

The format will be rather more lecture style than you're probably used to, if you come to evenings regularly – its relatively difficult to do church history in a highly interactive way!

Why bother with church history?

1 Christianity is historical

Christian faith essentially views history as linear – it has a beginning in the creation and the garden of Eden and it has an end with the second coming of Christ and the final judgment.

And all the key points in between have concrete, definite historical settings. The fall happened in the garden of Eden, this was after Adam and eve were created, but before Cain killed able. Or the Passover in Egypt happened after Joseph went to Egypt, but before Joshua set out to conquer the promised land. Do you see, this thing had to happen first, in order for this thing to happen. No matter what our postmodern friends or lecturers say, history is linear. In other words, this happened there, then this happened here, then this happened etc

I guess its worth saying that, unlike a lot of other types of “spirituality”, the centre of the Christian faith is not a set of principles but an historical event – the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

God became a man in history. He left footprints in the sand of Palestine, and achieved reconciliation between God and his people through an historical, physical death and resurrection.

If you remove the history from the Christian faith and try and reduce it to a worldview, or a moral code or an abstract set of doctrines (say about the character of God), as many people have tried to do, you are left with things that are all important to Christianity but you have taken away the real events that lie at the centre of God's revelation to us.

Now obviously church history isn't as important as Bible history. In the Bible God authoritively reveals himself and his plans for his world. We always should be looking at the bible then looking at the world around us and understanding it better. The bible is like a pair of glasses that we can put on, as we understand it more, the world comes more into focus

It's the same with history as we study history using our bible glasses, we see the same God of the Bible working in amazing ways to fulfil the things he has promised to do in the Bible. For that reason alone these 4 sessions should be useful to you, as they will assure that the God of the Bible who says I will build my church, is the same God who sets up kings, emperors, presidents, prime ministers and deposes them, the same God who raises up people of great courage and faith to stand under real persecution, and the same God who gives people the intelligence and boldness to defend real Christianity from heresy.

2 Church history helps us understand the Bible better

There is a famous quote from the 12th century theologian and author John of Salisbury :

"We are like dwarfs standing upon the shoulders of giants, and so able to see more and see farther than the ancients."

As we study anything of the historical Christian faith we need to realise that we don't do it alone, rather we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, we learn from their insights and their mistakes.

Whichever Bible book, passage, topic or doctrine we want to study. It has certainly been thought about before, probably many times, by many Christians over 2,000 years.

To live in complete ignorance of their thoughts and ideas is to run the risk of constantly repeating the same errors and mistakes as others have made in the past.

Those who are ignorant of the past are likely to make the same mistakes as the past.

3 Church history shows us how to engage with culture

Looking at the range of answers that Christians have given to such issues in the past can help us to make wise decisions about how to behave in the present.

And Christians in history have thought about almost all the issues that trouble us today including:

- Should we support war?
- Should Christians eat or drink certain things?
- Should we participate in government?
- What issues should we be prepared to die for?
- Should there be a limit to a Christian's income/wealth?

Sometimes Christians have got the answers to those questions right – and one can often see the blessing (and persecution!) that flows from that in history.

At other times Christians have got the answers to these (and many other) questions spectacularly wrong – and then one can see the sovereign hand of God at work sustaining and guarding the Church despite itself!

4 Church history stirs the heart and refreshes the soul

Church history is about Gods people, which makes it interesting. Studying church history will involve understanding structures, systems, heresy and counter arguments. And these things are actually really interesting once you grasp whats going on. Understanding how heresies are wrong will increase our understanding of what we actually believe.

I think that the most interesting thing for me in church history, though, is the people. Together we will see heroes and villains. Men of courage despite weakness, women of patience and godliness in difficult times. And understanding there place in history stirs my heart and refreshes my soul.

5 Church history teaches us that God is in charge

God is the God of all history, not just the history of Bible times. As we study church history we will be reminded time and again that God is in charge.

Its fair to say some versions of church history are carefully sanitised.

But real church history is actually full of people just like us – selfish, sinful, ambitious, rebellious, cowardly, jealous human beings.

Mark Noll puts it brilliantly:

“The heroes of the faith usually have feet of clay – sometimes thighs, hearts and heads as well. The golden ages of the past usually turn out to be tarnished if they are examined closely enough. Crowding round the heroes of the faith are a lot of villains, and some of them look an awful lot like the heroes.”

And yet through all of that we are hear today. Meeting as people who have heard and believed the good news. If it weren't for those people, our country would still be pagan, this christian school certainly wouldn't exist. Life would be very different. BUT God has used these sinful, twisted people to accomplish his purposes in building a church.

