

Christian Education: A Comparison through the Ages

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Abstract

Christian education has been an essential topic in the lives of many within the last two thousand years. The topic has piqued the minds of some and threatened the lives of others—however; the values taught within Christian institutions over these years have molded what the modern-day Christian Community looks like today. Humanity's journey from the beginning of Christianity to the modern day has involved endless lessons and teachings passed on through many generations. Numerous Christian educators have taught these Christian morals since society received its first set of values that God bestowed upon them, pushing them forward to teach their truth to others from generation to generation (Anthony & Benson, 2011). Therefore, this paper compares the teachings of early Christian educators with the instructions of the Christian educators of today. The analysis and data sets may show inconsistencies that provide humanity with extraordinary evidence of what can help society connect with everyday people in a relatable way, which can then be used to spread the ministry of God even further.

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Christian education has been essential to many Christians since its inception thousands of years ago. These teachings of core foundational values within Christian institutions have molded what the modern-day Christian Community looks like today. Humanity's journey from the beginning of Christianity to the modern day has involved endless lessons and teachings passed on through many generations. Numerous Christian educators have taught these Christian morals since society received its first set of values that God bestowed upon them, pushing them forward to teach their truth to others from generation to generation. Comparing these teachings of Christian educators from the early church, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance period, and the Reformation period with the values taught by modern-day Christian educators provides observation that assists in discovering any changes or inconsistencies in the teachings (Anthony & Benson, 2011). The analysis and data sets may show inconsistencies that would provide the Christian community with unexpected evidence of what can be used to help them connect with everyday people in a relatable way.

Christian Education

According to Oxley (2021), The national elementary education system established in 1870 helped to equip children for the adult world of work. This establishment at the time relied heavily on instruction involving Theology and the teaching of Christian values. As a result, there was a massive investment of time, buildings, and resources provided for Christian education for children and young people. These foundational teachings to the nation's young people help project Christian education into what it is today on all levels of education. In addition, more formal learning opportunities increased in providing Christian education nationally or regionally. Theological education is the most obvious, but there have been many other opportunities for individuals to learn or equip themselves for particular tasks in the local church (Oxley, 2021).

Modern-day Christian education has grown dramatically in the hearts and minds of those today. Some believe that Christian education may even be a calling given by God to be pursued entirely within one's life (Anthony & Benson, 2011). However, Christian education must fully adapt to world changes and worldviews. Those leaders and educators of today must continually adapt to the ever-changing views of the young generation. According to Pearcey (2005), the postmodern generation desperately seeks something genuine and authentic. They will not take Christians seriously unless Christian educators and leaders demonstrate an authentic way of life and continuously work to exhibit the character of God in all aspects of their relationships.

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In this adaptability, history can be examined to verify what has worked in the past with what will continually work to instruct the views of future generations. This can begin with the study of Christianity in the early church.

Christian Education and The Early Church– (1st – 3rd Centuries)

The Early Church is the first example of Christian Education and teachings, set within the first few centuries. The origin of Christian education is indebted to the Old Testament saints who provided Christians with an example of how to live in a pledged relationship with their Creator (Anthony & Benson, 2011). God gave humanity the complete guidance and direction needed to nurture that relationship. God chose leaders within the early church to spread his teachings and law to the people of that time. He chose leaders such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to model godly leadership. He commissioned priests, judges, and prophets to instruct people on applying the laws he intended to apply to everyday life (Anthony & Benson, 2011). Christian leaders have analyzed these teachings and periods for centuries.

According to Everton and Schroeder (2019), research shows that experts in the early church had different opinions regarding what was influential during that time. Influences during that time involved Christian teachers and other influences such as the government, society, illness, and social status. One such researcher explains that the early Christian church indirectly benefitted from the plagues that struck the early Roman Empire in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. He believes that the early church's doctrines concerning love, social service, and charity would have led Christians to enjoy higher survival rates than the pagans had (Everton & Schroeder, 2019). If this is a likely scenario, it would have left the Christians' social networks intact and destroyed the pagan social circles. This is due to recruiting new religious members through different social ties (Everton & Schroeder, 2019). The Middle Ages came after the years of the early church.

