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*The Postmodern approach to history differs dramatically from that of all other worldviews. 2 For example, a Christian worldview sees history as the grand unfolding of God's divine plan to redeem a fallen humanity (see Paul's speech in Acts 17).*

What is postmodern therapy, and is it biblical? Postmodernism is a worldview opposed to modernism. Rather than rely on scientific fact and a sense of absolute truth, postmodernists believe that reality is constructed. Reality does not exist apart from observation. Many Christians fear to engage postmodernism, as it clearly denies absolute truth and espouses relativism. However, certain of its tenets are worthy of further examination. Postmodernism has invaded much of Western culture, and it is important to understand the worldview of those with whom we have to do. Postmodernism has also affected psychotherapy; namely, it has given rise to a social constructionist approach to counseling. Specific therapeutic practices considered postmodern include the collaborative language systems approach, solution-focused brief therapy, solution-oriented therapy, and narrative therapy. While each approach is unique, we can better understand them all with a general explanation of postmodern approaches to counseling and a biblical commentary. Explanation of Postmodern Therapy Rather than believe themselves to be experts who can solve client problems, therapists using a postmodern approach view the client as the expert. Story is an important theme. How a client narrates his or her own life is indicative of any problem he or she may be experiencing. It is not so much that a client experiences depression as that he considers himself to be depressed. Social constructionists challenge conventional perspectives and believe that knowledge is socially created and that language is culture-bound. A client narrates his or her story in new ways to form new meanings. Many postmodern therapies attempt not to focus on a specific problem, but rather on a solution. Clients are encouraged not to wallow in the past but to live in the present. Rather than affirm problems, therapists and clients look for exceptions. Therapy is not oriented toward pathology but toward growth. Some therapies aim at concrete actions, and others are oriented toward forming a new life narrative. Biblical Commentary on Postmodern Therapy Any form of therapy that denies truth is clearly unbiblical. However, certain techniques in postmodern therapies can be useful, even to Christians. Many times our perspective on life causes us problems. The Bible teaches us to be grateful in all things 1 Thessalonians 5: When we think of our lives as a series of tragedies or disappointments, it is difficult to be grateful and easy to fall into depression or some other maladaptive behavior. If we define ourselves and our stories any way we like, without a foundation of truth, we are in for trouble. Postmodern solution-focused therapies are effective in that they help clients get out of their ruts. The Bible calls us to action. We are not merely to agree with God; we are to do something about it. James says that faith without action is dead James 2: We have become those who look in the mirror and go away unchanged James 1: Certainly, we do not solve our problems solely by ourselves, and at times all we can do is give them to God. But casting our cares on God and inviting Him to do His healing and sanctifying work in our lives still requires action on our part. The most obvious difficulty with postmodern therapy is its denial of absolute truth. We are there because we live in a fallen world tainted by sin. Only God can rescue us from sin, and that is the absolute truth.

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## Chapter 2 : Postmodernism - Wikipedia

*Writing Christian History in the Shadow of the Enlightenment Toward "Modern" Histories of Christianity Postmodern and Liberation-oriented Approaches to Christian History.*

Ideas such as God, freedom, immortality, the world, first beginning, and final end have only a regulative function for knowledge, since they cannot find fulfilling instances among objects of experience. With Hegel, the immediacy of the subject-object relation itself is shown to be illusory. So-called immediate perception therefore lacks the certainty of immediacy itself, a certainty that must be deferred to the working out of a complete system of experience. The later nineteenth century is the age of modernity as an achieved reality, where science and technology, including networks of mass communication and transportation, reshape human perceptions. There is no clear distinction, then, between the natural and the artificial in experience. Indeed, many proponents of postmodernism challenge the viability of such a distinction tout court, seeing in achieved modernism the emergence of a problem the philosophical tradition has repressed. A consequence of achieved modernism is what postmodernists might refer to as de-realization. De-realization affects both the subject and the objects of experience, such that their sense of identity, constancy, and substance is upset or dissolved. Important precursors to this notion are found in Kierkegaard, Marx and Nietzsche. In this sense, society has become a realization of abstract thought, held together by an artificial and all-pervasive medium speaking for everyone and for no one. In Marx, on the other hand, we have an analysis of the fetishism of commodities Marx , " where objects lose the solidity of their use value and become spectral figures under the aspect of exchange value. Their ghostly nature results from their absorption into a network of social relations, where their values fluctuate independently of their corporeal being. Human subjects themselves experience this de-realization because commodities are products of their labor. Workers paradoxically lose their being in realizing themselves, and this becomes emblematic for those professing a postmodern sensibility. However, with the notion of the true world, he says, we have also done away with the apparent one. What is left is neither real nor apparent, but something in between, and therefore something akin to the virtual reality of more recent vintage. Where Apollo is the god of beautiful forms and images, Dionysus is the god of frenzy and intoxication, under whose sway the spell of individuated existence is broken in a moment of undifferentiated oneness with nature. While tragic art is life-affirming in joining these two impulses, logic and science are built upon Apollonian representations that have become frozen and lifeless. Hence, Nietzsche believes only a return of the Dionysian art impulse can save modern society from sterility and nihilism. In order to be responsible we must assume that we are the cause of our actions, and this cause must hold over time, retaining its identity, so that rewards and punishments are accepted as consequences for actions deemed beneficial or detrimental to others Nietzsche , ; , . Thus logic is born from the demand to adhere to common social norms which shape the human herd into a society of knowing and acting subjects. In this text, Nietzsche puts forward the hypothesis that scientific concepts are chains of metaphors hardened into accepted truths. On this account, metaphor begins when a nerve stimulus is copied as an image, which is then imitated in sound, giving rise, when repeated, to the word, which becomes a concept when the word is used to designate multiple instances of singular events. Conceptual metaphors are thus lies because they equate unequal things, just as the chain of metaphors moves from one level to another. There is no question, then, of reaching a standpoint outside of history or of conceiving past times as stages on the way to the present. Nietzsche presents this concept in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche [ , ], and in a more developed form in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche " , " Many have taken the concept to imply an endless, identical repetition of everything in the universe, such that nothing occurs that has not already occurred an infinite number of times before. However, others, including postmodernists, read these passages in conjunction with the notion that history is the repetition of an unhistorical moment, a moment that is always new in each case. In their view, Nietzsche can only mean that the new eternally repeats as new, and therefore recurrence is a matter of difference rather than identity.

