

David K. Bernard

A
HISTORY
of
HISTORY
Christian Doctrine

The Post-Apostolic Age
to the Middle Ages
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Volume 1

A History of Christian Doctrine, Volume One

The Post-Apostolic Age to the Middle Ages,
A.D. 100-1500

by David K. Bernard

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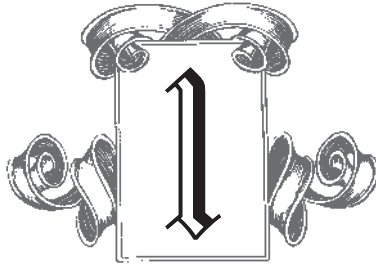
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The Study of Doctrine in Church History

Why is it important to study the history of doctrine in Christianity? We can identify several reasons. First, a study of this nature can help to confirm the apostolic doctrine as revealed in Scripture and to analyze the teachings of God's Word in light of discussions in church history.

A second purpose is to trace the development of false doctrines. If we conclude that some doctrines taught in Christendom today are erroneous, the question arises, Where did these false doctrines begin? Church history can help show us which doctrines were original, which were not, how false doctrines entered Christendom, and how they became, in some cases, part of the mainstream of historic Christendom.

A third benefit of this study is learning about the

major denominations and movements, thereby providing a context for dialogue today. The goal is to identify each major category of Christendom and learn where it began, why it began, and what its distinctive, characteristic doctrines are.

Scope of Study

At the outset, let us define the boundaries of our study. We will start with the death of the apostles, or the end of the apostolic era; therefore, we will begin with the second century A.D. By using the words *church* and *Christianity*, we will not make a value judgment as to the accuracy of the doctrines of various groups. Rather, we will use the words *church*, *Christian*, and *Christendom* in the most general sense, speaking of the visible structures known collectively as Christianity. When we speak of Christian doctrines we do not mean that a particular belief is correct or has been officially endorsed, only that some people within Christendom have believed and taught it.

We would expect to find true apostolic believers within the visible, historical church, or at least associated in some way with it at various times, but the visible church is not always identical to the invisible church, the true church, the church of God. We will focus on all those who have historically gone by the label of Christian, whether or not their experience and doctrine seem identical to that of the apostles in the first century.

Our study will be an overview, not an exhaustive investigation. We will not describe in great detail all the movements, personalities, and events in church history, but we will seek to give at least a survey of church histo-

ry, particularly focusing on doctrinal history. We will not place heavy emphasis on names, places, and dates, but we will look primarily at the origins of various doctrines and movements throughout the history of Christianity.*

Major Themes

1. *A great falling away.* It is evident when we study early church history that there was a great falling away, a great infusion of false doctrine. Indeed we find warnings and indications of this falling away in the New Testament itself. It contains admonitions to the early church not to embrace false doctrine as well as warnings concerning false prophets, false teachers, and false doctrines that were already creeping in among the churches. (See Matthew 7:15; Romans 16:17-18; I Corinthians 11:19; Ephesians 4:14; II Timothy 4:3; Hebrews 13:9; II Peter 2:1; I John 4:1; II John 10; Revelation 2:14, 15, 24.) It also predicts that in the latter days would come a great falling away, seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons. (See Matthew 24:11-12, 24; II Thessalonians 2:3; I Timothy 4:1.)

Even in the first-century church, then, problems had already begun to develop. In Revelation 2 and 3, letters to seven churches in Asia Minor reveal serious errors of doctrine and practice in various local assemblies in the first century. In the second century, this process of doctrinal corruption accelerated. In short, we find a great influx of false doctrines over the centuries. That is not to say these doctrines polluted everyone, but widespread heresies and

*For a chronological list of important people, events, and dates in Christianity, along with important secular dates, see Appendix A.