

Twenty Questions

that shaped World Christian History

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Study Guide

Twenty Questions That Shaped World Christian History: **Study Guide**

Welcome to *Twenty Questions That Shaped World Christian History*! Needless to say, I think you have made a good decision to read this book, and I sincerely hope that you find this study guide to be an easily navigable and user-friendly companion to the book. This guide is ideal for classes, groups, and personal enrichment.

This guide is designed to be simple and straightforward. There are three parts to each chapter (and two parts to the introduction and conclusion).

- The first part is a general introduction or outline to the chapter. I will offer what I believe are the highlights of each chapter as well as what I believe are helpful supplements to the content discussed.
- The second part contains “Questions to Contemplate.” These are open-ended questions that will allow you to process what you are reading. There are no right or wrong responses to these questions. If you are using this guide as part of a group, different members may respond in different ways—and that’s great!
- The third part contains “Questions to Ascertain.” After getting intellectually “warmed up” with the open-ended “Questions to Contemplate,” these questions are knowledge based. They may require extra work such as reading an excerpt, viewing something online, or consulting an encyclopedia. These types of questions are designed to unpack the historical or theological context of each chapter.

Here’s what I recommend: before reading each chapter, consult the “Questions to Contemplate,” so that you may read with certain open-ended questions in mind. Then after reading the chapter, consider reading the outline or introduction below of that chapter and then responding to the “Questions to Ascertain.”

These, of course, are just suggestions. You may prefer to read the outline first before reading the actual chapter, or you may like to think about the “Questions to Ascertain” before tackling the chapter at large. Or leaders or instructors may have their own suggestions on how to use this guide in consultation with the book. Whatever exact procedure is chosen, I hope you will enjoy studying what I think is one of the most interesting and rewarding of all subjects—church history!

INTRODUCTION: WHAT’S IN A QUESTION?

This opening section introduces one of the major themes of this book, namely, that Christians love to ask questions! They have been doing so since the first century, and there’s no stopping now. Perhaps it’s a carryover from Judaism. Perhaps it’s what it means to be human. Or perhaps it is a trait that is prominent among practitioners of the Christian religion.

Whatever the case, although some people associate Christianity with hammer-tight doctrines, every specific teaching of the church is the result of a question someone asked at a specific point in time. In this way, Christianity is a thoroughly *historical* religion, one that has taken shape in the crucible of time.

Someone, long ago, thought out loud: “What are we going to do with people in our church who deny Christ?” and “Is it right for priests to marry?” and “If evolution is true, does that mean that Christianity is not?”

As each century has unfolded, more questions have been thought out loud, and there have been a number of responses to them. But what about you? What are some of *your* questions? As you think about that, let’s consider the questions below.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Do you think Christians ask more questions than people of other, or no, religious backgrounds?
2. Why do people ask questions? Are you a person who prefers more closure in your questions or more open-endedness?
3. What are some of the major questions you are asking these days about God or religion? What’s the specific context for these questions, that is, what prompted them?
4. If you are a parent, what are some of the questions your children have asked you about God or religion? When you were a child, do you remember any questions you asked about God?
5. Scroll down the Table of Contents. Which one of the questions are you most interested in? Why?

CHAPTER 1: WHAT’S THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY?

Most everybody knows that Christianity is the daughter religion of Judaism. But this is nothing extraordinary. It’s actually fairly common among world religions for one religion to emerge from another. Did you know that Buddhism emerged out of Hinduism? Or that Confucianism and Daoism emerged out of the Chinese Religion? Or that Baha’i emerged out of Islam? Or that Mormonism emerged out of Christianity? This helps put things in perspective.

This chapter alludes to something very important throughout this book: There has never really been *universal* agreement among Christians on *any* question that has been asked. That’s right—none. Sure, there has often been consensus to a question, but never absolute agreement. In this chapter, I discuss how Christians were not completely united in their response to what the relationship between Judaism and Christianity should be. And guess what? There’s still no absolute agreement today. There are some Christian churches that do not even have Old Testaments in their Bibles under the belief that Judaism is a different religion, and there are some

Christian churches that fully incorporate Jewish practices into their Christian services. Christianity is a *very* diverse religion.

As we think about all the different kinds of questions about the Christian religion, it's best to create mental categories in your head for the *types* of questions that Christians have asked over the centuries. There are, for instance, *regional questions* that only pertain to specific clusters of churches or Christians. Then there are *international questions* that relate to practically all Christians. In this book, we focus on international questions for the simple fact that a book on regional questions would take years to write, and would no doubt test your patience as a reader.

The general method of this book is to ask an international question and then allow for thinkers during that time period to respond to it. It doesn't always work out perfectly, but it's a clear and accessible way for us to get to the heart of the issues Christians were wrestling with during each century of the church.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. If Christianity emerged out of Judaism, what does this imply about the relationship between these two religions? Should they *always* have some kind of living or existing connection? How so? Or does it not matter at all if there is any living connection?
2. Do you think there are more similarities or differences between Christianity and Judaism? How so?
3. What's the importance of a name? What difference does it make if we refer to the author of the most letters of the New Testament as "Saul" or "Paul"? If we could go back in time, how do you think he would introduce himself to you? Why?
4. Paul rarely quoted from Jesus in his writings. Why do you think this is?
5. If you were a Jewish Christian living in the year 68 CE, do you think you would support the Jews in their war against the Romans? Why or why not?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. In consultation with a dictionary or a reliable internet source, explain the system of Roman patronage. (If you are really interest in a full study of this topic, consider reading *Alan Wheatley's Patronage in Early Christianity: Its Use and Transformation from Jesus to Paul of Samosata* [Pickwick Publications, 2011].)
2. Read Acts 15. Do you know any churches that seek to enforce the regulations for non-Christians converting to Christianity? If not, why not? Are the regulations meant for a specific time in history or for all Christians? Can you detect any ways that Paul enforces these regulations on his churches in his letters to, say, the Corinthians or Thessalonians?

3. In consultation with a dictionary or a reliable internet source, describe Josephus' role in the First Jewish War. (You may want to consider reading Josephus's *Life [or Autobiography] of Flavius Josephus* 13-17, which can be found online.)
4. Who are the Ebionites? What were their major teachings? If you are able to, read "The Letter of Peter to James." What is the point of this letter? How does it compare with the teachings of Jesus or of Paul?
5. What's the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the first century?

CHAPTER 2: WHAT MAKES SOMEONE A HERETIC?

It's a temptation for many Christians. When you come across people who believe different than you do, you want to distinguish yourself from them. You want to demonstrate that you are right and they are wrong. You don't want to be in any way associated with them. So you think of the best word you can find to describe them, and out it comes: heretic!

Christians have been calling each other heretics from the beginning. Certain Christians are always trying to distinguish themselves from other Christians, so they resort to calling each other names. In the second century, this name-calling came to a head. Although only a century or so old, the church was anything but united. There were all sorts of Christianized groups, some of which held very different beliefs.

In this chapter, I focus on three men who launched their own churches and movements: Montanus, Marcion, and Valentinian. Although they believed themselves to be Christians, many disagreed.

It's in the second century that we begin to see an emerging tradition that would "win" the fight between who was right and who was wrong. Sometimes scholars call this tradition "the proto-orthodox tradition," meaning that this tradition was the seed form of the tradition that eventually grew to become the "correct" tradition: the Catholic Church or the (Eastern) Orthodox Church.