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Furthermore, postmodernists join the concept of eternal return with the loss of the distinction between the real and the apparent world. The distinction itself does not reappear, and what repeats is neither real nor apparent in the traditional sense, but is a phantasm or simulacrum. Nietzsche is a common interest between postmodern philosophers and Martin Heidegger, whose meditations on art, technology, and the withdrawal of being they regularly cite and comment upon. Heidegger sees modern technology as the fulfillment of Western metaphysics, which he characterizes as the metaphysics of presence. From the time of the earliest philosophers, but definitively with Plato, says Heidegger, Western thought has conceived of being as the presence of beings, which in the modern world has come to mean the availability of beings for use. In fact, as he writes in *Being and Time*, the presence of beings tends to disappear into the transparency of their usefulness as things ready-to-hand Heidegger [], Hence, the mountain is not a mountain but a standing supply of coal, the Rhine is not the Rhine but an engine for hydro-electric energy, and humans are not humans but reserves of manpower. However, humans are affected by this withdrawal in moments of anxiety or boredom, and therein lies the way to a possible return of being, which would be tantamount to a repetition of the experience of being opened up by Parmenides and Heraclitus. Heidegger sees this as the realization of the will to power, another Nietzschean conception, which, conjoined with the eternal return, represents the exhaustion of the metaphysical tradition Heidegger a, For Heidegger, the will to power is the eternal recurrence as becoming, and the permanence of becoming is the terminal moment of the metaphysics of presence. On this reading, becoming is the emerging and passing away of beings within and among other beings instead of an emergence from being. Thus, for Heidegger, Nietzsche marks the end of metaphysical thinking but not a passage beyond it, and therefore Heidegger sees him as the last metaphysician in whom the oblivion of being is complete Heidegger a, ; b, Many postmodern philosophers find in Heidegger a nostalgia for being they do not share. In this gathering, which follows the lineaments of an exclusively Greco-Christian-German tradition, something more original than being is forgotten, and that is the difference and alterity against which, and with which, the tradition composes itself. Here, being is the underlying ground of the being of beings, the subiectum that is enacted in modern philosophy as the subject of consciousness. But in *Being and Time* Heidegger conceives the human being as Dasein, which is not simply a present consciousness, but an event of ecstatic temporality that is open to a past Gewesensein that was never present its already being-there and a future Zu-kunft that is always yet to come the possibility of death. The finitude of Dasein therefore cannot be contained within the limits of consciousness, nor within the limits of the subject, whether it is conceived substantively or formally. In addition to the critiques of the subject offered by Nietzsche and Heidegger, many postmodernists also borrow heavily from the psycho-analytic theories of Jacques Lacan. For Lacan, the subject is always the subject of speech, and that means speech directed toward an other in relation to whom the subject differentiates and identifies itself. However, desire ultimately aims for something impossible: Insofar as the phallus is nothing but the signifying function as such, it does not exist. It is not an object to be possessed, but is that through which the subject and the other are brought into relation to begin with, and it thus imposes itself upon the subject as a fundamental absence or lack that is at once necessary and irremediable Lacan , Hence the subject is forever divided from itself and unable to achieve final unity or identity. He describes his text as a combination of two very different language games, that of the philosopher and that of the expert. Analysis of this knowledge calls for a pragmatics of communication insofar as the phrasing of messages, their transmission and reception, must follow rules in order to be accepted by those who judge them. However, as Lyotard points out, the position of judge or legislator is also a position within a language game, and this raises the question of legitimation. Science is therefore tightly interwoven with government and administration, especially in the information age, where enormous amounts of capital and large installations are needed for research. Science, however, plays the language game of denotation to the exclusion of all others, and in this respect it displaces narrative knowledge, including the meta-narratives of philosophy. This is due, in part, to what Lyotard characterizes as the rapid growth of technologies and techniques in the second half of the twentieth century, where the emphasis of knowledge has shifted from the

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ends of human action to its means Lyotard [], This has eroded the speculative game of philosophy and set each science free to develop independently of philosophical grounding or systematic organization. As a result, new, hybrid disciplines develop without connection to old epistemic traditions, especially philosophy, and this means science only plays its own game and cannot legitimate others, such as moral prescription. The compartmentalization of knowledge and the dissolution of epistemic coherence is a concern for researchers and philosophers alike. Furthermore, within each game the subject moves from position to position, now as sender, now as addressee, now as referent, and so on. The loss of a continuous meta-narrative therefore breaks the subject into heterogeneous moments of subjectivity that do not cohere into an identity. But as Lyotard points out, while the combinations we experience are not necessarily stable or communicable, we learn to move with a certain nimbleness among them. Postmodern sensibility does not lament the loss of narrative coherence any more than the loss of being. However, the dissolution of narrative leaves the field of legitimation to a new unifying criterion: Performative legitimation means maximizing the flow of information and minimizing static non-functional moves in the system, so whatever cannot be communicated as information must be eliminated. The performativity criterion threatens anything not meeting its requirements, such as speculative narratives, with de-legitimation and exclusion. In this regard, the modern paradigm of progress as new moves under established rules gives way to the postmodern paradigm of inventing new rules and changing the game. Inventing new codes and reshaping information is a large part of the production of knowledge, and in its inventive moment science does not adhere to performative efficiency. By the same token, the meta-prescriptives of science, its rules, are themselves objects of invention and experimentation for the sake of producing new statements. In this respect, says Lyotard, the model of knowledge as the progressive development of consensus is outmoded. In fact, attempts to retrieve the model of consensus can only repeat the standard of coherence demanded for functional efficiency, and they will thus lend themselves to the domination of capital. On the other hand, the paralogical inventiveness of science raises the possibility of a new sense of justice, as well as knowledge, as we move among the language games now entangling us. Without the formal unity of the subject, the faculties are set free to operate on their own. Where Kant insists that reason must assign domains and limits to the other faculties, its dependence upon the unity of the subject for the identity of concepts as laws or rules de-legitimizes its juridical authority in the postmodern age. As Lyotard argues, aesthetic judgment is the appropriate model for the problem of justice in postmodern experience because we are confronted with a plurality of games and rules without a concept under which to unify them. Judgment must therefore be reflective rather than determining. Furthermore, judgment must be aesthetic insofar as it does not produce denotative knowledge about a determinable state of affairs, but refers to the way our faculties interact with each other as we move from one mode of phrasing to another, i. In Kantian terms, this interaction registers as an aesthetic feeling. Where Kant emphasizes the feeling of the beautiful as a harmonious interaction between imagination and understanding, Lyotard stresses the mode in which faculties imagination and reason, are in disharmony, i. For Kant, the sublime occurs when our faculties of sensible presentation are overwhelmed by impressions of absolute power and magnitude, and reason is thrown back upon its own power to conceive Ideas such as the moral law which surpass the sensible world. For Lyotard, however, the postmodern sublime occurs when we are affected by a multitude of unrepresentables without reference to reason as their unifying origin. Justice, then, would not be a definable rule, but an ability to move and judge among rules in their heterogeneity and multiplicity. Modern art, he says, is emblematic of a sublime sensibility, that is, a sensibility that there is something non-presentable demanding to be put into sensible form and yet overwhelms all attempts to do so. But where modern art presents the unrepresentable as a missing content within a beautiful form, as in Marcel Proust, postmodern art, exemplified by James Joyce, puts forward the unrepresentable by forgoing beautiful form itself, thus denying what Kant would call the consensus of taste. Genealogy and Subjectivity The Nietzschean method of genealogy, in its application to modern subjectivity, is another facet of philosophical postmodernism. That is, genealogy studies the accidents and contingencies that converge at crucial moments, giving rise to new epochs, concepts, and institutions. In

