

If solved, it would mean...**a deeper understanding of how God works in people's lives**...(outcome)."

Thank you all for your participation and insightful comments.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW DOCUMENTATION

Interviewee #1: President and CEO of an international evangelistic organization.

Prior to speaking with my interviewees, I sent them my tentative NPO statement and the core findings from the workshop I conducted. On October 13, 2020 at 8:30 a.m., I spoke with my first interviewee and the conversation lasted thirty minutes. Interviewee #1 agreed that an obstacle to my project might be the feeling among Christians that history is boring and not immediately relevant. He was enthusiastic for the project however, and thought the idea had potential for having an impact. He stressed to bring others into the project: Church Historians, someone proficient in I.T./computer video who can help give the presentations professional production value, and perhaps someone with ministry experience. Suggested to use Church History magazine as a resource (a subsidiary of Christianity Today that is no longer in print). Recommended my audience of Millennials who are already Christian and therefore don't "dumb it down" for them. Instead challenge them. There is a beauty to the Church, despite its imperfections, and it should be put on display for people to see.

Interviewee #2: A Lead Pastor in Salt Lake City, Utah and Doctorate of Ministry candidate.

On Tuesday, October 20th at 3:00 pm I spoke with Interviewee #2. He is enthusiastic about the idea and recommended as a source, "5 Minutes in Church History" by Stephen Nichols, a website and daily podcast. He agreed the best audience would be Millennials and those who have some Christian foundation of faith. The key is to make it immediately relevant. Show how the Church changed society; the power of people acting boldly in faith. Tell the compelling story of how 120

people in Jerusalem set into motion an entire change to Western Europe and then the world. But do this in a series of videos of about five or six minutes each, because people's attention span is short.

Interviewee #3: A Church History Professor at an accredited Christian University.

The most helpful interview. He has taught Church history at the undergraduate and graduate levels for many years and says his students are interested in Christianity on a global scale. Don't give the audience an Americanized version of Christianity. Show how the Christian Gospel has changed the world and don't be afraid to talk about Eastern Orthodox denominations or African and Asian Christianity. Don't be afraid to tackle the difficult questions of Church history, its failures and its controversies. As far as organizing the material, a combination might be best: Chronological, yet focus some episodes on an individual (Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, for example) or a theological issue (controversies about the Divine -vs- Human nature of Christ), major events (the Reformation and World missions in the 19th century). He provided me with a list of great resources for further reading.

Interviewee #4: A Pastor of a Baptist Church located Baton Rouge, LA, ministering to a large university community.

Likes the project in thought and perceives a need for this subject on the internet for Christian Millennials. He particularly would like to see something about Colonialism and how the church participated in it, the rise of Evangelicalism in the USA and globally; Civil rights era in USA; The Social Gospel influence on the 18th and 19th century. He thinks that ten or eleven minutes would be about the longest to make a presentation. Millennials are frustrated with the church but not with spirituality. They would like to see the church effect culture positively, bring about a just society and reduce inequalities. Do not leave out the Eastern Orthodox Church—Americans do not know about this part of Christian history, so tell them. Similarly, include Church history that effected non-white and non-European parts of the world, like Asia and Africa.

Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

INTRODUCTION

The study of church history records and analyzes the unfolding story of God's redeemed people building God's Kingdom on earth, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The church began on Pentecost and as promised in Matthew 16:16, the gates of Hell have not prevailed upon it. The church's mandate is found in the Great Commission spoken by Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 and the injunction continue for all believers living today. By the very nature of its mission, the church is optimistic—even audacious—accomplishing nothing short of bringing God's Kingdom "on earth as it is in Heaven" (Matthew 6:10)². We certainly cannot not do it without God; in his wisdom, God determined he would not build it without us.

As an academic discipline, church history is an attempt, through the search of the past, to explain the meaning and function of the present while providing hope and direction for the future.³ Similar to secular history, church history seeks to report the facts accurately: the *who*, *what*, *where*, and *how* of the time period under consideration. But unlike secular history, church history assumes that human history is on a path that will end in the triumph of God over his enemies and reign over his own people forever.⁴

For each new generation of believers, the study of church history offers inspiring stories and critical lessons of faith from those who have gone before. It is important and indeed expected that the older generation shares these lessons with the younger, emerging generation. The research topic of this essay is therefore to learn how to present church history as relevant and inspiring to the faith life of the generation born between 1980-2000, collectively known as "Millennials."⁵

The believer only needs to look to scripture to find justification for teaching history to God's people. Luke begins his gospel by stating, "It seemed good also to me to write an orderly account . . . so you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:3). Variations on this theme are found throughout the Bible, and all of them admonish the believer to learn from the past to excel at living in the present. We turn next to examine four such passages.

² All scripture references, unless otherwise noted are from the Holy Bible, New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985).

³ John D. Hannah, *Invitation to Church History: World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal Publications, 2018), 25.

⁴ Hannah, *Invitation to Church History: World*, 29.

⁵ The term Millennial was first coined by Neil Howe and William Straus in the 1991 book *Generations*.

SECTION 1: BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

An Orderly Account: Luke 1:1-4

Luke's gospel and Acts together form the first written history of the church. It is therefore an appropriate starting place for the study of church history.

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you...so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

These first four verses act as his prologue and as Luke Johnson observes, "The prologue shows Luke understood his composition as a form of history."⁶

Luke is concerned with more than just getting the facts of the story correct, and he does not write his history as a detached observer. Joel Green explains, "Luke's purpose was apparently not to provide an historical foundation for the Christian message. For him, the narrative is not the basis of proclamation; rather, *narration is proclamation*."⁷ Although Green makes a good point, he stretches his point too far. Luke says in his own words that he desires to "write an orderly account." The passage works on two levels: Luke intends to write an orderly historical account of the early church, and at the same time, to proclaim the truth of the gospel.

It is a matter of emphasis and as F.F. Bruce points out, "Luke's emphasis is not to simply get the facts right; his emphasis is on the dominant role the Holy Spirit plays in the expansion of the gospel."⁸ This dual emphasis teaches believers that faith and objectivity are not opposed to each other. Ken Heer says about Luke: "He maintained objectivity, while at the same time personally experiencing the transforming gift of grace from God through Christ."⁹

⁶ Luke T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2012), 29.

⁷ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 36.

⁸ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 13.

⁹ Ken Heer, *Luke: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 28.

Examples as Warnings: 1 Corinthians 10:11

"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come."

Although the church at Corinth was predominantly Gentile, in this verse Paul refers to the Jewish nation during the old covenant era. Paul stresses the following principle: by looking backwards in history we learn from other people's successes and failures. We recognize ourselves in their experiences. As Gordon Fee argues, "Behind all these things lie the eternal purposes of the living God, who knows the end from the beginning."¹⁰

In this verse Paul's reference to Israel's disobedience serves as a stern warning. In the Greek, the warning is even more forceful. The NIV translates "were written down as warnings for us" from the Greek πρὸς νοουθεσίαν ἡμῶν. The preposition πρὸς expresses a goal or purpose and the ἡμῶν is an objective genitive. Thus, the phrase could also be translated as, "but they were written down to warn us."¹¹ Paul strongly admonishes the Corinthian church to learn from the past. But it is a precept that human nature requires both warnings and encouragement to mature us, so perhaps it is no accident that in chapter thirteen of this same epistle, we have Paul's timeless thoughts on faith, hope, and love to encourage his readers.

There is Nothing New Under the Sun: Ecclesiastes 1:9-10

"What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new'? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time."

Ecclesiastes is unique in the wisdom literature and perhaps is best known for its repeated use of the Hebrew word הֶבֶל (hebel), translated alternatively as "meaningless," "vanity," or "futility." However, these English words render too pessimistic a note and miss an important nuance. At its root, the Hebrew word means "smoke" or "vapor" and throughout Ecclesiastes, it refers to the fleeting nature of our existence. Life is short and enigmatic and we must make peace with the mysterious nature of our existence. This is key, because it is only God, and not humanity's striving apart from God, who can solve the seemingly meaningless nature of existence. When we allow God's involvement in our lives—when we fear him and obey his rules for living—then purposeful and worthwhile moments happen in our ordinary, daily experiences.

¹⁰ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 506.

¹¹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians Revised Edition*, 506.

At first reading these verses might sound unduly negative and more importantly, not true. Is not human experience replete with newness every day? From the newest iphone to the latest Tesla car model, we are experiencing new things all the time. But that is only a surface observation and as Dave Bland points out, "The verses do not speak of specific incidents but of larger types or patterns of life such as birth, death, love, hate, suffering, joy, etc. These human experiences are not new, even though they may be expressed differently in different times and by different generations."¹²

There is a fundamental experience of living that all people of all times experience, and it follows that those of us living today can learn from those who have gone before. Michael Eaton stressed, "History is traveling to a goal, the Day of the Lord, when he will complete his purpose, redeem his people and judge his enemies."¹³

Run with Perseverance: Hebrews 12:1

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

This single verse concludes the entire preceding chapter where inspiring examples of faithful men and women in the past serve to instruct and inspire believers who are living by faith today. Donald Guthrie says, "The heroes of the past are now viewed as spectators, whereas the Christians are in the arena."¹⁴ Although persecution of Christians had occurred by this time, the emphasis in this verse is not to hold fast in the face of imminent death. Rather, it is to inspire believers to live their lives in full confidence and obedience in Christ.

The inspiration comes from Christ and the Holy Spirit, as well as a "great cloud of witnesses." We are being watched by saints who have gone before. As Gareth Cockerill says, "This unity of the people of God throughout time is the basis upon which he now urges them to run the race set before them in response to the faithful cloud of witnesses."¹⁵

¹² Dave Bland, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Song of Songs* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2002), 312.

¹³ Michael Eaton, *Ecclesiastes* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity press, 1983), 71.

¹⁴ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 249.

¹⁵ Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 601.

This verse highlights the reality that building the kingdom of God is a multi-generational effort. It is therefore incumbent upon the older, living generation to instruct the younger generation about the relevancy of church history.

Synthesis of Themes, Values, and Commitments

This project's research topic is focused on teaching Evangelical Millennial Jesus-followers about the inspiring stories and important lessons of faith found in the early church. After examining scripture's own teaching on the necessity of learning from history, this project has its marching orders.

Each of the four biblical passages has its own emphasis. Instead of contradicting each other, their differences demonstrate their richness of teaching. Luke describes the story of the life of Jesus, the events of Pentecost, and concludes with Paul's imprisonment in Rome. In 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul uses an example of the unfaithful Israelites as a warning to believers to obey the leading of the Spirit. Ecclesiastes 1:9-10 reassures the believer that the struggle of life is universal and faithfulness is the key to finding significance and joy. Hebrews 12:1 inspires believers to follow Christ and gain the victory—just like the saints of old who now stand in the heavenly realm cheering us on.

Although each passage has its own nuance, more conspicuously they all share the same themes and values. The first is that believers are not alone in this journey of faith. The church is a body that grows and learns together, and we flourish as a family by helping each other. The second theme is that building the Kingdom of God is an on-going story that is unfolding from generation to generation. Believers of every time period are called to play a role in building the family of God for eternity. Lastly, there is the consistent teaching that believers can and should learn from the past, both good examples and bad. Romans 15:4 synthesizes the idea well, "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope."

Together, these four passages provide strong motivation and indeed obligation for the generation of mature believers living today to teach the lessons from church history to the Millennial generation. There are valuable lessons to be gleaned in the lives of those who have gone before us on the journey of faith.

SECTION 2: TOPIC HISTORY AND KEY VOICES

Topic History

Theologians and historians alike have written extensively on the early church. Ever since Luke began his gospel, "I too decided to write an orderly account . . ." scholars of every era have sought to improve or reinterpret the narrative.

The early church (defined in this project as AD 30-313) set into motion traditions and liturgies that are still practiced today. Just as critical, the expression of several doctrines, such as the dual nature of Christ and the interrelationship of the Trinity, found their expression in the early church. When heresies appeared in the centuries that followed, the defenders of orthodoxy looked back to the early church for guidance. Christians came to view the teachings of the early church as determinative and binding, often times on equal footing with the authority of scripture.

Next, we will survey how the Christian faith, and specifically church history, has been taught the past two thousand years. The content as well as the means of that teaching have varied widely.

The First Forty Years: AD 30-70

The early church, of course, did not know it was the early church. Indeed, nearly all believers living in that time period were convinced that they were in the last days and Christ's return was imminent. But from Pentecost in approximately the year AD 30 to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the nascent church was busy spreading the gospel and making the history that would come to be celebrated in the centuries that followed.

Teaching church history started as an oral tradition. "Personal witness was by far the most common method of evangelism used by Christians, but preaching in the Jewish synagogue was also a common tactic in the age of the apostles."¹⁶ The tradition quickly became a written one, and given the long tradition of Jewish literature, this is not surprising. Contained within the New Testament itself are the first written histories of the early church. From the four gospels, to the Acts of the Apostles, to Paul's itinerary found in his letters, we can piece together a picture of the church's beginnings and growth.

Liturgy Formation and Apologists: 70-400

As the Church advanced, the beliefs and practices became established. It was taught, "Since the church is one, its beliefs and practices should be uniform."¹⁷ The church immediately established two sacraments: Baptism and the Eucharist. Philip Schaff explains, "The celebration of the Eucharist or holy communion with appropriate prayers of the faithful was the culmination of Christian worship."¹⁸ Formal instruction preceded baptism and lasted between one and three years.

¹⁶ Timothy Dowley, *Introduction to the History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 58.

¹⁷ Owen Chadwick, *The Early Church, Revised Edition* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, USA, 1993), 51.

¹⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, third ed., revised, vol.2* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 235.

Christians summarized their beliefs and set them in hymns and creeds such as the Apostle's Creed, the Didache, and the Creed of Nicaea. Some early hymns predate even the New Testament letters. Tim Dowley argues, "Ephesians 5:14 and 2 Timothy 3:16 are the most likely examples of hymns from the early church."¹⁹ Because of widespread illiteracy, church history, creeds, and hymns were memorized and passed on to fellow believers.

This era also saw apologists such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus come to the defense of the faith and the history. Due to the Hellenistic influence, they had a philosophical approach to their teaching. The most prolific apologist was Origen, who was vigilant in the defense of the faith. Chadwick noted, "The defense of orthodoxy against heresy occupied much of Origen's attention."²⁰

The Medieval Church: Architecture, Artwork, Leadership: 313 - 850

With Constantine's ascension, the Church underwent immediate and dramatic changes. Owen Chadwick points out, "The earliest churches were simply private houses . . . it was not till the fourth century that churches acquired a 'public' style of architecture."²¹ Suddenly architecture became a medium in which to communicate the faith. The churches became adorned with paintings, mosaics, icons, stained glass, sculptures, and detailed woodwork. Because the masses were still predominantly illiterate, art became an important means to teach the faith and the history.

This era includes Eusebius, who gets the honorific title, "Father of Church History." Tim Dowley notes, "Eusebius was the first to attempt to write a history of the church on a grand scale."²² Another important figure at this time is Augustine of Hippo. Alvin Schmidt maintains, "Contrary to the Roman view, history has meaning, says Augustine, and as a consequence, Christians can, in part, discern God's will in the events of History."²³ The Venerable Bede

(c. 673-735), also made a contribution by formalizing the study of church history and is widely credited with creating the science of historiography.²⁴

¹⁹ Timothy Dowley, *Introduction to the History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 94.

²⁰ Owen Chadwick, *The Early Church, Revised Edition* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, USA, 1993), 104.

²¹ Chadwick, *The Early Church, Revised Edition*, 55.

²² Timothy Dowley, *Introduction to the History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 75.

²³ Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 351.

²⁴ Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the*, 351.

Monasteries, Scholasticism, and The Great Schism: 400-1100

The Middle Ages saw the establishment of monasteries across Europe. Tim Dowley states, “the earliest Christian monks appeared in the late third century. Wanting to forsake material possessions for a life of prayer and solitude, an early practitioner was Antony of Egypt.”²⁵ Beginning in the sixth century, St. Benedict of Nursia also had a dramatic impact on its growth and helped shape the institution for centuries to come.

As the Western Roman Empire waned, the Roman education system broke down and the church stepped in. Cathedral schools, which would grow to become universities, became the new educational standard. An outgrowth of this was Scholasticism: an academic approach to teaching the faith and its history.