In the early church, it wasn't so clear-cut between the proto-orthodox and "the heretics." Both groups believed themselves to be right, and the other wrong. What's more, the groups that were considered "heretical" did not get along with each other. Believe it or not, the groups deemed "heretical" also believed that other groups labeled "heretical" were heretical. It was all or nothing in the early church. People could not be part of two simultaneous groups of communities.

The real winners in this debate of heretics were the bishops of the proto-orthodox tradition. The bishops came to represent the true church. If a church could lay claim to a bishop who could eventually trace his (not her) tradition back to the apostles, then the church was pure, and the bishop was legitimate. If this could not be demonstrated, then there was a big problem—and this church was illegitimate or heretical. Part and parcel to this debate, of course, was authority. Where does authority come from? From bishops who could prove that they are three generations removed from the apostles or from charismatic leaders who claimed to be led by the Holy Spirit—as well as by Scripture?

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Where does church authority come from? If you attend church, who has the most authority? Why do you think so?
2. Why do you think so many early Christian leaders resisted female leadership in churches?
3. Many early Christians believed in apostolic succession, the notion that true teaching was connected to those bishops who could trace their lineage all the way back to the apostles of Christ. What do you think about this doctrine, which is still upheld by Catholic and Orthodox Christians but rejected by most Protestant Christians?
4. The teachings of Marcion, Montanus, and Valentinus can only be reconstructed from the writings of their opponents, since their writings were destroyed and their churches were condemned. Why do you think the more mainstream body of believers reacted so strongly to these men and the movements they founded? Do you think they were right or wrong to destroy the writings of Christian leaders they disagreed with?
5. What makes someone a “heretic”? If you attend church, are there certain groups your church leaders consider heretical? Do you think this is a helpful term to have today?

Question to Ascertain:

1. Read First Clement (which can be found online or in printed versions). What is the principal message of this document? How does the document compare to the other writings of the New Testament?
2. Who is Marcion? What are some of his major beliefs and practices?
3. Who is the New Prophecy? What are some of its major beliefs and practices, and who were some of the key figures involved?
4. Read the Gospel of Thomas, an early Christian Gnostic gospel. How is this document similar to and different from the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke)? Do you detect any differences in terms of authority?
5. What are the Nag Hammadi texts? When were they discovered, and what type of writings are they? If possible, consult *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* edited by Marvin Meyer and published by HarperCollins. In that volume, read “Valentinian Exposition with Valentinian Liturgical Readings.” What’s your overall impression of that text?

CHAPTER 3: WHAT HAPPENS TO CHRISTIANS WHO BACKSLIDE?

It happens to all churches. No Christian tradition is exempt. Certain individuals or groups will “leave the faith,” that is, they *will* abandon their religious tradition. This is done for a variety of reasons, but in this chapter people were “backsliding” or committing apostasy because of

persecution. Rather than suffer arrest, persecution, social pressure, or even torment, many Christians in the early church chose to abandon their faith.

Some people living in the individualistic and modern world of the West have a hard time fully appreciating the magnitude of apostasy in the early church. In a world where faith is primarily personal and separate from the state, some Westerners today don't see "the big deal" about pouring some wine or throwing some grain over a fire one day and then going to church the next. But for ancient people, where church and state were indivisible and where the increase of honor and the decrease of shame were the motivators of actions, this was a sin for which there may be no forgiveness. Throwing a little grain on a fire as prayer to the emperor or to a Roman god was as good as stomping on the cross of Christ. The Christian community, the bedrock of the ancient church, would not abide it.

Why did Romans react so harshly toward Christians? At a time when the Roman Empire was collapsing and finances were in dire straits, it was important that everybody was united and doing his or her duty. In a communal empire like Rome, everybody was supposed to be united in their devotion to the gods for the preservation of the society. Because Christians refused to worship the gods of Rome and put their stress on life in the world to come, they were interpreted as threats to the welfare of the empire. Their actions were not just unpatriotic, they were treasonous. As the well-known Roman orator Cicero wrote in the first century BCE, "In all probability, disappearance of piety towards the gods will entail the disappearance of loyalty and social union" (*On the Nature of the Gods* 1.2.4). From a certain perspective, he was right. Whatever the case, the Romans prosecuted the Christians for their refusal to obey the laws of the land by making sacrifices or saying prayers when required. The Christians had shamed the empire, and they were going to have to pay with their lives.

When many Christians were given the option of punishment or apostasy, they chose the former, which created all kinds of pastoral problems. Although we tend to look back upon this time in the church as unattached observers, it was not at all a theoretical exercise. It was real life, just as it's still real life for many people today. Many Christians are still persecuted around the world today, and they are dealing with issues quite similar to what North African Christians in the third century dealt with.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. What is the most patriotic thing someone in your country could do? What would be the most unpatriotic thing? How would the general populace react to that person for (a) doing the most patriotic thing for his/her country and (b) for doing the most unpatriotic thing?
2. If you were given the option of completely renouncing your faith or of undergoing stern legal punishment, how do you think you would respond? What are the primary thoughts and feelings that come to mind?
3. First Peter 4:1-2 says: "(for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), so as to live the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God." What do you think this means? How does this relate to the debate discussed in this

chapter about the “confessors,” those who confessed their faith before authorities, were punished, lived, and gained great influence in the church?

4. Do you think the United States will ever be a place that persecutes Christians for their beliefs? Why or why not?
5. How do you think religion in America would be different if the United States did not separate church from state?

Question to Ascertain:

1. In a dictionary, compare the definitions of “persecute” and “prosecute.” What’s the difference? Which do you think is the right word to use of Christians in the second century?
2. Locate and define the different Latin terms used in this chapter.
3. How many people lived in Carthage in the third century when Cyprian was bishop?
4. Through a search online, try to discover how many Christian martyrs there have been worldwide. Then do a similar search for martyrs during the twentieth century.
5. Read Hebrews 6:4-6. Then read the entire chapter and try to figure out the context and what the writer meant by this passage.

CHAPTER 4: ARE JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT DIVINE?

These interrelated questions were perhaps the most important theological questions that the early Christians asked. The controversy surrounding these questions is legendary, and there is no survey of Christian history that does not mention Arius, Athanasius, Constantine, the Council of Nicea, and the Nicene Creed. Arius, one of the main figures of the controversy, spoke passionately about the subordination of Christ. He even wrote songs explaining his standpoint, so his congregations might easily grasp the core concept. Soon, the matter was taken to the Supreme Court, so to speak, of the Christian church.

The Roman emperor, Constantine, called for an assembly of the bishops. He hoped they would settle their internal dispute over the nature of Jesus. The bishops voted against Arius at the Council of Nicea (325), proclaiming Jesus as true God and the exact same substance as God the Father. Because of the political involvement of Roman emperors and continued discord among bishops, the decision remained in limbo for decades until later councils re-affirmed the original decision.

In that time period, questions also surfaced regarding the Holy Spirit’s nature. These did not prove as contentions. At the Council of Constantinople (381) it was declared that the Holy Spirit be worshiped and glorified in tandem with God the Father and God the Son.

What can be learned from these controversies? Instead of vilifying and finger pointing, one could thank Arius for helping the church clarify its own view of Jesus. He was asking hard questions, curious about the truth. In addition, his innovative discipleship method of placing truth within memorable songs should be noted and duplicated when pragmatic. Children especially catch lyrics through song in rapid fashion. What Christian childhood lyrics can you recall? Are there any songs about the nature of Jesus which come to mind?