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Nietzschean fashion, Foucault exposes history conceived as the origin and development of an identical subject, e. Underlying the fiction of modernity is a sense of temporality that excludes the elements of chance and contingency in play at every moment. In short, linear, progressive history covers up the discontinuities and interruptions that mark points of succession in historical time. This entails dissolving identity for the subject in history by using the materials and techniques of modern historical research. Just as Nietzsche postulates that the religious will to truth in Christianity results in the destruction of Christianity by science see Nietzsche [], 83 , Foucault postulates that genealogical research will result in the disintegration of the epistemic subject, as the continuity of the subject is broken up by the gaps and accidents that historical research uncovers. Here, Foucault gives an account of the historical beginnings of modern reason as it comes to define itself against madness in the seventeenth century. His thesis is that the practice of confining the mad is a transformation of the medieval practice of confining lepers in lazar houses. These institutions managed to survive long after the lepers disappeared, and thus an institutional structure of confinement was already in place when the modern concept of madness as a disease took shape. However, while institutions of confinement are held over from a previous time, the practice of confining the mad constitutes a break with the past. Foucault focuses upon the moment of transition, as modern reason begins to take shape in a confluence of concepts, institutions, and practices, or, as he would say, of knowledge and power. In its nascency, reason is a power that defines itself against an other, an other whose truth and identity is also assigned by reason, thus giving reason the sense of originating from itself.

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Chapter 3 : What is Postmodern Therapy Complete Definition Here | CRC Health Group | CRC Health Group

*Writing Christian history in the shadow of the Enlightenment Gottfried Arnold Johann Lorenz von Mosheim 9. Towards 'modern' histories of Christianity Postmodern and Liberation-oriented approaches to Christian history*

Christian Books Back cover copy For 2, years the Christian churches have developed, disagreed with each other, and divided into separate and often hostile factions. This book, written by a distinguished Church historian, explores the theological lessons to be learnt from this difficult history. The author identifies a recurring historic tendency to identify the Christian life with one or another specific means to holiness, such as ascetic discipline, martyrdom, or the cult of the Eucharist. He examines how historians of Christianity gradually came to terms with the idea that the Church could change, and even lapse into serious error. He also shows how historical perspective has played a key role in many of the most important theologies of the past years. The book concludes that a living Christianity is never absolutely timeless, and that we can only ever perceive a facet of its total revelation, conditioned as we are by our own historical and cultural context.

Diversities of Belief, Practice, and Priorities. Steering Between Two Extremes. The Compass and Structure of the Book. Greek and Latin, East and West. Persecution, Legal Establishment, Empowerment, and Retreat. Disputes over Control, and the Rise of a Continental Church. The High Medieval Synthesis. The Age of Competing Orthodoxies. Reason, Enlightenment, and Revolution. The Era of Romanticism and its Implications. The Multiple Crises of the Twentieth Century. Reflecting on the Process of Historical Development. Means to Holiness Become Ultimate Goals. Giving Things Up for God. The Company of Heaven: Purity of Doctrine and Instruction: The Christian Community and its Membership. Reflections on Shifting Priorities. Early Medieval Church History: The High Middle Ages: The Reformation and the Rise of a Sense of History. Confessional Histories in the Age of Orthodoxy. Writing Christian History in the Shadow of the Enlightenment. Toward "Modern" Histories of Christianity. Postmodern and Liberation-oriented Approaches to Christian History. The Historical Background to Historical-critical Theology. Responses to Liberalism in the Twentieth Century. Thomism, Mysticism, and Neo-liberalism: Some Roman Catholic Responses. Cultural Diversity, Liberation, Postliberalism, and Postmodernity. Drawing the Threads Together. Index show more Review quote "This book is an excellent summary of Christian history from the apostolic period to the current day and is written in an engaging way. It will be profitably used by scholars and students in all Christian traditions and is a helpful text not only for introductory seminary church history or historical theology courses, but also for historiography in university graduate courses. Euan Cameron, however, is an exemption as shown by his careful assessment of what the historians of this and previous generations have both taken for granted and spelled out explicitly in writing the history of Christianity. As one might expect from a distinguished student of the sixteenth century, Interpreting Christian History is particularly good on what the rise of Protestantism meant for understanding the Christian past.

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## Chapter 4 : What is postmodern therapy, and is it biblical?

*Writing Christian History in the Shadow of the Enlightenment. Toward "Modern" Histories of Christianity. Postmodern and Liberation-oriented Approaches to Christian History.*