Church history is about God being at work in his world.

So we are going to see 3 stages of church history

AD 30 – 70 The history of the fledgling church

AD 70 The destruction of the temple

AD 70 -300 Christianity spreads under attack.

AD 30 – 70 The history of the fledgling church

Church growth in the New Testament period

Christ commanded his disciples to take the gospel to the whole world (Matthew 28v19-20; Acts 1v8). The message of the gospel, proclaimed in a pluralistic context, was an uncompromising: 'Jesus is Lord.' Paul and other missionaries spread the gospel through the Eastern Mediterranean. There was probably a church in Rome by AD 50, before Paul visited.

The gospel spread quickly because there were Jewish communities living in most of the major cities. The early missionaries preached first to Jews and Greek God-fearers (e.g. Cornelius - Acts 10v2) and then to pagans (e.g. Paul in Athens Acts 17v16-34). After the siege of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in AD 70 the dominance of the Jerusalem church came to an end and the church became a predominantly gentile movement.

Lets have a look at Acts 15

What is the church like in acts?

1Some men came down from Judea to Antioch (up near turkey) and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. 3The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. 4When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

5Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

6The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 7After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

12The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

Do you see Paul had a problem so he went to the centre of Christian thought. Jerusalem. They discuss and think, then they send out letters. The church is still thinking centrally, and like the Jews. It is easy to see why they may have been viewed as a Jewish sect, no matter what they said. In these first few years Christianity and Judaism were tangled together quite tightly.

But the Jews were not keen on the Christians, and the fact that people were associating them together.

Persecution from the Jews

The majority of the persecution of the church recorded in the New Testament was inflicted by the Jews, who either persecuted the Christians directly or stirred up the Roman authorities to persecute them (e.g. Acts 17v5, 13; 18v12-17; 2 Corinthians 11v24).

It seems that trouble in Rome between the Jews and Jewish converts to Christianity caused Claudius to expel all the Jews from Rome, in AD 51. A few years later the Jews did return.

Persecution by the Roman Empire

Christians were persecuted because they refused to worship Caesar or participate in the worship of the pagan gods (cf. 1 Corinthians 10v14-30). Christians sought to ensure that they were not perceived as rebels (e.g. Romans 13v1-7; cf. Mark 12v13-17)

Fortunately, however, Christianity was initially treated as a sect of Judaism, which enjoyed protected status in the Empire. The early church benefited from its ties to Judaism, in this respect. The Jews had fought through ceaseless conflicts with the occupying Romans, for over 100 years, to retain their monotheism. Rome came to recognise Judaism as a legal religion (*religio licita*) despite Jewish refusal to acknowledge the Roman Gods. The Christian church through its association to Judaism, (Christianity was often viewed as an appendage of Judaism) caused it also to be viewed as *religio licita*. This status continued for Christianity even after the destruction of the temple.

Despite the *religio licita* persecution increased for Christians had to endure economic hardship because the local trade guilds operated 'closed shops' centred around the pagan Temples and membership required worship of the local gods. So the Christians could not and would not become members of this trade guild. This meant the Christians lost out on opportunities to trade, therefore losing their business.

The main piece of persecution for Christians before AD 70 was because Nero, in AD 64, blamed Christians for the fire of Rome. Which some suspected to be his fault. Listen to what one guy says.

'To suppress this rumour, Nero fabricated scapegoats - and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called)...First, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information, large numbers of others were condemned - not so much for their incendiarism (starting fires) as for their anti-social tendencies.' (Tacitus)

In order to sort out these christians he persecutes the church ruthlessly, and uses Christians as candles to light his garden. It is likely that both Peter and Paul were executed during this persecution

Then we come to the big turning point
AD 70 The destruction of the temple

2 Years after Nero had blamed the christians for the fire in rome, another significant thing happened.

By AD 66 the people of Israel were thoroughly fed up with Roman rule. Of course as in any society there were radical and more moderate voices but there were very few who liked the Romans (even those Jews who had done pretty well out of their rule almost certainly despised them).

The immediate cause of rebellion in AD66 seems to have been a group of Greek speaking settlers in Caesarea. They celebrated a local legal victory by attacking Jews and their property. And the Roman soldiers stood by and allowed it to happen. This news, predictably, caused uproar when it reached Jerusalem – though it probably wasn't any worse than many other things that had happened under Roman rule – Herod's slaughter of all the baby boys under two around Bethlehem spring to mind as an example!