Questions to Contemplate:

1. How does your particular church work out theological disagreements? Does your church have a specific procedure? What unresolved areas of theological tension persist in your local church, denomination or country?
2. Do you think politicians like Constantine should be able to ex-communicate or ordain religious leaders?
3. How would you answer Arius when he pointed out passages on the earthly subordination of Jesus to the Father as proof of Jesus as less than God?
4. Do you think a Christian should worship, pray, or thank the Spirit?
5. If God is three persons, does that imply Christianity is not monotheistic?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. What current geographical regions extensively intertwine politics and religion as the church in Constantine's era did? What are the ramifications of this dynamic?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-19. Does the Apostle Paul consider disagreements negative or positive? How do theological arguments help or hinder Christians from exemplifying Jesus in society? When is short term confusion and division worth the long term benefits of clarity and unity? When is it not?
3. Locate the terms *dogmatic* and *dogma* in a dictionary. Why would the divine nature of Jesus and the Spirit be Christian dogma and not merely a matter of denominational or individual opinion?
4. Some of the early Christians considered music a powerful instructional tool. Can you think of any other examples of music and theology in the church's history?
5. Examine passages for and against the addition of the *filioque*: Luke 11:13, John 14:16, John 16:7, John 20:22. Which side would you have taken and why?

CHAPTER 5: HOW MANY NATURES DOES CHRIST HAVE?

This theme of this chapter is, in many ways, one of the hardest for modern Christians to understand today. For them, this question seems abstruse, irrelevant, and far removed from the

practicalities of life. But for early Christians, this was the stuff of life and death, and heaven and hell. Why? Because for ancient Christians, any deviation from truth meant heresy.

High-ranking bishops often felt compelled into lose-or-take-all theological struggles, pitting their reputations against any outspoken rival. This kind of belligerence devastated the church. Cyril and Nestorius seemed so concerned about winning their argument that they overlooked civility and love. Because of their social incompetence, they sowed division instead of unity, promoting hatred instead of dialogue.

The universal split into three segments at this time. While it was due in part to theological arguments, the culture and language barriers also proved formidable. It became impossible as the church spread to maintain relationships or call councils in which everyone could attend.

Resolution came at a high price. The council of Chalcedon (451) concluded that “Jesus was recognized as two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person.” Regrettably, the churches also concluded they could no longer tolerate each other’s company. Unlike the nature of Jesus, they would live in constant confusion, change their minds based on which emperor ruled, divide the church and separate. They preserved the truth but, in the process, annulled their union.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Nestorius demonstrated great zeal, but lacked prudence. Inexperienced, he did more harm than good due to his jump-first-and-think-later philosophy. Generally speaking, before enacting drastic or minor changes, how long should a pastor evaluate ministries, befriend members, and listen intently before implementing new policies or programs in a local church?
2. How often do you think a person’s indirect or direct experience with church politics turns them away from happily serving and faithfully affiliating with a church? Has it ever caused you or someone you know to leave a church?
3. Nestorius and Cyril, high-ranking Christian leaders, exhibited pettiness, jealousy, and power mongering. Why do you think it is so difficult for Christian leaders then and now to get along?
4. Do you think the church should have split into three over the issue of how the divine and human element of Christ’s nature exactly relate?
5. Why does Mary still elicit such strong reactions from people in terms of her relationship to Jesus? How has your church viewed Mary? What denominational interpretations of Mary would they condemn?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. Compare and contrast the present-day Catholic and Protestant views of Mary, the Mother of God, through a simple online search. What do you agree or disagree with?
2. Read Romans 12:18 and Philippians 4:2-3. What would Cyril and Nestorius have done differently if they had truly followed Paul's two admonitions?
3. In multiple online dictionaries, consult the word *politics*. How closely do the various definitions accurately describe church life?
4. Read the "Tome of Leo." Leo accuses Eutyches of spiritual blindness and theological simplicity. Leo then argues for the humanity of Christ. What scriptures does he mention? Why were they so effective in persuading others of his position?
5. Survey the geographical location of Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox Church, and the Church of the East in the first centuries of the church. Consider how distance and culture hindered communication and unity. How do churches today attempt unity while living in a globalized world? Should churches stay geographically concentrated or should their goal be global expansion? If so, should power remain halfway across the world where the movement originated or should it be given away to those closer culturally and geographically?

CHAPTER 6: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HOLY?

Defining holiness can be as difficult as defining the nature of Christ. Some monks went out alone in nature. Others gathered together in small groups. Most all of them prayed, fasted, and studied scripture. They sought intimacy with God by abstaining from food, marriage and every day comforts like new clothes and meat. Lent, for instance, represents a modern day example of Christians seeking God by setting aside normal indulgences.

The difficulty in holy living is in separating from normal life. Individual Christians and denominations differ on how much separation is necessary or good. Wiggle room exists in scripture. Jesus ate luxurious food and drank wine, but his cousin, John, lived in the desert and ate sparingly. Both exemplified holiness but in different ways.

Holiness can be cultivated. A person can gradually emphasize prayer, fasting, and scripture reading, either alone or in a community, while at the same time gradually deemphasizing bodily cravings. Those with families should not be ashamed or think that holiness isn't for them. They, too, can abstain from certain comforts just probably in smaller increments and time frames.

Why did monks go to such lengths? First, their zeal needed an outlet. A portion of the Christian population will always exhibit extraordinary levels of devotion because of how God made them. Spiritual disciplines fan this zeal into flame and aid their walk with God. Second, they hungered for God's character. God said to his people in Leviticus 20:26, "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." One of Some Christians have argued that God's primary attributes is holiness, which is why the Holy Spirit carried the adjective *Holy* in his name.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Do you think you can be genuinely set apart from society without appearing holier-than-thou or self-righteous? Do you think aspiring for holiness can be accomplished without other people noticing and commenting?
2. In ancient Christianity, those who abstained from food and marriage were considered holy. Who is holy in your eyes today? What person in your life would you consider holy?
3. Monks who abandoned secular life in pursuit of God were known for their powerful intercessory prayers. Does holy living impact the power of a person's prayer life? Is fasting or abstaining from comfort something you ever considered?
4. Saint Benedict considered a monk's obedience to his abbot a mark of true devotion. Does your church respect their pastor and elders in the same way Benedict would have endorsed?
5. Would you rather be a monk who lived alone (eremitical) or in a community (coenobitic)? Would you rather live in a tree or in a cave? Would you rather live a life of intense physical labor and prayer or intense scholarship and prayer? Monks made these choices and established flourishing communities the world over. They improved agriculture technology, advanced scholarship, and powerfully interceded for those in need.

Questions to Ascertain:

1. Look up the word *holy* in Greek. What is the Greek word? What were the various definitions? How did it expand your view of holy?
2. Read Psalm 24:3-6 and James 5:16. How do these passages explain the connection between prayer and holiness? Do they sufficiently explain the prayer life of hermits and monks?
3. *Benedict's Rule* contains 73 chapters. Ask your pastor what policies and procedures your church follows. If possible, obtain a copy and compare it with Benedict's policies and procedures. What rules stand out from the ancient text and your church's current rules?
4. Read step 1, paragraph 4 of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by St. John Climacus. What are the requirements for a monk?
5. Monks regularly incorporated scripture into their prayers. Which book of the Bible did Benedict draw from most?

