

Christianity at 2000, or

**two millennia of western Christianity in thirty minutes or less.**

sunday 23 may 2004 praxis class | wayside

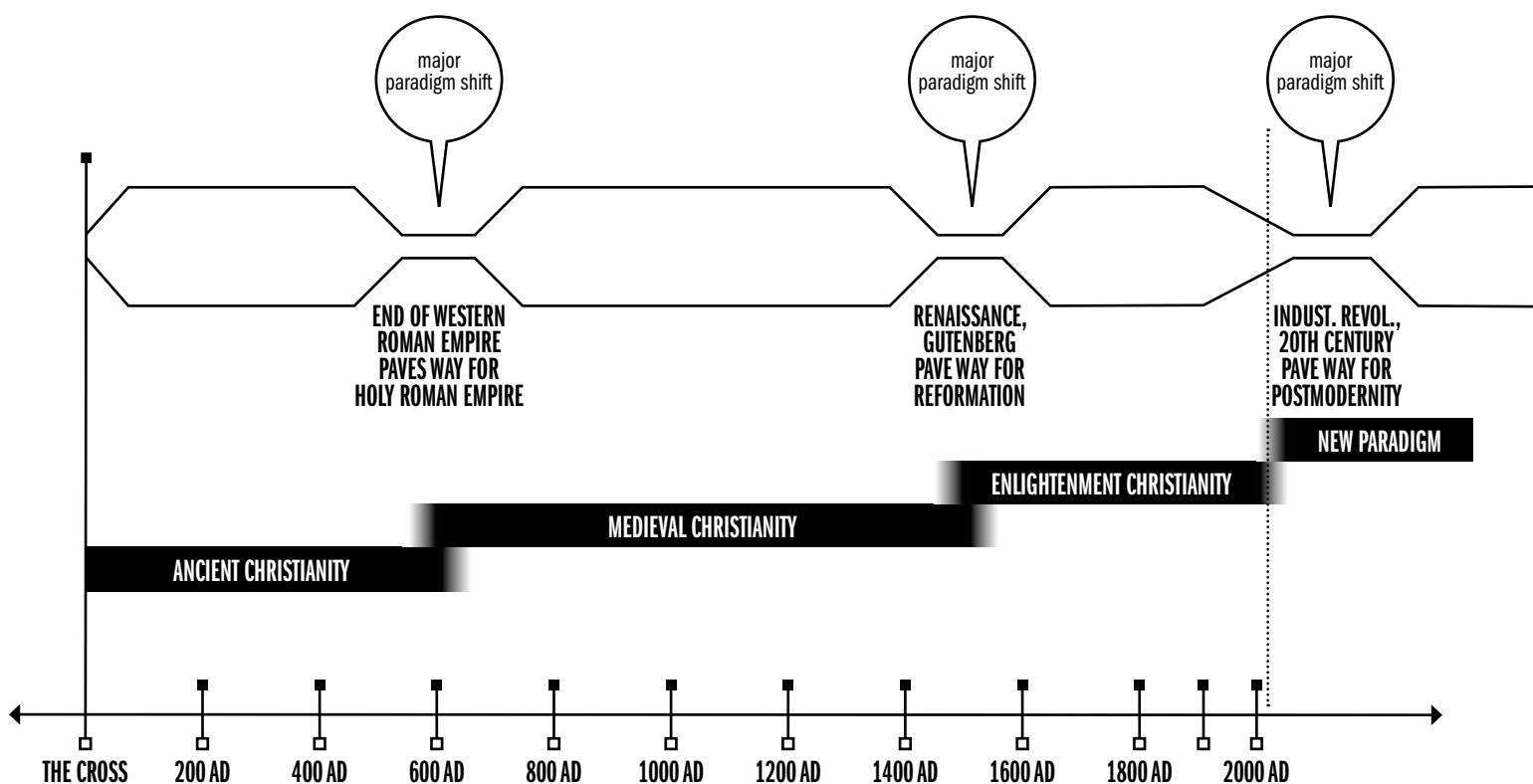
# this morning we'll be looking at the major paradigm shifts of western history and how the Church has responded.