Martin Heidegger[ edit ] Martin Heidegger rejected the philosophical basis of the concepts of "subjectivity" and "objectivity" and asserted that similar grounding oppositions in logic ultimately refer to one another. Instead of resisting the admission of this paradox in the search for understanding, Heidegger requires that we embrace it through an active process of elucidation he called the " hermeneutic circle ". He stressed the historicity and cultural construction of concepts while simultaneously advocating the necessity of an atemporal and immanent apprehension of them. In this vein, he asserted that it was the task of contemporary philosophy to recover the original question of or "openness to" Dasein translated as Being or Being-there present in the Presocratic philosophers but normalized, neutered, and standardized since Plato. To do this, however, a non-historical and, to a degree, self-referential engagement with whatever set of ideas, feelings or practices would permit both the non-fixed concept and reality of such a continuity was requiredâ€”a continuity permitting the possible experience, possible existence indeed not only of beings but of all differences as they appeared and tended to develop. Such a conclusion led Heidegger to depart from the phenomenology of his teacher Husserl and prompt instead an ironically anachronistic return to the yet-unasked questions of Ontology , a return that in general did not acknowledge an intrinsic distinction between phenomena and noumena or between things in themselves de re and things as they appear see qualia: In this latter premise, Heidegger shares an affinity with the late Romantic philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche , another principal forerunner of post-structuralist and postmodernist thought. In direct contradiction to what have been typified as modernist perspectives on epistemology , Foucault asserted that rational judgment, social practice, and what he called " biopower " are not only inseparable but co-determinant. Instead, Foucault focused on the ways in which such constructs can foster cultural hegemony , violence, and exclusion. His writings have had a major influence on the larger body of postmodern academic literature. This crisis, insofar as it pertains to academia, concerns both the motivations and justification procedures for making research claims: As formal conjecture about real-world issues becomes inextricably linked to automated calculation, information storage, and retrieval, such knowledge becomes increasingly "exteriorised" from its knowers in the form of information. Knowledge thus becomes materialized and made into a commodity exchanged between producers and consumers; it ceases to be either an idealistic end-in-itself or a tool capable of bringing about liberty or social benefit; it is stripped of its humanistic and spiritual associations, its connection with education, teaching, and human development, being simply rendered as "data"â€”omnipresent, material, unending, and without any contexts or pre-requisites. The value-premises upholding academic research have been maintained by what Lyotard considers to be quasi-mythological beliefs about human purpose, human reason, and human progressâ€”large, background constructs he calls " metanarratives ". These metanarratives still remain in Western society but are now being undermined by rapid Informatization and the commercialization of the university and its functions. We are now controlled not by binding extra-linguistic value paradigms defining notions of collective identity and ultimate purpose, but rather by our automatic responses to different species of "language games" a concept Lyotard imports from J. Richard Rorty[ edit ] Richard Rorty argues in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* that contemporary analytic philosophy mistakenly imitates scientific methods. In addition, he denounces the traditional epistemological perspectives of representationalism and correspondence theory that rely upon the independence of knowers and observers from phenomena and the passivity of natural phenomena in relation to consciousness. As a proponent of anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism within a pragmatist framework, he echoes the postmodern strain of conventionalism and relativism , but opposes much of postmodern thinking with his commitment to social liberalism. Jean Baudrillard[ edit ] Jean Baudrillard , in *Simulacra and Simulation* , introduced the concept that reality or the principle of " The Real " is short-circuited by the

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interchangeability of signs in an era whose communicative and semantic acts are dominated by electronic media and digital technologies. Baudrillard proposes the notion that, in such a state, where subjects are detached from the outcomes of events political, literary, artistic, personal, or otherwise, events no longer hold any particular sway on the subject nor have any identifiable context; they therefore have the effect of producing widespread indifference, detachment, and passivity in industrialized populations. He claimed that a constant stream of appearances and references without any direct consequences to viewers or readers could eventually render the division between appearance and object indiscernible, resulting, ironically, in the "disappearance" of mankind in what is, in effect, a virtual or holographic state, composed only of appearances. For Baudrillard, "simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or a reality: Eclectic in his methodology, Jameson has continued a sustained examination of the role that periodization continues to play as a grounding assumption of critical methodologies in humanities disciplines. He has contributed extensive effort to explicating the importance of concepts of Utopia and Utopianism as driving forces in the cultural and intellectual movements of modernity, and outlining the political and existential uncertainties that may result from the decline or suspension of this trend in the theorized state of postmodernity. Like Susan Sontag, Jameson served to introduce a wide audience of American readers to key figures of the 20th century continental European intellectual left, particularly those associated with the Frankfurt School, structuralism, and post-structuralism. Thus, his importance as a "translator" of their ideas to the common vocabularies of a variety of disciplines in the Anglo-American academic complex is equally as important as his own critical engagement with them. Douglas Kellner [edit] In *Analysis of the Journey*, a journal birthed from postmodernism, Douglas Kellner insists that the "assumptions and procedures of modern theory" must be forgotten. His terms defined in the depth of postmodernism are based on advancement, innovation, and adaptation. Extensively, Kellner analyzes the terms of this theory in real-life experiences and examples. Kellner used science and technology studies as a major part of his analysis; he urged that the theory is incomplete without it. The scale was larger than just postmodernism alone; it must be interpreted through cultural studies where science and technology studies play a huge role. The reality of the September 11 attacks on the United States of America is the catalyst for his explanation. This catalyst is used as a great representation due to the mere fact of the planned ambush and destruction of "symbols of globalization", insinuating the World Trade Center. One of the numerous yet appropriate definitions of postmodernism and the qualm aspect aids this attribute to seem perfectly accurate. He questions if the attacks are only able to be understood in a limited form of postmodern theory due to the level of irony. Similar to the act of September 11 and the symbols that were interpreted through this postmodern ideal, he continues to even describe this as "semiotic systems" that people use to make sense of their lives and the events that occur in them. He finds strength in theorist Baudrillard and his idea of Marxism. The conclusion he depicts is simple:

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## Chapter 5 : Table of contents for Interpreting Christian history

*Postmodern and Liberation-oriented Approaches to Christian History. Summary and Conclusions. 4 Some Theologians Reflect on the Historical Problem. The Historical Background to Historical-critical Theology.*

Diversities of Belief, Practice, and Priorities. The Compass and Structure of the Book. Greek and Latin, East and West. Persecution, Legal Establishment, Empowerment, and Retreat. Disputes over Control, and the Rise of a Continental Church. The High Medieval Synthesis. The Age of Competing Orthodoxies. Reason, Enlightenment, and Revolution. The Era of Romanticism and its Implications. The Multiple Crises of the Twentieth Century. Reflecting on the Process of Historical Development. Means to Holiness Become Ultimate Goals. Giving Things Up for God. The Company of Heaven: Purity of Doctrine and Instruction: The Christian Community and its Membership. Reflections on Shifting Priorities. Early Medieval Church History: The High Middle Ages: The Reformation and the Rise of a Sense of History. Confessional Histories in the Age of Orthodoxy. Writing Christian History in the Shadow of the Enlightenment. Postmodern and Liberation-oriented Approaches to Christian History. The Historical Background to Historical-critical Theology. Responses to Liberalism in the Twentieth Century. Thomism, Mysticism, and Neo-liberalism: Some Roman Catholic Responses. Cultural Diversity, Liberation, Postliberalism, and Postmodernity. Drawing the Threads Together. Index "This book is an excellent summary of Christian history from the apostolic period to the current day and is written in an engaging way. It will be profitably used by scholars and students in all Christian traditions and is a helpful text not only for introductory seminary church history or historical theology courses, but also for historiography in university graduate courses. Euan Cameron, however, is an exemption as shown by his careful assessment of what the historians of this and previous generations have both taken for granted and spelled out explicitly in writing the history of Christianity. As one might expect from a distinguished student of the sixteenth century, *Interpreting Christian History* is particularly good on what the rise of Protestantism meant for understanding the Christian past.

