

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST HAS ALWAYS EXISTED

A Very Short History

1st and 2nd centuries. The Apostles themselves and their disciples spread the church throughout Asia, Africa, Russia, and Europe.

3rd century. The church remained the same as it had been in the first century according to the Catholic Encyclopedia.

4th century. Goths from Russia got the Bible in their own language, then spread to France and Spain. As the church of Christ, they rejected that the Lord's Supper became the actual body and blood of Jesus.

5th century. Christ's church in Scotland and Ireland rejected Roman Catholic pressures to set up a papal diocese in their countries.

6th century. During the Dark Ages, the Lindisfarne Gospels thrived with the Celt Christians in N. Europe. The church of Christ in Syria refused to bow down to paintings & statues of Jesus, Mary, Apostles, etc.

7th century. Christ's church in Britain continued to reject celibacy of clergy, purgatory, confession to priests, etc. Killien went to Germany to preach and converted the governor in Wurtzburg.

8th century. In Britain when the pope quoted Matthew 16:19 (the keys of the kingdom were only given to Peter), Christians reminded him of Matthew 18:18 (the keys of the kingdom were given to all the apostles).

9th century. The Bible was translated into German. In Moravia the Bible was translated and called the "Old Church Slavonic Bible" for people to read for themselves. The church continued worshipping the N.T. way.

10th century. The Encyclopedia Britannica said there were many non-Catholics during the Middle Ages. Christ's church in southern Europe (nicknamed Waldenses) wrote later that they had always existed.

11th century. Berengarius of France preached that the Lord's Supper was not literal and only the Bible, not church rules & traditions, was to be followed. Peter de Bruys separated his congregation from Rome and insisted the Lord's Supper was only a memorial, ministers should marry, & infant baptism or holding mass for the dead were not in the Scriptures.

12th century. The church of Christ in Toulouse and other French towns declared Christians could do nothing except that which came directly from the Scriptures. Peter Valdo and congregations he preached for openly opposed Rome and went only by the Bible. In northern Italy, Arnold of Brescia preached simple New Testament Christianity.

13th century. Waldens Christians in Italy continued to declare all Christians priests, and the Roman Church's elaborate organization and worship not in the Bible. Persecuted, they fled to the Alps and Germany.

14th century. In Britain, John Wycliffe, Philip Repingdon, William Swinburn, John Purvey preached that ordaining priests was not scriptural, clerical celibacy was unnatural, declaring the bread & wine were Jesus' actual body and blood was idolatry, hallowing altars and vestments was witchcraft. They condemned prayers for the dead, offerings to images, confession to priests. Chastity of nuns led to abortion & child murder. All should have free access to the Scriptures in their own language. In Bohemia Johan Milic preached the simplicity of the first-century church.

15th century. The church of Christ, many of whose members were nicknamed Lollards in much of Europe, had no official creed and no headquarters. They said the church was the community of the faithful, not people who answered to a priest in a building. They encouraged Bible reading, and emphasized scriptures rather than rituals in worship.

16th century. In 1523 in Switzerland, Huldreich Zwingli began a movement for simple Christians to remove all images, suppress organs, replace mass with a simple communion service, declare baptism for adults only, and introduce Bible reading into the Sunday service. Later believers were called Brethren in much of Europe. They remained conservative, following only the pattern of the New Testament for several decades.

17th century: Eventually, many groups who started out following only the New Testament church, began to fall into developing creeds and having a clergy hierarchy and world headquarters. The church of Christ would now thrive through men who pled for unity by getting rid of the creeds and headquarters. For example, in Scotland, John Drury traveled tirelessly begging denominations to unite.

18th century: In 1728 John Glas and later Robert Sandeman led independent congregations, emphasizing immersion of adult believers. They were nicknamed Glassites by outsiders, but were in reality just the church. In 1749 John Erskine emphasized celebrating the Lord's Supper every Sunday. Dr. John Mason agreed, and was sent as a missionary to America in 1761. At that same time, David Dale's congregation became independent, adopted weekly communion, and appointed elders.

Around 1793 in Scotland, the Haldane brothers became lay preachers and eventually organized the Society for Propagating the Gospel. They kept the Lord's Supper every Sunday, congregations appointed their own elders, they ceased baptizing children, and began preaching immersion of believing adults. Other great preachers followed this example, thus continuing the existence of the church of Christ.

In North Carolina, America, in 1790, Presbyterian James McGready began preaching congregations should be independent and should have only the Bible as its creed. In 1793 in North Carolina and Virginia, Methodist James O'Kelly tried in vain to convince his episcopate that congregations should be independent, and the New Testament their only creed, so his congregation became independent. At first known as Republican Methodists, they later resolved to be known as Christians only with no head but Christ and no creed but the Bible.

19th century: Not knowing about these movements, in Vermont Baptist Abner Jones pleaded that sectarian names and creeds be abolished. His congregation became independent in 1800. In 1803 a similar group of the church of Christ formed in New Hampshire.

About the same time, not knowing about the others, Baptist Elias Smith of New Hampshire influenced his congregation to become independent. The church spread all over New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Canada. They, too, went only by the name Christian.

Not knowing about them, down in Kentucky Presbyterian Barton W. Stone, who had earlier been a Methodist and a Baptist, preached the same thing to over 20,000 people in a camp meeting. Presbyterians McNamar, Thompson, Dunlavy, Marshall and David Purviance in Kentucky declared their congregations independent of any denomination. Some people called them the "Christian Connection."

In 1808 Presbyterian Thomas Campbell arrived in Pennsylvania preaching that denominational creeds should be discarded in order to bring people of all faiths together. Later his son Alexander preached the same thing.

By 1860 it was estimated that there were some half million people in North America declaring themselves to be Christians only, with no creed but the Bible, and no head but Christ.

20th century: By the mid-20th century, there were estimated to be around 3,000,000 Christians only. However, an accurate count is impossible because churches of Christ as set up by Christ and his apostles do not have a world headquarters, their only headquarters being in heaven.

Missionaries have found the church of Christ among people in India, Africa and other places of the world. They had copies of the scriptures and do not know how they got them because they'd "always had them." They baptized adult believers by immersion and kept the Communion every Sunday. The Apostles of Jesus Christ went throughout the world. Perhaps that is who they got the scriptures from. Congregations do not have to know about other congregations in order to be the true church that Christ founded. All they have to know is the Bible and have a desire to follow it alone.

And thus we see that the church of Christ, the church that has only Christ as its head and in its name, has always existed.

For a history of the church in England, read Keith Sissman's TRACES OF THE KINGDOM online and beautifully illustrated with photos here: <http://www.traces-of-the-kingdom.org/>