

HISTORY of CHRISTIANITY

Part IV – The Age of Reason and Piety: The Church in Early Modern Times (A.D. 1543 - 1738)

Significant Events and Landmarks of the Era

1607:	American Protestant (Anglican) established at Jamestown Virginia.	1719:	Isaac Watts' <i>The Psalms of David</i> is published.
1608:	John Milton is born.	1719:	Count von Zinzendorf is converted.
1618-48	Date of Thirty Years' War.	1724:	Immanuel Kant is born.
1620:	Pilgrim Fathers disembark at Plymouth, New England.	1725:	John Newton is born.
1621:	Johann Arndt dies.	1727:	New England has an earthquake.
1623:	Blaise Pascal is born.	1734:	"The Great Awakening" in Northampton, Massachusetts begins.
1626:	Dutch East India Company founds New Amsterdam.	1735:	George Whitefield's conversion.
1628:	John Bunyan is born.	1735:	Howell Harris' conversion.
1632:	John Locke is born.	1737:	John and Charles Wesley sail for Georgia.
1635:	Philip Jacob Spener is born.	1737:	The Wesley brothers' <i>The Collection of Psalms and Hymns</i> is published.
1639:	American Baptists (Roger Williams) gather.	1738:	John Wesley's conversion.
1640:	<i>The Bay Psalm Book</i> is published.	1739:	"Love feast" is held at Fetter's Lane (London).
1643:	King Louis XIV is born.	1739:	Jonathan Edwards' <i>Personal Narrative</i> is published.
1648:	Date of the "Cambridge Platform" charter agreement.	1740:	George Whitefield arrives in New England.
1649:	Charles I is beheaded.	1749:	Charles Wesley marries Sarah Gwynne.
1650:	Descartes dies.	1750:	Johann Sebastian Bach dies.
1654:	Pascal becomes a Christian.	1754:	Jonathan Edwards' <i>Freedom of the Will</i> is published.
1660:	John Bunyan is imprisoned.	1758:	Jonathan Edwards becomes President of the College of New Jersey at Princeton.
1662:	Pascal dies.	1758:	Jonathan Edwards dies.
1666:	Bunyan's <i>Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners</i> is published.	1759:	William Wilberforce is born.
1674:	John Milton dies.	1760:	Count von Zinzendorf dies.
1678:	Bunyan's <i>Pilgrim's Progress</i> first published.	1769:	Introduction of Sunday schools.
1679:	Presbyterian Synod is held at Boston.	1770:	George Whitefield dies.
1682:	Bunyan's <i>The Holy War</i> is published.	1773:	Howell Harris dies.
1683:	Church plantings in Maryland.	1778:	Voltaire dies.
1685:	Huguenots flee France.	1778:	City Road Chapel opens.
1685:	Johann Sebastian Bach is born.	1779:	John Newton's hymn book, for the village of Olney, is produced.
1688:	John Bunyan dies.	1786:	Church of England Sunday School Society begins.
1694:	Voltaire is born.	1788:	Charles Wesley dies.
1700:	Count von Zinzendorf is born.	1791:	John Wesley dies.
1703:	John Wesley is born.	1792:	Baptist Missionary Society begins.
1703:	Jonathan Edwards is born.	1795:	London Missionary Society begins.
1704:	John Locke dies.	1799:	Church Missionary Society begins.
1705:	Philip Jacob Spener dies.	1799:	Religious Tract Society begins.
1706:	Presbytery of Philadelphia is formed.	1803:	Sunday School Union begins.
1707:	Isaac Watts' <i>Hymns and Spiritual Songs</i> is published.	1804:	British and Foreign Bible Society founded.
1707:	Charles Wesley is born.	1804:	Kant dies.
1714:	George Whitefield is born.	1807:	John Newton dies.
1714:	Howell Harris is born.	1833:	William Wilberforce dies.
1715:	Isaac Watts' <i>Divine Songs</i> is published.		
1715:	King Louis XIV dies.		