Christian Education and The Middle Ages (5th – 13th Centuries)

The Middle Ages is the second example of Christian Education and teachings, set within the fifth through the thirteenth centuries. The Middle Ages brought about a continuation of the spreading of Christianity and its values across Europe. Various examples of Christianity's influence in this period can be found within cultures spanning generations. An example of a change adopted at the time included how the dead were buried. The change included burying the dead from the face-down prone position to burying in single graves on a shared burial ground in an extended supine position. This was demanded by the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Church (Alterauge et al., 2020). An additional change regarding burials involved the clergy deciding the locations of burial plots without limiting the opportunities for relatives and the incredibly wealthy. People could guarantee unique burial places for themselves and their relatives through model behavior and donations (Barbiera, 2015).

According to Otten (2016), the Middle Ages were a time of Christian expansion, reflection of creation and salvation, and the development of specific religious orders. The Middle Ages produced an innovative form of religious dedication that combined the military role of the knight with religious obedience. These military and religious orders were first established in the early twelfth century to provide for and protect any pilgrims out on their travels to the various religious shrines throughout the land. The roles of these military and religious orders changed dramatically as they found themselves going off to defend the Kingdom of Jerusalem. The most powerful of these groups were the Templars, Teutonic Knights, the Hospitallers, and the Teutonic Knights (Borowski & Gerrard, 2017).

The Christians were not the only active religious group in the Middle Ages, as the Jewish population was heavily affected by the expansion of Christianity. Jewish conversion to Christianity has been a central narrative in medieval Jewish history. There was a mass conversion of Jews to Christianity that swept Spain in 1391. This mass conversion angered different, which caused an extensive anti-Jewish movement met with extreme violence. The angry views resulted from the Jews' view of Greek rationalism and political ambitions. The Jews that lived in northern Europe did the opposite by resisting conversion in the face of violence and instead preferred martyrdom (Tartakoff, 2015). Research shows that anti-Jewish rhetoric continued throughout the Middle Ages. Even Christian "thinkers" had ideas about depicting Jews and monsters together. Accusations included rituals of murder and cannibalism, which showed them as "a kind of monster" that Christians found evil and threatening (Shyovitz, 2014). After the Middle Ages came the time of the Renaissance.

Christian Education and The Renaissance Period (15th & 16th Centuries)

The Renaissance Period is the third example of Christian Education and teachings; set within the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Renaissance Period revealed how broad the influence of Christianity had become.

Political and Philosophical thoughts have shifted to include new thinking methods regarding education and religion (Blaydes et al., 2018). The university had become a haven where students were free to exchange ideas without the threat of retaliation. The church felt threatened by this academic freedom and was not always keen on letting scholars express their minds freely (Anthony & Benson, 2011). Christianity brought on new ways of thinking regarding the Christians having one true God, which found its influence in the literature and playwrights of the era. The dramas played a crucial part in celebrating, promoting, and clarifying Christian ideals. Topics popular within the Christian dramas included works from the Book of Genesis, the Crucifixion, and issues dealing with Christian moral values (Al-Joulani, 2017). Philosophers also showed Christianity to be awful within their playwright dramas. These philosophers often targeted different forms of Christianity, but Catholicism was attacked the most. The depictions or attacks were presented as facts to the people. An example drama would depict how the Christians killed many people during the Crusades and witch-hunts (Venter, 2013).

The Renaissance Period has had its share of positive or negative recorded historical incidents. For example, in 1527, a plague broke out in Wittenberg, Germany, as recorded by a famous historical figure named Martin Luther. Martin Luther accurately depicted the feelings of those dealing with the plague at the time and mentioned God's influence on people's lives. He stated that some people had decided not to escape the deadly plague as death was God's punishment, and people should patiently submit to God's punishment. However, others were taught that they might adequately flee as long as they did not hold a position of significance (Christ, 2022). The Renaissance was a period of reawakening in the hearts and spirits of European thinkers. It marked the end of a dark period of human history and the beginning of a new dawn known as the Reformation Period (Anthony & Benson, 2011).

Christian Education and the Reformation Period - (16th& 17th Century)

The Reformation Period is the fifth example of Christian Education and teachings, set within the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The real resurgence of Christian reform would take place during this period when the Renaissance had started fully culminating during the Reformation Period (Anthony & Benson, 2011). The Reformation brought forth great scholars who made very significant contributions. One of the most famous scholars at the time was a Catholic Priest named Desiderius Erasmus. Erasmus intended to reform the religious authorities through education in classical Christian wisdom, while later, Reformers pursued a complete break with the Catholic Church. Erasmus believed that the primary issues among church leaders and educators were due to persistent immorality, which caused a lack of understanding of Christian beginnings and "sound learning" (Powell, 2018).