Meanwhile a growing rift between the Roman West and the Orthodox East came to the breaking point in 1054. Daniel Clendenin explains, “In the centuries leading up to the Great Schism of 1054, political, cultural, and theological factors combined to insure the eventual divorce.”²⁶

The Protestant Reformation: 1400-1700

Historian Justo Gonzalez observes, “The sorry state of the church during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries gave impetus to various movements of reform.”²⁷ The printing press, invented by Johannes Gutenberg in 1440, made possible the wide dissemination of the Reformers’ message. Forerunners of the Reformation like John Wycliffe and Jan Huss were the first to decry publicly the abuses and erroneous theology of the Roman church. Where they left off, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli picked up. They used flyers, books, printed notices, and public debates to dissent on the state of affairs within the Church. Clashes with the Catholic Church were inevitable and Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, first published in 1563, captured the tragic bloodshed.

Music as a means of communication also changed. Growing sophistication of polyphonic chant required specialized singers to perform to the congregation, turning believers into an audience. The Reformation returned hymn singing back to the congregation. Edward Dickinson explained,

²⁵ Timothy Dowley, *Introduction to the History of Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 56.

²⁶ Daniel Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 40.

²⁷ Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church To The Dawn of The Reformation* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1984), 407.

"The Lutheran music is primarily based on the congregational hymn . . . spontaneous and democratic. Lyrics were not just praise, but included theological teaching."²⁸

As for the Reformers' view of church history, they believed the Church began a long, slow decline since the time of Augustine. To move forward, they looked back.

The Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, and Revivals: 1730-1900

As the church entered the eighteenth century, an era of skepticism began. Bruce Shelley argues, "The Enlightenment was highlighted by the denial of any supernatural religion. Respect for science and human reason replaced the Christian faith."²⁹ At all levels of society, people called into question the authority of the church and scripture. At the same time, advances in technology launched the Industrial Revolution and forever changed the world.

There was, however, the First and Second Great Awakenings that occurred as a response to these developments. The response varied: Pietism in Germany, the preaching of the Methodists in Britain, and revivalism in America. Men such as Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, John Wesley, and Charles Finney preached to the masses outdoors. Bruce Shelley argues, "Wesley's impact renewed the religious life of England and her colonies. It elevated the life of the poor. It stimulated missions overseas and the social concerns of evangelicals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."³⁰ *Teaching* church history, as it was done in the Middle Ages and the Reformation, gave way to *preaching* church history to convert the masses. Music complimented this change. Charles Wesley and Fanny Crosby would compose music for the general public experiencing revival. Stephen Marini asserts, "The experience of singing is central to revivalism."³¹

Conclusion

Teaching church history has taken many forms—each one meeting the needs of the era in which it existed. Lessons of church history have existed in ancient liturgy, they have been distilled into creeds, composed into hymns, written in apologetic exposition, taught in academic settings, and preached in mass revivals. All methods have in common the biblical admonition found within the book of Esther, "These days should be remembered and observed in every generation" (Esther 9:28).

²⁸ Edward Dickinson. *Music in the History of the Western Church: With an Introduction on Religious Music among the Primitive and Ancient People* (New York, NY: C.Scribner's Sons, 1950), 223.

²⁹ Bruce Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 309.

³⁰ Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 340.

³¹ Stephen Marini. "Hymnody as History: Early Evangelical Hymns and the Recovery of American popular Religion." *Churh History* 71, no. 2 (2002), 273.

Knowledge of church history is critical because it gives perspective to our own times. The wisdom that studying history imparts protects us against the inclination for the novel or the misguided zealotry that arises in every generation. Dr. Hannah implores, "Knowledge of the past can be preventative; it can help us separate the merely exciting, but temporary, from the enduring and eternal."³²

Key Voices of the Recent Past

This section examines the key voices who have significantly impacted the communication of the Christian faith and history the past one hundred and thirty years. By the late nineteenth century, great advances were being made in science, technology, and medicine. The Industrial Revolution was in full swing. Optimism in human capability and the advancement of society was at an all-time high. There had been two Great Awakenings in North America and widespread revival in Europe, especial Britain. Church attendance was at near-record levels and world-wide missions were at an all-time high. At the same time, liberal scholarship had begun making inroads into universities and seminaries on both sides of the Atlantic. Liberalism attacked the institution of the church as well as the inspiration and reliability of the scriptures. The Bible was no longer the inerrant word of God, but a collection of mythologies with a few moral lessons thrown in. Suddenly, and perhaps surprisingly, there was renewed interest in church history. Historians and theologians sought to better understand the development of the church's doctrines and practices. In times of great change, history often serves to give perspective and acts as a hedge against "new" but erroneous teachings.

Scholars of all theological persuasions undertook writing new perspectives on church history. Out of this milieu arose Philip Schaff's eight volume, *History of the Christian Church*. We turn our attention next to this seminal work.

Philip Schaff and "History of the Christian Church"

Philip Schaff (1819-1893) was a theologian and church historian who spent the majority of his professional career at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He was a prolific author and was the co-editor of the thirty-eight volume, *Early Church Fathers*, a collection of original sources from the Apostolic Fathers through the fourth century. This work is now deemed by scholars of all traditions as being critically important for the study of church history. He also served as President of the committee that translated the American Standard Version of the Bible before his death in 1893.

³² John D. Hannah, *Invitation to Church History: World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2018), 27.

His magnum opus however, is the eight-volume work entitled *History of the Christian Church*. In the preface to his third and final edition (completed in 1890) Schaff says, "The interest in Church History is steadily increasing in our schools and among the rising generation of scholars, and promises good results for the advancement of our common Christianity."³³

Volume one begins with an analysis of the world in which Jesus was born, taking into consideration the Jewish, Greek, and Roman influences. Volume eight concludes with the later developments of the German and Swiss Reformation. Although he is an academic, the writing is accessible to the laymen. Seminary students, pastors, and students of church history continue to utilize it as a great resource. Modern church historians credit his influence: "Philip Schaff helpfully outlined the modern emergence of Church historiography."³⁴

Schaff embodies the growing sophistication applied to church history as an academic discipline. As methodologies modernized and more ancient sources uncovered, the quality of the historian's analysis improved. There was also an increase in collaboration with other disciplines, such as archeology and historical theology, that brought refinement to the discipline. Schaff embodied all these changes while maintaining an accessibility for the Christian sitting in the pew on Sunday morning. He is considered the "Father of American Church History" because he brought together the best advances in the study of church history and set new standards for the discipline in the United States.³⁵

Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel Movement

The next key voice of the recent past belongs to a man who came to embody a powerful social movement. Walter Rauschenbusch came to exemplify the Social Gospel Movement of the early twentieth century. Rauschenbusch and the other passionate leaders belong in this discussion because all of them looked back to the early church for their inspiration. They sought to put their faith into practice to solve the urgent needs of their day, much like they saw the early church do. In an era of explosive population growth, cities had become scenes of great wealth but also desperate impoverishment. The Social Gospel Movement tried to apply Christian solutions to issues like poverty, justice, child labor, education, crime, and racial inequality. "The central concern was with

³³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christain Church, third ed., revised*, vol.1 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), iii.

³⁴ James Bradley and Richard Mueller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 11.

³⁵ James Bradley and Richard Mueller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 19.

the human problems arising from industrial strife, from the unequal distribution of wealth, and from the worsening of urban conditions for the poor."³⁶

Although other voices were involved in the movement ([Richard Ely](#) and [Washington Gladden](#)), "The leader was Walter Rauschenbusch, who was a professor of church history at Rochester Theological Seminary until his death in 1918."³⁷ Rauschenbusch was an ordained Baptist minister, serving a church in "Hell's Kitchen" (westside of Manhattan) in New York. In 1917 he wrote his groundbreaking book, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. This work provided the historical and scriptural justification for the movement and made him the leading voice of the movement.

Historian Mark Noll explains, "They were trying to solve an American dilemma—how to adapt the Protestant tradition of an earlier rural America to the changing demands of a newly industrialized society."³⁸ It was his knowledge of early church history that provided examples of how the church should act in this world. "Rauschenbusch was a scholar who had become a social reformer, and in his classroom both factors played powerfully on his students."³⁹ Writing in the 1930's, Dr. Benson Landis stated, "Rauschenbusch was the greatest single personal influence on the life and thought of the American Church in the last fifty years."⁴⁰

The Advent of Radio

The next three key voices are related because all have to do with technology. Perhaps more than any other factor, the story of the twentieth century has been marked by great leaps in technology. This changed dramatically the way the church communicates. We turn first to the invention of the radio.

Beginning in the 1920's and seemingly overnight, hundreds of radio stations across America began to broadcast news, sports, and entertainment. Religious programming followed almost immediately as ministers and evangelists of all denominations saw the potential to spread their

³⁶ Robert Handy, *The Social Gospel in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1966), 4.

³⁷ Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation To The Present Day* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1984), 343.

³⁸ Mark Noll, *A History of the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 307.

³⁹ Benson Landis, *A Rauschenbusch Reader: The Kingdom of God and the Social Gospel* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), xvii.

⁴⁰ Landis, *A Rauschenbusch Reader: The Kingdom of God and the Social Gospel*, xiii.

message. "As a tool to reach out to the people, radio was seen as useful as the printing press was to those who printed the earliest bibles."⁴¹

Paul Rader (1879-1938) was an early pioneer. A pastor at the Moody Church of Chicago, he conducted revival-style services in 1921. Soon thereafter, Rader received an invitation from the mayor of Chicago to participate in a radio broadcast. The first religious broadcast occurred on Saturday, 17 June 1922. Rader said of the new technology, "It can push out the walls of the biggest church and reach the unsaved man."⁴²

By 1925 religious groups operated one out of every ten stations in the U.S."⁴³ In 1927 Harry Emerson Fosdick broadcast his "National Vespers Hour" and reached more than two million listeners. Charles Fuller began his radio broadcast in 1937 and by the mid-1940's, his audience was estimated at twenty million. Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the Church of the Foursquare Gospel famously said, it was now possible to "carry on the winged feet of the winds, the story of hope, the words of joy, of comfort, of salvation."⁴⁴ Billy Graham began his first radio broadcast, "The Hour of Decision" in 1950, which ran uninterrupted until 2015. The substance of the Christian faith nor the teaching of Christian history did not change, but the form in which it was delivered had.

The Advent of Television

Religious programming for television has its roots in the Christian radio broadcasts of the 1920's and 1930's. Religion did not achieve widespread exposure on television until the 1950's. As with the radio, this new technology forever changed how ministers and evangelists taught the Christian faith and its history. The fundamentals are the same, but the manner in which it is delivered is new and still evolving. In this sense, a new technology becomes a new "voice."

Bishop Fulton Sheen made the leap from radio to television early. Beginning in radio in 1930, he graduated to television in 1951 and continued until 1968. His show would develop a pattern that would be replicated: a commentary on current events, highlight a need or ministry, a brief sermon,

⁴¹ Steve Greene, "Religious broadcasts in Old Time Radio," March 20, 2021, <https://www.otrcat.com/religious-broadcasts-in-old-time-radio>.

⁴² Mark Rogers, "Broadcasting the Gospel," March 19, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2010/march/broadcasting-gospel.html>.

⁴³ Rogers, "Broadcasting the Gospel," March 19, 2021.

⁴⁴ Mark Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 514.

prayer, and share news on the church at large. For his efforts, *Time* magazine called him "the first Televangelist."⁴⁵

Many well-known televangelists began in the 1960's and 1970's: Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, Fred Price and Jim and Tammy Faye Baker.⁴⁶ Others, such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, created a television presence that supported their efforts in the educational or political arena such as Falwell's, *Moral Majority* and Robertson's, *Christian Coalition*. The largest Christian broadcast television network, Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN) began in 1973 by an Assemblies of God minister named Paul Crouch. Because of the growth in satellite technology, it now operates globally under different network names. Lectures on church history are included in its programming. Justo Gonzalez comments, "Evangelical television work grew enormously. Some television preachers created and headed vast corporations for the furtherance of their work which they organized into "ministries"—a widespread phenomenon dubbed by critics "the electronic church."⁴⁷

Some segments of Christianity have criticized the development of this new technology. William Fore states, "The research shows that the electronic church consolidates and reinforces a restrictive and narrow view of religion and of the world"⁴⁸ Dr. Fore goes on to say, "Television, not the church, has come to communicate to believers what is happening in society, telling us how to behave, what to wear, who has power and who is powerless, and what to believe about the world."⁴⁹

The Internet

The last key voice, the development of the internet, includes the outgrowths of internet technology: websites, social media, podcasts, blogs, and online education.

The internet began its explosive growth in 1990's due in large part of the world wide web interface that made websites user friendly. With spectacular speed, there were hundreds of internet

⁴⁵ "Televangelism," Contemporary American Religion, Encyclopedia.com, March 20, 2021, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/legal-and-political-magazines/televangelsim>.

⁴⁶ "Televangelism," Contemporary American Religion, Encyclopedia.com, March 20, 2021, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/legal-and-political-magazines/televangelsim>.

⁴⁷ Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation To The Present Day* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1984), 489.

⁴⁸ William Fore, "Religion and Television: Report on the Research," March 19, 2021, <https://www.religion-on-line.org/author/william-f-fore>.

⁴⁹ William Fore, "Religion and Television: Report on the Research," March 19, 2021, <https://www.religion-on-line.org/author/william-f-fore>.

providers and millions of websites. By the end of the decade, it was essential to have an “internet presence” if you were a business, school, church, or government entity.

As it relates to Christian education, it is now essential to use the internet. Today, Christian colleges and seminaries offer online classes for anyone who wishes to learn. The student (consumer) does not have to be enrolled and many of the classes are free. For enrolled students working toward a degree, most universities offer hybrid curriculum that is both in-person and online.

Aside from the ease and immediacy of access to information, the internet offers an unprecedented variety of perspectives.⁵⁰ The criticism of early television was the lack of diversity: with only three channels for consumers to get their news, diversity of opinion was minimized. The criticism leveled against the internet is the opposite: the internet provides a platform for so many voices, the result can be a cacophony of ill-informed multifariousness.

Today, Christian ministries can hardly imagine an outreach that does not have at minimum, a website. Bruce Wilkerson, The Bible Project, Beth Moore, Timothy Keller, and Rick Warren all go well beyond a website and have outreaches on Twitter, You Tube, Instagram, and even TikTok. For Christian history enthusiasts, “5 Minutes in Christian History” by Dr. Stephen Nichols has an entire library of daily podcast on practically any individual or event in church history, accessible free of charge.

The largest demographic that uses the internet in America are the Millennials. If a ministry wants to try and reach this demographic, the ministry has to take advantage of the opportunities this powerful tool provides.

Conclusion

The growth of Christianity the past two thousand years demonstrates God’s providential care for his children and the victorious march of his kingdom. Although we divide the past into time periods, Christian history is in fact a seamless progression of divine governance that sometimes appears to be in the foreground of human activity, but oftentimes unfolds in the background. Historian John Hannah argues, “God’s creative and constant providential power and love finds its purpose and end in a divine display of himself.”⁵¹ Church history provides perhaps the most convincing proof that God is active in guiding the affairs of his church and children. Dr. Hannah contends, “Recorded history is the story of God gathering his ‘new people’.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Christian Piatt, “Is the Internet Killing Christianity?” March 20, 2021, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/is-the-internet-killing-c_b_5921324.

⁵¹ John D. Hannah, *Invitation to Church History: World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2018), 10.

⁵² Hannah, *Invitation to Church History*, 10.

Teaching church history instructs the younger generation that the past is a valuable guide for the present. Philip Schaff observed, "Every age has a message from God to man, which is of the greatest importance for man to understand."⁵³ Those of us living now have at our disposal two thousand years of learning of what the church got right and where it missed the mark. It is incumbent upon the living, older generation, to share these lessons with the Millennial generation that is now coming of age. They will soon be in positions of church leadership. As Philip Schaff taught, "Church history is the backbone of theology and the storehouse from which it derives its supplies. It is the best commentary of Christianity itself"⁵⁴

SECTION 3: SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

Agreement and Consensus

In the centuries of scholarship that followed the early church period, there has been a consensus among all traditions that teaching early church history has enduring value. We turn next to examine some of the specific areas of agreement that this celebrated history bestows upon the present-day church.

