

TURNING POINTS Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity THIRD EDITION Mark A. Noll, Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity, Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), iii.

by Mark A Noll · Language: EN

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Overview

Mark A. Noll's "Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity" offers a compelling narrative of Christian history by focusing on twelve pivotal events that profoundly shaped the faith's trajectory. Rather than presenting a comprehensive chronological account, Noll meticulously selects moments that represent significant shifts in theology, practice, institutional structure, and geographical spread. From the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, which forced Christianity to define itself apart from Judaism, to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910, which signaled the global expansion of the faith, each 'turning point' is analyzed for its immediate impact and long-term consequences.

Noll's main argument is that understanding these critical junctures is essential for grasping the complex development of Christianity. He demonstrates how each event not only resolved existing challenges but also created new ones, leading to further transformations. The book emphasizes the dynamic nature of Christian belief and practice, showing how the faith has adapted, fractured, and expanded across diverse cultures and historical contexts. It matters because it provides a framework for understanding the continuity and discontinuity within Christian history, offering insights into how past decisions continue to influence contemporary Christianity and its global presence.

Key Takeaways

- Recognize that Christian history is not a monolithic narrative but a series of responses to specific challenges and opportunities.
- Understand that theological doctrines, like the Trinity or Christ's nature, were often forged in intense debates and councils, not simply handed down.

- Appreciate the profound impact of institutional developments, such as monasticism and universities, on the shaping of Christian thought and society.
- Consider how political power and religious authority have historically intertwined, often leading to both advancements and conflicts within Christianity.
- Realize that the global spread of Christianity is a relatively recent phenomenon, with the Edinburgh Missionary Conference marking a significant shift.
- Reflect on how past 'turning points' continue to influence contemporary Christian denominations, practices, and theological perspectives.
- Learn to identify critical moments in any historical narrative that fundamentally alter its future course and meaning.

Chapter Summaries

The Fall of Jerusalem (AD 70)

The destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the Romans forced early Christianity to definitively separate from its Jewish roots. This event propelled the nascent faith to articulate its distinct identity, solidify its Gentile mission, and develop its own institutional structures and theological interpretations independent of the Jewish religious center, profoundly shaping its future trajectory as a universal religion.

The Council of Nicaea (AD 325)

Convened by Emperor Constantine, the Council of Nicaea addressed the Arian controversy concerning the nature of Christ. Its affirmation of Christ's full divinity and co-eternality with God the Father, encapsulated in the Nicene Creed, established a foundational theological principle for orthodox Christianity and set a precedent for ecumenical councils in defining core doctrines.

The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451)

This council resolved debates over the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures, affirming that he is one person in two natures, without confusion, change, division, or separation. The Chalcedonian Definition became a cornerstone of Christology for most of Christianity, though it also led to lasting schisms with some Eastern churches.

The Benedictine Monastic Movement (c. 530)

Benedict of Nursia's Rule for monks provided a stable and influential model for monastic life in the West. Emphasizing prayer, labor, and community, Benedictine monasteries became centers of learning, agricultural innovation, and spiritual discipline, playing a crucial role in preserving classical knowledge and evangelizing Europe during the early Middle Ages.

The Coronation of Charlemagne (AD 800)

The crowning of Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III symbolized the close alliance between political and religious authority in Western Europe. This event solidified the concept of a Christian empire, established a pattern for church-state relations, and marked a significant step in the formation of a distinct Western European Christian identity.

The Great Schism (AD 1054)

The formal split between the Eastern Orthodox and Western Roman Catholic Churches resulted from centuries of growing theological, cultural, and political differences. Issues such as papal authority, the filioque clause, and liturgical practices culminated in mutual excommunications, permanently dividing Christendom into two major branches.

The Founding of the Universities (c. 1200)

The emergence of universities in cities like Paris and Bologna transformed intellectual life and Christian thought. These institutions fostered scholasticism, a method of theological inquiry that integrated reason and faith, and became vital centers for training clergy, lawyers, and administrators, profoundly shaping medieval European society and intellectual traditions.

The Diet of Worms (AD 1521)

Martin Luther's defiant stand before the Holy Roman Emperor and imperial diet, refusing to recant his writings unless convinced by Scripture or clear reason, marked a decisive moment for the Protestant Reformation. His actions underscored the principle of individual conscience and Scriptural authority, irrevocably challenging papal and imperial power.