Still it seems that on this occasion the radicals won the day and the Jews attacked the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, slaughtering the soldiers. Others stopped making the compulsory sacrifices to the Roman empire and the emperor Nero, who as weve just seen wasn't a friend to Christians or Jews, dispatched an army led by the general Vespasian to sort out the situation.

Vespasian moved slowly attempting to draw a kind of noose around the city, though things were delayed somewhat when he became emperor on AD68 and had to leave his son Titus in charge of the 4 legions at his command. Titus eventually encircled Jerusalem in April, A.D. 70. He posted his 10th legion on the Mount of Olives, directly east of and overlooking the Temple Mount. The 12th and 15th legions were stationed further to the east and commanding all ways to Jerusalem from east to north.

Eventually he starved the population so that there were so few left and those still alive were so weak he could take the city without difficulty. On the 10th of August, in A.D. 70 in Jewish calendar reckoning, the very day when the Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon burned the Temple in 586 BC, the Temple was burned again.

As Jesus predicted the temple was utterly destroyed – razed to the ground and burned. No one is entirely sure if it was Titus' intention from the outset to destroy the temple. One account that says this was always his plan, whether accurate on this detail or not, it still gives an interesting insight into Roman thinking about Judaism and Christianity at this time.

Sulpicius Severus writing later (around 200AD) said that the temple was destroyed:

“in order that the Jewish and Christian religions might more completely be abolished; for although those religions were mutually hostile, they had nevertheless sprung from the same founders; the Christians were an offshoot of the Jews, and if the root were taken away the stock would easily perish.”

That is to say that from the Roman perspective Christianity, even 35 years after the death of Jesus, was still seen as an offshoot or sect within Judaism – despite the fact that the apostle Paul had by then planted majority Gentile churches pretty much all over the Roman world.

If Titus really thought that destroying the temple would finish off both Judaism and Christianity he was wrong on both counts – and especially wrong about Christianity. In fact the destruction of Jerusalem was significantly responsible for turning Christianity into a global religion with up to 2 billion adherents worldwide today. And it did that by forcing Christianity out beyond Judaism to make its own way in the world.

This single event liberated the church for its destiny as a universal religion offered to the whole world.

There was no longer any temple of Jewish structure whose coattails christianity could cling to. Church leaders could no longer operate like synagogue leaders. The Christian church had to find its own ways or doing things – or die.

The church was now faced with many pressures – as well as persecution from both the Jews and the Romans they also had lots of questions – who should be in charge? How could Christianity distinguish itself from the thousands of belief systems that were roaming the Roman Empire at the time? How could Christians prevent their churches being taken over by people with erroneous or even malicious theology?

BREAK

AD 70 -300 Christianity spreads under attack.

The demographic of the Early church

After churches were established in the major cities Christianity tended to spread by personal evangelism. There was little effort to preach the gospel beyond the boundaries of the Empire. The first Christians were, with some exceptions, largely from the lower classes. Women in the higher classes were the main means by which Christianity penetrated higher social groups.

Why did Christianity grow?

- corruption and depravity of paganism
- radical thinking that all were equal made it attractive to the oppressed (e.g. slaves, poor, women)
- obvious love of Christians for each other - 'See how these Christians love one another' (Tertullian)
- willingness of Christians to die rather than deny Jesus

How was the early church viewed?

Fundamentally, in a few words, with suspicion.

The early Christians were a despised minority with no political power. Pliny described the practices of the early Christians:

'They had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honour of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for criminal purposes, but to abstain from theft, robbery and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it. After this ceremony it had been their custom to disperse and reassemble later to take food of an ordinary, harmless kind.' (Pliny, Letters 106-114 AD)

As well as this Christians were suspected of cannibalism because they ate the body and blood of Jesus, and of holding orgies because of their 'love [agape] feasts.'

Features of the early Church

- no buildings - they met in houses

- no national structure/denominations - churches were organised locally
- democratic - elders and bishops elected by the people
- practical care - e.g. by 251 AD the church in Rome was supporting 1500 Christian widows and other needy people

The Emperors

We'll have a look at the time line on that hand out. We have already seen Nero and then Vespasian. Who was then followed by his son Titus. Domitian Titus' brother, Vespasian's younger son, came to power in 81 and he renewed the persecution of the church. The book of Revelation may have been written whilst he was emperor. He was followed by emperor Trajan, under his rule Christians could survive secretly.

The policy of Trajan (98-117), which he communicated to Pliny in Bithynia, was 'don't ask, don't tell.' Christians were not to be sought out, but when accused they should be punished if they refused to recant. Christians were noted for their obstinacy and refusal to recant.

