

A BOOK REVIEW
"TURNING POINTS"/4TH EDITION
"DECISIVE MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY"

Title of BOOK: "Turning Points"/"Decisive Moments In The History of Christianity"/4th Edition

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

This book is certainly not a book to read for its entertainment value. It is not an easy read. In fact, reading it can entail a bit of a slog. That said, this is a book which should be one of interest to any reader who has even a passing interest in the history of Christianity. How did we, as Christians, and how did our Church get to where we are today?

It is oftentimes said that "history repeats itself" or at least "echoes itself". Whether or not such is the case, it is difficult for us as Christians to understand our Church (whatever or demonization of congregation might be) or to even have at least some understanding of ourselves as Christians or of our beliefs (or of Christianity as being more than a religion but as being a way of life), if we do not understand from whence we came. How did that faith which we now know as "Christianity" begin to spread after the death of Christ and the Pentecost event? How and why did it spread in the Greco-Roman world, when it was sometimes the subject of persecution? What caused the various splits in the once Universal Church, including the split of the Eastern Church (the Orthodox Church) from the Western Church (which became identified as the Roman Catholic Church), and Protestantism from the Roman Catholic Church? Why were there and are there so many Protestant Churches or Protestant Denominations? What was "Christendom", and what caused it to break up? If we look at the status of the Church today, and particularly the many and varied Protestant Churches/Denominations/Congregations, what conditions or events have led to what we see today? Most respectfully, it is submitted that one can have no understanding about the conditions in which Christianity finds itself today, if one has no understanding of the conditions, events and circumstances which have brought about what we see today with respect to the Church, writ large, the so-called "Universal Church" or "Universal Christianity" or "Worldwide Christianity".

Some, not all of the questions and areas of inquiry mentioned in the preceding paragraph are addressed by the Authors in this book. This book is, therefore, a must read and a must retain reference book for any Pastor, Minister, or Church leader or teacher, and it should be a book of interest to any Christian who has a serious interest in the History of that religion or way of life which we call "Christianity". This book is not an easy read. Reading it takes time, study and concentration. In order to have any sense of memory retention of its contents, this book requires that one engage in the forgotten skills of note taking, and even outlining. Certainly, in order to retain some knowledge of the book's contents, I had to outline it. I will refer to that outline below, and will provide it to any Reader who wants a somewhat summary of the

book's contents. So, don't think that you are going to pick up this book and read it as bedtime reading or for any purposes other than ones of serious study. All of these things said, this book is a very worthwhile book to read for almost any serious Christian, and certainly for any Christian Pastor or Minister, or any Christian Leader or Teacher.

WHAT THE AUTHORS ARE DOING WITH WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

The Authors are of the belief that a comprehensive outline of the History of Christianity can be provided by a study of what they believe to have been the key Historical TURNING POINTS or PIVOT POINTS in that History. They have, therefore, provided their selection of, and their very comprehensive description and analysis of their selected TURNING POINTS in this History of Christianity. While they agree that other scholars might take issue with their identified Turning Points, they submit that their selected Turning Points, and their comprehensive description and analysis of each of these Turning Points will provide a careful reader with at least a very good history and understanding of the changes which have impacted Christianity and the Church, and Christians generally, over the centuries which have passed since the death of Christ and the Pentecost event. While I, your Reviewer, do not claim to be a trained scholar or historian, or to have any detailed knowledge of the History of Christianity, I agree with the approach taken by our Authors. I have devoted a substantial amount of time to reading this book and to then making a "personal use" outline of its contents. I have found that my expenditure of this time and of these efforts to be a very worthwhile investment of time and efforts. I have found, and I think that you, Dear Reader, will also find that a thorough study of this book provides at least a basic knowledge of how we, as Christians, and our Church (and our individual churches and congregations and denominations) have gotten to where we now find ourselves. I have been oftentimes puzzled over the reasons why what we call the "Universal Church", the Church we refer to as "Christianity", has so many different "churches". This book has provided me, and I think that it will provide you, Dear Reader, with at least some of the historical reasons of why there are so many, differing forms of the "Christian Church".