The English Act of Supremacy (AD 1534)

King Henry VIII's declaration of himself as the Supreme Head of the Church of England severed ties with papal authority, initiating the English Reformation. This act established a national church under royal control, profoundly altering the religious and political landscape of England and setting a precedent for state-controlled Protestantism.

The Council of Trent (AD 1545-1563)

The Council of Trent was the Catholic Church's comprehensive response to the Protestant Reformation. It reaffirmed traditional Catholic doctrines, reformed internal practices, and established the framework for modern Catholicism. Its decrees shaped Catholic theology, liturgy, and discipline for centuries, defining the Counter-Reformation era.

The Conversion of the Wesleys (AD 1738)

John and Charles Wesley's evangelical conversions sparked the Methodist revival, a movement characterized by fervent preaching, personal piety, and social activism. This spiritual awakening revitalized Protestantism in England and America, leading to the formation of new denominations and profoundly influencing subsequent evangelical movements globally.

The Edinburgh Missionary Conference (AD 1910)

This landmark conference brought together Protestant missionaries and leaders from around the world, signaling the emergence of Christianity as a truly global religion. It fostered ecumenical cooperation, strategized for worldwide evangelization, and highlighted the shift of Christianity's demographic center towards the Global South, setting the stage for 20th-century missions.

Themes

- Theological development
- Institutional evolution
- Global expansion
- Church-state relations
- Intellectual transformation

Notable Quotes

- "Turning points are moments when the stream of Christian history not only takes a new direction but also seems to gather new power, new momentum, as it flows into the future." — From the Introduction, explaining the concept of a 'turning point' in the book's framework.
- "The great theological debates of the early church were not abstract exercises in philosophical speculation, but desperate efforts to preserve the integrity of the gospel." — Discussing the significance of early ecumenical councils like Nicaea and Chalcedon.
- "The Reformation was not simply a theological dispute; it was a profound cultural and political earthquake that reshaped the map of Europe and the very nature of Western society." — Reflecting on the broader impact of the Protestant Reformation beyond just religious doctrine.
- "The story of Christianity is not just the story of ideas and institutions, but also the story of individuals whose lives were transformed by faith and who, in turn, transformed the world." — Emphasizing the role of key figures like Benedict, Luther, and the Wesleys in shaping Christian history.
- "To understand where the church is going, it is essential to understand where it has been." — A concluding thought on the enduring relevance of historical study for contemporary Christianity.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is TURNING POINTS Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity THIRD EDITION
Mark A. Noll, Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity, Third Edition

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker

The book is about twelve pivotal events that fundamentally altered the course of Christian history. Mark A. Noll analyzes these 'turning points,' from the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910, to show how they shaped Christian theology, practice, and global presence. It offers a thematic rather than strictly chronological approach to understanding Christianity's development.

Is TURNING POINTS Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity THIRD EDITION Mark A. Noll, Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity, Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Ac

Yes, it is highly regarded for its accessible yet scholarly overview of Christian history. Noll's focus on decisive moments provides a clear framework for understanding complex historical developments without getting bogged down in excessive detail. It's particularly valuable for those seeking to grasp the major shifts and influences that have shaped Christianity over two millennia.

How does TURNING POINTS Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity THIRD EDITION Mark A. Noll, Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity, Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Ba

Spoiler: The book concludes with the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, highlighting the global expansion of Christianity and its shift towards the Global South. Noll then offers a brief epilogue reflecting on the ongoing nature of Christian history and the potential for future turning points, emphasizing the dynamic and unfinished story of the faith.

Who should read TURNING POINTS Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity THIRD EDITION Mark A. Noll, Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity, Third Edition (Grand Rapids,

This book is ideal for students of religious history, theology, and anyone interested in understanding the major forces that have shaped Christianity. It serves as an excellent introduction for those new to the subject, as well as a valuable refresher for those with some background, offering a coherent and insightful perspective on Christian development.

How long does it take to read TURNING POINTS Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity THIRD EDITION Mark A. Noll, Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity, Third Edition

Given its length and academic nature, a typical reader can expect to spend approximately 7 to 8 hours to read "Turning Points." This estimate assumes a reading speed of about 250 words per minute and accounts for the need to engage with the historical and theological concepts presented.