



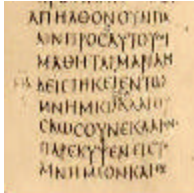
Who's Who in Church History

Lesson One

Who Cares About a Bunch of Dead
Guys With Funny Names?

Time Warp

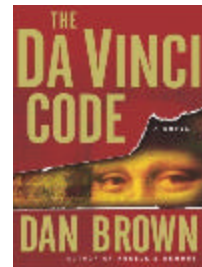
Imagine that you hear a story about Jesus that doesn't too sound familiar—for instance that he used to kiss Mary Magdalene a lot. You check things out a little more and the reason that it doesn't sound familiar is that it comes from the Gospel of Philip.



“What ‘Gospel of Philip’? I’ve never heard of such a thing,” you think to yourself. But sure enough you check around, you find that there is a gospel account supposedly written by Philip about Jesus and some of things that he says seem pretty strange.

So you start wondering, why haven't I heard about this gospel before? Is Philip right about his claims? How do I know that I should trust Luke's account? He was never one of the 12. So what makes Luke's work authoritative instead of Philip's? And if there are questions about Jesus' marital status, maybe there are other things that we should question as well?

This scenario probably sounds familiar to us as a 21st century audience in light of Dan Brown's best selling book, *The DaVinci Code*. But you might be surprised to know that it would also sound familiar to a 2nd century audience as well. You see from the earliest days of our Christian heritage there have been other books than just those included in the New Testament that claim to have a direct knowledge about Jesus, and some of them say some pretty strange things—like Jesus was married!



The very same questions that *The DaVinci Code* raise for us and our friends are the same sorts of questions that our spiritual ancestors, men like Tertullian and Athanasius, were faced with—

- What makes a religious text authoritative scripture, instead of mere theological speculation?
- Who gets to decide which texts are authoritative and which are not?
- What if not everyone agrees about the decision?

Their answers to these sorts of questions (and a whole host of others) profoundly shape how we ourselves answer this question.

Theology as you know it, worship as you know it, even Christianity as you know has a history, a past, a series of events and persons and movements that have shaped it into what it is today.

What if...

- Instead of Rome becoming a chief center of theology Beijing did? What would our doctrine of justification sound like if it were rooted in Asian language and concepts?
- Instead of Athanasius winning the debate about the nature of Christ, Arius' view of Christ won out, as seemed likely for a while?
- The Roman Emperor Constantine never converted his empire to Christianity?

All of these things have deeply shaped who are as Christians.

And yet none of them are mandated by the biblical text. Even if we are several generations removed from them, they still have an impact on very basic things in our lives.

**Reasons?! We Don't Need No Stinkin' Reasons!
(Well, actually, yes, we do.)**

So why is it important that we have at least a rudimentary understanding of Church history, beyond mere historical curiosity?

Without understanding how things have developed it is easy to be blinded to our cultural biases in our faith.

We are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past and miss out on the achievements of the past if we don't understand it.

Church history gives us a sense of humility—very little we face is entirely new. Church history keeps us from reinventing the wheel.

It reminds us Christianity wasn't invented in 1800's America.

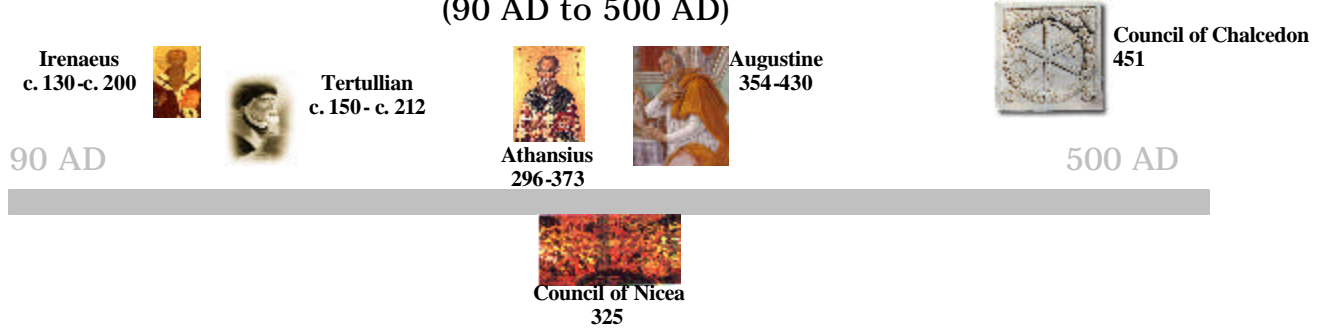
Before 1519 there was only one church in the west—all of the popes up until then are part of our family, not just part of the Roman Catholic faith. The idea that church and state are distinct entities is a thoroughly America notion. It also reminds us that even when the leader of a nation or empire is Christian (even a sincere one) that sin doesn't disappear and the world doesn't necessarily become a better place.

“And Now, Hailing from Greater Cappadocia, Starting at Power Bishop It’s...”

There are several large movements within church history that will help us keep our bearings.

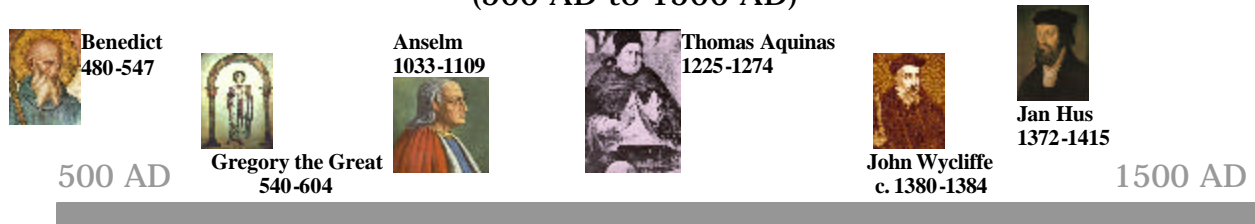
The Church of the Fathers

(90 AD to 500 AD)



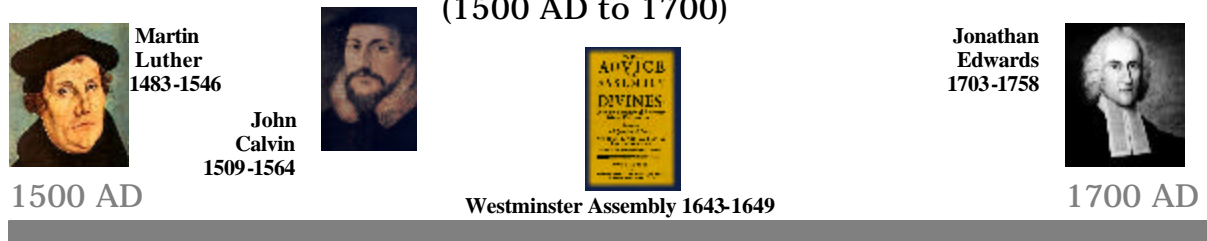
The Medieval Church*

(500 AD to 1500 AD)



Reformation and Reaction

(1500 AD to 1700)



* The “Medieval Church” for our purposes really refers to the church in Western Europe. In 1054 the tensions between church in the East (eastern Europe and the Middle East) and the church in the West came to a head prompting the “Great Schism.” Even though they remained a vibrant and growing church in the East, our tradition comes from these Western churches and so we focus on them.