The first area of agreement is that teaching early church history is inspirational for Christians living today. There is much to admire about the believers of the early church and their example continues to inspire the living to be as committed to their faith as the early Christians. From Pentecost onwards, the church was courageous in its convictions and relentless in sharing the faith to anyone who would listen.

In his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, historian Rodney Stark asks, "Finally, all questions concerning the rise of Christianity are one: How was it done? How did a tiny and obscure messianic movement from the edge of the Roman Empire dislodge classical paganism and become the dominant faith of Western civilization?"⁵⁵ The answer is a bold and living faith that refuses to cower in the face of opposition. These examples should be remembered and taught to every generation.

A second area of agreement is that the history of the early church is still relevant for those living today. Although it has been approximately two thousand years since the days of the Apostles, in the most critical of ways, the human condition and the life of faith remains the same. We can relate

⁵³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christain Church,third ed., revised*, vol.1 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 21.

⁵⁴ Schaff, *History of the Christain Church,third ed., revised*, vol.1, 20.

⁵⁵ Rodney Stark. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominat Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3.

to the struggles of the early church because their struggles are not so different than ours. Historian Philip Schaff maintained, "The history of the church has practical value for every Christian, as a storehouse of warning and encouragement, of consolation and counsel."⁵⁶ Because early church history remains relevant, our own faith can mature if we pay attention to the many lessons history has to offer. "History can help believers to grasp the breadth and width of the human journey towards God."⁵⁷

The third and final area of consensus is that studying church history keeps the present-day church from falling into error. The lessons learned from the past protect the church from radical "new" ideas or charismatic charlatans that wish to lead others astray. This collective memory of the past is a hedge that protects us from evil within and without. N.T. Wrights argues, "Without historical enquiry there is no check on Christianity's propensity to remake Jesus, never mind the Christian God, in its own image."⁵⁸

Tensions and Disagreements

As can be expected, there are areas of tension and disagreement about how best to teach early church history. The oldest and most predominant disagreement has to do with the authority of the early church. The early church set a precedent, but is it determinative for the rest of church history? Are its teachings and declarations on equal footing with scripture? Throughout the centuries, these questions have been answered most clearly along an East-West divide. The Eastern Orthodox tradition gives special prominence to the first seven Ecumenical Councils and indeed their teachings are binding on the universal church thereafter.⁵⁹ This understanding is at odds with the Protestant interpretation.

A second tension is in the area of conservative versus liberal scholarship. Coming of age in the early nineteenth century, liberalism tried to reconfigure traditional Christian teaching in the light of modern knowledge and values.⁶⁰ This theological approach spills over into the interpretation of

⁵⁶ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christain Church*, third ed., revised, vol.1 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 21.

⁵⁷ Philippe Denis, "On Teaching Christian History in the Postmodern World." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019): 7.

⁵⁸ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*. First North American ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 10.

⁵⁹ Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994) p.38.

⁶⁰ George Sinclair, "'Conservative' and 'Liberal' Christianity," *The Gospel Coalition Canada*, April 7, 2019, <http://www.ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/conservative-and-liberal-christianity/>.

church history, often removing the supernatural element of the spread of the gospel and replacing it with social and political reconstructionism. Adherents of liberal scholarship would consider themselves to be modern, relevant, and progressive—and they would consider conservatives to be less accommodating. Conservatives, on the other hand, take a harder line against new cultural ideologies. They declare the timeless truths of historical, orthodox, biblically-based faith that was once and for all entrusted to the saints. Conservative scholarship considers itself to be more faithful to the authority of scripture, more historically consistent, and truer to the early church's teachings and practices. Although these battle lines were drawn over a century ago, the division persists even today.

Gaps in the Literature and Limitations

The gap that exists is not on the scholarship of the early church; there has never been a shortage of excellent research from various points of view. Rather, the niche to be filled is effectively communicating the inspiring stories of the early church to the mainstream Millennial Christian. These examples of faith provide insight and they are not currently being effectively communicated to evangelical, Millennial Christians—and they need to be.

Church attendance for Millennials is decreasing and Dr. John Clay has uncovered a worrisome trend. "Millennials' participation has progressively dropped over the last ten years."⁶¹ At the same time the online space for both church and education continue to grow (expedited by the world-wide Covid pandemic) and no generation takes advantage of this technology like the Millennials. Currently, a general survey of the multitude of Christian websites reveals there are only a few that cover church history for the non-specialist.

Conclusion

This portfolio project aims to develop a series of online talks that teach the inspiring stories of the early church. The brief talks would be accessible on a website and in the style of educational (and compelling) Ted Talks. In his book, *Ted Talks: The Official TED Guide to Public Speaking*, Chris Anderson argues, "Your number one mission as a speaker is to take something that matters deeply to you and to rebuild it inside the minds of your listeners."⁶² This project could successfully develop

⁶¹ John E. Clay, Jr., "A Project to Discover the Use of Social Media Apps to Attract and Welcome Millennials into the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America" (PhD diss., South University, 2020), 1.

⁶² Chris Anderson, *Ted Talks: The Official TED Guide to Public Speaking* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), p.12.

this opportunity and share the inspirational stories of the early church. As this project moves forward, determining the exact shape and scope of this online ministry will be focus.

Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

NPO STATEMENT

Millennial and Generation Z Jesus-followers will be educated and inspired in their Christian faith by learning from the experiences of the Early Church.

NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS

The non-negotiables with this project include creating an educational website that teaches relevant and inspiring lessons from Early Church History. Millennials and Generation Z are the target audience. The website and perhaps one or two other platforms, such as TikTok or Instagram, will help build the audience. The specific costs have not yet been determined, but a range of \$500 - \$800 is the forecasted estimate. Because of the willingness of a few key volunteers in the area of website design and audio/video production, the potential cost, and therefore the risk, has been greatly reduced.

NPO CONTEXT

The ministry setting for this NPO is completely online and therefore, the outreach of this ministry is not geographically constrained. The target audience includes Millennials (born between 1980-1995) and Generation Z (born after 1995). They will be English speaking and predominantly Evangelical in their faith tradition. However, a deliberate choice is being made to create the *Ted Talk Style* videos free from denominational bias. Furthermore, although having a Western perspective is inescapable, there will be a concerted effort to highlight developments in the Early Church that influenced other traditions of Christianity. Therefore, there will be an understated ecumenical theme to this project: history teaches there is more that unites us than divides us.

ROOT CAUSES

From my research this past year and from the insights gained during the workshop and interviews, it became evident that there are several root causes as to why this NPO has not been addressed before. The first is the widespread opinion that history is boring. It is viewed as an academic subject that belongs in the classroom. Taking time to study history is not seen as a priority once an individual leaves school and begins their ministry. The second cause is that it is not considered essential for an individual's spiritual growth. Christians attend church, perhaps take time for daily scripture reading, or attend a Bible study during the week. But reading church history is not considered to be essential. Lastly, as one member of the workshop observed, our modern world is so different from most of Church history that it is difficult to draw lessons from the past while living in today's sophisticated, global culture.

THREE BIG IDEAS

- 1.) Website only; includes six videos, each video lasting five-seven minutes each
- 2.) Website plus brief videos on TikTok to help build my community of followers
- 3.) Website plus posts on Instagram to help build my community of followers

DEFINITION OF 'DONE'

The visitors who interact with this online teaching ministry will be inspired in their faith because of the historical example of the early church. Comments and feedback evaluation capability on the website will be the primary way to measure the project's impact.

3 CONCEPT PITCHES

Pitch #1

Big Idea: A well-designed website for an online educational ministry. It will be the "home base" even if other online platforms are used in the future.

Audience: The website is designed for English speaking Evangelical Christians who belong to the Millennial and Generation Z demographic.

NPO: Millennial and Generation Z Jesus-followers will be educated and inspired in their Christian faith by learning from the experiences of the Early Church.

Benefit: By learning that early church history is relevant to the present, Christians will learn to live in our modern world with wisdom and confident faith.

Approach: The website will provide a series of brief, *Ted Talk Style* videos, providing insight for an informed and bold faith that meets today's challenges.

Risks: The project could sputter if the website fails to reach an audience or it does not transform the visitor's faith.

Assumptions to test: A website presenting early church history reaches an audience that finds the material relevant and inspiring for living in today's modern world.

Benchmark for success: There are several back-end metrics that will track the number of visitors, time spent on webpage, returning traffic, shared links, etc.

Other Approaches: My approach is unique and I have not been able to find anything else online that is similar. I will teach how the early Christians met the challenges of their times and successfully shared the Gospel to an opposing, cruel, and pagan Roman Empire.

Pitch #2:

Added to the website will be a series of sixty second videos placed on TikTok. This platform will be used as a marketing outreach to capture and direct more traffic to the website. This added exposure can potentially direct thousands of people in my demographic to the website. It is a proven strategy but one that is not yet tired or overly done.

Big Idea: A well-designed website for an online educational ministry. It is the "home base," used in combination with TikTok to help direct traffic to the website.

Audience: The website is designed for English speaking Evangelical Christians who belong to the Millennial and Generation Z demographic.

NPO: Millennial and Generation Z Jesus-followers will be educated and inspired in their Christian faith by learning from the experiences of the Early Church.

Benefit: By learning that early church history is relevant to the present, Christians will learn to live in our modern world with wisdom and confident faith.

Approach: The website will provide a series of brief, *Ted Talk Style* videos, providing insight for an informed and bold faith that meets today's challenges.

Risks: The project could sputter if the website fails to reach an audience or it does not transform the visitor's faith.

Assumptions to test: A website presenting early church history reaches an audience that finds the material relevant and inspiring for living in today's modern world.

Benchmark for success: There are several back-end metrics that will track the number of visitors, time spent on webpage, returning traffic, shared links, etc.

Other Approaches: My approach is unique and I have not been able to find anything else online that is similar. I will teach how the early Christians met the challenges of their times and successfully shared the Gospel to an opposing, cruel, and pagan Roman Empire.

Pitch #3:

Added to the website will be quotes from early church fathers and scripture placed frequently on Instagram. This platform will be used as a marketing outreach to capture and direct more traffic to the website. This added exposure can potentially direct thousands of people in my demographic to the website.

Big Idea: A well-designed website for an online educational ministry. It is the “home base,” used in combination with Instagram to help direct traffic to the website.

Audience: The website is designed for English speaking Evangelical Christians who belong to the Millennial and Generation Z demographic.

NPO: Millennial and Generation Z Jesus-followers will be educated and inspired in their Christian faith by learning from the experiences of the Early Church.

Benefit: By learning that early church history is relevant to the present, Christians will learn to live in our modern world with wisdom and confident faith.

Approach: The website will provide a series of brief, *Ted Talk Style* videos, providing insight for an informed and bold faith that meets today’s challenges.

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Assumptions to test: A website presenting early church history reaches an audience that finds the material relevant and inspiring for living in today’s modern world.

Benchmark for success: There are several back-end metrics that will track the number of visitors, time spent on webpage, returning traffic, shared links, etc.

Other Approaches: My approach is unique and I have not been able to find anything else online that is similar. I will teach how the early Christians met the challenges of their times and successfully shared the Gospel to an opposing, cruel, and pagan Roman Empire.

DESIGN WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS

Millennial male (Production Director)

Millennial female

Generation Z female (Minister)

Generation Z male college student

Millennial male (Minister)

Generation X male (Website Developer)

Generation X male (Minister)

Millennial male

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

- A Director for Fuller Seminary's online platform.
- Generation X professor of Christian Ministries, Theology, and the Arts.
- Professor of Church History with George Fox University.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Langager, Aimee Nichole. "Use of Social Media in Undergraduate Communication Classes." PhD diss., Iowa State University, 2015. Iowa State University Digital Repository.

This dissertation examines social media as an educational platform. It was a qualitative study using interviews to understand the experiences of instructors who use social media in their teaching practices. The results indicated that being aware of new platforms and uses, in addition to current trends and issues in social media, allowed for engaging discussions. The instructors felt that social media offered opportunities for collaborative learning that supported their learning objectives. While instructors said there were challenges in adapting social media for classroom use, they felt that is added enough value to their courses to continue. The author reveals that social media platforms have credibility for educational purposes, not just for personal connections. This finding confirms my suspicions that a website, with outreaches on Instagram or TikTok, on the subject of early church history, can reach Millennials and Generations Z.

Belfer, Joshua, Lance Feld, Rashi Kabra, and Stephen Barone. "44. Do it for the "Gram": Using Instagram to Educate the Millennial Learner." *Academic Pediatrics* 20, no. 7 (2020): E22.

Millennials spend upwards of 2.5 hours on social media every day. Research has shown that millennials have a characteristic learning style and they want their teaching to be creative. "The objective of this study is to demonstrate the utility of social media for the advancement of medical education." The chief residents at a large pediatric residency program created an Instagram page through which educational material is posted. Short stories were posted on the account on a regular basis to share learning with other students. The results were positive: 985 of the residents found the postings helpful and educational. This research shows how online education is not just about a classroom setting but rather learning can take place on a variety of platforms using nontraditional methods. The results inform my own approach to teaching a subject that has not been taught in such a manner.

Heggde, Githa., and Shainesh, G. *Social Media Marketing: Emerging Concepts and Applications*. 1st Ed. 2018. ed. Singapore: Springer Singapore: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Social media has become a behemoth in marketing and advertising across the globe. This book focuses on how social media is rewriting the rules for all industries. Discussion revolves around brand building, customer engagement, and customization. This book identifies trends and popular concepts and then applies this research into best applications for different industries. This book gives me a bird's eye view of the possibilities of creating content and marketing that content on social media. There are also plenty of warnings for the pitfalls to avoid. Because I do not yet know my exact marketing plan for my website, this book provides strategies for me to consider.

Kasey, Robert. *TikTok Marketing for Entrepreneurs: The beginner's guide to grow your business with Tiktok and Influencers Marketing*. Seattle: Self-published, 2021.

I am considering the possibility of using TikTok as a marketing platform for my website. TikTok has seen exponential growth over the past few years. There are now over 2 billion downloads of the app worldwide, with users coming from over 150 countries. Content creators are artisans, musicians and educators. There has also been a recent move by corporations to use the app as a platform for marketing. Robert Kasey published this book independently and it is available on Amazon. The fact that the book is not carried by a traditional publisher should not be seen as a shortcoming. TikTok is cutting edge and fast moving and this book captures the urgency of what the phenomena is creating.

Powers, David. *PHP 7 Solutions: Dynamic Web Design Made Easy*. Berkeley, CA: Apress L. P, 2019.

The book is for the individual who wants to create their own website. It is basic enough for the beginner, yet sophisticated enough for a creator to give their website a look that is not elementary. Functionality coupled with design is kept as the priority. Search engine efficiency is also an important consideration. I have created my own website before (while working in the property management field), so I am not a beginner but I do need to educate myself in this technology. For my Project Portfolio to succeed, a dynamic website is an absolute must. This book aids in that endeavor.