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## Chapter 6 : Postmodernism and History - Butterflies and Wheels

*Interpreting Christian history: the challenge of the churches' past. [Euan Cameron] -- "Expert historians are not always as good at self-reflecting on their craft at practicing that craft. Euan Cameron, however, is an exemption as shown by his careful assessment of what the historians.*

A new, radical form of skepticism emerged in the last half of the 20th century: This view questioned whether there can be any rational, objective framework for discussing intellectual problems, or whether instead the intellectual frameworks that people use are inherently determined by them. Postmodernism and modern philosophy Postmodernism is largely a reaction against the intellectual assumptions and values of the modern period in the history of Western philosophy roughly, the 17th through the 19th century. Indeed, many of the doctrines characteristically associated with postmodernism can fairly be described as the straightforward denial of general philosophical viewpoints that were taken for granted during the 18th-century Enlightenment, though they were not unique to that period. The most important of these viewpoints are the following. There is an objective natural reality, a reality whose existence and properties are logically independent of human beings—of their minds, their societies, their social practices, or their investigative techniques. Postmodernists dismiss this idea as a kind of naive realism. Such reality as there is, according to postmodernists, is a conceptual construct, an artifact of scientific practice and language. This point also applies to the investigation of past events by historians and to the description of social institutions, structures, or practices by social scientists. The descriptive and explanatory statements of scientists and historians can, in principle, be objectively true or false. The postmodern denial of this viewpoint—which follows from the rejection of an objective natural reality—is sometimes expressed by saying that there is no such thing as Truth. Through the use of reason and logic, and with the more specialized tools provided by science and technology, human beings are likely to change themselves and their societies for the better. It is reasonable to expect that future societies will be more humane, more just, more enlightened, and more prosperous than they are now. Postmodernists deny this Enlightenment faith in science and technology as instruments of human progress. Indeed, many postmodernists hold that the misguided or unguided pursuit of scientific and technological knowledge led to the development of technologies for killing on a massive scale in World War II. Some go so far as to say that science and technology—and even reason and logic—are inherently destructive and oppressive, because they have been used by evil people, especially during the 20th century, to destroy and oppress others. Reason and logic are universally valid. For postmodernists, reason and logic too are merely conceptual constructs and are therefore valid only within the established intellectual traditions in which they are used. There is such a thing as human nature; it consists of faculties, aptitudes, or dispositions that are in some sense present in human beings at birth rather than learned or instilled through social forces. Postmodernists insist that all, or nearly all, aspects of human psychology are completely socially determined. Language refers to and represents a reality outside itself. Inspired by the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, postmodernists claim that language is semantically self-contained, or self-referential: The postmodern view of language and discourse is due largely to the French philosopher and literary theorist Jacques Derrida, the originator and leading practitioner of deconstruction. Human beings can acquire knowledge about natural reality, and this knowledge can be justified ultimately on the basis of evidence or principles that are, or can be, known immediately, intuitively, or otherwise with certainty. It is possible, at least in principle, to construct general theories that explain many aspects of the natural or social world within a given domain of knowledge. Furthermore, it should be a goal of scientific and historical research to construct such theories, even if they are never perfectly attainable in practice. These theories are pernicious not merely because they are false but because they effectively impose conformity on other perspectives or discourses, thereby oppressing, marginalizing, or silencing them. Derrida himself equated the theoretical tendency toward totality with totalitarianism. Postmodernism and relativism As indicated in the preceding

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section, many of the characteristic doctrines of postmodernism constitute or imply some form of metaphysical , epistemological , or ethical relativism. It should be noted, however, that some postmodernists vehemently reject the relativist label. Postmodernists deny that there are aspects of reality that are objective; that there are statements about reality that are objectively true or false; that it is possible to have knowledge of such statements objective knowledge ; that it is possible for human beings to know some things with certainty; and that there are objective, or absolute, moral values. Reality, knowledge, and value are constructed by discourses; hence they can vary with them. This means that the discourse of modern science, when considered apart from the evidential standards internal to it, has no greater purchase on the truth than do alternative perspectives, including for example astrology and witchcraft. If postmodernists are correct that reality, knowledge, and value are relative to discourse, then the established discourses of the Enlightenment are no more necessary or justified than alternative discourses. But this raises the question of how they came to be established in the first place. If it is never possible to evaluate a discourse according to whether it leads to objective Truth, how did the established discourses become part of the prevailing worldview of the modern era? Why were these discourses adopted or developed, whereas others were not? Part of the postmodern answer is that the prevailing discourses in any society reflect the interests and values, broadly speaking, of dominant or elite groups. Inspired by the historical research of the French philosopher Michel Foucault , some postmodernists defend the comparatively nuanced view that what counts as knowledge in a given era is always influenced, in complex and subtle ways, by considerations of power. There are others, however, who are willing to go even further than Marx. The French philosopher and literary theorist Luce Irigaray , for example, has argued that the science of solid mechanics is better developed than the science of fluid mechanics because the male-dominated institution of physics associates solidity and fluidity with the male and female sex organs, respectively. Thus postmodernists regard their theoretical position as uniquely inclusive and democratic, because it allows them to recognize the unjust hegemony of Enlightenment discourses over the equally valid perspectives of nonelite groups.

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### Chapter 7 : The Postmodern Challenge - Christian Research Institute

*Get this from a library! Interpreting Christian history: the challenge of the churches' past. [Euan Cameron] -- This book explores the theological lessons to be learnt from years of Christian Church history.*

