

## Revivals And Church History :: 10 Reasons to read Christian History:

### 10 Reasons to read Christian History: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/1/22 3:02

#### Reason #1

Because Christian history is everywhere in our culture. No matter what your religious background (or lack thereof), you just can't understand the modern, Western world—including its wars—unless you know your Christian history!

I was interviewing for an academic position at a small midwestern college, and the committee asked me this: How would you convince our undergraduates to take a course in Christian history? I answered: I would suggest they look around them. So many aspects of American culture come from Christian sources:

Biblical expressions embedded in our language. Christian ethical positions—though dimly remembered and now honored most often in the breach. Assumptions about who human beings are and what we're doing on this planet—although again, fragmented and unmoored from the theology that once anchored them. Musical styles—even rock'n'roll owes much to slave spirituals and gospel "shouts."

There's more. Holidays—Easter, Christmas, even Halloween may all include "pagan" elements, but their frame of reference was always thoroughly Christian. Oh, and let's not forget St. Patrick's Day! Art—stroll through almost any Western art exhibit and just try to avoid Christian references, explicit and implicit. Science—I won't repeat the list of "Christian fathers of the scientific revolution"—see the archive of articles from our issue 76, online. Â...

If you live in America, or anywhere in the West, your whole environment is soaked in "leftover Christianity."

from Christianity Today:  
Church History Newsletter Jan 2005

### 2/10 Reasons to read Christian History: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/1/24 9:45

#### Reason #2

Because it liberates you from the tyranny of the present—and of the recent past. The ever-quotable C. S. Lewis put it like this:

"I don't think we need fear that the study of a day and period, however prolonged, however sympathetic, need be an indulgence in nostalgia or an enslavement to the past. In the individual life as the psychologists have taught us, it's not the remembered past, it's the forgotten past that enslaves us. And I think that's true of society. Â... I think no class of men are less enslaved to the past than historians. It is the unhistorical who are usually without knowing it enslaved to a very recent past." (From a radio adaptation of Lewis's inaugural lecture as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature given at Cambridge on Nov. 29, 1954; see issue 7: C. S. Lewis.)

During wartime, Lewis sharpened the point. He compared the reader of history to the man who has lived in many places. This man "is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village; the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age." ("Learning in War-Time," in *The Weight of Glory*.)

### Re: 2/10 Reasons to read Christian History: - posted by PreachParsly (), on: 2005/1/26 18:56

dont stop now! you have 8 more to go :-P

**3/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/1/27 3:59**

OK, here's another one...

Reason #3

Because life is too short to learn by experience. To echo Lewis's words that we've just heard, "the scholar has lived in many times." What a rich way to grow in wisdom! Though experience can be the best teacher for some things, for others it does not take us far at all.

Job's friend, Bildad the Shuhite, had it right (for once): "Ask the former generations and find out what their fathers learned, for we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow. Will they not instruct you and tell you? Will they not bring forth words from their understanding?" (Job 8:8-10).

**Re: 3/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by PreachParsly (), on: 2005/1/28 23:08**

wow i like #3

**4/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/1/29 3:15**

Quote:

-----wow i like #3

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Good, here is...

Reason #4

Because whatever question is on your mind, someone smarter than you has already seen it clearer, thought about it longer, and expressed it better. Why reinvent the wheel? Also falling under this heading: There are no new heresies—only old ones in new clothes. And again, they've all been answered with more wisdom and erudition than we'll ever be able to muster.

**5/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/2/9 9:12**

Reason #5

Because the deeper our roots, the higher we grow. Believers are all part of a "Dead Christians Society." We have far more brothers and sisters in the faith who are no longer around than we do contemporary saints. Let's get to know them. And while we slog it out on earth as members of the Church Militant, the Church Triumphant is pulling for us from heaven.

What a shame to lose a sense of the communion of saints—the "cloud of witnesses" urging us to go on. The heroism, tears, toil, and triumphs of "Dead Christians" can inspire the living.

"Exhibit A" is surely the Martyrs. Blaise Pascal put it like this: "The example of the deaths of Christian martyrs move us, for they are our members, having a common bond with them, so that their devotion inspires us not only by their example, but because we should have the same."

**Re: 6/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/2/18 5:26**

Reason #6

Because reading Christian history is a great way to meet fascinating people and hear dramatic, colorful stories. History is all about people. Memorable people. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once put it, "There is properly no history, only biography." And Thomas Carlyle added, "Biography is the most universally pleasant and profitable of all reading." Those Victorians had it right—and nothing sizzles like the stories of the saints!

**Re: - posted by ZekeO (), on: 2005/2/18 6:57**

We will never learn.