Persecution revived under Marcus Aurelius (161-180). One example the slaughter at Gall

Early heresies

Next week we will be looking at a few of the early heresies that the church had to battle against, and how they refuted them. Tonight I just want to briefly outline a few of the earliest heresies. I am not going to spend too long on them tonight, because that would be stealing one big interesting chunk from next week.

Gnosticism (1st Century)

Gnosticism was a movement in the 1st century. Gnostics believed that matter was evil and that the spirit was imprisoned in the body. Salvation was conceived in terms of the liberation of the spirit from the body by secret spiritual knowledge (gnosis). Gnosticism led to the idea that Jesus did not have a physical human body but only appeared to be a man. Gnostics tended to become either extreme ascetics (denying bodily pleasures) or extreme libertines (anything is permissible).

Marcionism (144 AD)

Marcion taught that the God of the Old Testament (Jehovah) was not the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Whilst Jehovah made the material world, the Father intended a spiritual world. Marcion compiled a Canon of Scripture excluding the OT. The Church countered Marcionism by the Apostle's Creed (approx. 150 AD) and formulating the Canon of Scripture:

'I believe in God, the father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary'

Montanism (circa. 155 AD)

Montanus claimed that he was a prophet who had received a fresh outpouring of the Spirit marking the beginning of a new age, and indicating that Jesus would shortly return to establish the millennial kingdom. Montanism was accompanied by increased moral rigour, which made it attractive to some Christians.

'The orthodox reply, as formulated by Hippolytus of Rome; the quest for miraculous gifts is well (he thought), but the supreme miracle is conversion and therefore every believer alike has the gifts of the Spirit; the supernatural is discerned in the normal ministry of the word and sacrament (communion and baptism), not in irrational ecstasies which lead to pride and censoriousness.

Some important figures

130 Conversion of [Justin Martyr](#). Justin loved philosophy, and had studied many philosophies and pagan religions in his search for truth. He was an apologist, and taught that the seeds of truth (*logos*) could be found in all religions, but that only Christianity taught the whole truth. 165 Justin is [martyred](#). He wrote a lot of texts that we still have today

155 Polycarp was a disciple of John. Martyred by being stabbed to death then being burned. He wrote an early letter to the church at Philippi and simply tells them to keep on as Christian. He as a bishop includes a lot from Paul and John and he openly admits that he sits under their teaching.

Eventually as an old man he was called before the Roman authorities, imagine the scene.

'the Pro-Consul pressed him and said "Take the oath and I let you go, revile Christ," Polycarp said: "For eighty six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong, and how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

Others pressed him further and said swear by caesers name. Polycarp replied "if you imagine that I will swear by caeser, as you put it, pretending not to know who I am I will tell you I AM A CHRISTIAN" These words are is basically signing his death certificate.

The proconsul responded "I have wild beasts outside ready to tear you apart, if you don't change attitude (meaning belief)"

Polycarp respond "Call them. we can not change our attitude"

The govoner responded " if you make light of the beasts I will throw you in fire, if you will not change your attitude"

Polycarp responds "The fire you threaten burns for a time and is then extinguished, there is a fire that you know nothing about. The fire of the judgement to come, the fire for the ungodly, but why do you hesistate do what you want."

And then they killed him

177 MASS persecution in Gall, think of asterix and obelix. It happened in llyon, France. This was intensive persecution. Well what happened? Great mobs went out and found people they though to be christians and put them in an ampithether. They were all asked, are you a christian?

About 50 answered Yes. They were then put to death. One man was made to sit in an heated iron chair that was red hot, he was roasted to death. Whilst in the chair he yelled out. Eating men is what you are doing, we do no wrong. Charge of cannibalism

There is an Incredible story of young slave girl. Bludena was tortured without mercy. Let me read to you what happened.

" bludena was in agony, and scared that she could make a decent confession of Christ because she was so weak. But bludena was continually filled with such power.

They took it in turns to subject her to every kind of torture from morning to night, they were exhausted by their efforts. They confessed themselves beaten because they could not do anything else to her. They were amazed that she was still breathing and for her whole body was mangled and her wounds gaped. They declared that torment of one kind was enough to

separate the soul from the body let alone several together. 'Blundea carried on I am a christain we do nothing to be ashamed of.' She was hung on a post and wild beasts were let loose into the arena. None of them touched her

So she was sent back to jail.