I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth. In contrast, the more radical Postmodernists see no ultimate purpose in history, advocating instead a nihilist perspective. Less radical Postmodernists advocate the view that history is what we make of it. They believe that historical facts are inaccessible, leaving the historian to his or her imagination and ideological bent to reconstruct what happened in the past. Postmodernists use the term historicism to describe the view that all questions must be settled within the cultural and social context in which they are raised. Both Lacan and Foucault argue that each historical period has its own knowledge system and individuals are unavoidably entangled within these systems. Postmodern History – History as Fiction Unlike Postmodern history, the traditional approach to history holds that by sifting through the evidence at hand texts, artifacts, etc. This means that not all descriptions of history are equally valid. Some accounts may be more true to the actual events than others. As new information comes to light, any narrative of history could be revised or supplemented. However, most Postmodernists doubt that an accurate telling of the past is possible because they blur the difference between fact and fiction—some even claim that all historical accounts are fiction. In Michel Foucault attempted to commit suicide. He was at the time a student at the elite Parisian university, the Ecole Normale. Foucault appeared to be racked with guilt over his frequent nocturnal visits to the illegal gay bars of the French capital. His father, a strict disciplinarian who had previously sent his son to the most regimented Catholic school he could find, arranged for Michel to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation. Yet Foucault remained obsessed with death, joked about hanging himself and made further attempts to end his own life. The subject matter of many of his later books arose from his own experience—Madness and Civilization, The Birth of the Clinic, Discipline and Punish, and The History of Sexuality 3 Vols. Foucault is an anti-historian, one who in writing history, threatens every canon of the craft. For Foucault, truth and knowledge were constructions we offer to persuade others. They need not correspond to reality, for we construct our own reality in such a way as to give us power over others. If, as Foucault declares, a claim to knowledge really is nothing but an attempt to overpower others, then retelling history serves the purpose of gaining power for some repressed group. Thus, according to the Postmodern condition the discipline of history has turned away from the study of significant individuals and the struggles between nations to focus on social groups and institutions. Historical research becomes not an attempt to understand the past but a propaganda tool for use in modern political and social power struggles. As a result we see a growing willingness to arrange and edit facts in a way that supports the message of particular historians. This rewriting of the past to serve a purpose, known as revisionist history, contributes to empowering oppressed social minorities. Thus feminist histories attempt to expose a male-dominated, patriarchal past and point the way for empowering women. Likewise, homosexual histories are put forward in response to homophobic repressions to provide equality for homosexuals. Black histories emphasize the horrors of slavery to redress past maltreatment of African Americans. Every repressed group—minorities of all colors, ethnicities, nationalities, and sexualities—has an injustice that must be exposed in order to rectify the abuses of the past. An Indian Woman in Guatemala. Her book became an instant success on college campuses, where professors used her story to demonstrate the plight of the impoverished Guatemalans languishing under government death squads. Burgos-Debray claimed that Menchu, as a female, was denied school, yet she actually attended two Catholic boarding schools through seventh grade. The book states that she worked on a plantation under horrible conditions, yet she never set foot on a plantation as a child. Also, the author claimed that the local villagers saw the Marxist guerrillas as liberators, when in actuality the villagers were terrified of them. We should teach our students about the brutality of the Guatemalan military and the U. Some feminist historians

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assert that men cannot write histories of women, first because men simply cannot understand women, and second because men have masculine ideologies and women have feminine ideologies. The same is said about a person attempting to write the history of a different race. It cannot be done since all people are presumed to be under a cloud of racial bias. Postmodern History

Conclusion Because ideas have consequences, we cannot afford to overlook the consequences of the more radical Postmodern approaches to history. If history is mere fiction, or even largely so, then those who deny, for example, the Nazi holocaust are validated in their attempts to diminish the numbers of Jews imprisoned, tortured, starved, shot, cremated, or buried in mass graves. Indeed, if history is largely fiction, then Mother Teresa and Adolph Hitler cannot be used as examples of good and evil. Rendered with permission from the book, *Understanding the Times: All rights reserved in the original.* Pantheon Books, , Encounter Books, , Oxford University Press, , 32 Cambridge Papers, , 1. Polity Press, , Cited in Windschuttle, *The Killing of History*, Bethany House, , God , the Father, sent His only Son to satisfy that judgment for those who believe in Him. Jesus , the creator and eternal Son of God, who lived a sinless life, loves us so much that He died for our sins, taking the punishment that we deserve, was buried , and rose from the dead according to the Bible. If you truly believe and trust this in your heart, receiving Jesus alone as your Savior , declaring, " Jesus is Lord ," you will be saved from judgment and spend eternity with God in heaven. What is your response?

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## Chapter 8 : The Po-Mo Page: Postmodern to Post-postmodern

*Postmodern therapy focuses on deconstructing common beliefs and examining their value in an individual's life. For example, postmodern therapists question the definition of "mental health" as well as commonly held assumptions such as the definition of success and what it means to be an adolescent.*

Postmodernism comes in many guises and many varieties, and it has had many kinds of positive influences on historical scholarship. It has encouraged historians to take the irrational in the past more seriously, to pay more attention to ideas, beliefs and culture as influences in their own right, to devote more effort to framing our work in literary terms, to put individuals, often humble individuals, back into history, to emancipate ourselves from what became in the end a constricting straitjacket of social-science approaches, quantification and socio-economic determinism. But this is postmodernism in its more moderate guise. The literature on postmodernism usefully distinguishes between the moderate and the radical. It must be obvious that this idea has a corrosive effect on the discipline of history, which depends on the belief that the sources the historian reads can enable us to reconstruct past reality. It is just this idea that many post-structuralists have attacked. Alan Munslow, for example, proclaims: It is created and represented by the historian as a text. What historians write depends on their own purposes and their own point of view, and there is no way of deciding whether one representation of the past is true and another, contradictory one, untrue. Arguments such as these are extremely self-contradictory, however. If the statement, commonly made by postmodernists, that truth is always relative to a particular society or culture or group in society, is true, then it is true in an absolute sense, not a relative one, since as a statement, it must hold good for all societies and cultures. Similarly, when postmodernists claim that nobody has access to the truth, they must believe that this is in fact a true statement, so the person making it does have access to the truth. If texts are given meaning by the reader and not the writer, then why have so many postmodernists complained that when I have criticized them I have been basing my criticisms on a misrepresentation of what they have written? Presumably postmodernists believe that the texts they are writing are not capable of an infinity of interpretations, that they make their meaning unmistakably clear so that the reader is left with only one way of interpreting it. Again, therefore, the postmodernist proposition refutes itself. All of these points are in the end fairly obvious. Let me illustrate this by looking at the concept of Truth, a term one usually finds in post-structuralist writings placed inside a cordon sanitaire of quotation marks, as if it would cause some horrible infection of old-fashioned empiricism in the writer or reader if it was let out. Of course it is right to say that we can never know the whole or absolute truth about anything in the past. But just because we can never attain the whole or absolute truth, just because we make mistakes in our search for the truth about the past, just because there will always be something new to say about any historical subject, it does not follow that there is no such thing as the truth at all. So if we claim that there is no such thing as truth, then either that statement is true, in which case there is such a thing as truth, or it is not true, which amounts to the same thing. The point is, of course, that postmodernists passionately want us to believe that what they are saying is true and objective, even when they say that nothing anybody says is true and objective. This has been the source of a lot of confusion. It does not mean the same as absolutely, completely and irrefutably true, and postmodernists who say it does, are setting up a target deliberately manufactured to be able to knock over without too many problems. Objectivity does not really have this strong meaning, however; it generally means, fairly obviously, a perspective or representation deriving from something external to the mind, the object, rather than from the mind of the person doing the representation, the subject. We can read it for a variety of purposes and in a variety of ways, but the possibilities are not unlimited. We bring to our sources all kinds of theories, ideas, beliefs, questions, and the more conscious we are of them, the better, but what happens when all of this comes into contact with the sources is a dialogue, a two-way process, not the simple one-way imposition of our own views on a blank sheet of paper or an empty piece of ground. Postmodernists like Keith Jenkins and Frank Ankersmit have tried

