

# 75 Other Important Events in Church History

*A brief listing of significant dates that also earn a place in the “CHRISTIAN HISTORY 100”*

65—**Peter and Paul are executed**; martyrdom of the church’s two greatest apostles forces church leadership into a new era. 150—**Justin Martyr’s *First Apology***, the work of the first major scholar-apologist, makes Christianity reasonable to thinking pagans. 180—**Irenaeus’s *Against Heresies*** leads the fight against the powerful Gnostic heresy. 196—**Tertullian begins writing**, with his legal-trained mind, major writings that promote purity of life and doctrine. 215—**Origen begins writing** brilliant works that “provided a foundation for the great ecumenical councils to come.”

230—**the earliest known public churches are built**, signaling a shift in Christians’ life and practice. 250—**Empire-wide persecution** under Emperor Decius causes thousands to fall away and produces a major schism in the church. 270—**Anthony takes up solitude**, attracting many to asceticism and prayer and paving the way for monasticism. 312—**The Donatist Schism**, over treatment of apostates from the Great Persecution, challenges thinking about the church.

## Christian Empire

358—**Basil the Great founds a monastery**, laying foundations for religious communities ever after. 381—**First Council of Constantinople** ratifies the Nicene Creed and condemns Apollinarianism, safeguarding a high view of Christ. 390—**Ambrose defies Emperor Theodosius**, refusing him Communion after his brutal killing of thousands in Thessalonica; the act influences church-state relations for generations. 432—**Patrick’s mission to Ireland** breaks heathenism and fosters Christianity, leading to a flourishing Celtic church. 529—**Justinian’s *Code*** is published; it becomes the basis for later canon law in the West, thus shaping medieval society.

## Middle Ages

590—**Gregory the Great becomes pope**: The “first of the medieval popes” takes on civil power and lays the foundations for the papal state. He also commissions, in 597, **Augustine’s mission to England**, which converts the pagan Angles. 663—**Synod of Whitby** decisively aligns the English church with Rome for the next nine centuries. 716—**Boniface’s mission to the Germans** spreads Christianity to pagan northern Europe, preparing the way for the later Holy Roman Empire. 732—**Battle of Tours**: Frankish general Charles Martel halts the seemingly unstoppable Muslim invasion, keeping Europe under Christian control. 800—**Charlemagne crowned Holy Roman Emperor**: With the help of his adviser, Alcuin, the seven-foot-tall king brings Europe political unity, a stronger church, and a renaissance of learning.

910—**the monastery at Cluny is founded**, the genesis of a reform movement that spreads to over 1,000 communities and revitalizes monastic life for hundreds of years. 1093—**Anselm named archbishop of Canterbury**, a post from which he writes lasting works on the Atonement and proofs for God’s existence. 1115—**Bernard founds monastery at Clairvaux**: The “father of Western mysticism” strengthens the monastic tradition.

In approximately 1150, **the Universities of Paris and Oxford are founded**, fostering higher education and, eventually, a modern world view. 1208—**Francis of Assisi renounces wealth** in order to preach a simple, passionate gospel, and later founds the Franciscan Order. 1215—**Innocent III calls the Fourth Lateran Council**, which climaxes the rule of the medieval church’s most influential pope and defines transubstantiation. 1220—**Dominic establishes Order of Preachers**, who travel barefoot, teach, and convert heretics.

1321—**Dante’s *Divine Comedy*** gives masterful poetic expression to medieval concepts of heaven, hell, and purgatory, and shapes later thought. 1370—**Catherine of Siena’s *Letters***, a treasure of Western mysticism, are begun. 1380—**John Wyclif supervises Bible translation**, leaving the first complete English Bible. 1453—**Constantinople falls to the Turks**, ending a millennium of Christianity in the Eastern Roman (“Byzantine”) Empire. 1479—**The Spanish Inquisition**, under Ferdinand and Isabella, begins against baptized Jews and Moors.

## Reformation

1518—**Ulrich Zwingli is called as people’s priest in Zurich**, where he begins his radical break with Catholic practices and lays the foundation of Reformed theology. 1529—**Colloquy of Marburg**: Here, however, Zwingli and Luther’s differing views on the Lord’s Supper lead to separate Reformed and Lutheran churches. 1530—**Augsburg Confession**, written largely by Philipp Melancthon, definitively expresses Lutheran beliefs. 1540—**Ignatius Loyola receives approval for the Society of Jesus**, the Jesuit “soldiers of Christ” who help preserve and extend Catholicism.