APPENDICES

DESIGN WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

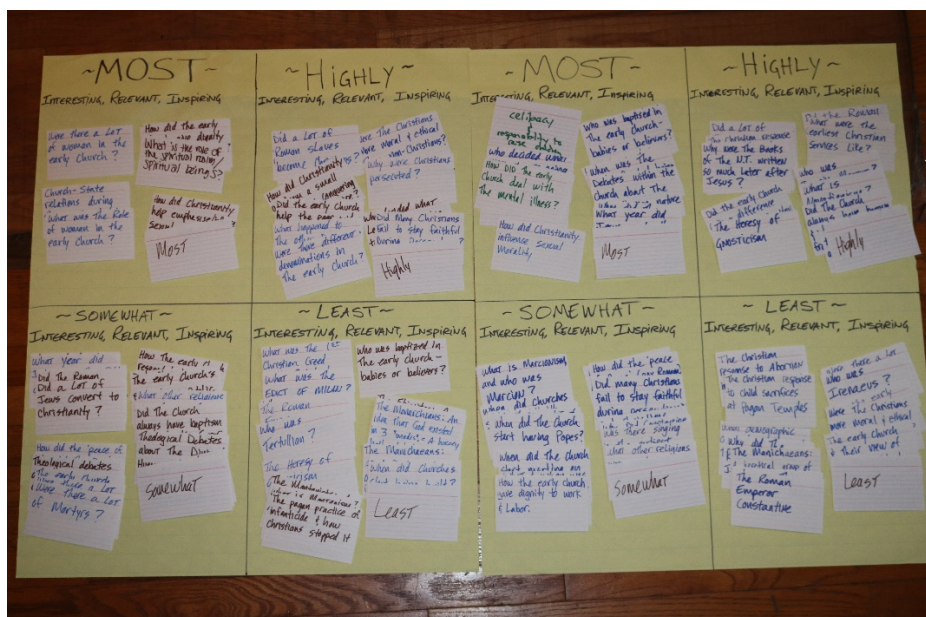
I held my Design Workshop at Northwest Christian Church, Newberg, Oregon, on Tuesday October 19th, 2021. It lasted approximately five hours but afterwards many participants lingered to have additional time with me to discuss their ideas. The workshop began at 10:00 a.m. and by the time I finished those conversations and cleaned the conference room, it was after 4:00 p.m. There were eight participants, nine including myself. Because last year I had several last-minute cancellations, I invited several more than the required five to seven. I invited ten potential participants, and this year eight attended. They include: a Millennial male who serves as the Production Director for all audio and video requirements for the church and their online platform; a Millennial female who assists in the audio and video production at the same large church; a Generation Z female who is the Director of Ministries at a large Christian church; a male Generation Z college student at George Fox University who also works at a large Christian church as a Family Ministries Intern; a Millennial male who recently graduated from George Fox University and is a leader of Student Ministries at a large Christian church; a Generation X male who is the Communications Director/Website Developer for a large Christian church; a Generation X male Minister at a Christian church in Tigard, Oregon; a Millennial male Youth Minister at a Christian church in Tigard, Oregon.

The workshop consisted of four main activities. The first was called *Card Sort* and it required the participants to place 3 x 5 index cards with a wide variety of subjects on Early Church History written on them into different categories of interest. Subjects included famous individuals, important debates, and critical historical events. The second activity was called *The 4 C's*, and the goal was to examine the different technological platforms that might be best used for my project. The third activity was called *Atomize*. The group's aim was to break down all the possible components of this project into its smallest parts and see what can be included and what parts can be left out. The fourth and final activity was called *20-20 Vision*. This helped the group to prioritize the next steps needed for this project to become the most effective in reaching an audience.

The workshop went better than expected and proved more fruitful than last year. I began the workshop by building interest for Early Church History and the goals of my project. The participants enthusiastically shared their opinions. Several times throughout the workshop people were talking over each other to be heard and I had to play the role of teacher and quiet down the class. But the over-talking was always focused on the subject and everyone was fully engaged. On the Likert Scale, I would rank the workshop as a five (strongly agree), the highest ranking possible. This workshop was a success and an important step in the development of my Project Portfolio.

DESIGN WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

Below are pictures of the workshop location and activities I led on Tuesday, October 19th, 2021.



COMPONENTS	CHARACTERISTICS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • website - visual aids, graphics, TikTok, social media, Instagram, Youtube, Partnerships, guests, shoutouts on social media, Podcasts, interviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to other websites • Giveaways • Tribal Belonging & insider language
CHALLENGES	CHARACTERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT Specialties • Cost (Grants, scholarships, etc.?) • Time • MVP (Minimum Viable Product) • Stage 1: Content Creation / Fed. trials • Stage 2: Marketing / Platforming • Stage 3: Gimmicks / Niche / • Stage 4: Partnerships • Attention span 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website Developer (live online, videos, emails, etc.) • Web/Graphic Designer (visuals, graphics, logo, etc.) • Partnerships / Influencers (Bible Project) • Similar Content Creators • People to test materials • Early Adopters (17%) • Patreon (fund projects)

HOME BASE WEBSITE		EXERCISE 3	PRIORITIES - 20/20 vision Moving Forward	EX 4
		INITIATIVE	BENEFITS	
<p>Social Media (MVP - with different content on each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc. • Hook + BAIT • Not as many than 2 or 3 platforms! • If TikTok, then 50-60 sec. video to build following 	<p>NEW BRAND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • website = "my boat" • new name • "Church History with Tray" • Separate my "product" from me • Consistent theme; colors; font • Find my voice; find my niche • Blog • Intuitive • Rely on Experts? 	<p>complete 4-6 "talks"</p> <p>Website Development</p> <p>Improve Time - Line</p> <p>Brand (Product Line)</p> <p>Distribution (e-mail, social media, etc.)</p> <p>Funding</p> <p>Content for Social media</p>	<p>The Critical Component</p> <p>Attractive, simple & Compelling</p> <p> succinct, helpful</p> <p>Repeat to grow the ideal niche</p> <p>Don't be like anyone else</p> <p>Next steps if it ends up striking a chord</p> <p>Choose 2 or 3 platforms <u>only</u>.</p>	

ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

Thank you for your much-appreciated participation in my workshop held on Tuesday, October 19th at Northwest Christian Church. Because of your willingness to share your ideas, I have a sharper clarity on the different aspects of this project, as well as fresh ideas and new directions. This would not have happened without your eagerness to share your opinions and engage with this subject. My goal remains unchanged: "Evangelical Millennial and Generation Z Jesus-followers will be educated and inspired in their faith by learning from the experience of the Early Church."

I took away three big ideas from our time together that I want to share them with you. The first is the consensus that I should create a website as my "Homebase" for this project, even if I use other platforms. The second was the opinion that the *Ted Talk* video presentations should be only five to seven minutes each—or I run the risk of my target audience tuning out. The third takeaway was the specific subjects to address in Early Church history: I cannot be afraid to wade into theological controversies, such as the deity of Christ or the Trinity.

The benchmarks for success will be measured not only by the number of website visitors, but also on how well my target audience considers the lessons from the early church. My next step is to create prototype video presentations to learn what material to include and what to discard. If you have any additional comments, please reach out to me anytime.

Thank you,

Troy Rappold

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS DOCUMENTATION

Interview #1: The Director and Editor for Fuller Seminary's online teaching platform, "Fuller Studio"

I. Church History Questions

A. Yes theological debates could be interesting to the younger generation if presented correctly.

-Don't be afraid to discuss theological disagreements. People argued rigorously about this and so it is an important part of church history. These debates shaped our creeds.

-Show how current debates might split the church today to bring in relevancy. Abortion, gay marriage, racism for example. Why do these issues matter? Why is it important to have a Christian response?

B. It would be good also to focus on key individuals, leaders in the church. Don't paint them as saints but as humans living in an age of struggle who relied on their faith. How did they shape the church? What was their contribution?

-Don't "dumb it down" but challenge people. Don't talk to the audience like their Jr. high school students. Be relevant and talk about issues back then that also exist in today's society.

-Focus also on the Eastern church; don't just talk about western Europe's history of Christianity.

-Don't be too abstract about the history, explain why it matters and the ongoing effects on the church today. For example, talk about Gnosticism but as an illustration use a modern-day example that is similar to Gnostic beliefs.

II. Questions about the technical side of my project

A. Critical to have good lighting and sound for the filming of the talks. Must consider aspects like pacing, editing. I have to think of it as a performance.

-It is good to speak fast, but not hurried. Quickly speak so I don't bore my audience, but be articulate.

-He thinks 5-7 minutes long is about right. Fuller Studio found this out by doing extensive research. If I want to go longer, consider a Podcast instead of, or in addition to, the talks.

-Be authentic, enthusiastic, and speak the truth, I don't need to "sell it". *There is a gravitational pull to truth.* I don't need to spin it. Don't have an agenda, the younger generation can sniff that out in an instant.

B. Web design is very trendy. If I'm going to have a website, don't be afraid to change it from time to time so it doesn't appear outdated. Be flexible and open to changes and new ideas.

-Don't spend a lot of money on the front end to at least get a website up and running. There will be plenty of time in the future to make changes and make it more sophisticated.

-At the end of the talk maybe ask a few questions to let the audience think about. Don't spoon-feed them.

-Memorize the talk! No notes allowed. Ted-Talk style is good, try to emulate that.

-There will be some post-production needed. That takes time and is a specialized task. I need to have someone for that.

*Interview #2: A Generation X Professor of Christian Ministries, Theology, and the Arts, who is also an officially licensed movie critic for *Rotten Tomatoes*.*

A. Focus on key figures in the history and the larger narrative that guides the story.

-Tell their stories; people love to hear good stories.

-Connect the ancient history to modern day to make it relevant; always try to tie the history to modern times.

-Don't be afraid to discuss theology, it was an important part of the early church.

B. Be prepared to write and rewrite the script several times. Same with the actual taping of the presentation. Practice it a dozen times and be ready to film it another dozen times.

-Add a personal element to it. Genuine, not like a marketing video.

-I'm trying to marry two worlds: Church History + performance. Work hard to make it look effortless, but not overly polished.

-He likes the idea of TikTok more than Instagram. That would be a great way to capture a wider audience.

-He pointed me towards Romans 5, Lamentations 3, Hebrews 10. "Faith is looking back at God's promises. Hope is looking forward to God's future promises."

Interview #3: An experienced professor of Church History with George Fox University

I. Target audience is critical; tailor my talks to a specific niche, not for everyone.

A. Study some aspects of the Millennial Generation and Generation Z and put those lessons into practice.

-What's keeping the church going if most people are illiterate? Talk about the formation of the canon. If the Bible is authoritative for Christians today, then what was authoritative in the church before the canon was officially assembled? Circulation of letters? Why did the bishops come to have so much power?

-Mysticism was part of the early church; talk about the emphasis on mysticism. Connect these ideas to modern day.

-There were no churches in this time period, they were all house churches. How did it grow?

B. Don't be afraid to go into theological controversies.

-Theories of Atonement, sanctification, recapitulation, the nature of sin: (west = moral, forgiveness); (east = estrangement) all are fair game. The tricky part is to make it accessible and relevant.

- It would also be worth talking about Christology. People debated about the correct understanding: an over-divine Christ is unrelatable; an over-human Christ and it leads to legalism and emulation.

-Trinity debates are important. Is the economy of the trinity social/relational? Or is it more hierarchical? Huge implications and very important. Again, the tricky part is to explain this succinctly and in an interesting way.

-Mention persecution but don't over-do it. This point is frequently exaggerated.

-Gnosticism! Our current world is gnostic; point out the areas of our world. It will open the eyes of the younger generation. Directly relates to present-day.

Appendix D—Milestone 4 Design Research Report

PROTOTYPE SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

- Prototype Description:** My prototype consists of two parts: a website with educational videos and a secondary platform such as Tik Tok to use for marketing the website and building an audience. The first step was to create a basic website (at this stage at least) where I could upload the videos. I wanted to create some other content for the website, and not just have videos, so I created a few extra pages that I hope will hold the interest of a visitor. The website address is www.TroyRappold.com. The domain name is reserved and paid for and the website is hosted by HostGator. I planned to make each educational video between six to ten minutes. Each of these videos will focus on a different aspect of early church history. When complete, a total of six to eight videos is planned for this project. The second part of this prototype involved using the Tik Tok platform to help market the website and build an audience. Sixty second videos were planned to be created and uploaded to their platform so viewers worldwide are able to watch them. As I describe later, this part of the prototype was changed.
- NPO Statement:** Evangelical Millennial Jesus-followers will be nurtured and inspired in their faith by learning from the experience of the early church.
- Research Question:** I have two research questions in this project. The first: What are the characteristics of Millennials and how can I get them to respond to my teaching about the early church? The second question: What similar parallels exist between the early church and today's church? Both questions will need clear answers for this Project Portfolio to be a success.
- Assessment Benchmarks:** There will be two rounds of questions and interviews with my volunteers. This will help me get a clearer understanding of the effectiveness of the content. For example: What parts did you find inspiring and what parts did you find boring? Was the history relevant to you? Does this information affect how you perceive your own faith experience? Does watching the lessons make you want to engage your culture differently?
- Participant Description:** I recruited individuals from Northwest Christian Church, which has three campuses: Tigard, Newberg, and McMinnville, Oregon. I work and attend at both the Tigard and Newberg campuses. Because the target audience are Millennials, all participants, with the exception of one (who belongs to Generation Z and just missed the cut-off point), belong to the Millennial generation.
- Summary of What I Learned:** The website creation was easier than expected, but it is only a basic website at this stage. If it needs to become any more sophisticated, I will most likely need to hire a website developer. The videos I made were very well received by my evaluators. Everyone loved the content but my delivery needs to be improved. After the first round of evaluations, I took their advice and tried not to be so serious and academic on my second take. I became a little more relaxed, animated, and allowed my natural enthusiasm for the project show. I had technical assistance from the audio/video expert at the church

and they allowed me to use the teleprompter, which was helpful. I had never used a teleprompter before but after a few minutes of practice, I became comfortable using it. But there is still room for improvement in my delivery. After the first take, I also made some changes to the transcript and the writing became stronger. The take away that most encourages me was the content of the video itself. Everyone seemed genuinely interested in the material and wanted to know more about early church history. This is the most critical part of the entire project and to hear such positive remarks gives me confidence that I am on the right track.

- **My Most Important discovery:** The second part of the prototype was supposed to be sixty second videos uploaded to Tik Tok to help build an audience and market the longer videos on the website. I uploaded two of these but learned quickly Tik Tok videos have an incredibly short life span. There are over one billion users on Tik Tok and millions of videos are uploaded daily. To be relevant and continue to get exposure, I would need to create new content almost daily. There is not enough material to do this, nor do I have the time to create and upload so much content. The solution was to use a different platform and I chose to use Instagram. I created four different Instagram posts and this approach will work better for what I am trying to accomplish. I received positive feedback about the postings from my volunteers. I put my website address on all four posts so viewers can find the videos and learn more about the early church if they wish. Instagram proved to be a better fit for this project.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH ESSAY ON THE EMERGING SOLUTION

As I develop my Project Portfolio, there are two gaps in my knowledge that require additional research. The first gap concerns my understanding of my target audience, the Millennials. "Anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 26 to 41 in 2022) is considered a Millennial, and anyone born from 1997 onward is part of a new generation."⁶³ Worldwide, their number is estimated at 1.8 billion. They hold an identifiable set of attitudes, tendencies, and values. The better I understand this group, the more relevant and engaging the church history lessons will be. The following is a list of the four most important traits about this demographic that I need to further understand.

The first trait that Millennials share is technological sophistication. They grew up with ubiquitous computers, the internet, cell phones and video games. "What has shaped the Millennial experience

⁶³ Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," *Pew Research Center*, January 17, 2019, <http://www.pewresearch.org/facttank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

of the world is not an event, but an evolution—specifically, the evolution of technology.”⁶⁴ They feel comfortable with technology at home, in the work place, or for entertainment. It has been an integral part of their lives since childhood. Technology therefore plays a critical role in communicating to Millennials. “Communicating effectively to Millennials goes beyond understanding their worldview; it also requires a grasp of modern technology and electronic communication.”⁶⁵ Because my project is using technology to communicate the history of the early church this dynamic is necessary for me to understand. Houston goes on to say, “The Millennial generation has grabbed hold of the technological advances of the previous years and has mastered the use and ease of the system.”⁶⁶ It is therefore essential to make use of the best technology for my project to be successful.

The good news is my project incorporates online technology and therefore it has great potential to reach my audience. The latest research confirms the ability of online education to reach the Millennial audience. Bruce Carlin says, “Demand for online educational content and related video services has exploded over the last few years, suggesting that we are experiencing a global paradigm shift in the way people access education.”⁶⁷ But I must also be careful to use technology correctly and not allow it to get in the way of the message I am trying to convey. Arlen Meyers says to those trying to reach Millennials, “Embrace technologies, but don’t let technologies get in the way of learning.”⁶⁸ This means that I need to use the technology intelligently, where it helps the educational experience, and does not hinder it. Always keeping the end user in mind is the guiding principle.

The second area needing further research into Millennials is that they are *spiritual* but not *religious*. Another way researchers describe this characteristic is to say that Millennials are passionate about values but not necessarily interested in institutional religion. Cameron Wooten states, “Millennials are no longer choosing to identify themselves with religion. They remain content with calling

⁶⁴ Alexander G. Houston, “How to Effectively Engage in Ministry with the Millennial Generation: Developing a Contextualized Intergenerational Church Through Millennial Outreach” (PhD diss., Drew university, 2015), 1, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁶⁵ Philippe Denis, “On Teaching Christian History in the Postmodern World,” *Hervormde Theologiese Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019), 6.