Who's Who of the Era

Johann Sebastian Bach - Martin Luther's influence brought about a great new tradition of music in the church. Organ music reached its peak with the work of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). Bach wrote mostly for the Lutheran church, and his works include more than 300 cantatas. His most ambitious works were the *Mass in B Minor* and the *St. Matthew Passion*.

John Bunyan - A Calvinist, John Bunyan (1628-1688) is remembered for his widely-read allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, published in 1678. Born at Elstow, Bedfordshire, and the son of a poor man, he served in the Parliamentary army. In 1651, he met with the congregation at Bedford. After his conversion, he joined the Bedford congregation, and began to preach for them. In 1660, due to his preaching, he was thrown into prison. In prison, he wrote *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and *The Holy War* (1682).

Sir Isaac Newton - In his *Principia Mathematica* (1687), Isaac Newton (1642-1727) set out laws in which he tried to prove that the universe was divinely ordered. He believed the power and wisdom of the Creator could be demonstrated by inquiring into nature. An English scientist, Newton is best remembered for his law of gravity and his work on the physics of light. He, himself, believed his scientific discoveries were given to him by the Holy Spirit. He regarded the understanding of Scripture as more important than his scientific work.

Immanuel Kant - Whereas Copernicus taught that the earth revolves around the sun, German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) placed humankind in the center of his universe and made everything else revolve around him. Kant regarded his philosophy as a "second Copernican revolution."

Kant believed humanity was the starting point.

Voltaire - Francois-Marie Arouet, whom we know as Voltaire (1694-1778), thought the church deceitful and corrupt. His 35-volume Encyclopedia voiced revolutionary change and Enlightenment ideas.

Blaise Pascal - Pascal (1623-1662) was born in Claremont, France, and became one of the great thinkers of the West, excelling as a mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer, and religious thinker. He invented the first workable calculating machine at age 19. Pascal became a Christian in 1654. His sister involved him with the Jansenists. In 1657 he wrote his *Provincial Letters* to re-emphasize Augustine's doctrine of grace within the Catholic church. "The heart has its reasons," Pascal wrote, "which the reason does not know." "We come to know truth not only by reason," he wrote, "but still more so through our hearts." Pascal believed that "God can be known through Jesus Christ by an act of faith, itself given by God." He died at age 39, leaving his *Apology for the Christian Religion* unfinished.

The Wesleys (Samuel, Susanna, John and Charles) - Born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley, John (1703-1791) and Charles Wesley (1707-1788) were partners in evangelism and organizers/administrators of early Methodism. Born at Epworth in Lincolnshire, John and Charles both attended Oxford University.

Charles started "The Holy Club," and John later took the Club's leadership. The brothers sailed for Georgia in 1737 on mission for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. They returned to England the next year, dissatisfied with the results of their mission. Influenced by Peter Böhler, Charles' and John's conversion experience proved the turning point of the Evangelical Revival. The brothers traveled from place to place and preached in churches, marketplaces, and commons. They preached primarily to working class people.

Charles married Sarah Gwynne in 1749, and they made their home in Bristol, with Charles supervising the Methodist society which met at the New Room there. In 1771, they moved to London, where Charles shared the preaching at City Road Chapel, the headquarters of Methodism with its opening in 1778. Charles produced over 7,000 sacred songs and poems during his lifetime. His hymns added greatly to the Evangelical Revival. John Wesley traveled over 250,000 miles preaching the gospel. He also edited the *Christian Library* as well as *Notes on the New Testament*.

Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf - Count Von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) is credited with the renewal of Moravianism in the eighteenth century. Brought up by his grandmother, Baroness von Gersdorf, Zinzendorf was sent to Francke's grammar school at Halle at age ten. He and five other Christian boys founded the "Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed" and pledged themselves to "love the whole human family" and to spread the gospel. He later studied law at Wittenberg and Utrecht and entered civil service in 1721. His conversion came in 1719 when he was moved by a painting by Domenico Feti. *Ecce Homo* showed Christ wearing the crown of thorns and its inscription read: "All this I did for you. What are you doing for me?" In 1722 he started a Moravian refugee settlement on his estate at Berthesdorf and sought to promote worldwide evangelization. He was acknowledged as leader of the Moravian Brethren and consecrated as a bishop in 1737. He was the first person to use the term "ecumenical" in its modern sense. His goal was to unite all Christians in evangelism and missions.

