

Influential Christian Literature

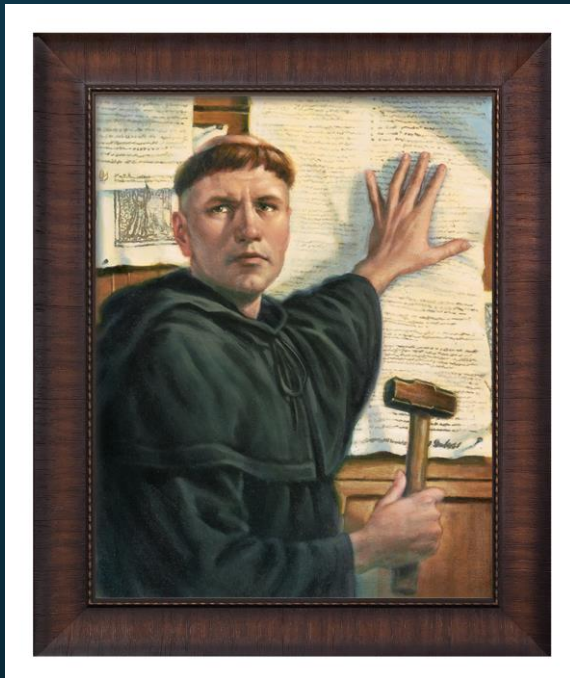
*Exploring Essential Works That Shaped
Christian Thought*

Wilbur Reid, summer of 2025

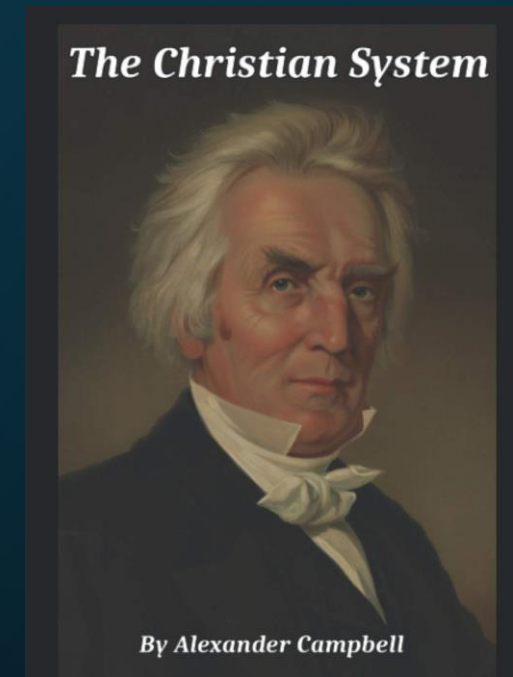
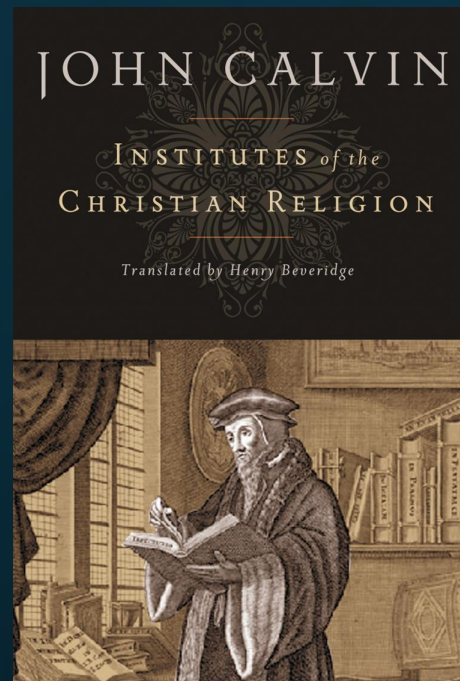


The Foundations of Faith

The Reformation's call back to Scripture laid the groundwork for returning to biblical simplicity.



