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# CHURCH HISTORY MONTHLY

February 2023, Vol. 3, no. 2, Page 1/2

Timeline of Topics.

## Tracing the origin of a phrase you may have heard of: We all have a God-shaped hole that only God can fill

- Quote
- Katherine Zell (d. 1562)
- Tracing a phrase: AD 52 – early 1900s
- Everyone has a God-shaped hole
- Today
- How do I determine what is Christian and what is not?

For you and/or friends

Free online classes this Winter/Spring: How we got the Bible and books not in the Bible

- Feb 20 - March 12: 3 weeks
- How we got the New Testament
- March 20 - Apr 9: 3 weeks
- New Testament Apocrypha: The heretical and false books that did not make it into the NT
- Apr 17 - May 14: 4 weeks
- How we got the Old Testament and OT Apocrypha (including books Catholics use that Protestants do not have)

Once-a-year fundraiser (only for readers in the USA)  
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 --Venmo: My username is @Mark-Nickens-2  
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--Tracing the origin of a phrase can be difficult. This phrase did not originally begin with the exact wording "God-shaped hole" but with the idea that everyone needs God, those who seek Him find Him, but many vainly fill the "void" with other things. I have not been able to discover the origin of that phrase, but I have traced the idea.

--In Acts 17, Paul was in Athens and debating with philosophers about God. He told them he found an altar with the inscription, "To an Unknown God." He said, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. . . . God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." (Acts 17:24-27). Thus, people are created to seek for God.

--350 years later, a bishop named Augustine (354-430) wrote this: "Lord, you have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you." (Confessions 1.1.1.) Not exactly the phrase "god-shaped hole" but the same idea.

--Blaise Pascal (1623-62) said something closer to our phrase over a millennium later: "What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and unchangeable object; in other words by God himself." (Pensees 10.148) Thus people have an "empty"-ness inside which most try to "fill with everything around." But only God will exactly fit.

--An alternative to this idea is a paraphrased version of a quotation from G.K. Chesterton: "When people cease to believe in God, they do not believe in nothing; they believe in anything!"

Katherine Zell (1497 - 1562). Wife of one of the lesser known Protestant Reformers, Matthew Zell. Her meditation on the "Lord's Prayer."

--"Our Father, who art in heaven" He is not called Lord or Judge but Father.

--"Hallowed be your name" May we hold it in reverence and not cause others to hold it in irreverence.

--"Thy kingdom come" Reign in our hearts, soul, body, and conscience.

--"Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" Save us from murmuring about any cross laid upon us.

--"Give us this day our daily bread" Bless the labor of our hands that we may have food for ourselves and others.

--"Forgive us our debts" Save us from resentment when we are maligned and scorned, like Christ, who as a sheep before the shearers, was silent and opened not his mouth.

--"Lead us not into temptation" of believing that we have truly forgiven, when bitterness lingers and from the temptation of despairing of your mercy.

--"Deliver us from the evils" of hunger, war, famine, and pestilence, though only if it be your will.

--"For thine is the kingdom". May Christ reign in heaven and on earth.

--"and the power" As you did deliver Israel so deliver us.

--"and the glory forever, Amen." You give breath to every living thing. Wherefore of your glory there is no end.

## So, what are the basic beliefs of Christianity?

Before we get to the answer, we have to discuss two words that used often but rarely defined: heresy, error, and opinion.

--Heresy is a belief that keeps one from being a Christian. In order for a belief to be considered heresy, it has to attack or deny some aspect of the Trinity, such as Jesus not being physical (Docetism) or being adopted by the Father when we was baptized.

--Error is a belief that Christians have that causes some type of separation, such as believer's vs. infant baptism. A person who believes in infant baptism (pedobaptism) would not say that someone who believes in believer's baptism (credobaptism) is not a Christian but is in error.

--Opinion is a difference in beliefs that Christians have that do not necessarily result in separation but people will disagree on, such as whether to dress up or not for church on Sunday morning.

Now, after studying Church History for many decades, this is my list of the beliefs that all Christian groups, movements, and denominations have in common. To put it another way, if a group, movement, or denomination does not hold to all these beliefs, I am not sure how they can call themselves Christian.

1. Incarnation
2. Trinity
3. Virgin birth of Jesus
4. Everyone is separate from God at birth but needs to have a relationship with God.
5. Death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (this includes ideas such as salvation, justification, and sanctification)
6. The church
7. Holy Scripture
8. Love everyone
9. Attempt to live a holy life.

That is my list. While I believe baptism and communion are important and were commanded by Jesus, I do not include them for two reasons: First, someone who becomes a Christian and then dies very soon afterward might not have had time to be baptized or receive communion, but I would still say that they are a Christian. Second, Quakers (Friends) nor the Salvation Army practice a physical baptism or communion (believing them to be spiritual-only acts), but I believe they are both Christian.

Questions, comments, or want to join a free class contact Mark at [marknickens@gmail.com](mailto:marknickens@gmail.com)

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