According to Ditchfield (2017), the Reformation Period came with significant challenges. First, the Newly reformed areas had people with different cultures and languages that had to be learned. Second, they had to in order to communicate the Christian message to the non-European people. Third, new rules and a sense of control had to be trained into Christianity over this new global circulation of sacred relics and images. The Bible speaks about spreading the word of God and creating new disciples as stated by the Apostle Matthew in the book of Matthew, "Jesus tells his followers, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew, 1 BCE – 34 AD/2023; *New International Version*). After the Reformation Period came the Modern day.

Christian Education and The Modern Era - (18th Century Forward)

The Modern Era is the sixth example of Christian Education and teachings set within the modern-day, early modern teachings developed within Europe are early part of the modern era. According to Anthony & Benson (2011), Christians were exhausted by a thousand years of religious prejudice and the man-centered institutional leadership styles. They were left with the choice of reforming the church with a focus on the New Testament model or rejecting God altogether and establishing a new worldview without God (Anthony & Benson, 2011). These changes helped to develop what Christianity looks like today.

Christians in the modern day have changed their teachings and viewpoints in many ways that are far removed from the teachings of other periods. Teachings have examined different variables such as culture, worldviews, and social acceptance. Christians must learn how to speak to those unfamiliar with the word of God and get blunt responses to their attempts, such as "Do you know why I am not a Christian?" as well as the defenses behind the stark reaction (Young, 2017). In addition, Christian education has had to move into a new realm regarding gender and sexual identities, which has not been seen to this extent until this time in history. The difficulty for some of these Christians involves the teachings that have been passed through the generations regarding how Religiosity has a focal point of helping improve mental wellness and life satisfaction. However, the accuracy of these teachings to the world queer populations is varied (Askari & Doolittle, 2022).

According to Suarez (2014), As society has played a significant role in adapting Christian teachings to the world, the geographical location of Christian education also plays a big part in the teachings. An example comes from Cuba, where feminist pastors work to spread Christianity with the varied influences of revolution, liberation theology, and feminism. Their perspective is unique, developed in a country immersed in the change search. An additional example can be found within the United States in the world of sports. Sports is a significant phenomenon in the United States as it is in other parts of the world. What is not common in U.S. sports is Theology. Christianity is not often seen in the public eye within sports, but one individual named Tim Tebow did not hesitate to show his faith to the world. Tebow did not mind demonstratively praying and thanking God in public spaces or testifying his faith in post-game interviews. This became a type of covert ministry shared with an audience unfamiliar with the combination of a sports star and a Christian as one. The Phenomenon became so popular that actions by Tebow became known as “Tebowing,” which was mimicked positively and negatively for a brief time (Parker & Watson, 2015).

The Early Church in Comparison

The Early Church contains comparable Christian teachings and education aspects with other historical periods. Christianity started in the Early Church, which is significant in its comparison. The Early Church developed the writings that would be distributed to Christians for centuries. An example is the story of King David and his Psalms. These Psalms gave way to understanding poetry and politics in the Middle Ages. The additional works in literature followed suit with adaptations of David’s writings into the dramas of the Renaissance period (Kilgore, 2014). The Bible speaks about the significance of the early teachings and how important it is to pass on the teachings to new generations, as stated by King David in the book of Psalms, “He commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they, in turn, would tell their children. Then they would trust God and not forget his deeds but keep his commands” (David, 1035 - 970 BCE/2023; *New International Version*).

According to Loubser (2014), those who favored the early church's teachings consider that era the era of law. Rules and regulations appease some, with the other opinion being that modern day may be known as post-law, which brings different opinions on the Christian values that should be attended to daily. There have been no identifiable inconsistencies within the data, research, and Christian teachings reviewed in this paper in comparing the Early Church to the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the modern times.

The Middle Ages in Comparison

The Middle Ages contained comparable Christian teachings and education with other historical periods. The Middle Ages lasted for a long time and contained many variables unique to that period and the evolution of Christianity worldwide. This time can be compared to one of the darkest times in history, full of war, plagues, and famine. During this time, the development of basic Christian rituals that were not done in the early church continued to the modern day. One of these examples was through new teachings of burying rituals. The value of these medieval burials as a source of information was not even thought of until the 2000s (Alterauge et al., 2020).