George Whitefield - The great preacher of the English Awakening, Whitefield (1714-1770) was born in Gloucester and was converted to Christ in 1735. Ordained deacon in 1736, he set sail for Georgia the next year. An effective preacher (especially in open-air evangelism), he traveled throughout Scotland, America, England, and Wales. Whitefield centered his theology on the old English Puritan themes of original sin, justification by faith, and regeneration. On his second trip to America, he arrived in New England in September, 1740, and preached for six weeks. The results? The American colonies experienced an "awakening." Whitefield roused the ministers to revival. "The reason why congregations have been so dead," Whitefield bluntly explained, "is because dead men preach to them." Whitefield left his mark on America, for out of this movement came vast revival, institutes of higher education, and a zeal for missionary and evangelism outreach. Despite some theological differences with John Wesley, the two remained good friends and allies in the Evangelical Awakening.

William Wilberforce - Wilberforce (1759-1833) is best remembered for his campaign against the slave trade. At the age of 14, he wrote a letter to a local newspaper attacking the evils of slavery. Educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, Wilberforce read Philip Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, a book which caused him to undergo a spiritual crisis. He emerged a believer in "real Christianity" centered on Christ. As a member of Parliament (until he retired in 1825), he worked for parliamentary resolutions against the British slave trade as well as many other political reforms. In 1813, Wilberforce helped to open India to missionaries.

The Imperfection of Human Knowledge – John Wesley

1. The desire of knowledge is an universal principle in man, fixed in his inmost nature. It is not variable, but constant in every rational creature, unless while it is suspended by some stronger desire. And it is insatiable; “the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing”; neither the mind with any degree of knowledge that can be conveyed into it. And it is planted in every human soul for excellent purposes. It is intended to hinder our taking up our rest in any thing here below; to raise our thoughts to higher and higher objects, more and more worthy of our consideration, till we ascend to the source of all knowledge, and all excellence, the all-wise and all-gracious Creator.
2. But although our desire of knowledge has no bounds, yet our knowledge itself has. It is, indeed, confined within very narrow bounds; abundantly narrower than common people imagine, or men of learning are willing to acknowledge; a strong intimation (since the great Creator doth nothing in vain) that there will be some future state of being, wherein that now insatiable desire will be satisfied, and there will be no longer so immense a distance between the appetite and the object of it.
3. The present knowledge of man is exactly adapted to his present wants. It is sufficient to warn us of, and to preserve us from, most of the evils to which we are now exposed; and to procure us whatever is necessary for us in this our infant state of existence. We know enough of the nature and sensible qualities of the things that are round about us, so far as they are subservient to the health and strength of our bodies. We know how to procure and prepare our food; we know what raiment is fit to cover us; we know how to build our houses, and to furnish them with all necessities and conveniences. We know just as much as is conducive to our living comfortably in this world. But of innumerable things above, below, and round about us, we know little more than that they exist. And in this our deep ignorance is seen the goodness, as well as the wisdom of God, in cutting short our knowledge on every side, on purpose to hide pride from man.
4. Therefore it is, that by the very constitution of their nature, the wisest of men know but in part. And how amazingly small a part do they know, either of the Creator, or of his works!



A contemporary representation of Wesley preaching before a congregation at Newgate Prison.

Reflection and Review Questions

1. Historian often called this period the Age of Enlightenment (or Reason), what was the relationship between faith and reason in this age?
2. What was the purpose and thesis of Nicolas Copernicus' book *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies*, and how did this discovery change the world?
3. What was Pietism, and what did the Pietists believe? Define *Gotteskinder* and *Weltkinder*.
4. Who were John and Charles Wesley? What's the theology of the Wesley?