i. huh? –

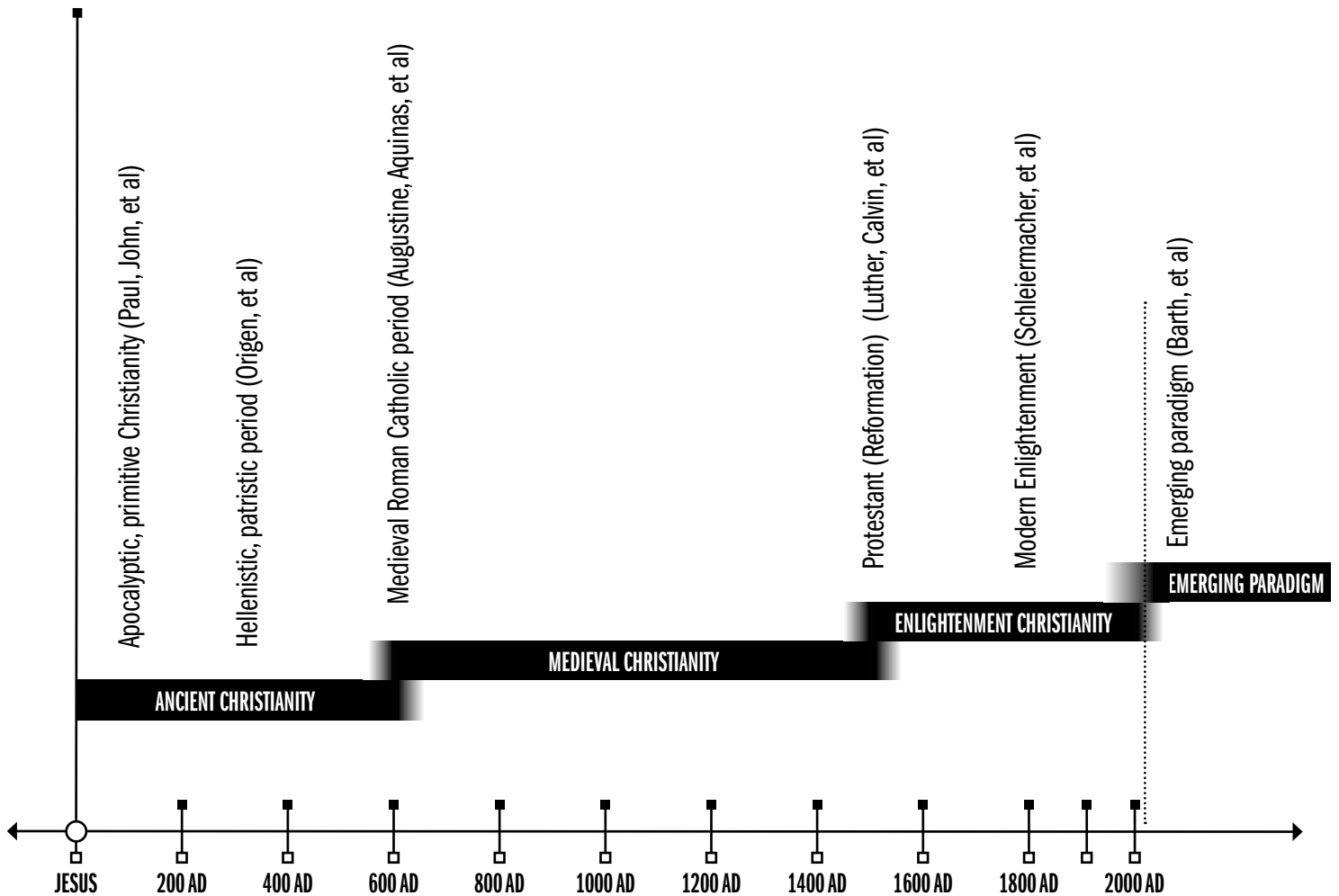
**paradigm** – n. a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them, especially in an intellectual discipline. informally, “the prevailing view of things”

**paradigm shift** – n. In 1962, thomas kuhn defined and popularized the concept of “paradigm shift” – it looks at history as a “series of peaceful interludes punctuated by intellectually violent revolutions”, and in those revolutions “one conceptual world view is replaced by another”. that displacement is a paradigm shift. think of a paradigm shift as a change from one way of thinking to another. It's a revolution, a transformation, a sort of metamorphosis. It just does not happen, but rather it is driven by agents of change.