CHAPTER 7: WHAT'S ISLAM?

What are the basic facts about Islam? First, not all Arabs practice Islam. Arabs hold other faith traditions as well. Second, Muslims live all over the world and not just in the Middle East. Third, the five tenants of Islamic faith include a profession of faith, prayer, charity, fasting, and a

pilgrimage. Fourth, the Sunnis constitute the majority of the world's Muslim population while the Shias account for the bulk of the rest. Muslims are not a monolithic ethnic group who think and act the same! Finally, Muhammad is believed by Muslims to be the final prophet of God. There will be none after him.

Where did Islam come from? Muhammad the prophet conquered much of Saudi Arabia by unifying various tribes of the region through trade and force. He expounded his beliefs and his followers codified them. As Muslim territory expanded, so did Islam into the Middle East, Persia, and India. Islam's rapid expansion continues at the present time, rivaling only Christianity. Did you know Islam, Judaism, and Christianity each began in the Middle East? Likewise, their sacred texts bear a great deal of resemblance.

In fact, Islam and Christianity represent very similar religious perspectives. Their sacred scriptures contain Old Testament stories and mention Jesus. They encourage prayer, fasting, and giving. In many ways, these two religions are like siblings, coming from the same religious upbringing. However, like cousins or siblings, their rivalries, as recorded in this chapter, can escalate fairly quickly.

It would be good for a modern Christian to know about Islam since we share so much in common. The world, moreover, has shrunk through migration, globalization, and the spread of religion, increasing the chances of frequent interaction with Muslims. Reading *The Cross and the Crescent* by Richard Fletcher, or similar books, would generate empathetic knowledge of the sort which leaves a person empowered to graciously and knowledgably interact with Muslims.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Multiple statements by Christians expressed their understanding of the Muslim army as divine punishment. Have you ever felt like God punished you for something you did or didn't do in your own life?
2. Why do you think people immediately explain heightened calamity in their society as a sign of the end times? Why do people consider any national catastrophe as the end of the world? Do you think the Muslims in that time period considered themselves harbingers of Armageddon?
3. Anastasios wrote *The Guide*. In it, he attacked Islamic interpretations of Jesus. How do you personally dialogue with people who practice another religion?
4. Do you think Christians better represent Christ when they are marginalized in a pluralistic society or when they are well connected politically and the dominant religion?
5. Do you think it is helpful to read the religious texts of other faith traditions? How may this practice be beneficial or harmful?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. How closely do the writings of Jeremiah in chapter 1 of Lamentations parallel the writings of Christians during the Muslim advance?
2. How did the Church of the East differ in their interpretation of the Muslim advance in comparison with the Eastern Orthodox Church? Which church would most likely quote the enemy of my enemy is my friend?
3. Christians paid a tax called *jizyah* while under Muslim occupation. Today, the opposite holds true in the United States. What tax break do religious figures normally enjoy as a result of their vocation? Should governments impose rules based solely on what religion a person claims?
4. Read a segment of the Qur'an. What stood out? What confused you?
5. What are the major media outlets in the United States, and how do they frequently portray Islam? What other sources of information may help supplement a person's knowledge of another religion besides television?

CHAPTER 8: ARE ICONS IDOLATROUS?

The Iconoclastic Controversy left its fingerprint on history. People rallied either for or against it. Muslims, for their part, considered religious images idolatrous and indirectly influenced the East against icon proliferation. John of Damascus and Theodore the Studite placed great emphasis on icons, and wrote some of the most influential treatises on the use of icons in all of Christian history. Among other things, they argued that since Christ embodied flesh for the sake of humankind, art embodying Christ for the sake of humankind was no different and, thus, greatly beneficial.

The Christian West emphasized the Eucharist as sacred but not images. For them, images could not fully capture Christ in his divine and human state, so it shouldn't be emphasized. When the Papacy with iconophiles, the Franks in Germany responded negatively, writing books on why the practice should cease. This controversy further divided Christians in the East from the West.

Christians of the past sincerely questioned art's effect on them and what purpose it should ultimately serve in Christian households and gatherings. Today, Christians decorate homes and churches with art. Buildings themselves frequently hold symbolic meaning. What do the physical spaces in your home and church say about your personal and corporate faith history?

Questions to Contemplate:

1. What kind of pictures would people find on the walls of your house? Would they find religious relics, sports jerseys, family photos, religious sayings, family art, or secular paintings? What do these pictures say about what a person values?
2. Do you like your picture being taken? Some people eagerly await a photo's outcome while others hate being captured by the camera. If Jesus had been born in our day and age, do you think he would want his picture to be taken?

3. Do you think icons contain supernatural powers? Does the Bible or the Eucharist or a pastor or any Christian contain a supernatural element? How would this be discerned or determined?
4. To what extent should a church depict art? What does your church consider taboo or acceptable?
5. Why would Byzantine soldiers support Leo's ban on images? Why would monks vehemently disagree? How would their distinct roles within society shape their stance?

Questions to Ascertain:

6. Locate examples of Muslim calligraphy. What writing form compares in the English language?
7. Read 2 Kings 13:21 concerning Elisha's bones. Would this be considered an icon or a relic? Is this text proof of objects being supernaturally imbued with power?
8. Read Exodus 20:4 about images. Is this text proof against the creation of icons? What contextually may have been different about images in the Israelite time period than in the Leo's day?
9. Pope Hadrian considered icons useful for teaching. Ask a pastor or Sunday school teacher about when and how they use pictorial representations of stories and characters in a sermon or lesson.
10. Visit any Christian bookstore, and you will see a sample selection of gifts and pictures. Do these stories sell physical representations of Christ, angels or saints? Are these considered icons or just pictures? What's the difference?

CHAPTER 9: WHO HAS AUTHORITY OVER NEWLY CHRISTIANIZED NATIONS?

Kings searched for religious affiliation at a time when the Christian church was divided. Because of this dynamic, churches competed for newly Christianized nations. Each church sent missionaries into different countries, hoping to secure allegiance. The kingdom's religious language, culture, and theology immediately reflected the new alliance once a deal was made.

The king enjoyed the benefit of a political and social alliance, and the church rejoiced since it gained new members. But what happened when a new king came to power or when a new, enticing church offer presented itself? The king would switch church affiliation. Options brought freedom of movement and a king used that freedom when convenient.

Switching churches is a hot topic in the church. When is it acceptable? Should it be done? A person can grow by persevering during moments of frustration, but that person can also be stifled. How does the religious and political climate of the Middle Ages reflect the church shopping that many Christians experience today?

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Do you think Christians should know the original biblical languages? Should pastors know the original biblical languages? What should seminaries focus on when they educate future pastors?
2. When should a person search for a new church? What are the major criteria for choosing a church?
3. How upset would you be if your elders decided on switching your church into another denomination?
4. Why do a portion of churches decide against affiliating with any denomination? What factors may motive a church to become non-denominational? Why were kings so hungry for church partnership?
5. What translation of scripture do you read? Why do you read that one? Have you considered other translations? Does your church endorse a particular translation?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. Look up www.biblestudytools.com. Type in a specific Bible chapter and verse then click on compare translations. What versions attract you? What versions repel you?
2. There are three kinds of church growth: birth, transfer, and conversion. If possible, find statistics on a local church's or denomination's growth or decline rate. How do birth rates, transfer growth, and conversions factor into the equation?
3. Each pope sent missionaries. Where do churches tend to send missionaries? What are they hoping to achieve there?
4. Find Biblical Seminary online at www.biblical.edu. Then click on the link for becoming a student. Under the degree programs, place your mouse on Master of Divinity, then click on the Language MDiv. What rationale is given for learning original languages?
5. What authority does your denomination have over the affairs of your local church? Are there financial requirements, building permits, or theological decisions which need approval from the denomination?

