

## **An Introduction to Church History: The Story Continues...**

### **Rationale**

“History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's dam is the history we make today.” – Henry Ford

“Until there shall be new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church has the appearance of this world which is passing...”  
(Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium §48)

This unit will continue the story of God’s “salvation history” begun in the Scriptures, going beyond Pentecost to see what God has continued to do through his Son in the Holy Spirit among his people *in history*. Contrary to Henry Ford, ignorance of our past is ignorance of our identity and our destiny. To know who we are in the present and where we should be going in the future, we need to know our past. The history of the Church is the story of a pilgrimage with meaning, purpose, and direction.

### **Aim**

This unit will offer an overview of the whole history of the Church, in all its lights and shadows. Each session of this unit will focus on one or two periods in Church History. It will cover the turning points that define that period, and address some popular questions and misconceptions about it. At the same time, students will find a way to make sense of the whole history of the Church.

### **Learning Objectives**

This course will assist students to gain

1. A theological understanding of Church History
2. An overview of the history of the Church and a timeline of the “ages” of the Church
3. A familiarity with key people and events in Church history, including major saints and “non-saints” in their historical context, and the inter-related history of Church and State.
4. An appreciation for the process of the development of doctrine, including heresies, theological controversies, and ecumenical councils
5. A basic knowledge of the formation of Catholicism and the origin of the other Christian traditions
6. An honest awareness of the “shadows” as well as the “lights” of Church history, and an appreciation for the role Christianity played in the formation of “Western” or “secular” values.

### **Student participation**

The unit aims to answer *your* questions about Church history. The unit will be offered on Zoom. The formal part of each session will include a 60 minute presentation,

followed by a tutorial in breakout rooms for group exploration led by the presenter and tutor. Recommended reading will be assigned for preparation for each session.

### **Duration**

Five 120 minute sessions over five weeks. For those doing the course for professional development with MACS, each session attended will be individually accredited.

### **Program**

**Session One:** What is Church History, and does it have “meaning”?

This introductory session will ask:

- What do you know about Church history? What questions do you have? What do you want to learn from this course?
- Is there a “right side” of history?
- Is the history of the Church a story of “Decline and Fall” (Gibbon) or “Rise and Triumph” (Stark)?
- What are the “Six Ages” of the Church? (Christopher Dawson)
- What role did the Church play in world history?
- What were the major turning points in the timeline of the history of the Church?

**Session Two:** The Foundational History of the Church (30-650AD)

Defining points of the period:

- 1) Evidence for the Early Church – What do we know and how?
- 2) The Conversion of Constantine – What impact did this have on Church History?

This session will answer the following questions (and others):

- How did we get from Jesus to the Church?
- Was the Early Church ‘Catholic’?
- Was Peter the first Pope?
- Were Christians thrown to the lions in the Colosseum?
- Who were the Church Fathers?
- Did Constantine suppress other gospels?
- Did the Church invent the doctrine of the Trinity?
- What about Mary and the cult of the saints?
- Did St Patrick convert Ireland?

**Session Three:** The Medieval Church (650-1450AD)

Defining points of the period:

- 1) Rise of Islam – the End of Christian Antiquity
- 2) The Road to Canossa – the Struggle between “Church and State”

This session will answer the following questions (and others):

- What happened to the Roman Empire?

- Was Islam “spread by the sword”?
- Were the Dark Ages really “dark”?
- Monasticism: Leech on Society or Saviour of Civilisation?
- Was Charlemagne the first “Holy Roman Emperor”?
- Who were the Vikings?
- What was “The Great Schism”?
- What is the truth about the Crusades?
- When was the pope NOT “Roman”?
- How many popes can you have at once?
- Can a Council depose a pope?

#### **Session Four: The Reformation (1450-1750AD)**

Defining points before and after the Reformation:

- 1) The Fall of Constantinople – the Christian East
- 2) The Thirty Years War – European Christianity tears itself apart

This session will answer the following questions (and others):

- Did the medieval Church need a “Reformation”?
- Were the Borgias the worst popes ever?
- How many people were killed in the Inquisition?
- What was the first Information Revolution?
- Did the Church forbid bible reading?
- Would the Reformation have happened without Martin Luther?
- How many wives did Henry VIII have (and did he die a Catholic)?
- What happened at the Council of Trent?
- What was the effect of the “Counter-Reformation”?

#### **Session Five: A Secular Age (1750 to the Present)**

Defining Points:

- 1) The Enlightenment – the “Reformation Continued”
- 2) The Age of Authenticity – our “New Age”

This session will answer the following questions (and others):

- Does Galileo prove the Church is anti-science?
- Was “the Enlightenment” anti-Christian?
- When did the Church become interested in Social Justice?
- What was “Modernism”?
- Was Pope Pius XII “Hitler’s Pope”?
- What happened at the Second Vatican Council (and afterwards)?
- Are we in a “Seventh Age of the Church”?

#### **Reading List:**

Recommended Texts:

- John Vidmar, *The Catholic Church through the Ages: A History*

Additional helpful texts:

- Walter Brandmüller, *Lights and Shadows: Church History amid Faith, Fact and Legend*
- *The New Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity*
- John Dickson, *Bullies and Saints: An Honest Look at the Good and Evil of Christian History*
- Christopher Dawson, *Medieval Christianity, Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*
- Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity, Reformation Myths, How the West was Won, Bearing False Witness.*
- Richard Rex, *The Making of Martin Luther.*
- Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity* (there is a DVD series that goes along with this that is very helpful), *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700*
- Tom Holland, *Dominion, Millennium, In the Shadow of the Sword.*
- Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age.*

### **Presenter**

David Schütz is a casual academic at Australian Catholic University, and editor of Geshar for the Council of Christians and Jews (Vic.). He was an ordained minister of the Lutheran Church before entering the Catholic Church in 2001. From 2002 to 2020 he was Executive Officer for the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission of the Archdiocese. He served as an Adult Education Officer for Catholic Adult Education Melbourne from 2004-2007. He originally founded Anima Education with Anna Krohn in 2007, and is honoured and privileged to be joined by Natasha Marsh since 2021.

#### Formal qualifications:

- Completed Master of Theology (Catholic Theological College, University of Divinity – to be conferred)
- Bachelor of Theology (Luther Seminary, North Adelaide),
- Graduate Diploma in Ministry (Luther Seminary, North Adelaide),
- Bachelor of Arts (University of Adelaide),
- Graduate Diploma in Library and Information Management (University of South Australia)
- Graduate Certificate in Higher Education (Australian Catholic University)

### **Tutor**

Natasha Marsh teaches philosophy, theology, and ethics at the University of Notre Dame, Sydney, and is a casual academic at Australian Catholic University. A former journalist, Natasha is the music director for the Parish of St John Henry Newman in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

#### Formal Qualifications:

- Master of Arts in Theological Studies (John Paul II Institute for Marriage and the Family)
- Bachelor of Liberal Arts (Campion College)
- Associate in Music Australia (AMEB)