**a Christian view of paradigm shift** God is sovereign, King of kings, clearly Lord over history. nothing happens outside of His purposes. one youth pastor has said, “there's nothing new under the sun in one regard in that the pursuits of humankind often repeat themselves. What stays the same is the need to communicate the gospel effectively in our context. what changes is the context. the world was not the same after the enlightenment, the industrial revolution, and, it appears, will never be the same after the postmodern shift. (Anna Aven, <http://annaaven.typepad.com/emerging>)” these shifts are part of God's plan for humanity. God is at work.



**the Church has weathered three major paradigm shifts; many now see the scientific, technological and philosophical changes that began in the 20th century as the birthpains of a fourth major transition**



## **Principal #1: seeing the big picture**

**if we look at the changes God is bringing about in His Church in the last 50 years only through generational lenses (and fail to see changes in light of the paradigm shifts of the last 2,000 years), we run the risk of becoming marginalized, ineffective Christians content with “answering all the questions that no one is asking.” God is moving. Will we move with Him?**

# here's a quick look at the three paradigms we know about.

## **ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY ±AD 100—500** **THE CLASSICAL ERA**

“Christianity goes from being an unknown and ignored religion, to a known and persecuted religion, to a legal and permitted religion, to a favored religion, to the civil religion of Rome, all in a matter of 500 years.”

(Brian McLaren, Onramp to Postmodernism Discussion, Emergent Convention 2004)

Anne Wilkinson-Hayes of South Oxford Baptist Church in England writes in *The Gospel and Our Culture Network* about ways to look at church; she points to church historian Alan Kreider who asked the question, **“Why did the church grow at its fastest rate in the first four centuries?”** This is no small question. Pre-Constantine (Pre-Christendom) Christianity must have some distinctives about it that inform to way we are to do church. Kreider’s 3 conclusions:

1. A deep expression of inclusive community. (“it broke all normal social barriers...”)
2. The degree of service Christians offered to the wider community. (“...widows and orphans, assisting with funerals...”)
3. A distinctive lifestyle... (“...refused to take up arms ... sought to live simply and share [their] belongings...”)

## **MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY ±AD 500—1500** **THE RISE OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM**

The Church is so enmeshed with the Roman Empire, when Rome is sacked, the Church essentially takes over the role of sustaining European Culture. The Church/Europe is confronted by Huns, Barbarians, Mongrels, Goths, Vikings, rise of Islam, Crusades; because of new trade routes, every 75 to 100 years 5 to 25% of the population gets decimated as a result of the spread of germs. (Brian McLaren, Onramp to Postmodernism Discussion, Emergent Convention 2004)

Martyrs gave way to monks; “the influence of monasticism tended to develop a two-tiered church, in which laity were passive and clergy and monks were active and in charge – thought to be on a higher spiritual level. the possibility of lay sanctity was not as appreciated.” ([www.idahomonks.org/hcc.htm](http://www.idahomonks.org/hcc.htm))

## **THE ENLIGHTENMENT ERA ±AD 1500—TODAY** **MADE UP OF THE REFORMATION ERA (1500-1750) AND THE MODERN ERA (1750-TODAY)**

Here we see the first new communication technology in a millennium – the printing press. Before 1500AD no preacher ever said to a congregation, “Open your Bibles please.” Writing changes the way we think. Arguments during this time took on new shape; because of movable type and the resultant new literacy, arguments become long, linear, structures. Discussions about God become linear, word-oriented. Reason reigns supreme. Descartes and Kant provide the bookends of the Reformation era, In the 20th Century, apologetics flourish with McDowell’s “Evidence”, C.S. Lewis’ “Trilemma”. (Brian McLaren, Onramp to Postmodernism Discussion, Emergent Convention 2004) ... Modern Era begins to decline throughout the last century (different disciplines decline at different rates – art, music, architecture, science, physics, theater, technology, literature; the church lags its transition).