CHAPTER 10: ARE THESE THE END TIMES?

Fascination with the end times has not abated in the slightest. Hit movies like *Armageddon* and best-selling books like the *Left Behind Series* signify our culture's apocalyptic curiosity. Not only are movies produced and books written, but theologians debate details of the world's ending, labeling people as pre-tribulationists, mid-tribulationists, post-tribulationists, or amillennialists.

Throughout church history, Christians such as Thiota predicted the end of the world, setting a concrete date on the calendar. Committed followers would then prepare accordingly. These leaders were usually condemned by the Christian majority and prominent theologians like Augustine. Bishop Augustine, for instance, quoted Acts 1:7 saying, “No one can know the times that the Father determined by his own authority.”

So besides buying milk and bread at the local store, how do Christians prepare for the end times? Everybody agrees that an end will come (whether Jesus returns from the clouds, the sun collapses, or a nuclear disaster occurs), but not on the timing. Christians have historically prepared for Christ’s arrival through the sacraments and prayer. According to Matthew 25:1-13, Christ will come when he is not expected. Those waiting for him are supposed to preserve an active spirit of faith.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Would you prefer the end times to happen in your life or in a later generation?
2. Why do you think apocalyptic movies, literature, and art hold so much influence in people’s imaginations?
3. Why do people listen when a person predicts an end-time date?
4. As discussed in this chapter, which historical dating method should be standardized? What do you personally like and why?
5. What kind of natural phenomena or human activity do you associate with the end times?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. Watch an apocalyptic film and analyze the way it portrays the end times. How closely does it match biblical descriptions?
2. Compare Revelation 6, Matthew 24, and 2 Peter 3. How are they similar? How are they dissimilar? How do they differ from secular representations?
3. What other portions of the Bible are considered apocalyptic? What characterizes the genre?
4. Define the word *Antichrist* in your own words. In consultation with a dictionary, identify the various depictions. Which one were you most familiar with? Which version of the Antichrist is located in 1 John 2:18-27?
5. Multiple famous prophecies predicted the end of the world. Which do you remember? *Time* Magazine’s online division listed the top 10 end of the world predictions including the Millerites, Harold Camping, 2012, William Branham and the Pentecostal Tradition, the Anabaptists of Munster, The Late Great Planet Earth, Y2K, the Branch Davidians,

Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Great London Fire of 1666. Spend time researching two of these events. What did you learn?

CHAPTER 11: SHOULD CHRISTIANS FIGHT MUSLIMS OVER THE HOLY LAND?

Paul reminds Christians about God's justice by saying in Romans 12:19, "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord." Christians have not always interpreted this passage in the same way, and there has been nothing in the history of Christianity if there has been no violence.

Violence, in fact, is prevalent in the Bible. In the Old Testament, David, before he was Israel's second king, experienced a desire for revenge (2 Samuel 25). He had been voluntarily protecting another man's sheep in hopes of receiving a few sheep as compensation. Instead, the man ridiculed David. Incensed by the insult, David told all his soldiers to sharpen their swords and kill Nabal and all his male servants. Abigail, Nabal's wife, heard of David's planned revenge, so met him and gave his men food. David realized his mistake in escalating the situation and said, "Blessed be your discretion and advice, and blessed be you who have kept me today from blood guiltiness and from avenging myself with my own hand."

Pope Urban II obviously felt angry over the destruction of Christian sites. He incited his people to arms as David did, but there was no Abigail who stopped the Crusades. On the contrary, Crusaders repeatedly attacked Muslim-controlled cities and land, slaughtering thousands in the process. In addition, they attacked bystanders such as Jews and Byzantine Christians. This chapter explores the outcomes of revenge and how Christian leaders supported it. Although the events described occurred around a thousand years ago, they are just as relevant today as in the past.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Protestants normally do not engage in a yearly pilgrimage, yet many travel extended distances to retreats or conferences designed for spiritual growth. Others tour the Holy Land with trained guides. What is the allure of getting away? How can new settings stretch faith? Where have you gone in the past for spiritual solace? Where could you go in the future?
2. Al-Hakim destroyed a sacred Christian site. This instigated, in part, the crusades. Of course, Christians have done the same thing historically as well. Today, however, it is ISIS that has intentionally demolished ancient buildings. Why do you think conquering groups destroy buildings of sentimental or religious import?
3. It is no secret. Portions of the Old Testament contain depictions of horrific personal violence, group violence, and national war. Should politicians quote passages when justifying their political stance on violence?
4. Should Christians engage in war at all? Christian pacifists consciously object when ordered into military action. Should Christians join the military and serve in the armed forces?

5. According to Bruce Shelley in his book *Church History in Plain English*, Ulfilas, a missionary to Goths, omitted 1-2 Kings from his translation because he didn't want them reading about Israel's violence. Should pastors intentionally bypass certain Scriptures in their preaching based on their knowledge of congregational dynamics?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. According to James 4:1-3, why do people fight and quarrel? What proper or improper motivations do you think contributed, in part, to the Crusades?
2. Research just war theory. What Christian theologians developed this concept? How has it impacted the world?
3. In consultation with a dictionary, identify the meanings of crusade and pacifism. Do personal crusades damage a person's reputation or enhance it? How should a person choose a cause worth fighting for?
4. Read Matthew 26:52 and Isaiah 31:1. What do these verses say about war? Does it effectively neutralize just war theory completely, partially, or not at all?
5. Pope Urban II's speech made certain arguments for the Crusades. What were they? Do you agree with his statements? What letter would you craft in response to his words?

CHAPTER 12: CAN PRIESTS MARRY?

A phrase teens say when navigating unclear relationships aptly sums up the sexual requirements of those living around 1000 CE. In essence, "It's complicated."

Sexual relations are part of human existence, but for whom? Should priests indulge in sex or abstain from it like Jesus and Paul? The complicated answer depended on geographical location, church politics, and theology. Christians in the East held a more moderate stance than those in the West. Everyone expected greater sexual discipline from priests but the degree of that discipline varied.

To some, sex represented earthly pleasure, the kind which made a person unclean for spiritual tasks. Others didn't feel as strongly. The church allowed marriages or concubines for centuries if it was discrete and unobtrusive. This dynamic changed over time and priests endured intense scrutiny as church politics and theological belief aligned. Those caught paid a price for going against the laws of the church.

Religious leaders wrestled with penalties for sexual deviance. Mandates, set down by ruling councils, were not always enforced evenly. Noticeable, high-profile cases which stirred attention and caught the eye brought with it severe punishments while other situations did not.

A great deal of energy was spent in this period examining the sexual lives of priests. Perhaps, it is the same today. When a pastor or priest acts out sexually, newspapers print, community

members talk, and church members grieve. But should priests or religious figures be held to a higher status than so-called laypeople? What sets them apart from the rest of the community?