1549—***Book of Common Prayer***, the service book of the Church of England, is drafted by Thomas Cranmer. 1559—**John Knox returns to Scotland** and, despite being outlawed, champions a bloodless Reformation, secured the following year. 1598—**The Edict of Nantes** officially ends persecution of French Protestants (Huguenots), whose years of suffering included the infamous St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in 1572. 1609—**Separatist pastor John Smyth baptizes** himself and about forty adults, the start of modern Baptist denominations.

1633—Galileo is forced by Rome to recant his belief in the Copernican theory (that the earth revolves around the sun); tensions heighten between Christianity and modern science. 1646—Westminster Confession, the definitive statement of Presbyterian beliefs, is drafted. 1648—the Peace of Westphalia ends the Thirty Years' War, settling European wars of religion and effectively ending the papacy's political control over large areas.

## Age of Reason and Revival

1652—George Fox founds Society of Friends (“Quakers”), gathering 50,000 followers in just eight years. 1675—Jakob Philipp Specner's *Pia Desideria* (*Pious Desires*) launches the influential Pietist movement. 1678—Jailed Baptist preacher John Bunyan writes *Pilgrim's Progress*—next to the Bible, the most-popular English-language book of all time. 1707—Isaac Watts's *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, with 600 hymns including “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” moves the church from nearly exclusive singing of metrical psalms to the hymn singing we know today. 1732—First Moravian missionaries, spurred by an earlier religious awakening in their small community of Brethren, launch the modern missionary movement. 1735—George Whitefield is converted and soon begins dramatic open-air evangelism in the U.S. and England. 1780—Robert Raikes begins Sunday school to teach poor local children, creating a lasting institution.

## Age of Progress

1789—The Bill of Rights guarantees freedom of speech, assembly, and religion to Americans; the French Revolution leads later to the Festival of Reason and de-Christianization of France. 1807—William Wilberforce's efforts lead to the abolition of the British slave trade. 1816—Richard Allen becomes bishop of the new African Methodist Episcopal church, which later publishes the first African-American newspaper and magazine.

1835—Charles Finney's *Lectures on Revivals* is published, explaining the “scientific” methods the revivalist used in converting 500,000 people. 1833—John Keble's sermon launches the Oxford Movement, encouraging high-church worship, authority, and tradition within the Church of England. 1844—Søren Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* is published; his works attack formalized Christianity in favor of the personal leap of faith. 1845—Phoebe Palmer writes *The Way of Holiness*, spurring the Holiness movement, while strengthening women's ministries and encouraging the Prayer Meeting Revival. 1855—D. L. Moody is converted and goes on to become the greatest evangelist of his era. 1864—*Syllabus of Errors*, issued by Pope Pius IX, rejects modern societal trends, including liberalism and socialism. 1870—The First Vatican Council declares papal infallibility (when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* on matters of faith or morals). 1878—William and Catherine Booth found the Salvation Army, soon a worldwide thrust for social and spiritual salvation. 1886—Student Volunteer Movement begins, ultimately stirring 20,000 college students to become Christian missionaries. 1906—The Azusa Street Revival begins in Los Angeles under William Seymour's leadership, spreading Pentecostalism.

## Age of Ideologies

1910—The Edinburgh Missionary Conference, an interdenominational gathering chaired by John R. Mott, births the modern ecumenical movement. 1910—*The Fundamentals*, a twelve-paperback series presenting conservative doctrine, is launched, signaling the rise of fundamentalism. 1919—Karl Barth's *Commentary on Romans* rocks the theological world by breaking with liberalism for a “neo-orthodoxy.” 1931—C. S. Lewis's conversion gives rise to numerous theological and apologetic books that explain Christianity to twentieth-century people. 1934—Wycliffe Bible Translators begins under Cam Townsend, providing Scriptures for hundreds of language groups with no Bible. 1940—First Christian television broadcasts are made. 1941—Rudolf Bultmann calls for demythologization of the New Testament message into terms acceptable for moderns. 1945—Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* call for costly discipleship in a difficult world. 1948—The World Council of Churches is formally constituted, uniting nearly all major Western denominations. 1949—L. A. Crusade catapults Billy Graham to prominence, and with ensuing crusades he preaches to more people than any evangelist in history. 1954—United Methodists grant full ordination to women, signaling increasing leadership for women in mainline and other churches. 1960—Charismatic renewal advances following national attention given to Episcopal rector Dennis Bennett's experience.