⁶⁶ Alexander G. Houston, “How to Effectively Engage in Ministry with the Millennial Generation: Developing a Contextualized Intergenerational Church Through Millennial Outreach” (PhD diss., Drew university, 2015), 16, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁶⁷ Bruce Carlin, Li Jian, Stephen Spiller, “Millennial-Style Learning: Search Intensity, Decision Making, and Information Sharing,” *Management Science* 64, no. 7, (2018), 3313.

⁶⁸ Arlen Meyers, “A Boomers Guide to Teaching Millennials,” *Disruptor League*, June 10, 2018, <https://www.disruptorleague.com/wpcomstaging.com/2018/11/30/a-boomers-guide-to-teaching-and-working-with-millennials>.

themselves spiritual."⁶⁹ Although this might at first glance seem a pessimistic view, there is reason for great hope. They are intensely interested in the larger questions of life, the human soul, what lies beyond the grave—but they have apprehension about the rigidity of formalized religion. Optimistically, Alexander Houston says of Millennials, "There is not a lack of seeking to answer the great existential questions that humanity has asked for generations."⁷⁰

Although this generation is searching into many different spiritual paths, there is not an adversity towards Christianity or towards Jesus in particular. Bolashade Hanson says in his dissertation, "This generation is craving a way to understand how to connect to Christ in an authentic way that relates to the world they live in and the lifestyle they lead."⁷¹ Christianity certainly has competitors for the minds of the Millennials as other research suggests. Cameron Wooten states, "Millennials desire to formulate a set of values forged by the unification of the various cultures and ethnicities of their environment, simultaneously receptive to them and accepted by them."⁷² Lastly, Wooten goes on to observe the dire condition of the Millennials and what is at stake: "Millennials are striving to just stay afloat, drifting from experience to experience, searching for something authentic to give their life purpose and meaning."⁷³

The third area is the fact that Millennials thrive on personal relationships and want to be valued. This is true in the workplace as well as the classroom. "Millennials strive on personal relationships . . . they prefer and appreciate instructors showing a personal interest."⁷⁴ They do not want to be viewed as a commodity or a statistic, but wish to be recognized as a unique individual with something to contribute. Despite the online nature of this project, keeping this in mind will enable

⁶⁹ Cameron Wayne Wooten, "Trinitarian and Epistemological Implications for Spiritual Formation Among Millennials" (DMin., Southeastern Theological Seminary, 2016), 13, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁷⁰ Alexander Houston, "How to Effectively Engage in Ministry with the Millennial Generation: Developing a Contextualized Intergenerational Church Through Millennial Outreach" (PhD diss., Drew university, 2015), 5, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁷¹ Bolashade O. Hanson, "Branding Faith: Do Christian Ministries Reach Millennials with Branding?" (PhD Diss., Liberty University, 2016), 33, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁷² Cameron Wayne Wooten, "Trinitarian and Epistemological Implications for Spiritual Formation Among Millennials" (DMin., Southeastern Theological Seminary, 2016), 12, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁷³ Cameron Wayne Wooten, "Trinitarian and Epistemological Implications for Spiritual Formation Among Millennials" (DMin., Southeastern Theological Seminary, 2016), 13, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁷⁴ John Laskaris, "How to Engage Millennials: 5 Important Moves," March 5, 2016, <https://www.efrontlearning.com/blog/2016/03/5-strategies-to-engage-the-millennials.html>.

my project to reach them. Alexander Houston's research agrees, "The Church must be willing to meet young adults where they are and not simply reference them as commodities."⁷⁵

Of course, this concern is true to every generation. But it does seem to be especially vocalized by Millennials. Michael Dimock clarifies: "Generations are a *lens* through which to understand societal change, rather than a *label* with which to oversimplify differences between groups."⁷⁶ Scripture has a way of speaking to *individuals* more powerfully than human rhetoric. As I create my early church educational videos, there will be moments to quote scripture. Cameron Wooten's dissertation argues, "A return to Scripture will begin to address the heart-felt needs of Millennials in helping them find significance in something beyond themselves."⁷⁷ The history of the early church is fertile ground for addressing the importance of friendship and being valued as an individual. The early church grew in part because these very human needs were being addressed in a community of faith and love. Exactly *how* I flesh this out in a seven-to-ten- minute video will require some more work. Bolashade Hanson has some parting advice for me: "To be successful one must understand this audience in particular, because different marketing strategies will be required for them."⁷⁸

The fourth area is the penchant Millennials have for the next big thing or the next big adventure. Millennials are an adventurous group; they are curious about the world and they are not shy about experiencing it. The slang term is FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and they rely on their friends to make sure they do not miss the next big thing. "Research shows that Millennials spend a lot of time with their peers and are heavily influenced by them."⁷⁹ If their friends are leaving on an adventure, they want to go, too. When communicating to Millennials, John Laskaris advises, "They need to experience change to maintain interest. Their attention spans are shorter—they quickly move

⁷⁵ Alexander G. Houston, "How to Effectively Engage in Ministry with the Millennial Generation: Developing a Contextualized Intergenerational Church Through Millennial Outreach" (PhD diss., Drew university, 2015), 11, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁷⁶ Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," *Pew Research Center*, January 17, 2019, <http://www.pewresearch.org/facttank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

⁷⁷ Cameron Wayne Wooten, "Trinitarian and Epistemological Implications for Spiritual Formation Among Millennials" (DMin., Southeastern Theological Seminary, 2016), 36, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁷⁸ Bolashade O. Hanson, "Branding Faith: Do Christian Ministries Reach Millennials with Branding?" (PhD Diss., Liberty University, 2016), 28, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁷⁹ Bolashade O. Hanson, "Branding Faith: Do Christian Ministries Reach Millennials with Branding?" (PhD Diss., Liberty University, 2016), 31, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

on.”⁸⁰This directly informs my strategy on how long I should make each video. Too short and I run the risk of not inspiring the audience; too long and I’ll lose their interest.

My hope is that I can make early church history a captivating subject and one that Millennials will discuss with their friends. Research shows repeatedly that Millennials are interested in spiritual matters, especially if their friends are willing to participate. In his dissertation, Alexander Houston contends, “Millennials have the capacity for greater involvement and leadership within the local church while participating in intergenerational ministry.”⁸¹ My target audience can be inspired to live out their Christian faith if they catch a glimpse of the power of the Gospel affecting the ordinary person in all times of human history.

In his research about the Millennial demographic, Keith Puffer says, “Millennials are the most analyzed and populous generation in the United States. Collectively, they have been slowly transforming American Culture.”⁸² That is good news for this project—I have a lot of research material to draw on that will help improve my project. A theme that keeps returning is articulated by Bolashade Hanson, “It is vital . . . to engage Millennials on multiple levels with self-defined strategies, intriguing content and on platforms most used by them.”⁸³ This is great advice to heed as I develop my project this semester and next year. The nature of my project, if done incorrectly, will be boring and not relevant. If, however, I develop this project with thorough research about my audience and draw insightful parallels about the early church and the modern church, this project has the potential of making a big impact on the ever-changing landscape of online education. Lastly, Philippe Denis has provided a guiding statement that I have followed since beginning this research: “History can help believers to grasp the breadth and width of the human journey towards God.”⁸⁴ We are all on the journey of experiencing what it means to be a human being and faith grows when we learn about another person’s faith expressed in their lifetime.

The second gap that exists in my knowledge are the exact historical parallels that exist between the early church and today’s church. There are striking similarities that make the study of the early

⁸⁰ John Laskaris, “How to Engage Millennials: 5 Important Moves,” March 5, 2016, <https://www.efrontlearning.com/blog/2016/03/5-strategies-to-engage-the-millennials.html>.

⁸¹ Alexander Houston, “How to Effectively Engage in Ministry with the Millennial Generation: Developing a Contextualized Intergenerational Church Through Millennial Outreach” (PhD Diss., Drew University, 20015), iii, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁸² Keith A. Puffer, “Protestant Millennials, Religious Doubt & The Local Church,” *Religions*, 9, no.1 (2017): 1.

⁸³ Bolashade O. Hanson, “Branding Faith: Do Christian Ministries Reach Millennials with Branding?” (PhD Diss., Liberty University, 2016), 29, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁸⁴ Philippe Denis, “On Teaching Christian History in the Postmodern World,” *Hervormde Theologiese Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019), 7.

church especially germane to Christians living today. Perhaps more than any other time period of the past two thousand years, the early church has relevance for us to study. The remainder of this essay will review three similar dynamics that the early church and our modern church have in common.

The first similarity between the early church and the contemporary church is in the area of economic volatility. During this era, there were times of relative economic stability and even growth, but also great poverty and destitution. Frend states, "There was indeed a darker side to this picture. The cities lived off the countryside and the Romanized provincials off the backs of the peasants."⁸⁵ The rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer, just as if it were a headline out of today's news. It wasn't a well-rounded economy, but rather, "Agriculture continued to be the base of the whole empire's economy, but ownership of productive land was increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer proprietors."⁸⁶ Wayne Meeks goes on to say, "The small, independent land-owners living on their own land began to disappear, reduced to tenancy or slavery."⁸⁷ The Roman Empire continually experienced political turmoil and social unrest due to economic despondency—a situation not so different than today.

Frend succinctly puts it: "Perhaps the foundations were not so stable as they looked."⁸⁸ And N.T. Wright concurs, "Daily life held few securities in employment, food supply, and survival."⁸⁹ To make up for the shortfall of taxes, unscrupulous means were sometimes employed by Rome. "Rome had frequently raided the Temple treasury to make up for what is called unpaid taxes."⁹⁰ Amidst these horrible economic circumstances, there was the fledgling Christian church, trying to make a difference. Even though the poor and the slave were ignored and looked down upon in Roman society, Christians recognized the dignity of all human beings. Gerald Sittser states, "Christians were known as the people who cared for the 'least of these,' challenging Rome's patronage system

⁸⁵ W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 166.

⁸⁶ Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 14.

⁸⁷ Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 14.

⁸⁸ W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 171.

⁸⁹ N.T. Wright and Michael Bird, *The New Testament in its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (London: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 146.

⁹⁰ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 24.

and culture of honor and shame. Jesus, the one who was rich, became poor to make the poor rich."⁹¹

The second area requiring more study I have labeled, "Problematic Political Stability." The politics of the Roman Empire in which the early church had to navigate were precarious and often violent. Although Rome was the undisputed ruler, there were constant threats to Rome's political supremacy. N.T. Wright says, "The Roman Empire had grown out of an insatiable hunger for conquest."⁹² All the cities under the banner of the Roman Empire, and their numerous cultures found in them, owed their respect and their taxes to Rome. N.T. Wright goes on to say, "When we speak of the first century, the eastern Mediterranean is culturally Greek, but politically dominated by the Roman Empire."⁹³ And finally, "Revolution was in the air throughout this period."⁹⁴

Rome's political will was reinforced by a military threat. Constant dissenters to Roman rule surrounded the shores of the Mediterranean and made for continuous volatile, political situations. Wayne Meeks observes, "The cities of the Mediterranean world were at the leading edge of the great political and social changes."⁹⁵ Although the *Pax Romana* did its best to provide stability in the cities of the Roman Empire, there was constant political unrest. And yet, in this milieu the church grew—especially in the volatile cities. Bradley Billings says, "The social phenomenon of the growth and expansion of early Christianity took place within the physical environment of the Greco-Roman city"⁹⁶

A similar political reality has existed as an environment for the church to grow for the past forty years. Instead of the *Pax Romana*, it is the *Pax Americana*. Although there has been relative peace and stability since the end of the cold war, and arguably since the end of World War II, there has been constant unrest and political challenges everywhere. And yet the global church continues to

⁹¹ Gerald L. Sittser, *Resilient Faith: How the Early Christian "Third Way" Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 122.

⁹² N.T. Wright and Michael Bird, *The New Testament in its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (London: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 145.

⁹³ N.T. Wright and Michael Bird, *The New Testament in its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (London: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 142.

⁹⁴ N.T. Wright and Michael Bird, *The New Testament in its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (London: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 143.

⁹⁵ Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 11.

⁹⁶ Bradley S. Billings, "From House Church to Tenement Church: Domestic Space and the Development of Early Urban Christianity—The Example of Ephesus," *Journal of Theological Studies* 62, no2 (2011): 569.

grow. This similarity that exists in the two eras, and how it affects the growth and health of the church at large, is an area of research that I need to explore further.

A third area of similarity between the early church and the contemporary church exists in the religious plurality of our cultures. "Religion in the Roman Empire was huge, multifaceted, and unavoidable. It was infinitely varied, constantly incorporating new divinities and almost infinitely tolerant."⁹⁷ There were the Greek mythologies that Rome adopted and gave new names but kept their anthropomorphic personalities. There were religions from Persia such as Zoroastrianism that had adherents in the major cities of the Roman Empire. There was also the Emperor Cultic practice that required fealty and obligations from its citizens. This too was everywhere. N.T. Wright observes, "What Paul saw in Athens, a city 'full of idols,' was typical of towns and cities everywhere in the ancient world."⁹⁸

Against this backdrop arose the courageous upstart Christianity that seemed to continually be attracting new followers. Robert Weber points out, "Classical Christianity was shaped in a pagan and relativistic society much like our own."⁹⁹ In our own day, as business, politics, and entertainment continually grows more global and interconnected, cultural and religious intermixing is happening in this generation to a degree never before seen. In this aspect, the situation today is not so different to what people living in the Roman Empire experienced two-thousand years ago.

Christianity was first seen by the Romans as a sect of the Jewish faith, and there were Jews spread throughout the Empire. N.T. Wright states, "By the first century, the majority of Jews, up to 80 percent by some estimates, did not live in Palestine, but in the lands of other nations. In some cities as much as 20 percent of the population was Jewish."¹⁰⁰ We read in the Book of Acts how Paul takes advantage of this by visiting a city's synagogue first.

Christians interacted with this religious plurality and indeed, even invited them into conversation. Ronald Heine says, "When the early Christian theologians began to use the *logos* concept of Christ,

⁹⁷ Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 37.

⁹⁸ N.T. Wright and Michael Bird, *The New Testament in its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (London: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 151.

⁹⁹ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 7.

¹⁰⁰ N.T. Wright and Michael Bird, *The New Testament in its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (London: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 164.

they clearly chose a concept that would catch the attention of the Greek intellectual world and open up a multiplicity of possibilities for understanding Christ.”¹⁰¹

Contrary to popular opinion, religious persecution of Christians (and other religions) was uncommon during the early church. Persecution was in fact, rare, isolated, and never long lasting. Rodney Stark states, “Although Christians stood in formal, official disrepute for much of the first three centuries, informally they were free to do pretty much as they wished, in most places, most of the time.”¹⁰² If the gatherings of the faithful were peaceful, the authorities allowed a plurality to exist.

The ministry setting for this NPO is completely online and therefore, the outreach of this ministry is not geographically constrained. The videos will be going out into the cyber universe for anyone to watch. It is an offering, given to the next generation, to help them learn from those who have gone before because the baton is now in their hands. On the subject of teaching church history, Philip Denis states, “History can help believers to grasp the breadth and width of the human journey towards God.”¹⁰³ When students learn about early church history, they are also learning about their own faith journey. When that happens, history becomes relevant to a person living today and inspiration naturally follows. I believe there is a place for this project in our church and in our world. Robert Webber states, “The postmodern church is in quest of a more dynamic faith, a faith that has shifted away from the old debates that once divided Christians. Instead, the postmodern church seeks unity, spirituality, worship, and involvement in the lives of other people.”¹⁰⁴

MVP (MOST VIABLE PROTOTYPE)

There is a clear winner for my Most Viable Prototype. I am sticking with the website and the brief videos lasting no longer than ten minutes each. I will create only six videos on the early church and no more. I was considering eight, but any more than six and I run the risk of diluting the most important aspects of the history and potentially making each video not as interesting. This was important feedback from my volunteers.

¹⁰¹ Ronald E. Heine, *Classical Christian Doctrine: Introducing the Essentials of the Ancient Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 38.

¹⁰² Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 192.