Questions to Contemplate:

1. List how a religious figure's marriage can benefit or hurt a congregation.
2. Would you prefer a married pastor or priest or a single one? Why?
3. Historically, people believed sexual abstinence lent a pastor greater influence in the Holy Spirit. Do you think pastors or priests practicing sexual abstinence are closer to God than married pastors?
4. What do you think is the most "respectable" feature of a religious person? Is it their schooling, experience, calling, speaking ability, relational ability, celibacy, personal self-discipline, model family, or another reason?
5. Do you think a pastor or priest who committed adultery should continue on as a pastor? What are the sexual rules that religious figures should follow? Who decides these rules?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. What prominent figures of the Bible were celibates? Which ones were monogamous? Which ones were polygamous? Was their religious faith any different depending on their sexual status?
2. How did Christians in the East and West consider marriage among clergy? What supporting arguments were developed and communicated for each side?
3. What motivated Gregory VII in his pursuit of celibate clergy?
4. Ephesians 5:22-32 illustrates Christ's relationship with the church and, depending on the church denomination, a pastor's relationship with a local church. Read the passage and consider it in light of a pastor fulfilling his or her vocational calling.
5. When were the different councils convened to mandate clerical celibacy in the West? What was the specific wording used?

CHAPTER 13: WHAT'S THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON?

Did you know that the development of reason through higher education was fostered, in large part, by those seeking a deeper faith? Christians established universities in the United States, so clergy could gain essential Bible knowledge and reasoning skills. Then universities gradually divested themselves from their religious roots as the state of higher education shifted from the study of the divine to the natural. This same dynamic played out earlier in Europe. Mixed emotions accompanied the change.

But why was there such a tense relationship between faith and reason in the Middle Ages? The church feared that the attainment of reason would undermine faith, and, in some cases, it did. Thomas Aquinas fought against those who blindly accepted science. The reverse also held true. Philosophers feared that blind faith undermined good reason. These two powerful instruments—religion and science—sharpen each other and keep the other from becoming dull or ineffective. As you read the chapter, consider potential blind spots in one’s faith or reasoning ability. Which one is more important, and what’s the relationship between the two supposed to look like?

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Do you think Christian universities do a good job of balancing faith and reason? What universities do better at faith? What Christian universities specialize in “secular” programs?
2. If you were studying in the Middle Ages, would you like the model of reasoning abilities preceding the study of faith? What would be the advantages and disadvantages?
3. How should science and religion interact? Which tradition has done the best job at keeping these two things together or apart?
4. Aristotle doubted the validity of miracles. Do you believe in miracles and divine intervention? How do you interpret biblical passages containing miracles?
5. What extreme versions of Christian faith have you noticed? What extreme versions of Christian reason have you noticed? What is worse: doubt or ignorance? How does a person develop faith? How does a person ascertain reasoning skills?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. Locate an index of the Bible. Are there any books that seem supportive of science or philosophy? Which ones?
2. What is higher criticism, and where did it originate? How can higher criticism strengthen or diminish faith?
3. The *trivium* and *quadrivium* played a crucial role in shaping a medieval student’s worldview. What classes are mandatory at most colleges in the United States? What classes should colleges include for the sake of a well-rounded education?
4. Re-read the section on entrance requirements in the Middle Ages. These requirements highly favored upper-middle class males. What requirements do universities currently impose on students? Has this solved the problem of social mobility in the United States or merely solidified it?
5. Read Bonaventure’s *Retracing the Arts to Theology*. How would you summarize this for others in a clear way? Why is it important to check primary sources when studying a historical issue?

CHAPTER 14: HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO MASS DEATH?

Sickness triggers a range of responses. People's reactions to mass death ran the gamut in the Middle Ages. Many fled the area, abandoning ancestral homes. Others conducted self-mutilation in hopes of God noticing and relenting. The pious prayed and offered gifts. The physical reaction of those involved only tells half the story. Besides external choices of fleeing, remaining in place, praying, or self-flagellating, people deliberated upon why this was happening to them. Medieval Christians blamed God, the Jews, the poor, nobles and the zodiac.

It wasn't so long ago that the United States first faced the HIV health crisis. More recently, the Ebola virus affected Africa while the Swine Flu surfaced in Asia. Mass death persists and people, the infected and the observer, still exhibit a range of responses. Those sick might feel anger at God. Those observing might blame the person's condition solely on the individual's choices. How should Christians respond?

Jesus compassionately loved supposed undesirables by talking with them and healing them. He certainly did not blame them for their condition. His counterparts, the Pharisees, thought illness signified God's displeasure with the individual. Jesus disagreed. Although no one wants to face mass death, everyone can reflect upon how they might react to sickness or natural disaster. Those in medieval times did not have the luxury of reflection first, for they were thrust into a terrible situation without warning.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Would you leave your home if a contagion spread in your geographical area? How would a family or relatives close by change your thought process?
2. Has there ever been a time when you thought your sickness was brought about because of personal, moral, or religious failings?
3. People often sympathize most with those who experience similar tragedies. How have your own bouts of sickness or trauma helped you care for others?
4. How, if at all, do churches help the sick in your surrounding community? Why did you think Jesus cared so deeply about the sick?
5. What emotions do you feel when you or a loved one falls ill?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. Study these verses on the compassion of Jesus: Luke 7:13, Matthew 15:32, Isaiah 42:3, Matthew 8:16-17, Matthew 9:36, and Matthew 14:14. What did you discover?
2. In consultation with a dictionary, locate the definition of *scapegoat*. Who were the scapegoats for the bubonic plague? Have you ever been a scapegoat? Who might be scapegoats in our society?

3. What was the initial national and church response to the HIV outbreak? What mistakes did the church make in dealing with the outbreak? What is it today?
4. According to James 5:13-17, prayer is able to heal Christians. What natural and supernatural methods bring about physical healing? How can these present-day methods be abused or practiced wisely?
5. Where is mass death occurring today? What is the cause? What should be the response of your local community?

CHAPTER 15: WHO OWNS NEWLY DISCOVERED TERRITORY?

Kids love playing king of the hill. They stake out high ground and then fight over it. The strongest dominate the game, pushing everybody else down the hill in unceremonious fashion. Those climbing the hill fight each other as they ascend. In a similar way, Spain and Portugal played king of the hill with entire continents. Other nations soon joined the game.

Columbus day, a federal holiday in the United States, celebrates Christopher Columbus's historic arrival in the Americas. At the time Spain rejoiced. The Catholic Church, sensing opportunity, quickly entered the fray. The pope met with national leaders, dividing the land with no regard for the inhabitant's preference or wishes. The Treaty of Tordesillas cemented Spain and Portugal's monopoly. Spain focused on the Americas. Portugal claimed portions of America, Africa, and Asia.

The world was colonized and explored by the Europeans who hungered for gold, God, and glory. They assumed the inhabitants would be better off under "civilized" Christian rule. Untold wealth flowed into European coffers. Slaves, too, captured by the Europeans were separated from their families and sent into foreign environments for the sake of greater profit margins. For Spain, this was an unprecedented financial windfall. For the original inhabitants, European arrival signified hardship and oppression. In many ways, it was the beginning of the modern world.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. How should countries resolve disputes over territory?
2. How did you resolve room conflicts in your house growing up? Where did you sit at dinner? Who got the front seat of the car? Why do people care so much about physical locations?
3. Do you think Columbus Day should be kept as a holiday? Why is it so controversial? What is at stake?
4. What is the role of the church in nation building? The pope spent time dividing new land between superpowers. In your opinion, what should the pope have done during this time of European expansion?