On the last day, blunenda and a 15 year old Christian boy had been forced to watch everyone else being martyred. They stood firm, the mob, subjected them to every horror, one at a time, but to no avail. Eventually the 2 died. She put into a basket and thrown to a bull, time after time the animal tossed her. But she was indifferent now to all that had happened, because of her hope and firm hold on all that her faith meant and her communing with Christ..

The heathen admitted never had they seen a women endure so much for so long.

Tertullian

Tertullian was the first Christian writer to write in Latin, and was described three centuries later as writing 'first, and best, and incomparably', of all the writers to do so. His writing is aggressive, sarcastic, and at points very funny. He was deeply conscious of his own failings, and had a burning desire for truth and integrity.

He was born a member of the educated classes, and clearly gained a good education. Life in his times wasn't very different in some ways to the modern day - he indulged his passions as he saw fit, including sex, and like everyone else attended the games where gladiators killed each other and criminals were eaten alive, for the enjoyment of the spectators.

But among the sights he saw, was that of Christians being executed this way. He was struck with the courage with which stupid and contemptible slave men and little slave girls faced a hideous death, against all nature; and after investigating, became a Christian himself aged 40, and turned his budding talents to writing in defense of this despised and victimised group.

His most important work is the *Apologeticum*, in defense of the Christians. We will hear a bit of that in a bit.

In keeping with his great sense of truth, Tertullian also wrote several works attacking the heresies of his day, writing against Gnosticism and expounding orthodox Christian belief.

Over the years, however, Tertullian grew angry at what looked like compromise creeping into the church - unwillingness to be martyred, willingness to forgive more serious public sins - and aligned himself with the Montanists. (A heretic) The emphases of the New Prophecy seemed to have been on resisting persecution, fasting, and avoiding remarriage, together with hostility to any compromise with sin. All this appealed to Tertullian

As such he was not recognised as a Saint, despite his orthodoxy, and his works were all marked as condemned in the 6th Century [Decretum Gelasianum](#).

Tertullian saw, that the persecution of the church by the Roman authorities actually strengthened the Church of Christ: "It is bait that wins men for (our) school. The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow: the blood of Christians is seed [of the church]."

Tertullian's best work, obviously, comes before he went off the rails a bit. He was strongly influenced by his own conversion experience. He longed to see Christians making a stand no matter the cost.

He once wrote "He who flees will fight again". Yes, and perhaps flee again too

He who lives only to benefit himself confers on the world a benefit when he dies.

More helpfully when talking of his duty as a Christian citizen he wrote

We are equally forbidden to wish ill, to do ill, to speak ill, to think ill of all men. The thing we must not do to an emperor, we must not do to any one else.

Or how about these 3 lyrical gems

Reason without goodness is not reason, and goodness without reason is not goodness

Nothing that is unjust can be good, and everything that is just is bound to be good.

Nothing that is evil is necessary.

Or how about his argument against abortion.

Indeed for us murder is forbidden once and for all, so it is not permitted even to destroy what is conceived in the womb. To prohibit the birth of a child is only a faster way to murder; it makes little difference whether one destroys a life already born or prevents it from coming to birth. It is a human being, who is to be a human being, for the whole fruit is already present in the seed.

And possibly my favourite

There is power also in brevity

[*Apologeticum ch. 39, 7*](#)

Chapter XXXIX.

I shall at once go on, then, to exhibit the peculiarities of the Christian society, that, as I have refuted the evil charged against it, I may point out its positive good. We are a body knit together as such by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, and by the bond of a common hope. We meet together as an assembly and congregation, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications. This violence God delights in. We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation. We assemble to read our sacred writings, if any peculiarity of the times makes either forewarning or reminiscence needful. However it be in that respect, with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more stedfast; and no less by inculcations of God's precepts we confirm good habits.

In the same place also exhortations are made, rebukes and sacred censures are administered. For with a great gravity is the work of judging carried on among us, as befits those who feel assured that they are in the sight of God; and you have the most notable example of judgment to come when any one has sinned so grievously as to require his severance from us in prayer, in the congregation and in all sacred intercourse. The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honour not by purchase, but by established character. There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God.

Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession.

But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. *See*, they say, *how they love one another*, for themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves will sooner put to death. And they are wroth with us, too, because we call each other brethren; for no other reason, as I think, than because among themselves names of consanguinity are assumed in mere pretence of affection. But we are your brethren as well, by the law of our common mother nature, though you are hardly men, because brothers so unkind.

At the same time, how much more fittingly they are called and counted brothers who have been led to the knowledge of God as their common Father, who have drunk in one spirit of holiness, who from the same womb of a common ignorance have agonized into the same light of truth!