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to respond to points like these by insisting that there is a huge difference between historical fact and historical interpretation. It is a fundamental premise of postmodernist critiques of history that a document is re-invented and re-interpreted every time someone looks at it, so that it can never have any fixed meaning at all. The point here is that it is not really possible to distinguish so sharply between fact and interpretation in history as this. Let me make this a bit clearer by giving you an example. In the David Irving libel trial held two years ago, in which I served as an expert witness for the High Court in London, Irving was suing Penguin Books and their author Deborah Lipstadt for calling him a Holocaust denier and a falsifier of history. It was not difficult to show that Irving had claimed on many occasions that no Jews were killed in gas chambers at the Auschwitz concentration camp. He argued in the courtroom, however, that his claim was supported by the historical evidence. Van Pelt examined eyewitness testimony from camp officials and inmates, he looked at photographic evidence of the physical remains of the camp, and he studied contemporary documents such as plans, blueprints, letters, equipment orders, architectural designs, reports and so on. Each of these three kinds of evidence, as the judge concluded, had its flaws and its problems. But all three converged along the same lines, creating an overwhelming probability that Irving was wrong. Falsifying documents involved not just leaving words out from quotes but even putting extra words in to change the meaning. If we actually believed that documents could say anything we wanted them to, then none of this would actually matter, and it would not be possible to expose historical fraud for what it really is. Postmodernist hyper-relativism has no political implications of a positive kind at all. We can say of course that we disapprove of them in moral and political terms, but neo-fascists can just put forward opposing moral and political arguments of their own in response, and in the end there are no objective criteria by which we can choose between the two positions. What the Irving trial showed in the end was the ability of historians to come to reasoned and persuasive conclusions about the past on the basis of a fair-minded and objective examination of the evidence. If there is such a thing as historical untruth, there must also be such a thing as historical truth. And if there is such a thing as a biased, tendentious historian who tried to support preconceived ideas about the past by a selective use of the evidence and by doctoring the documents, there must be such a thing as an objective historian who puts preconceived ideas about the past to the test of whether or not they are supported by the evidence, and modifies or abandons them if they are not.

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### Chapter 9 : Interpreting Christian History : Euan K. Cameron :

*Postmodernism is a broad movement that developed in the mid- to late century across philosophy, the arts, architecture, and criticism and that marked a departure from modernism.*

It is not quite Church history and not theology: It forced itself on to my attention some seven years ago and has demanded to be written ever since. Given its peculiarity, it may be useful to explain how its core ideas arose and why it felt necessary to write it. My doctoral research focused on the Waldensian heresy, and led in due course to a controversial little book, *The Reformation of the Heretics* Oxford University Press. According to traditional histories of heresy, the Waldenses rejected, uniformly and consistently, much of the apparatus of the late medieval Catholic Church for saving souls in this life and the next. In particular they renounced the prayers and masses for the dead so widely practiced at that time. Yet in the archival sources I read, many ordinary Waldenses seemed highly confused. To me this seemed somewhat bizarre. Was the inquisitor who persecuted it, or the layperson who lived it, to say what Waldensianism required? If the definitions did not fit the evidence, then perhaps the definitions should be amended before the evidence was dismissed. An important point was emerging here: My next work, *The European Reformation* Oxford University Press, posed the issue of religious pluralism in a different form. One generation believed passionately that God had instituted a sacramental, purificatory piety through the Church for the good of the soul. The Reformation was not a conflict between an old, decayed, corrupted institution and the forces of spiritual revival, as some of the older histories had implied. In it two vibrant and sophisticated theologies clashed, then grew progressively further apart until they became quite incompatible systems, each fervently supported by sincere partisans. Diversity did not stop there, however. Historians of the Reformation knew that for many of those who lived "and died" for the causes of Protestantism or Catholicism in the sixteenth century, the theological issues were hazy. They understood perhaps only a few slogans, a partial picture or a second-order set of derivative conclusions. So what made a Protestant or a Catholic? An educated Swiss canon lawyer in the mid-fifteenth century wrote a series of pamphlets in which he fervently defended healing spells and denounced theologians for narrow-mindedly criticizing such techniques. Christian history was traditionally written as the history of doctrine. To some extent this narrowness of perspective was inevitable. Theologians generated the overwhelming bulk of the surviving literature and therefore of the historical evidence. However, they represented an astonishingly thin sliver of the actual Christian people of their age. A metaphysician can align a late antique Church Father, a medieval scholastic, and a twentieth-century neo-orthodox theologian, and compare them without any sense of anachronism or incongruity. A social historian cannot imagine comparing ordinary Christians of these various periods without thinking very hard indeed about the historical and cultural differences that divide them. So, who represents the different historic forms that Christianity has assumed? And therein lay a problem that was spiritual and psychological as well as intellectual. Was not my Christianity and that of my community just as conditioned by my environment and culture as those of the past? As a result I began tentatively to explore the historical and theological responses to these questions that had gone before. Not surprisingly, it emerged that my first primitive reflections on this subject echoed those of nineteenth-century liberal theologians " although the process of thinking through the issues would not stop there. It also became evident that the subject was much less fashionable in the postmodern age than it had been a century earlier, and the developments in the writing of religious history as well as theology since the age of German Liberalism suggested that there was now much more to be said on the subject. Those talks almost nothing of which survives in the present volume offered a first sketch of some of the themes of what has become Chapter 2. The level of friendly interest generated by them encouraged me to prepare the idea for this book. In its final form the synopsis was entertained by Alex Wright, then at Blackwell Publishers, and entered its very long stage of pupation. Nevertheless, it should not be inferred that the decision to write this book derives from the choice to move from an arts faculty in a British secular university to a theological

