

How Church History Brought Me to Christ

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Christ promised his sheep would hear his voice and follow after him. His power to call his children and convince them to love and fear him knows no boundaries. This is just a humble attempt at showing my gratitude for his great love towards a sinner like me.

I was born in Brazil to Lidia and Neemias. When I was around four years old, my parents adopted a child, Simone, who is my older sister, and some years later my brother David was born. At that time, my family attended a Pentecostal church, with whose affairs I was most frequently involved. As far as theological teaching is concerned, I cannot remember much about what was taught there, but one thing was clear to me: salvation had to be earned, and if one were not good enough, that salvation would be lost. It was not mere Arminian teaching, but wide open Pelagianism.

I honestly put effort into obtaining that promised salvation. I did everything I could. I helped people; I prayed, I went to all the camps, I helped with children, teenagers and the elderly. I thought that if I did what *I* thought was right, God would save me. At that time, however, I did not truly know he who was to be my only comfort in life and death.

I remember that since I was a child, I was fascinated with missionaries. In the Pentecostal milieu, much emphasis is given to what they call missions, and given my lack of understanding, I was compelled to be one. In order to be so, I thought it would be a good idea to read some missionaries' biographies, and then it all started; God was going after me.

A dear friend of mine suggested a book on William Carey¹. His life impressed me so much! In reading about him, however, I stumbled upon unknown words, such as sovereignty, providence, justification, predestination, and depravity. Moreover, Carey would also mention books and authors that had helped him understand the Christian faith better; Calvin and the Institutes, though completely unknown to me, were constantly mentioned by Carey. I could notice he always mentioned his understanding of the importance of sound doctrine to missions. He said, "*Nevertheless we cannot but observe with admiration that Paul, the great champion of the glorious doctrines of free and sovereign grace, was the most conspicuous for his personal zeal in the work of persuading men to be reconciled to God.*"² I was also fascinated by his diligence in translating the Bible to the people he was sent to. Men like him and William Tyndale made me start to pay attention to the work of translation.

His book presented me to another devout man—David Brainerd, whose diary immensely blessed me; it helped me see how much of a sinner I was and that I could do nothing to earn forgiveness. I started understanding it was a gift, and only God could give it. Then Brainerd pointed me to Jonathan Edwards, Edwards led to Puritans like John Owen, who mentioned men like John Knox and John Calvin. And the list went on. Yet, at the time, I was not able to connect the dots. I then told one of the ministers at church about the books I was reading and their content, seeking some help to understand them. He told me to stop reading them for they were dangerous. Unaware of God's providence, I was then convinced I should find out why they were so dangerous. I was soon to discover that God uses dangerous books!

With a group of friends, I started studying church history. We came up with a simple and effective idea: each one of us would choose an important figure we knew at the time, do some research on them and present our findings to each other after the research was done. Since we didn't speak English at the time, I got really upset to see that most (good) books on church history were not available in Portuguese back then. Through this study, we came to know men like George Whitefield, David Livingstone, Adoniram Judson, and Henry Martin. In this study, at some point, one thing became clear: all of those

¹ Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (New Hope, 1991). Portuguese translation by Hans Udo Fuchs.

² Thomas Schirrmacher, editor. *Calvin and World Missions* (VTR Publications, 2009), 85. Available at http://www.worldevangelicals.org/resources/rfiles/res3_388_link_1338069512.pdf.

people who we were studying had one thing in common, their beliefs. They were all Calvinists to some degree. At that moment, God opened my understanding. The Reformed faith was presented to us.

I was just so deeply overwhelmed by the truth that sound theology does not only rescue one's intellect, but that in God's providence it also keeps one's heart warm, and gives one a biblical view of history as God's history. The comfort of knowing that since God is God, he can and will fulfill his promises and hold us firmly in Christ. We can undoubtedly trust that in the same marvelous way he has kept his church throughout times he will keep us until he comes.

Notwithstanding, though we had been awakened to God's truth in the Reformed faith, there was no real Reformed church to attend where we lived. But in God's providence, nonetheless, there was the internet. One website was very helpful at this time: Monergismo.com, maintained by Felipe Sabino, on which we found countless good materials on different subjects. It was there that we first saw articles from Herman Hoeksema, Angus Stewart, and Ronald Hanks (some of whom you might know).

After having learned English, I came across the Covenant Protestant Reformed (CPRC) website, and couldn't believe that there was this amazing project of translating good theology from English into a multitude of languages. Soon after, along with the same friends that had started studying Church History years ago, I encountered a masterpiece: *The Portraits of Faithful Saints* by Prof. Herman Hanks. We were so thankful for that book for there wasn't anything similar in Portuguese! We read that and decided to translate it.

Since then, our sincere prayer has been that in God's providence he would use Reformed literature to call people to Christ, as he did with me. I am extremely thankful for how God used his history in the lives of all these men and women to make me realize the beauty of living to the glory of God. We also pray that he may keep blessing us with faithful authors, great books, and with more translators.

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