It is impossible to begin to do any justice to the contents of this Book by including in this Review what I normally try to incorporate into my Reviews, which is a general summary or outline of the contents of a Reviewed Book. Therefore, I am going to provide, with this Review, my PERSONAL USE OUTLINE of the contents of this Book. Please Note that this Outline is one which I have prepared for my personal use, to be used by me in order to remind me of the general contents of this Book, and of the locations within this Book of the important information which this Book contains. I intend to use this Outline as a reminder of the general course of History which has been taken by our Christian Faith. Then, if a more comprehensive study is required, I can use the Outline as a "location aid", which will refer me to the location in this Book where all of the detailed facts and analysis of each key Turning Point can be found. Note that each of the Chapters of this Book identifies a separate Turning Point, placing it in its Historical Chronology, and then provides a host of information about the relevant historical event, the events leading up to and following that event, why and how these events impacted Christianity and the Church, and the many individuals whose efforts which surrounded these events, either contributed to the advance of, or the failure to advance the Christian Faith or Church, or even brought about some of the Schisms which have impacted Christianity. So, the Outline is not, in any way, a complete description of the huge contents of this Book.

Some final thoughts:

- 1) The Authors have demonstrated, by this Book, the manner in which our Christian Faith and Church have been hugely impacted, not just by differences over matters of Doctrine and

Theology, but by the political, governmental, economic, and social changes which have impacted, not just our Faith and Church but all of Global Humanity.

- 2) The Authors have also demonstrated what I believe to be the falsity of the assumption that our Faith, and its Doctrines and Theology are not impacted by Culture, and the huge multiplicity of Cultures which exist throughout the world, and the huge changes which have occurred in these various Cultures, including our Western Culture. Among other things, the Authors demonstrate how those seeking to bring Christianity to a given Culture, or to practice it in a given Culture, have adapted their methods of "Presentation" (not the important "Contents") of the Gospel to that Culture. As our Authors submit, if we view Christianity on a "Worldwide" basis, we will find that the manners in which Christianity is practiced in many Cultures of the so-called "Majority World" (i.e. Africa, Central and South America, India, substantial parts of Asia) differ, sometimes dramatically, from the manner in which our Faith is practiced in our "Western World". My reading of this Book has affirmed my belief that we, North American Christians or Western World Christians are pompous and arrogant in our beliefs that our "theologies" or "doctrines" or "Christian Practices" provided the only true way for Christian Truth, the Truth of our God and Lord Jesus.
- 3) I was quite surprised to learn, from this Book, how Pentecostalism and Charismatic beliefs and practices have hugely impacted the spread of the Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit has had and is having His Way with converts and Christians in an ever-expanding way.
- 4) Research Tool: I think that the primary use for this book is one as a research tool. It can provide a good starting point, or a decent outline or at least a beginning historical study for many of the issues which relate to the History of Christianity. For example, what if you want to know who Constantine was, or to have some information about his impact on Christianity, the Church and Christian Doctrines, or to have some information about the important, early Councils of Church leaders which were called and chaired by him or his successors, then this Book should answer these needs for information, or at least provide an excellent starting point for the study required to totally address these needs. You might also want to know just what "Christendom" was, or what its impacts were and have been or what caused its demise. Again, this book will provide you with that information, or will at least provide a very in depth, starting point for you to use in performing the studies required to unearth all of the information you might require in order to address your questions. Do you want to know why there are so many Protestant churches or denominations or "independent churches"? This book helps to address these questions.
- 5) Not a Complete History: Certainly, this Book is not, and its Authors do not purport it to be, a complete history of Christianity or of the Church or its many "churches". I, for one, would have liked to have some information about the Inquisition or the role of the Church or its leaders in this terrible passage of history. The role of the Church or its leaders in encouraging the terrible persecutions initiated by Queen Mary, sometimes known as "Bloody Mary" the predecessor of Elizabeth I, would be an issue of interest to me. All of this said, and while one can argue about the Authors' selected "Turning Points", or about the historical events or conditions which the Authors did not discuss, this Book provides an excellent source of information for a Pastor, Minister, Christian Leader or student, who wants to have (and truly should have) a basic understanding of the History of Christianity and of the Universal Church and its many branches. It also provides an excellent reference book, or starting point for any study of an issue relating to the History of Christianity or the Church.
- 6) Lastly, I leave with a summary, in my words, of one of the Authors' final conclusions, which is (again, in my words) that "It is by God's Grace, and most assuredly not by the efforts of humans, that the Christian Faith, and our Church (writ large) has survived, much less