**7/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/2/21 13:15**

Reason #7

Because reading Christian history helps root out prejudice and foster sympathy and humility. It's so easy to think "The Church 'R' Us." It ain't. Most Christian believers look—and have looked, in past centuries—very different than we do. They've had different questions, different assumptions, different "lifestyles," different approaches to the Christian life, different strategies for evangelism, teaching, preaching, sacramental life, social action. Â...

From the little we may have heard about some of those differences, we've probably already put some of our brothers and sisters in a box marked: "Weird." But in the words of historian Jacques Barzun, reading history "tempers absolute partisanship by showing how few monsters of error there have been." The more we read about other Christians, the more we get to walk in their shoes and gain respect for their approaches to the faith.

That's a good thing, because the church today is a body with a wide (and sometimes wild!) variety of members. Knowing more about the past, we gain insight into the practices and problems of other Christians in the present. We may become less critical of others—and even more aware of our own shortcomings and limited perspectives.

**Re: 7/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by RobertW (), on: 2005/2/21 13:33**

Quote:  
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One of the great concerns of mine of late has been how quick Christians can be to discount one another's expression of faith—even try to delegitimize it as though the one was preferred by God to the other. Our preferences have little to do with what God is willing to accept as true expression of faith. This is true in music, in our worship services, and even our standards of so-called 'holiness.' That is one of the things I realized being around the Messianics; everyone thinks they have the market cornered on expression. We do have much to learn from history. Indeed!

**Re: 7/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by madmatg (), on: 2005/2/21 14:32**

thanks for this, I've never really looked at the history of the church in depth. I'll have to start down the road. Thanks again

**8/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/3/4 6:08**

Reason #8

Because reading Christian history shows us how we got where we are today. Where did all those denominations come from? How did the distinctive beliefs and practices of my own church develop? What's the big deal over Calvinism and Arminianism?

**Re: 8/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by CJaKfOrEsT (), on: 2005/3/30 6:02**

Ron,

Is there a 9 & 10? :-)

**Re: 8/10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by CJaKfOrEsT (), on: 2006/4/12 10:25**

BUMP!!!

(should this perhaps have a title change) :-P

**Re: - posted by Compton (), on: 2006/4/12 12:41**

Quote:  
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This is certainly my experience and admitted blind spot. Yet a little history helps us to see how the contour of our Christian expression is often under influence in good and bad ways from our cultural and even personal context.

As such practicing forbearance and even trust in one another's walks with God is one of the hallmarks of true Evangelicalism, which only began effectively once it was outdoors away from the governing pulpits of the Church of England. Over 200 years ago the Anglican church leaders in Boston took George Whitefield aside and accused him of serious error for receiving communion from a Baptist and for daring to call a Presbyterian minister a "faithful servant of Jesus Christ."

Yet George Whitefield was already ahead of the curve and though he failed to convince the Anglican leadership, he succeeded in defining a new premise of evangelical and revivalist preaching. He said to them: "It was best to preach the new birth, and the power of godliness, and not to insist so much on form; for people can never be brought to one mind as that; nor did Jesus Christ ever intend it."

I mention this only to affirm that reading church history is one way to keep from being too sure of our contemporary experiences and from discounting other Christians, both east and west, past and present, too hastily.

BTW, the above Whitefield episode is from an excellent 4 volume series on the history of Evangelicism by Mark Noll published by IVP.

Blessings,

MC

**Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2006/4/12 13:21**

Quote:  
-----Ron,

Is there a 9 & 10?  
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Would love to hear about anything from Ron these days. :-)

**Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2006/4/12 16:05**

Quote:  
-----10 Reasons to read Christian History:  
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Leonard Ravenhill said: "One thing we learn from history, is that we don't learn from history."

I think this is a great thread and really I am firmly convinced in my own heart that one of the vital needs for the body of Christ is to hear more of church history and how God was active and using men for His glory and to build His kingdom. Ma

y God shake us out of our apathy in this generation and allow us to seek first His kingdom as so many saints did who went on before us.

**10 Reasons to read Christian History - posted by crsschk (), on: 2006/4/12 22:00**

Quote:  
-----BUMP!!!  
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**Re:, on: 2006/4/13 5:33**

Quote:  
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RobertW wrote:

Quote:  
-----Ron,

Is there a 9 & 10?  
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Would love to hear about anything from Ron these days. :-)  
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Not a bad idea Robert ... but in the mean time ... you've done well.

Just some reading of our History in the mean time.

Irenaeus who sat under Polycarp who sat under John and left us his treatise  
(<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-56.htm>) "Against Heresies".

When you click on "page" ... it appears page 2 is blank, but the Treatise begins on page 3.

Health and Peace too, to you both.

Maranatha.