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seminary in the USA. If anything the reverse may be partly the case, since the book was conceived before the career move. What do I hope to achieve by the exploration of Christian history offered here? Despite the emphasis on historical diversity, I most certainly do not intend to depict Christianity as a formless and incoherent series of transient movements, sharing the name of Jesus, disputed and contentious texts, an often tormented political history, and a series of constantly reworked cultural artefacts. The reason for this is that interested nonacademic churchgoers will expect to find continuity, tradition, and permanence in the history of the Christian Church. Such stability and continuity would not surprise these readers: In contrast, to find diversity, disagreement, discontinuity, loose ends, and wrong turnings may be downright alarming. There is already too much contradiction between different Christian churches. If to that is added the sudden discovery that the Christian churches had radically different priorities at various times in the past, believers may feel challenged, even shaken. How can this religion claim permanence, when so many of its defining characteristics in the past turn out to have been temporary, alien, sometimes even grotesque? One important reason, then, for writing this book was to reassure general readers that historical awareness need not lead inevitably to the nihilism of the utter relativist, the despair of finding no certainty, nothing fixed to believe. The book suggests ways of thinking through Church history with clarity of vision and critical honesty as well as faith. A strong conviction, even just a strong and faithful curiosity, should be ready to confront the checkered history of Christianity and learn from it. On the other hand, those who have not been so challenged or shaken need to be aware that there can be no real stability about a Christian faith that survives only by avoiding potentially unsettling information. A second practical reason is that churches are often disturbed by dissension over controversial disciplinary and ceremonial issues and more rarely nowadays over doctrines. In such disputes it is very common to hear one or even both parties in dispute cite the historic witness of the Church, the voice of tradition, the unanimous assent of those who have gone before, or similar phrases in their support. This sort of language often makes church historians wince. Even if a belief or teaching really is unprecedented, it may be in good company for all that. Many things have been done in the past history of the churches, from Pentecost onwards, which should certainly not be cited in support of anything. Church history, as the story of human beings and their activities, contains as many things to avoid as things to imitate. It does not matter whether some belief or practice is endorsed by the authority of a longcontinuous institution, or is believed to date from a biblical or apostolic golden age: Members of the churches would do well to treat such partisan appeals to history with caution and even suspicion. More positively, there are many advantages to an enriched historical perspective for the believing reader. Writing this book has led me deeper into serious issues, and led me in more directions than I ever imagined. It delves into areas of history and historiography that are almost pure research, but also contains, above all in chapter 1, some necessarily sketchy outlines to equip the interested nonspecialist reader. Inevitably, therefore, it is something of a hybrid. Professional theologians will find many questions raised but not answered, or see potential arguments that I have not responded to explicitly though it does not always follow that I am ignorant of them. It goes far beyond the ambit of this book to speculate about its implications for the main subjectmatter of theology as such, and the book intends to offer no such speculations. Theologians will also recognize some affinities but also differences between aspects of my approach and that of the liberal theologians of a century ago. Broadly speaking, I have adopted the historical-critical methods of the liberal theologians while discarding their optimistic anthropology and it is hoped other outmoded social and ethical assumptions of their age. I argue that theology, in the form that we received it, is devised by human beings and must be appraised as such, not as an unmediated revelation of the divine. I also argue that human beings suffer from a range of religious habits that have made the history of Christianity a continual struggle between fallenness and revelation. I have incurred a range of debts of gratitude in the writing of this book. Richard Hill, the Vicar, for allowing me to deliver those talks in the body of the church. Richard Hill and the Rt. Alec Graham, then Bishop of Newcastle, gave welcome support at a critical time. The encouragement and astonishing patience of successive religion editors at Blackwell, most notably Alex Wright and Rebecca Harkin, deserves my thanks and my tribute. I am

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genuinely grateful to the variety of anonymous commentators on synopses and drafts who have believed that the book was worth writing, even as they gently chided me for my theological simplicity. The book would have been much worse without their interventions. Thanks also to my advisee at Union, Karen Byrne, and her husband Peter, two friends who spontaneously put at my disposal their home in Washington, DC with its theological library while I forged out the final version of the text. As always I am forever in debt to the patience and forbearance of my family for allowing this book to dominate two summers that could have been spent more agreeably otherwise.

Capitol Hill, Washington DC August Introduction This book argues that knowledge of Christian history is essential to anyone who wishes to understand the present-day Christian churches, or to assume any position of leadership within them. Historical insight is not an optional extra, a venture into the exotic, a distraction from more obviously urgent present-day issues of Church polity or social ethics. The processes of historical change and development are of the very essence of the diverse and continuously unfolding Christian experience. Growing awareness of such historical change has played a critical role in the rise of modern theology, which cannot be understood without such awareness. In short, one cannot understand faith working in society unless one sees it with the help of a historical perspective.

Diversities of Belief, Practice, and Priorities An outsider coming to Christianity unprepared might be astonished at the scale and range of diversity that are now seen within even the most mainstream Christian movements. Some of those differences, the most obvious but also the most trivial, regard the externals of worship. These may include the language, music, and visual adornment used; the relative roles of worship leaders and congregation; the nature of worship whether predominantly eucharistic, expository, meditative, sung, or anything else ; the physical surroundings, which range from some of the oldest and largest structures in human culture still used for their original purposes, to meetings in small halls, private houses, or in the open air; and the quantity and type of decoration and visual aids. When one goes beneath these superficial factors, however, deeper and more compelling evidence of Christian diversity appears. Yet the attempt to describe the nature and role of Jesus has led to multiple controversies and schisms, some of which still persist. Several widely accepted statements about who Jesus Christ is or was, and about his relationship to God, entail apparent contradictions or oxymoronic formulae which make a coherent and clear exposition almost impossible. Yet the role of the Scriptures has been and is read in radically different ways in different churches and often within the same church. Some branches of Christianity entrust the interpretation of Scripture to a continuing hierarchical apostolic succession. Others regard it as the work of the Spirit on the individual reader. Some believe the Bible text to be divinely ordained and inerrant, while others point to the instabilities, uncertainties, and multiple versions of the texts. Some claim to follow the text literally, while others insist on the need for sensitive and discriminating interpretation in the light of its cultural context and the social conventions of the time when it was written. At various times some movements on the margins of Christianity have raised the direct inspiration of the individual to a level alongside or above Scripture, or have added new writings to the canon. Christianity often seems to suffer from a dizzying range of different preoccupations, some of which will be explored in the following chapters. Nearly all agree that it involves the worship of God: The commonest Christian liturgical act is Holy Communion, although it goes by different titles: The Communion has been conceived as a congregational gathering embodying the unity of the community, or as a sacrificial ritual conferring spiritual benefits even on the dead. In some branches of the Christian tradition it is the focus of every major act of worship, while in others it performs no role whatever. The ethical priorities of Christians diverge in many ways.