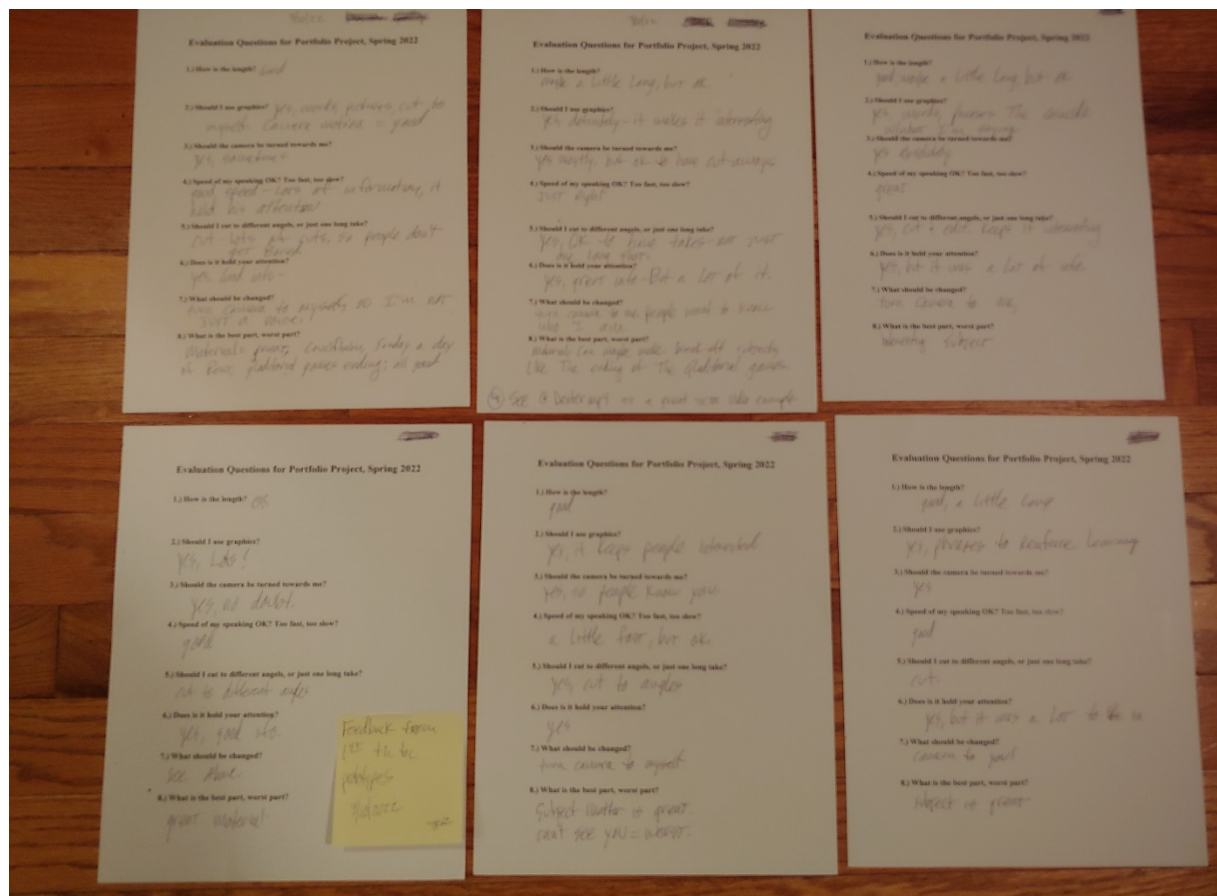
¹⁰³ Philippe Denis, “On Teaching Christian History in the Postmodern World,” *Hervormde Theologische Studies* 75, no.1 (2019): 7.

¹⁰⁴ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 204.

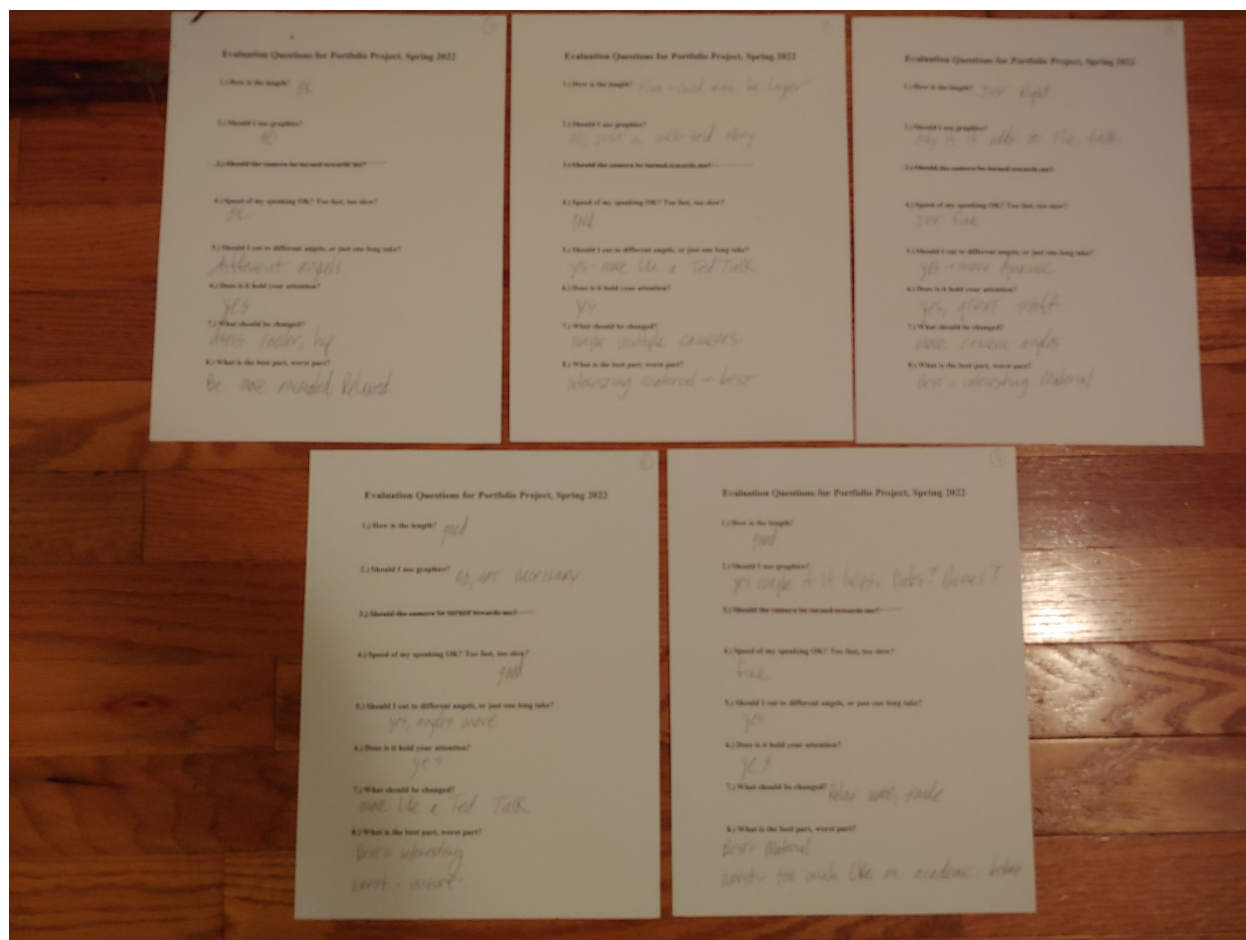
For my secondary platform in which to build an audience, I will use Instagram and not Tik Tok. I will upload pithy, insightful quotes and pictures of significant early church figures onto the Instagram platform. Uploads to this platform have a longer staying power than Tik Tok. I have uploaded four of these quotes during this prototype stage and added the website address as a link people can click to access the website. Tik Tok has over one billion users and to make this platform effective for a content creator, there needs to be daily uploads (or nearly so) to keep their audience engaged. But I have a ready supply of inspirational quotes and pictures of early church saints that I can easily and quickly upload to the Instagram platform. All of the posts will contain links to the website. My approach is to “hook” the potential audience with a catchy quote, engage them with a video, and inspire them to take their next step of faith. I am looking forward to the third and final year in which to develop this project.

APPENDICES

Evaluation from the first two Tik Tok videos I made. Because all six were so similar in their responses, I thought this was enough feedback.



Evaluation feedback from the first full length video I made for the website.



Evaluation feedback from Instagram post

The image shows three pieces of paper with handwritten feedback on evaluation questions for a portfolio project. The papers are placed on a wooden surface. Each paper has a title 'Evaluation Questions for Portfolio Project, Spring 2022' and five numbered questions. The feedback is written in cursive.

Top Left Paper:

Evaluation Questions for Portfolio Project, Spring 2022

- 1.) How is the quote? *good - catchy*
- 2.) Should I use better graphics? *no - the picture was good*
- 3.) Is it inspirational? *yes*
- 4.) Should I keep it going, say once per week? *yes*
- 5.) Other suggestions? *Keep Ben coming...*

Top Right Paper:

Evaluation Questions for Portfolio Project, Spring 2022

- 1.) How is the quote? *Nice*
- 2.) Should I use better graphics? *no graphs - use pics*
- 3.) Is it inspirational? *yup*
- 4.) Should I keep it going, say once per week? *yes definitely*
- 5.) Other suggestions? *Maybe a sentence afterwards saying something about the quote.*

Bottom Paper:

Evaluation Questions for Portfolio Project, Spring 2022

- 1.) How is the quote? *great*
- 2.) Should I use better graphics? *NO - a great quote can stand alone*
- 3.) Is it inspirational? *yes -*
- 4.) Should I keep it going, say once per week? *yes*
- 5.) Other suggestions? *Maybe another sentence about the person who said the quote.*

Appendix E—Project Appendix Documentation

Included in this Appendix are the transcripts of the other five videos and their accompanying screenshots. Three videos and their transcripts are featured above in the Presentation of Project section. The five that are featured here are: *The Book of Acts and Beyond*, *What Happened to the 12 Apostles?* *Creating A Church Service and Liturgy*, *The Edict of Milan*, *The Council of Nicaea*, AD 325. Lastly, I have included two more postings of scripture verses on the Instagram platform.

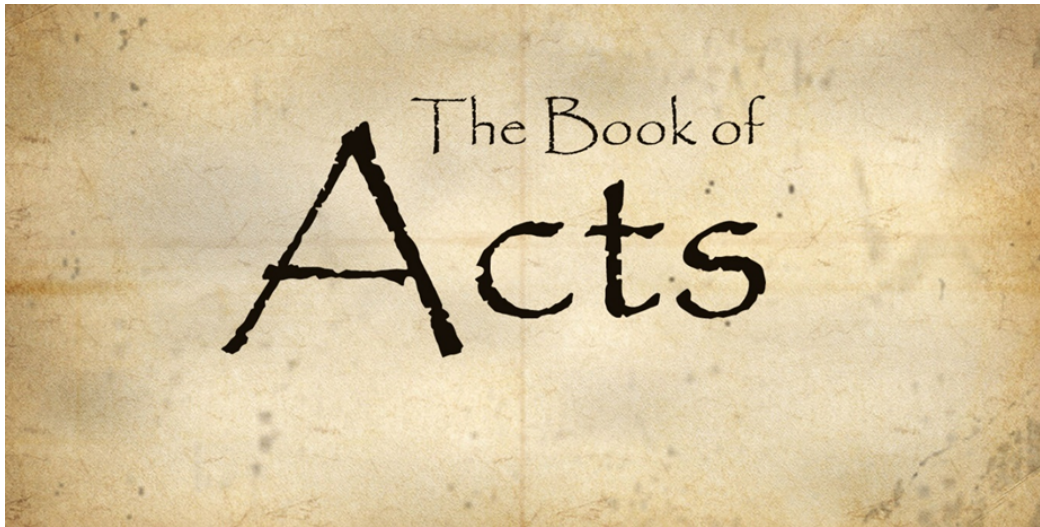


FIGURE 24: VIDEO ONE, THE BOOK OF ACTS AND BEYOND

The Book of Acts in your New Testament is the first written History of the Church, and the author was a Christian named Luke. He was not one of the original 12 Apostles, but he was a believer in Jesus. By profession, he was a medical doctor. He was also a friend to, and fellow traveler with, the Apostle Paul. Luke recounts the story of the Jesus movement, from the time Jesus ascended to Heaven, to the events of Pentecost, to the explosive growth of the church that went from Jerusalem, Samaria, Antioch, Greece, and finally to Rome itself. All of this takes place in about 30 years.

Because this is the first written history we have of the early church, it's worth reviewing. So, let's take a few minutes to recollect the people and events found in the Book of Acts. And then we'll even go a few years beyond where Luke ends his story to see what happened in the years that followed.

After Jesus' resurrection, he appeared several times to the apostles and to others over a period of forty days, teaching about the Kingdom of God and explaining how his life and his death had to happen in the way that it did. Jesus makes a promise to his followers that even though he is going away, the Holy Spirit will come and help them build this Kingdom of God. On the 40th day after the resurrection Jesus ascended, and 10 days after that the Jewish celebration known as Pentecost

took place. Pentecost was an annual Jewish holiday that celebrated bringing in the harvest and it was always 50 days after the Passover. Every year visitors from all over the known world would come to Jerusalem for this great festival.

A new meaning to the holiday was about to happen and another type of harvest was about to begin. It was now a harvest of men and women being brought into the Kingdom of God. It was a fulfillment of the promises of God in the Old Testament about his Spirit dwelling in and transforming our hearts. The Holy Spirit came rushing down as a great wind and appeared as a burning flame above the Apostle's heads. The Pillar of Fire that once led the nation of Israel in the Wilderness in the Old Testament, is now a pillar of fire that lives inside and guides each of us. What happened next was nothing less than the birth of the Church—and the Apostles picked up right where Jesus left off. Jesus had told his Apostles, "You shall do even greater things than I" and this proved to be true. The Apostles immediately started preaching, teaching, and performing miracles. In a single day the number of believers went from a couple of hundred to several thousand.

But with the number of believers growing quickly, opposition and persecution predictably followed. Peter and John are both arrested, jailed, and then questioned by the religious authorities. Peter famously answers them by saying, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard!"

Upon their release they continued to tell the story of Jesus to anyone who would listen. House churches formed immediately, and believers started meeting on Sundays in recognition of the day Jesus rose from the dead. Already there were two sacraments being performed by church members: baptism as an initiation rite and the Lord's Supper to be shared among believers to remember Christ's sacrifice.

As the church continued to grow, it soon witnessed its first martyr, Stephen. He recites the long history of God patiently working through the Jewish nation and how Israel's leaders always reject the messengers that God sends them. Stephen's history lesson infuriates the Jewish leaders, and they kill him. Stephen's death causes the movement to grow and spread. Believers go north to Samaria, south to Africa, and west to Macedonia, and Greece.

As the persecution grew more systematic, a young, angry Pharisee named Saul was one of many who spearheaded the violence. On his way to organize more oppression against Christians, he has an encounter with the risen Christ, and his mind and his heart are changed. Saul embraces his new understanding of Jesus, and he begins going by his Latin name, Paul.

The faith spread and the first large church is formed in a coastal city north of Jerusalem called Antioch. It was a multi-ethnic church, and it was here that followers were first called Christians. From this church Paul and his companions were sent out on their missionary journeys to other parts of the Roman Empire.

The Spirit prompted Paul and his companion Barnabas to go west on their first missionary trip and visit Cyprus and modern-day Turkey. Their 2nd missionary trip goes further west into Macedonia

and Greece. And their third goes further still and then returns to Jerusalem where Paul gives an account of their activities and travels.

Whenever Paul visits a new city, he goes to the Jewish synagogue first to talk about what the life and death of Jesus means. Many Jews do in fact become Christians, but many do not, and they oppose Paul's message of faith. Controversies ensue.

The very first church council is convened to help resolve these controversies. It's held in Jerusalem, and it specifically tries to resolve the contentious issues around expectations and requirements for Jewish and Gentile Christians. The church leaders conclude there are 3 practices that should be adhered to by the faithful: First: Believers should not eat food sacrificed to idols; Second: They should not drink blood or eat animals that were strangled—something that was often done in pagan temples; and three: They should not engage in sexual immorality. They advised that all believers "Will do well to obey these rules."