According to Shyovitz (2014), a terrible point in the Middle Ages came during the attacks against the Jewish people. The Jews were often compared to monsters, and many works of literature arts were created in that image. Research shows that the accounts were a type of “hate crime,” as told in the modern day, and the recollections should be disregarded. The Jewish people did not turn into monsters at times. The monstrous and whimsical creatures appear throughout the written and visual texts of the time (Shyovitz, 2014). An additional example of persecution at the time came from the mass conversion of Jews to Christianity that swept Spain in 1391. The most widespread anti-Jewish violence in medieval history resulted from the Spanish Jews' involvement in Greek rationalism, political ambitions, and their hunger for erotic experiences; all led to Spanish Jews neglecting their Jewish heritage. Research shows that this particular event is viewed today as a classic event influencing the attacks on the Jewish people within the nineteen thirties and nineteen forties (Tartakoff, 2015).

The Renaissance Period in Comparison

The Renaissance contains comparable Christian teachings and educational aspects to other historical periods. However, the Renaissance had a unique viewpoint and set of variables, which is significant in its comparison. A big focus during this period was the illness and plagues that swept across the lands of the time. This event was not seen before, causing a test of faith not seen in other periods. Some had decided not to escape the deadly plague as it was God's punishment; that example shows their faith in God and that they now worked what was best, even if it meant death (Christ, 2022). This period was also unique to other eras as it centralized heavily on expressing Christianity through art, architecture, and Philosophy (Anthony & Benson, 2011).

Research shows a comparison between the Renaissance and the early church as stated by Moses in the book of Exodus, “and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills, to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts”(Moses, 1391–1271 BCE/2023; *New International Version*). Teachings show the significance of the art movement in the Renaissance, with the direction given directly from the Bible long before this time.

The Reformation Period in Comparison

The Reformation Period contains comparable Christian teachings and education aspects to other historical periods. The Reformation began with Martin Luther’s nailing his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the local church in Wittenburg, Germany, on October 31, 1517 (Anthony & Benson, 2011). This era is unique in comparison as it has a definite date of inception and end. The Reformation is also unique to the other periods in history due to being labeled the Age of Enlightenment in changes of society and social class within the Christian community.

Research shows a comparison between the Reformation and the early church as stated by the Apostle Paul in the book of Ephesians, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people” (Paul, 5 – 65 AD/2023; *New International Version*). This enlightenment exploded during the Reformation and kept the evolution of Christianity into the modern era. Additional research went into the study of the mass conversion of Jews to Christianity at the time. The results found that the Jewish converts were not forced to join Christianity but did so on their own. They made their own rational decisions and recognized the interpretation of the combined works between the Old and New Testaments of the Bible (Åklundh, 2014).

The Modern Era in Comparison

The Modern Era contains various comparable aspects of Christian teachings and education with other historical periods as it is a culmination of teachings throughout history. The modern era has studied the past resources, the stories of legend, and the teachings of Christian educators through various periods to make Christianity what it is today. Research shows no inconsistencies with historical works in comparison to modern thinking. The biblical basis of teachings in the modern day can be found throughout the teachings of history. The research found evidence that modern Christian Institutions of higher education face an increasing demand for proof that the teachings being provided equate to the high-quality educational experience promised by the Universities. Educators require assessments for accountability to ensure continuous development. Some faculty at these Christian institutions have been found to agree with their earthly counterparts in questioning the value of time-consuming activities and the value of their meaningful instruction (Longman, 2020). Nowhere else in history did research identify Christian educators questioning what they were teaching. The Bible speaks about trusting God and trusting the word in teachings to others, as stated by King David in the book of Psalms, “How happy is the man who has made the Lord his trust and has not turned to the proud or to the followers of lies” (David, 1035 - 970 BCE/2023; *New Life Version*).

Conclusion

Christianity will continue to evolve based on the teachings of Christian educators in the modern day. These teachings are so significant in the ongoing thought processes and values that God wants Christians to continue to spread them through each generation. Therefore, this paper attempted to compare the teachings of Christian educators of the early church, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance period, and the Reformation period with the values being taught by modern-day Christian educators to prove any inconsistencies in what was considered a critical Christian value at the time with what is now considered to be an essential key Christian value (Anthony & Benson, 2011). The research and literature show no inconsistencies in the teachings that were the main focus of the periods by the educators of their day. All information was Biblically based; the information just was not always used correctly and to the effect God intended. Further research shows additional information that confirms that Christians throughout the Ages have seen success and higher survival rates, which not only would have benefitted their social networks but also would have benefitted their competitor's social networks by data sets highlighting how social networks affect the flow of faith in unexpected ways (Everton & Schroeder, 2019). The research concludes that future research must show scholars data that can be built upon further to confirm or deny Christian teaching methods and assumptions.

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