expanded". I guess that I have been sort of aware of the fact that many of our so-called "spiritual leaders" have, through the ages, been anything other than "spiritual" or "God Honoring" in their efforts, but, rather, have been ego driven, power driven, politics driven or completely "disunifying", if that is a word, in their efforts. So many of the "schisms" which have impacted our Church need not have happened, or could have been reconciled by good people, acting reasonably and in good faith. Unfortunately, the frailty and defective nature of humans, generally, have had their unfortunate impact on our Church. That is not to say that the many, many Saints, Ministers, Pastors, Missionaries and good people identified in this Book have not had extremely positive impacts on our Church. They have had those impacts, as identified in this Book. However, their impacts could have been magnified, intensified, if others had not let their egos and desires for power get in the way. Enough said.

In summary, I strongly, strongly recommend this Book to anyone who has even a passing interest in the question of How, we as Christians and our Church have gotten to where we are today.

In order to, hopefully, provide you, Dear Reader, with some Summary (far from complete) of the contents of this Book, I will provide my Personal Use Outline for whatever use you might choose to make of it.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

The question "How should I read this Book?" is invariably raised. In most cases, my response is "Why Do You Want to Read it?" or "What do you want to get out of reading it?". Those are my responses to that question of "how should I read...", when that question is raised as to this Book. If you are a Pastor, or Minister, or Church Leader, or Serious Student, who really needs to, or wants to have at least a basic understanding of the History of Our Christian Faith, and its Church, and how that Church (and its many churches) has/have gotten to where we find ourselves today, then you need to read this entire book, and then put it on your library shelf as a source for future reference, when questions of our history arise. If you just want to have a reference book, which you can consult when and as questions relating to the History of Christianity or the Church (or our many churches) arise, then you can content yourself with reading the "Preface to the Fourth Edition", the "Introduction" which is titled "The Idea of Turning Points for Reasons for Studying the History of Christianity", and the "Contents" which lists the title for each of the book's 13 Chapters (each being an Authors' selected "Turning Point"). You can, in this manner, familiarize yourself with the basic contents of this book, and have some familiarity with the information contained in it in order to know what information you can, in the future, obtain from this Book as the needs for such information arise. Additionally, the opening paragraphs and concluding paragraph of each of the Book's Chapters, provide, in the case of most of such Chapters, good summaries of the Turning Point which is the subject matter of the Chapter, and of the reasons why the Authors view that Turning Point as a key point of change in the History of Christianity. Of course, you can also just read and retain my Outline which accompanies this Review, and which will, hopefully, provide you with a decent summary of the Book's contents.

IF THIS BOOK A USEFUL RESOURCE FOR TEI OR ECLI OR ONE OF ITS CLASSES?

This Book should absolutely be retained in TEI's library as an excellent source of information about the History of Christianity. The answer to the question raised by the title for this Section of this Review is an Unqualified "Yes" when it comes to retaining this book in the TEI library as an excellent reference source. Should this book be used in any TEI or ECLI Class? My answer to this question would be "Only if this class

is one for serious, very serious students who are willing to devote substantial amounts of time, study and energy to studies of the History of Christianity. This book would not be a suitable text for a class of basic or beginning students, who have only a passing or basic need for a very basic, or limited understanding of that History.

Thank You

Dan Simon