The growing movement upset Roman officials as well as Jewish leaders and a plan was hatched against Paul. He was arrested, and a plot on his life was discovered. Paul was taken to Rome to face trial. During this time Paul wrote many of his letters that became part of the New Testament canon: the letter to the Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, and others.

For two years he taught and preached in a rented house while awaiting his trial. And this is how the story ends, with the Apostle Paul living in a house, openly teaching the message about Jesus in the capitol city of the Roman Empire, right under the nose of Emperor Nero. The faith had come a long way in a short period of time.

The book of Acts is an epic story that begins with a great promise from a resurrected Jesus to a bunch of scared believers—and ends with the Gospel quickly spreading all over the most powerful Empire in the world. Luke most likely composed his history around the year 62.

What happens next in the history of the early church was no accident. In 64 there was a great fire in Rome that destroyed nearly one-third of the entire city. The Roman Emperor Nero had to find a scapegoat to blame for the destruction—so he wouldn't get blamed for it. But there is evidence that supports Nero himself caused the fire in the first place so he could redesign the city to glorify himself. Only days after the fire occurred, Nero presented completed plans to rebuild the city to his specifications and liking. These plans would have taken months to draw up, but he had them at the ready just days after the fire.

Instead, Christians were blamed, and persecution for the next two years followed. It was during this time, between 64-66 that both Peter and Paul were most likely martyred. Other Christians were killed and many more fled Rome altogether. This scattering of people had a similar effect to spread the faith, just like Stephen's martyrdom had achieved earlier. New house churches popped up all over the empire as the faith multiplied in all classes: men and women, Jew, and Gentile, rich and poor, slave and free.

Over the next several decades all the other apostles, except John, were martyred for their faith. And when the Apostles were no more, the next generation picked up and carried the torch of faith just as courageously. We still have the writings of many of these faithful Christians: There is Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, to name a few. Their writings serve as a window into what it was like in the early church.

But in Jerusalem and Judea, the Jewish nation continued to oppose Roman rule and in 66, open war between the two broke out. For the next four years the war raged, and Roman Legions inched their way to the capitol city of Jerusalem. Victory was resoundingly achieved by the Romans in 70 under the command of General Titus. The city walls were broken through, and the Temple was utterly destroyed. Thousands were killed and the ones that got away scattered in all four directions. The reverberations of this destruction were felt throughout the entire Roman world. Titus himself said that this catastrophe was so horrific that it must have represented the very judgement of the Jewish God against these people. As an interesting Historical sidenote, the gold and silver stolen from the Temple in Jerusalem was used to help finance the building of the Roman Coliseum, the very place where the Gladiatorial games were held. Still today in Rome, there remains the Arch of Titus, commemorating this victory and on the top of the arch, you can see a relief carving of the soldiers carrying away the menorah and other treasures contained in the Temple.

Twenty years later, in the year 90, there was a small meeting of the Jewish leadership that met to discuss, among other things, the idea of excluded Christians from participating in Synagogue attendance. However, this was not at all consistently adhered to throughout the Roman Empire and Christians and Jews continued to dialogue with each other. Current scholarship supports the idea that during the first 300 years of the church, many of the Jewish faithful came to believe in the person of Jesus as their messiah.

And that is where we end this story, 60 years after the resurrection of Jesus in the year 90. Check out the other short videos on this website to see what happens next in the growth of the early church. (End of Video One).



FIGURE 25: VIDEO TWO, WHAT HAPPENED TO THE 12 APOSTLES?

Have you ever wondered what happened to the twelve Apostles *after* Jesus's resurrection and ascension? Do we have any historical records that testify to what they did with the rest of their lives? We know that Judas Iscariot committed suicide right after he betrayed Jesus. He died before Jesus died and so he never witnessed the resurrection. But what about the other eleven? There are some historical records, including what we read in the New Testament, but there are also many traditions that have been with the church since the very beginning. Some traditions are better attested to than others, but there are traditions about all eleven from the earliest of times. I'm going to take a few minutes to tell the stories that have been passed down to us about each of the eleven Apostles. The next eight minutes will be a fast-moving account of how the eleven Apostles fared after Jesus' ascension. As it turns out, all of them displayed courage and faithfulness as they ministered to people in their community, testified to the truth of the Gospel, and helped give birth to the church.

Let's begin with Peter, the leader of the twelve, and the Rock on which Jesus said he would build his church. Peter preached the first sermon on Pentecost, and it must have been powerfully persuasive because 3,000 people came to believe that very day. He was the oldest of the Apostles and naturally he became a leader in the church, but certainly not the only leader. He ministered around Judea and Antioch preaching and organizing church activities like helping the poor, the sick and the homeless. All these activities, done for the benefit of strangers, was unheard of in the ancient world. Peter eventually made his way to Rome and there he built up a network of house churches. During his ministry, he wrote two brief letters that became part of the New Testament,

aptly called 1st and 2nd Peter. He was most likely martyred in Rome, during a time of persecution under the emperor Nero, in approximately AD 64.

Next is the Apostle Andrew, who was Peter's younger brother and who also made his living as a fisherman. Andrew was originally a disciple of John the Baptist but after Jesus' baptism, Andrew saw Jesus walking away, caught up to him and asked him, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Jesus responded with the eternal invitation of the Gospel and answered, "*Come, and you will see.*" After Pentecost, Andrew began preaching nearby in Judea, but soon he travelled extensively, and tradition has him ministering all over Eastern Europe, Turkey, Macedonia, and Greece. He was martyred around the year 70 in Greece, on an "X-shaped cross." Still today, when you see a painting of St. Andrew at a museum, he is usually painted with an X-shaped cross in the background as a symbol for faithfulness.

James, the brother to John and one of the sons of Zebedee, was also a fisherman by trade. Along with Peter, and his brother John, these three formed an inner circle with Jesus. James became an early leader in the church but in the Book of Acts chapter twelve, we read about his death. In approximately 44, by the orders of King Agrippa, James was beheaded and became the first of the Apostles to be martyred. One tradition holds that his body was taken to *Santiago de Compostela* in Northwestern Spain, where a cathedral was built in his honor. A cathedral and a shrine stands there today and it's the ending point of *El Camino de Santiago*—a pilgrimage that attracts Christians from all over the world still today.

Next up is John, the brother to James and the second son of Zebedee. Together these two brothers were called the 'Sons of Thunder'. John is the only Apostle who most likely died a natural death. He was a church leader in Ephesus, and he took care of Mary after Jesus' death. John was exiled to the island of Patmos in AD 90, during a time of persecution. A tradition has him being freed from his time in exile on the island of Patmos and returning to minister at the church in the City of Ephesus. There he most likely died of natural causes, an old and faithful man in his 90's. His contribution to the New Testament includes the Gospel of John, the Book of Revelation, and the three short epistles that bear his name.

Next up is Philip, who was an Apostle originally from Bethsaida of Galilee, not too far from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. The book of Acts records Philip preaching and performing miraculous signs in Samaria. In Chapter eight of the Book of Acts, an Angel appears to Philip and commands him to go down the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. There he met an Ethiopian Official and Philip explained all the events surrounding Jesus to him and baptized the Ethiopian right then and there. Scripture says, somewhat mysteriously, that Philip was suddenly taken away. He went on to preach throughout Judea and Samaria. He became a great preacher and teacher in the early church, but because of this very fact, he was crucified in AD 54. He was probably the 2nd Apostle to be martyred.

Next is the Apostle named Thaddeus, who was a farmer before being called an Apostle. He is not the most well-known Apostle, but in the 14th chapter of John's Gospel, Thaddeus asks a question of Jesus: He asks, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus doesn't give Thaddeus a direct answer, but perhaps it's because Jesus intended that task be

completed by Thaddeus, the other apostles and indeed all Christians down through all generations. What a responsibility, what a privilege, what a purpose. Tradition holds that Thaddeus became an evangelist and a missionary to Persia, Iran, Libya, and Turkey. He was most likely martyred between 65 and 70.

Next is Simon the Zealot. Before Jesus called him to become an Apostle, he was a member of the religious group made up of Jewish extremists who were violently opposed to Roman occupation. Their faith had a strong political component to it.

This raises an interesting question about the personal relationships among the Apostles. When Simon the Zealot first became an Apostle, he would NOT have liked Matthew the tax collector. Being a tax collector meant Matthew was a Jew who worked for Rome. He collects tax revenue from his fellow Jews and gives the money to his Roman overseers. Any extra tax revenue Matthew collects, he gets to keep for himself. More than anyone else in this group of 12, Simon the Zealot would *not* have respected Matthew and indeed would not have tolerated his politics. But evidently, they overcame their differences because they both followed Christ. It's a lesson for all of us. Christ has that effect on people. One tradition says Simon traveled extensively with Thaddeus, preaching, and ministering to whoever would listen. Another tradition holds that Simon became a Bishop of the Jerusalem churches after James, son of Zebedee, was martyred in 44. Simon himself was martyred around 74.

We go next to Matthew the tax Collector. Rome only employed educated citizens in the role of tax collector—and out of the 12 Apostles, Matthew was most likely the best educated. He must have been financially comfortable as well because of this job—but he surely felt the disdain from his fellow Jews for accepting the job. But he left this comfortable living to follow Jesus. He wrote the first gospel account that occurs in our Bibles, the Gospel according to Matthew. Tradition has him preaching in Judea, Ethiopia, Macedonia, Syria, and Iran. He was martyred around 65.

Next up is Bartholomew, who was also called Nathaniel. In John's Gospel, at the end of chapter one, Jesus tells Nathaniel he saw him standing under a fig tree while a far way off. Nathaniel is impressed and makes the first confession of Jesus being the Messiah. Nathaniel says, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, the King of Israel." Nathaniel spoke better than he knew. In response, Jesus says you shall see greater things than that Nathaniel. Tradition says he preached in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Armenia. He was martyred in 70 when he refused to recant his faith under persecution.

The Apostle Thomas, once full of doubts about the risen Christ, lived the rest of his life with no doubts at all. Tradition says he preached in India and perhaps as far east as China. He was most likely martyred in India around the year 72.

Lastly, we come to the other Apostle named James; this one was known as James, son of Alphaeus, to distinguish him from the other James. He ministered mostly in Judea and Syria. He must have had good administrative skills because tradition says he became a Bishop in Jerusalem. He was martyred around the year 63.

All the Apostles had a critical role to play in the early church. They were picked by their teacher for good reason. It's unfortunate that we know so much of Peter and Paul's ministries but so little about the others. They became effective missionaries, administrators, evangelists, and pastors. None of them returned to their original vocations, but all of them spent the rest of their lives in Christian ministry. They lived and died bearing the name "Christian" and they served the purpose of God in their own generation with faithfulness and courage.

The early church theologian, Tertullian, said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." And how true that proved to be. Their lives and their deaths began building the Kingdom of God on Earth. And the Kingdom of God is still being built today. One heart at a time, one generation at a time. And today we still walk by faith, just like the Apostles did, as we strive to answer the call in our own lives and in our own generation (End of Video Two).



FIGURE 26: VIDEO THREE, CREATING A CHURCH SERVICE AND LITURGY

Have you ever wondered what Christians did when they first started going to church? Was always singing a part of it? The word “Liturgy” refers to the activities and rituals that are done during a church service. This short video explains when and why the Liturgy of a Church service began.

The Church began on the day of Pentecost, which was 50 days after Jesus’ death. The Apostles and other believers gathered awaiting the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit. When it arrived, Peter immediately preaches the first sermon. Scripture says about 3,000 people believed the message and the very first thing they did was get baptized and then gather for prayer and fellowship. The people were baptized because it was a symbol to identify themselves with the death and resurrection of Christ. It becomes the initiation rite for a believer to become a member of the church.

Believers also gathered for meals and friendship in different people’s homes. At these informal gatherings, everyone was welcome. It would still be three hundred years before the Roman Empire allowed the construction of Church buildings.

The church also began another ritual: the Lord’s Supper, also known as Communion. The example of the Lord’s Supper came from Jesus himself, in the upper room, the night before he was arrested. But there is ANOTHER instance in scripture where Jesus participates in this ritual. After Jesus’ resurrection he appears alongside two men walking to a small village called Emmaus. After they walk together for a bit, Jesus accepts their invitation to share a meal with them. When He takes the bread and breaks it, the two men recognize Jesus as the risen Christ. And then he vanishes. The Lord’s Supper comes to represent the most meaningful part of a church service because it

celebrates the salvation that comes by Christ. In the church service, the bread and the wine were distributed and shared. For those who were sick and unable to attend, church members would take the consecrated bread and wine to them--just like today.

All denominations re-enact this tradition at least weekly or quarterly, and some do it daily. As an interesting historical sidenote, during the early Church period, non-believers thought Christians were practicing cannibalism because they heard Christians were eating the body and drinking the blood of a Jewish prophet named Jesus.

The Apostles continued their preaching in and around Jerusalem. In Acts chapter 2, it says people would gather daily at the Temple in Jerusalem, at a covered area called Solomon's Colonnade and there they would talk about Jesus' teachings, his life, and his death.

The church met together regularly on Sundays, in addition to the usual Jewish Sabbath, which began at sunset on Friday and ended Saturday at sunset. Christians met on Sundays to honor the day that Christ rose from the dead. It's another interesting historical development that Christians, who still followed the 10 Commandments, altered the 4th commandment, and moved the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. It's also worth noting that the meaning of the Sabbath changed. Christians called it "The Lord's Day" and it celebrated the new creation that Christ initiated with his resurrection. The Jews came to call it "The Christian Sabbath."

Along with meeting on Sundays, baptisms, and the Lord's supper, there were offerings collected for the poor and needy. From the beginning, the church existed not for itself, but for others. The giving was for anyone in need. The way the Church came to care and provide for the poor like this had never been done before in the history of the world. The church grew in large part because of people's faith helped alleviate pain and suffering in practical ways.

As time went on, the church service took on a regular pattern. There would be an individual who acted as the Pastor of the service and Scripture would be read aloud. Before the New Testament was assembled, the scripture reading was from the Jewish scriptures--what today is called the Old Testament. But the New Testament letters and Gospels were copied and passed around to the churches from the beginning, and these were read alongside the Jewish Scriptures. After the readings, there would be a short sermon -- encouraging words to people combined with a spiritual truth. In some ways not too different than today.

Singing was always a vital part of Christian worship. During the Last Supper, Jesus and his Apostles sang. In several places in the New Testament, Paul speaks of singing Psalms and hymns. And in the year 112, we have a report from a Roman Governor who noted that a growing number of Christians would assemble every Sunday morning before sunrise to sing and honor Jesus as God.

The service would end much like they do today--with a song and a prayer. Everyone would rise and stand to pray together. Standing held special meaning. To stand in the presence of God meant to be accepted by him and to have the right to speak freely. The congregation would then speak a closing prayer in unison and then the service would end.

We have preserved several prayers from the early church, including this one from Clement of Rome, from the year 96. It says: "We ask you, Lord, be our helper and defender. Rescue those of us in distress; raise up the fallen, assist the needy; heal the sick; turn back those of your people who stray; feed the hungry; encourage those who lose heart, for Jesus Christ is your Son and we are your people. Amen." (End of Video Three).



FIGURE 27: VIDEO SIX, *THE EDICT OF MILAN*

Let's talk about that ancient, remarkable declaration known as The Edict of Milan. An Edict is an official declaration and Milan is a city in Italy. This declaration established once and for all, the freedom of religion, including the freedom to be a Christian, within the Roman Empire. The year was 313: That's 1,709 years ago.

Ever since the Jesus-Movement began, there was opposition and sometimes outright persecution. The first opposition came from the Jewish leaders in and around Jerusalem. But as we read in the Book of Acts, persecution of Christians by the Jews soon spread to other areas, such as Judea and Samaria. The Jewish leaders first persecuted Christians because they thought Christian teachings were blasphemy and their activities sacrilegious.

But it wasn't long before Rome joined in, and Christians experienced official state-sponsored persecution. But Rome persecuted the Christians for a different reason. Rome persecuted Christians because they were unwilling to participate in the Cult of the Emperor, where honor and praise was required to be given to the Roman Emperor. Christians believed this to be a form of idolatry, and many refused to perform the required rituals. In the eyes of Romans, this threatened the unity and security of the Empire. Romans wanted their Empire to flourish—and being a Christian soon came to mean being anti-Rome.