5. What do you think Jesus meant when he said the kingdom of God was at hand? What territory was Jesus claiming, if any at all?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. What territories does the U.S. own? Under what circumstances did the U.S. gain control of these territories?
2. What territory do China, Taiwan, Brunei, the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia all simultaneously claim at the moment? Read an article about the constant tension.
3. Consider reading *The Travels of Marco Polo* or a similar book. What occurred in this era of history? How did Marco Polo view the world?
4. Locate a globe of the world. Which lines represent longitude and which represent latitude? How do sailors chart direction today when they are at sea?
5. Study the history of Spain's territories. What happened to all the land it acquired during its nautical Golden Age? What ethical realizations and moral pitfalls surfaced as you researched Spain's rise and fall as a superpower?

CHAPTER 16: CAN CHRISTIANS OWN SLAVES?

Europeans enslaved those in America and Africa. Why would Christian nations endorse slavery? First, economic wealth exponentially increased. Second, potential evangelism justified brutal treatment. Third, culture and ethnic differences caused a great deal of misunderstanding. According to many Europeans, the “natives” were sub-human. Today, such views are commonly considered as an abomination of first rank, but back then it was standard opinion.

The Bible's ambivalent message on slavery left churches on ambiguous ground. Merchants took advantage of the Bible's tacit approval of slavery by collectively selling millions of people while monarchs created virtual slave camps called *encomiendas*. After hundreds of years, governments eventually forbade or curtailed the practice, but the enforcing laws for another continent proved exceedingly difficult.

The mistreatment of slaves resulted in longstanding consequences. Individuals, families, and nations were torn apart by the profitable slave trade. Christianity inadvertently became a symbol of global oppression. Many things have changed since then, but abject servitude in one form or another lingers. The child and adult sex trade, mistreatment of illegal immigrants for cheap labor, and forced marriage perhaps represent modern-day equivalents. Churches recognize the horror of slavery and now actively crusade for freedom, linking arms with non-profit organizations that seek to end all forms of human trafficking.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Why do you think the Bible didn't speak out against slavery in a more explicit fashion?

2. Europeans owning slaves considered slavery a form of evangelism. What forms of evangelism should be considered off-limits today?
3. Christian slaves were treated better by their Spanish masters. Is this a good idea? Should Christians treat fellow Christians in a kinder, generous manner than those who do not profess faith?
4. Bartolomé de las Casas argued against slavery. Why can debating social justice issues be so complicated? What are your experiences regarding verbally persuading other people of your particular cause or vice versa?
5. At one point Spanish law outlawed slavery, but it was not enforceable. What role should the law play in social issues? What inherent power does it wield? Why does it appear so ineffective in changing cultural tendencies?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. Read the book *Robinson Crusoe*. How were native populations represented in the book? Was Friday Crusoe's slave?
2. What is the Greek word for *slave*? What other meaning does it possess? How is the word translated in English Bible's?
3. Consider slavery in Deuteronomy 15:12-18 and 20:10-14. How does this differ from the Spanish version?
4. De las Casas so zealously sought protection for natives in America that he proposed enslaving Africans instead. Where there any better ways to make Spain and the native inhabitants prosper?
5. What legal or illegal immigrant groups in the United States endure harmful working conditions? Why are laws ineffective at stopping the abuse of the disadvantaged and disenfranchised?

CHAPTER 17: IS CONFUCIANISM COMPATIBLE WITH CHRISTIANITY?

People instinctively create culture. Culture, as defined by Merriam Webster's online dictionary, is a way of thinking, behaving and acting. In short, it is a distinct way of life. Families develop culture through unwritten codes of conduct for any number of everyday activities such as eating dinner. The time, place, seating arrangement, portion allotment, and manner of discussion all hinge upon the family's distinct culture. Workplaces and, on a larger scale, nations do the same. When people from various cultures interact, a great deal of confusion frequently results. Language barriers like the missionaries faced compound the problem. European missionaries and the churches they represented traveled into China, but they were not prepared for the culture shock in store for them.

Missionaries encountered a foreign language and foreign customs. Jesuits adapted their dress, language, and theology but the Dominicans and Franciscans maintained their European languages and urged conformity with European practices. The Chinese, in general, favored the Jesuits. So, a door opened for cross cultural-learning for a brief time. This door closed, however, when strict mandates from Europe offended the Chinese Emperor Kangxi. He issued a written critique and barred further missionary endeavors.

Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary originally from Italy, embraced Chinese culture and customs. He demonstrated his love for his new neighbors by eating their food, speaking their language, and dressing in their manner. His posture of being with and not above resonated with the populace. Ricci's example, though, was far from approved by everyone. In this chapter we learn about the differences that exist within one's own culture just as much as those that exist outside of one's culture.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Matteo Ricci felt called to mandarins. Is there a specific group of people you connect with best? Why?
2. What is your favorite name for God? How many names of God do you know? Why does the name of God matter in a practical sense?
3. Eastern cultures memorialize ancestors differently than Westerners do. How do you remember your parents, grandparents, and ancestors? How often do you think of them? Is there a way you honor them through your lifestyle?
4. Jesuits who attended pagan festivals and gatherings provoked a range of responses. Do you think Christians should participate in all secular holidays? What secular events should Christians not participate in?
5. Is secularism compatible with Christianity? How so?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. In consultation with a dictionary, define *accommodationist*. Did the Jesuits accommodate too much? Which Christian doctrines and practices, if any, are universal and thus should never be changed?
2. Read the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5. How did Elisha react when Naaman asked if he could bow down in the house of Rimmon? Would the Jesuits or Dominicans enthusiastically quote this verse?
3. According to tradition, Confucius wrote the book called *Analects*. After reading through a couple of chapters online, what did you learn from the book? How did it help you understand Confucianism?

4. Study Pope Clement XI's decree. What did he specifically forbid? Study Pope Pius XII's opposite ruling on the matter. What did he specifically allow? What changed, if anything?
5. Chinese Emperor Kangxi banned evangelism after feeling judged and alienated by the church. According to sociologists like Rodney Stark, why do people convert to new religions?

CHAPTER 18: IS CONVERSION NECESSARY TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

Children enjoy celebrating birthdays. It is that special day every year when parents stop and focus on the child by giving them cake and gifts. Adults track birthdays but don't always celebrate every year. Decade markers, like a person's fiftieth birthday, hold the greatest significance. In some Christian circles, people celebrate spiritual birthdays. These are the days when they converted to Christianity—which, in many occasions, was not the day they were baptized in water. In the eighteenth century, popular Protestant preachers spoke about an individual's need for conversion.

