

D. An Overview of the Periods of History

1. Periodization

Due to the total time involved in the process of our study, it is good for us to have a mental image of the various periods and stages in the life of the church. This would perhaps be more important if our study were totally horizontal in proportion but a general knowledge of the periods is useful at all cost. The big question is with regard to the method of setting aside a period. Usually it is thought that a period is marked by a change of thought in the direction of the body under study. This is most commonly signalled by climactic enactments at some point that serves to readdress the direction of the thinking of the body or group.

Various periods are suggested by different scholars.

Seeberg sees three major periods:

Construction of doctrine in the ancient church, post apostolic to Constantine.

Middler ages...the preservation, transformation, and development of doctrine.

Reformation to the present...the opposing crystallization of Protestant and Roman doctrinal bodies.

Pelikan allows five periods after this fashion:

Emergence of Catholic tradition (to 600)

Spirit of eastern Christendom (600-1700)

Growth of Mediaeval Theology (600-1300)

Reformation of church and dogma (1300-1700)

Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700)

Our general treatment in church history is so:

Ante-Nicene...to 325

Conciliar to 1054

Scholastic to 1500

Reformation to 1700

Modern since then....

These are just matters of convenience but if one does not have some some of scheme for distinguishing the church history periods...everything looks alike after a very short time. And conformity is not to be insisted upon so that we are able to save our strength for the "next battle."