For centuries Rome tried to diplomatically handle the many religions of the people it ruled. The official state policy held that all religions found within of the Roman Empire were to be categorized in one of two groups: a recognized religion or an unrecognized religion. If a faith was *recognized*, like the Jewish faith was, then believers could openly practice their faith and tax revenue from the State could even be used to support its activities. Even some of the clergy had tax exemption status. It was Rome's calculated approach to respect the different beliefs and customs of the people it ruled. And it helped keep the peace.

For the first 300 years, Christianity did not enjoy this status; it fell into the second category: an *unrecognized* religion. As a result, Christianity could not build any churches. They had to meet in an extensive network of house churches, and when times of persecution arose, they had to assemble in secret.

Although there were outbreaks of persecution from time to time, they were in fact, few and far between. When they did arise, they were not very long-lasting. If Christians kept their head down, if they paid their taxes, then for most of the time, in most locations, Christians were left alone. It's important to note that it was hundreds not thousands that were killed. In fact, if we add up the total number of Christians killed in the first four hundred years of the church, the grand total would still be under one thousand. Bad, but not as bad as many people might initially think.

About ten years after Jesus' death and resurrection, in AD 44, the Roman ruler who administered the Judean territory, King Herod's grandson, named King Agrippa, ordered the execution of the Apostle James, the son of Zebedee. He became the first of the 12 Apostles to be martyred.

Other persecutions did in fact surface. One example is the persecution that occurred under the emperor Nero. In 64, a great fire broke out and destroyed large portions of the city of Rome. Nero needed a scapegoat to blame so *He* wouldn't be blamed for the disaster. He conveniently pointed to the Christians to blame for the destruction. A persecution against Christians broke out and it was during this time that Peter and the Paul were both martyred.

Another example of persecution was during the reign of the emperor Diocletian. Violence against Christians began happening in the year 303. This turned out to be the most widespread Christian bloodshed in the entire early church period and so it is called *The Great Persecution*. It lasted on and off for several years and hundreds (but not thousands) of Christians were martyred. But support for the attacks on Christians was far from universal because Christianity had started to become widely accepted in Roman society. A movement of religious toleration began growing among the population and an outcry against this state policy officially ended the persecution.

This groundswell of support for Christians grew quickly when Constantine became co-emperor of the Roman Empire. Constantine became co-emperor when he defeated his rival in 312 at the famous Battle of the Milvian Bridge. The battle pitted Constantine against his rival Maxentius. Constantine's army was outnumbered Four-to-One—and he knew it. So, before this battle, Constantine prayed to the Christian God (by the urging of his mother!) During this prayer, He had a vision of a Cross in the sky, and he heard a voice that said, "In this sign, conquer." In response,

Constantine ordered all his men to paint a Christian symbol on the soldier's shields. The symbol was the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek = Chi/ Rho. Constantine's army gained a resounding victory and Constantine entered Rome and declared himself to be the new Ruler of the western portion of the Roman Empire. He gave full credit to the Christian God for his victory.

With his victory, there were now two Roman Emperors--Licinius ruled the Eastern portion of the Empire and Constantine ruled the West. In January of 313, the two men met in Milan to discuss religious freedom throughout the Empire. An agreement was made, and a proclamation announced that guaranteed religious freedom to all Christians throughout the Empire. This was called the Edict of Milan and it permanently ended Christian persecution.

However, the results of this new policy reached far beyond just allowing people to practice their Christian faith openly. They could now be appointed to important government positions within the Empire. Pagan Temples were converted to Christian Churches and State funds were made available to build new churches. Sunday became an official day of rest with businesses and markets closed. Crucifixion as a form of capital punishment was abolished and the bloody gladiatorial games came to an end. Christianity grew rapidly and soon believers who followed the teachings of Jesus occupied every class and station within the Roman Empire. Within one year's time of the edict of Milan, 10% of the entire population within the Roman Empire were Christian, roughly 6 million out of 60 million.

Constantine astute response to the rapid growth of Christianity proved to be the single most important political event during the early church period. In 325, just twelve years after the Edict of Milan, Constantine would set a precedent by calling the first Ecumenical Council of the Church: The Council of Nicaea. Constantine's commitment towards Christianity demonstrated that his allegiance to Christianity was genuine. His mother was a devout Christian and she continually urged him to support the faith--and support it he did. He remained committed to the faith until his death in 337. And in the centuries that followed, Christianity would continue to grow and shape Western education, economics, art, literature--and indeed all aspects of what we call today, "Western Culture." . . . And that is the Edict of Milan. (End of Video Six).



FIGURE 28: VIDEO SEVEN, THE COUNCIL OF NICAEEA, AD 325

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, from the substance of the Father; God of God and Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not made and by whom all things were made, in heaven and on earth...."

Even though what I just recited is not from the Bible, many people might think it is because every Sunday morning their entire congregation recited these words. But these words are the opening sentences to the Nicene Creed, written in the year 325. This Christian statement of faith is the only creed that is accepted as authoritative by the Orthodox Churches, Roman Catholicism, Anglican, Lutheran, and other Protestant churches around the world.

The Nicene Creed was one of the many important and enduring outcomes of the Council of Nicaea, the first world-wide meeting of the Christian church. World-wide at that time meant the Roman Empire. This meeting was called by the Roman Emperor himself, Constantine. It took place in the year 325 in the small city of Nicaea, located in modern day Turkey.

Constantine, who by this time, had been the sole Emperor of the Roman Empire for twelve years, was bothered by the division within the Christian Church, for both political and personal reasons. The theological debates were significant--and because the church had been growing quickly--there

were administrative tensions. Constantine wanted the divisiveness settled so there would be a unified Christian faith.

To deal with the growing disorder, he summoned a general assembly from all over the Roman Empire. Invitations were sent to every bishop in the church and over 300 bishops from every region of the Empire, except Britain, attended. Also in attendance were an abundance of scholars, priests, deacons, and ordinary, yet, interested believers. When everyone was counted, nearly 2,000 faithful believers overflowed the small city.

The opening session was full of pomp and circumstance. Constantine was surrounded by Christians who survived the persecution that happened just 12 years prior. The meeting took place at Constantine's Royal Palace. When the emperor arrived, he stood among the bishops, and as a mark of his reverence for them, he would not take his seat until the bishops nodded their approval.

When they fell quiet, the emperor exhorted them to unity, entreating them to lay aside all private grievances. His opening remarks help set the tone and is quoted as saying, "Division in the Church is worse than war."

After insisting on harmony and peace, he turned to the questions that they had come to discuss. And there was much to discuss and debate.

They achieved agreements on many topics, but on other topics when a consensus could not be reached, they set it aside. Agreements were reached on such practical issues as job descriptions for Deacons and the proper way to consecrate Bishops. There was universal condemnation on the practice of lending money at interest by the clergy even though charging interest was a standard practice of business in that day. It was agreed that Clergy could lend money, but they had to do so at a zero percent interest rate. Everybody was adamant that they did NOT want the church to look like an enterprise that existed to make money. It existed to preach the gospel and helping people.

There were other practical matters addressed, too, such as the best way to give the eucharist to the sick and dying. And under what conditions, if any, was it allowed for a clergy member to move from one city to another.

There were many items on their to-do-list where they could not agree. One such disagreement was establishing a uniform date for Easter. According to the Gospels, Jesus' death and resurrection occurred at the time of the Jewish Passover, which was celebrated on the first Full Moon following the Spring Equinox. This soon led to Christians celebrating Easter on different dates because different calendars were being used in different parts of the Empire. This led to some congregations celebrating Easter on the day of Passover, while other congregations celebrated it the Sunday before or the Sunday after Passover. Still today, there are churches that use a different method in calculating when to celebrate Easter.

Another issue where a consensus could not be reached, was whether Priests and Bishops could marry. The council discussed the issue of celibacy for the clergy, but agreement was not reached. Bishops, Priests, and Deacons were allowed to marry since the very beginning of the church, and

this council allowed all clergy to continue to marry. The Roman Catholic church did not officially change this law until another Church Council in the year 1139, some 700 years after the Council of Nicaea.

Over time, the Eastern Churches came to approach the subject differently. Today, if an unmarried man is already an Eastern Orthodox Priest, he cannot marry. However, if a man is already married, and he wants to become a priest in the Eastern Tradition, he can stay married and still become a priest. Deacons can marry in all traditions. We turn now to the topic that made the Council of Nicaea so controversial and so enduring.

A priest living in Alexandria, Egypt, named Arius divided the church by his ideas on the nature of Jesus. He gathered a lot of like-minded followers. They came to be known as Arians and the debate came to be known as the Arian Controversy. They conjectured that Jesus Christ, the Son, did NOT live eternally in the past, like God the Father. That is to say, the Son, even before He became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth, was NOT eternally existent with God the Father. In fact, God the Father created God the Son and therefore Jesus is not as fully divine as God the Father. Consequently, Jesus does not share equality with God the Father. Arius started this debate within an academic setting, but it soon spread to Christian congregations everywhere, threatening a schism in the early Christian church.

The traditional, orthodox position held that all three members of the God-head were eternal and equal in divinity and perfection. Two priests, Alexander and Athanasius defended this traditional understanding. They insisted that this is the teaching of scripture, the Apostles, and the teaching of Christ himself. Alexander and Athanasius worked hard to clarify and articulate a distinction between God the Father and God the Son, as scripture does, but without making the Son a mere creature or somehow less than God the Father. At stake was no less than our understanding of the nature Jesus; specifically, the relationship between the substance of God the Father and the substance of Christ, the Son.

And it was this word "substance" where all the focus of the argument became centered. A distinction between two similar Greek words became the answer to the problem. "Homoousios" means of "one substance" or "one being." The other word is "Homoiousios" and this means "similar substance" or "similar being." There is a vast difference between saying that Jesus the Son is the same substance as God the Father and saying that Jesus the Son is merely similar to God the Father. The distinction is between "same" and "similar" and to some it might seem like an academic brain-easer, but it was a critically important distinction at this council, and everyone knew it. Riots broke out among priests and bishop and riots broke out in the streets as passions ran out of control.

If Jesus is of the *same* substance as the Father, then he is truly God, and He was able to provide atonement for all of humanity. Jesus would have both the ability and the authority to defeat death and provide redemption for everyone. But if the Son is only of *similar* substance as the Father, then Jesus did not possess the divine authority or ability that was needed to make atonement on behalf of humanity. "Similar" turns Jesus into a sort of demigod and once you start down that path, the Gospel is lost, and the cross is stripped of its power.

In the end, the council agreed that Jesus is truly God, of the same substance, and so it published its creed clearly stating this truth, and at the same time, the council thoroughly condemned Arianism. It was nearly unanimous; only two bishops refused to subscribe to the creed. Constantine rejoiced at the accord that he thought was only possible by God's blessing.

The Council of Nicaea marked a new day and indeed a whole new era for the Christian faith. The Nicene Creed set a precedent because of its technical language to make important theological distinctions. When the council concluded, it established a clearer--and better--understanding of the Trinity and Christ's dual nature. The council issued twenty Rules which became the core of the Church's Canon Law. And even though for many years after the council there was debating still taking place, the vast majority believed the council was a great success.

The once-persecuted faith was now well on its way of becoming the faith of millions living in the Roman Empire. By the time the council convened, approximately 10% of the population of the Roman Empire called themselves Christian, and in the centuries to come, the number of believers would continue to grow. (End of Video Seven).

Two additional Instagram postings below. Figure 29 is John 17:19, "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified." Figure 30 is John 15:19, "I have chosen you out of the world."



FIGURE 29: INSTAGRAM POSTING FOR JANUARY 10, 2023

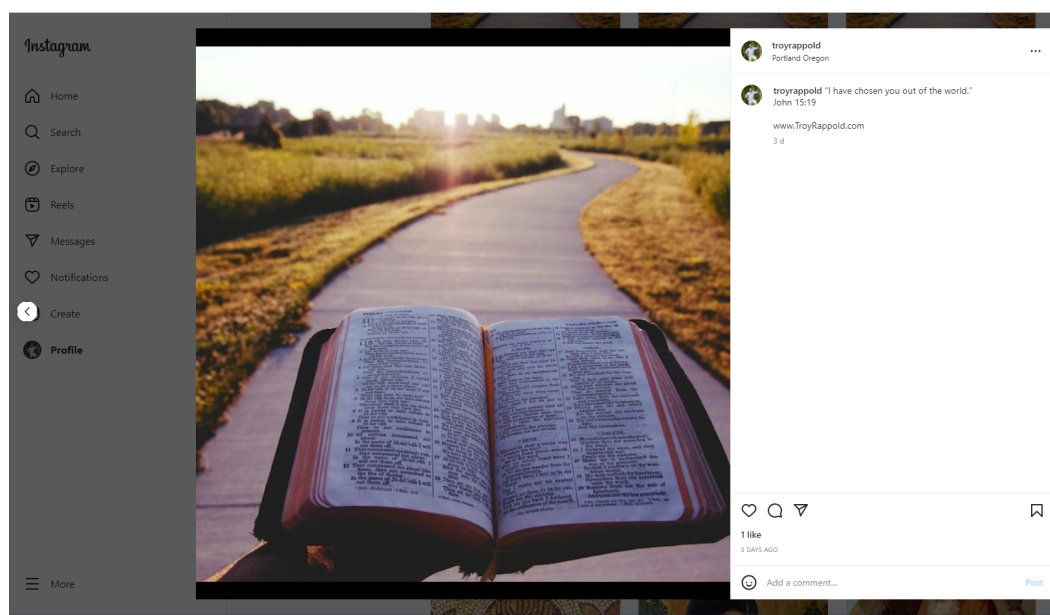


FIGURE 30: INSTAGRAM POSTING FOR JANUARY 23, 2023

Questionnaire for Video: Thank you for your feedback

1.) Is the Video too long?

-yes, 8 minutes is too long to watch	-yes, a little long. Maybe 5 or 6 minutes
-yes, shorten it. I lost interest	-yes, a little
-a little	-maybe
-no, it's ok	-yes, a little long

2.) Are there too many pictures embedded into the video? Too few?

-not enough pictures – add more	-not enough pics
-use more pictures!	-more is better
-not too many, in fact use more.	-not enough
-no	-more would be ok

3.) Do I talk too fast? Too slow?

-This is fine	-just fine
-OK	-just right
-OK	-speed is good
-definitely not too fast	-good speed

4.) Is the subject matter interesting? Boring?

- Very interesting content but the packaging needs to be improved or you'll lose your viewer.
- yes, very interesting
- just somewhat interesting
- yes, interesting
- a little
- not boring
- yes, interesting but non-Christians might think it's boring
- I love church history, interesting

**FIGURE 31: STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS
SUMMARY, PART 1**

5.) What could make it better?

- more dynamic? More graphics? Add a timeline maybe. Put names of people on the screen when you say their name.
- try to hold the attention of the viewer better. Not just pictures but video or graphics?
- make the pictures stay on the screen longer
- make my headshot smaller and make the pictures bigger and keep them up
- Add a time line maybe? More pictures and bigger and keep them up longer
- make it more dramatic!
- good job...
- keep up the pictures and more of them.

6.) Other feedback?

- Change font? More modern and cool
- Soft music in the background?
- good job...
- pictures of ancient stuff is cool. Pictures of old churches?
- Minimize head (put in a corner) maximize graphics
- ok
- I'll watch the other videos when you're done.
- make more videos! It's a great subject

**FIGURE 32: STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS
SUMMARY, PART 2**

Appendix F—Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation

Below are the metrics for both website traffic and the Instagram account, as of January 28, 2023.

The Edict of Milan, published September 6, 2022:

219 views

The Council of Nicaea, published September 6, 2022:

4 views

The Tradition of the Twelve Apostles, published September 9, 2022:

2 views

The Book of Acts and Beyond, published October 31, 2022:

3 views

Creating a Church Service, published December 23, 2022:

0 views

The Destruction of Jerusalem, published December 29, 2022:

23 views

The Role of Women in the early Church, published January 23, 2023:

2 views

How Did the Church Grow? Published January 23, 2023:

0 views

Instagram account: "TroyRappold"

I have acquired four views and one follower since January 1, 2023.

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