The movement gained steam rapidly. Beforehand, it was the sacraments that “saved” people. With the rise of evangelicalism, however, came a new wave of preachers such as John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Jonathan Edwards who preached a conversion of the heart by an individual's faith. Their personal testimonies about their own conversions drove home the point in explosive fashion. As a result, entire denominations fell in line with this new supposition. The popular question became: When were you born again? When were you “saved”? The devotion and zeal these preachers exhibited changed Christian culture, particularly in America.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Why do you think some people experience conversion moments and other do not? Should a church emphasize an individual's conversion moment?
2. John and Charles Wesley set up a holy club for mutual edification and encouragement. What role, if any, should such clubs play in the life of Christians today?
3. Do you think attaining spiritual perfection like Wesley advocated is possible on earth? How long can a Christian go without sinning?
4. How do you think you would have responded to the preaching of George Whitefield? Would you be more critical, sympathetic, or impartial to his evangelistic campaigns?
5. The preachers of that time often spoke in outdoor environments. Why was this so unpopular then?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. What is the doctrine of predestination? What is Calvinism? What are the five s-called key tenets of Calvinism? Which tenets do you agree or disagree with?

2. Through an online search, look up the twenty-two questions created by the holy club. How could the questions be changed or modified so as to add multi-cultural and gender inclusive components?
3. Research the unique Moravian influence on Wesley and global missions. Who were the Moravians?
4. Sociologist Rodney Stark argues that conversion occurs through social networks. People convert because of their prior relationships with friends and families, and then believe the doctrines propounded only later. Does this ring true to your understanding of religious conversions?
5. Read the famous born-again passage in John 3:1-21. What do you think this passage means?

CHAPTER 19: DOES EVOLUTION DISPROVE CHRISTIANITY?

What do you remember about your elementary and secondary education? Specifically, what stood out from science class? Nearly all children are taught evolution in biology. Teachers lecture on Darwin, the big bang theory, and dinosaurs as well as plant life and cell division. Christians, like cells, divide over the importance, validity, and biblical backing for Darwin's theory.

Darwin grew up believing that God created the world. Later on, as he traveled around the world, his views evolved. He wrote a book called *On the Origin of Species*, which chronicled his odyssey and his theory of natural selection. Publishing the book set off a firestorm in Christian circles. People wondered whether or evolution disproved Christianity, or whether it could be incorporated into Christianity. Christian theologians never reached a consensus. Gradually, the findings of Darwin became standard fare, utilized in schools to this day.

Darwin's views about God and science evolved as he aged. It is not easy letting go of childhood teachings, for a person can be criticized by peers and teachers alike. It is also not easy embracing new concepts. As an adult, what new concepts have you embraced or discarded regarding God or religion? How has your spiritual life and worldview, if you profess to have one, evolved through the years? What circumstance triggered the change? In Darwin's case, his journey of discovery, prompted by a scientific voyage, impacted the entire world's scientific outlook on humanity. It also profoundly affected our understanding of religion.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. What religious dogmas were you taught as a child? How have they changed since then? What caused the change?
2. Why do you think the media in Darwin's day stereotyped Wilberforce and Huxley as they did? Who is the current media stereotyping, and why? Why do groups distort a particular aspect of someone's personality or philosophy?

3. Is evolution, in your personal view, compatible with Christianity as B. B. Warfield assumed? Or, like Charles Hodge, do you see them as night and day? What aspect of religion, or the common belief that God exists, causes you the most internal confusion?
4. Do you think, like Darwin, that all of life is a series of random events and processes unaided by God? How do statistics and chance play out under God's direction?
5. What theory do you most align with: the Gap Theory, Day-Age Theory, or Days of Revelation Theory? Why so?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. Locate online or in print quotes by Charles Darwin's. How do they strike you? What stands out?
2. In consultation with a dictionary or reliable internet source, define the word *evolution*. Note the changes of this term over time.
3. Investigate the reason for the so-called Scopes Monkey Trial. When did it occur, and what were the results? What should schools teach, or not teach, about the creation of the world?
4. Genesis 1 and 2 is not a scientific treatise. What genre is it? How does its genre, or type of literature, impact its meaning?
5. The idea of "survival of the fittest" can be a terrifying proposition for those not in power. What aspects of our criminal justice system need to evolve? How should the church play a role in taking care of those who are neglected and treated poorly by those with power?

CHAPTER 20: HOW DOES CHRISTIANITY LOOK WORLDWIDE?

As parents age, they face a stark reality. Soon there will be a significant role reversal between themselves and their children. As the children mature and grow in strength, the parents diminish by contrast. The same can be said for the church. As the next generation emerges, the previous generation finds itself looking at a diverse, unrecognizable future. The next Christian generation in the United States promises to be ethnically diverse while the world's overall Christian population shifts the balance of influence to Africa and Asia.

Africa, Asia, and Latin America are fast becoming the largest Christian regions on earth. While these regions were often disregarded by historians and theologians a mere century ago, they are now being celebrated, studied, and listened to. In any coming of age movement, there are times when the Western church receives critique for inappropriate forms of evangelism and church building. Furthermore, theologians across the world are reconnecting with their cultural roots. In Africa, for instance, one pastor banned European hymns for seven years, so his people could enjoy Christian African music.

How should churches respond? One response involves holding on and not letting go of power. Another response, seasoned with more maturity, includes sharing power and letting the next

generation join the conversation. How should individuals respond? They can recognize the prophetic voices of the young, practically value ethnic diversity, and esteem both genders equally. Only time will tell how the new faces of Christendom will interact with the older faces of yesteryear.

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Why do you think there were so few Christians in Africa in the year 1900? What has changed?
2. According to some scholars, Brazil is the country with the largest Pentecostal Christian population in the world? What accounts for the growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America today?
3. Why is it so important for women to be in positions of power at church? What women leaders can you find in scripture and church history for further reflection?
4. What cultural mistake did the Western Christians commit as they traveled and influenced Africa, Asia, and South America? How, if at all, can it be resolved today?
5. What do you predict Christianity will look like fifty years from now in the United States? What about around the world?

Questions to Ascertain:

1. In consultation with a dictionary or reliable internet source, define *liberation theology*. What are its origins, and what does it stand for (and also against)?
2. What is Pentecostalism? How do Pentecostals practice Christianity? Why are certain Christian groups and denominations so critical of Pentecostalism?
3. How might an agrarian society be defensive when told it should no longer practice polygamy? In general, what was the European Christian response to polygamy in Africa?
4. Identify India's caste system. Should Christians attempt to change culture or let it change naturally? How did this conversation occur during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States? Why might the oppressed have a better chance of bringing change than outside power brokers?
5. Spend time reading quotes from Sadhu Sundar Singh. Where did Singh develop his theology, and what impact has he made on the Christian world?

CONCLUSION: WHO WILL DEFINE CHRISTIANITY IN THE YEARS TO COME?

The opening section introduced one of the major themes of this book, namely, that Christians love to ask questions! They have been doing so since the first century, and there's no stopping now. Although we have come to the end of the book, the questions are not going to stop coming.

As each century has unfolded, more questions have been thought out loud, and there have been a number of responses to them.

In the conclusion to this book, we are given permission to wonder about which questions Christians will be asking in the years to come. What will be the hot-button topics of tomorrow, and how will the church address these topics, if at all? How has this book helped you think about theology and the development of Christian history?

Questions to Contemplate:

1. Who do you think will be most influential in the answering of questions among Christians in the future?
2. Living in such a diverse world today, is there any hope of Christian consensus on anything? Should there be an attempt at consensus?
3. Today, there are more than 45,000 different Christian denominations. Why is this, and is this largely a good, bad, or indifferent thing?
4. What was your favorite chapter in this book? Why?
5. As you reflect on the twenty questions that were raised in this book, do you think any would be answered differently if they were raised for the first time today? Which ones, and how do you think the questions would have been answered differently?