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CHURCH HISTORY MONTHLY

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Timeline of Topics

- Quote
- Brother Lawrence
- Middle Ages
- Philosophy: Proving God's existence
- American Church History
- Puritans/Pilgrims/Separatists
- World Christianity
- Japanese Christians hide for 200+ years

Upcoming classes for Jan through May

- =Jan-Feb: History of all of Church History, 5 weeks (It can be done!)
- =Feb: How we got the New Testament, 3 weeks
- =Mar: False books not in the NT (Apocrypha), 3 weeks
- =Apr: How we got the Old Testament and false books not in the OT, 4 weeks
- =Potential new class sometime
- Jan-May: Overview of Christianity, probably 6 or 7 weeks

Puritans and Pilgrims and Separatists? Yes, all refer to the same group

With Thanksgiving close, people in the USA think of turkey and Puritans. You might know them by another name: Pilgrims.

To understand the connection, we have to go back to England in the early 1500s when Henry VIII broke from the Catholic Church and formed the Church of England. While most English supported him, many complained that the Church of England did not go far enough away from the Catholic Church in making changes to doctrine and practice. Small groups formed in opposition to the Church of England. They became lumped together under the name of "Puritan" because they wanted to purify the Church of England.

Yet one group went one step further and decided to separate from the Church of England. They could not remain in England because the Church of England would have persecuted them. They are known as "Separatists." Separatists were Puritans but they did not want to remain in the Church of England to try to make changes, instead they decided to reject the Church of England and "start over."

They traveled to Amsterdam in search of religious freedom in 1608. After twelve years, though, about half decided to leave. They knew returning to England meant persecution. Therefore, they decided to go to the newly discovered America.

Those leaving boarded a ship and sailed to Southampton, England. They joined another group of Separatists and boarded the Mayflower. They set sail on Sept 16, 1620 with 102 passengers. They saw Plymouth Harbor, on the western side of Cape Cod, and landed on December 21. They formed the Mayflower Compact and settled in their new land. But they were still known as Separatists. None of those on board would have recognized the name "Pilgrims." So who came up with the name "Pilgrims"? A guy named Chandler Robbins. In 1793, he preached a sermon at Plymouth commemorating the Separatists. He had read William Bradford's account of the departure of the Separatists from Leiden. Bradford mentioned that "they knew they were 'pilgrims' and looked not much on those things, but lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits." Robbins referred to them as "Pilgrims." The name stuck and so they have been known as "Pilgrims" for over 200 years.



The Mayflower from
www.mayflowerhistory.com/voyage

Brother Lawrence's advice (d. 1691):

“We should establish ourselves in God's presence by continually conversing with Him. . . . [I]t was a shameful thing to quit His conversation to think of trifles and fooleries.”

If You Like Philosophy, You Will Love This

Many people have thought deeply about God, and the scholastics of the Middle Ages would be amongst them. They wanted to be able to analyze every aspect of God, including being able to prove God's existence through logic. This “proof” is called the Ontological Argument for God.

Ontology refers to proving God's existence through reason and without using experience or the Bible. In searching out the ontological argument for God, we will go to the person most closely associated with it: Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). Anselm was Archbishop of Canterbury, and one of the greatest minds of his time.

Here we go:

--Step 1: In doing this right, Anselm had to start with a statement which was logical and obvious. So here we go (do you have your seat belt on?): God is “that than which nothing greater can be imagined.” Got it? In essence he says that the human mind cannot conceive of anything greater than God. Whatever you think God is, he is greater than that. Imagine the greatest good, the greatest creator, the greatest giver of mercy, the greatest love, the greatest compassion. Whatever you can imagine, God is greater than that. (The next four steps I take from philosophyofreligion.info/anselmontological.html.)

--Step 2: If God is that which is greater than anything you can imagine, then nothing you can imagine can be greater than God. See? So whatever you can imagine, the greater of that must be God.

--Step 3: Therefore it follows that nothing greater than God can be imagined.

--Step 4: Suppose God does not exist. Then there is something greater than God that can be imagined. This causes a problem, because Step Two proved that nothing greater than God can be imagined.

--Step 5: Therefore God must exist.

An Astounding Tale of Christians Who Hid Their Churches For Over 200 Years

Initially, Japan welcomed missionaries. Francis Xavier was a prime example, as he traveled to Japan in 1549 and, due to the success of his work, remained there until 1551. Other Jesuits followed as the number of converts grew. Japanese leaders were interested not only in the Christian faith but in protection and profits as well. Noticing the ships and wealth of the Europeans and hearing about their faith, some Japanese leaders conflated the appearances into one goal: alliance with Europeans and acceptance of Christianity produced safety at home. Over time, though, alliances grew strained as Christianity became more popular and Japanese loyalty became an issue.

Reversing the policy, in 1635, the founder of the ruling party or shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, signed the Christian Expulsion Edict forcing all Christians to leave or be killed. By this time in Japan, though, Christianity included both foreigners and Japanese. No matter, the edict was decisive and final. Many Japanese rebelled against Ieyasu, including for economic, religious, and political reasons. Tens of thousands removed to a secure area around a castle in Hama. After a prolonged series of battles and a siege, Ieyasu successfully captured the fortress. As a result, the government's forces decapitated over 30,000 Japanese, many of whom were Christian. This edict caused Japan to become a closed society until the 1850s. Christianity remained, but as an underground institution.

When Christian missionaries returned in the mid-1800s, they found a small covert Christian community had remained in existence 250 years. The first European to notice this group was a French Catholic priest, Bernard Petitjean (d. 1884), sent to Japan as a missionary, eventually settling in Nagasaki. A Catholic church was being constructed, and Petitjean began leading services when, several weeks later, members of the underground church approached. They had watched the building of the church with interest and were especially drawn to the crosses, which were like the crosses they had hidden in their homes. In 1873, religious freedom was guaranteed, and thousands more of the Kakure Kirishitan or “hidden Christians” came forth.

[Borrowed from Mark Nickens, “A Survey of the History of Global Christianity,” Second Edition (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 272-273.]