Martin Luther's 95 Theses



Purgatory

- Current definition in the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*
 - Essentially the same as Second Council of Lyon in 1274
- 210. What is purgatory?
 - Purgatory is the state of those who die in God's friendship, assured of their eternal salvation, but who still have need of purification to enter into the happiness of heaven.
- 211. How can we help the souls being purified in purgatory?
 - Because of the communion of saints, the faithful who are still pilgrims on earth are able to help the souls in purgatory by offering prayers in suffrage for them, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice. They also help them by almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance.

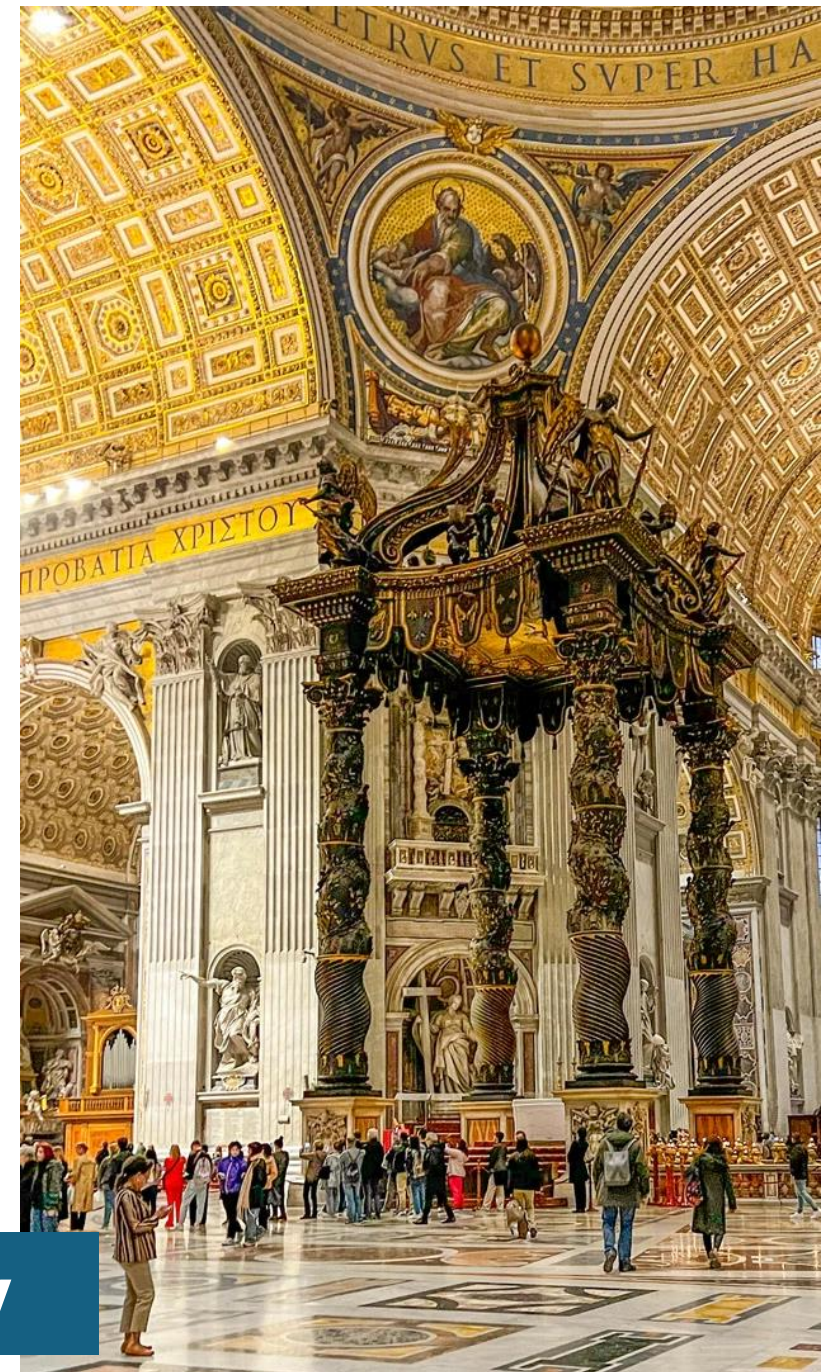


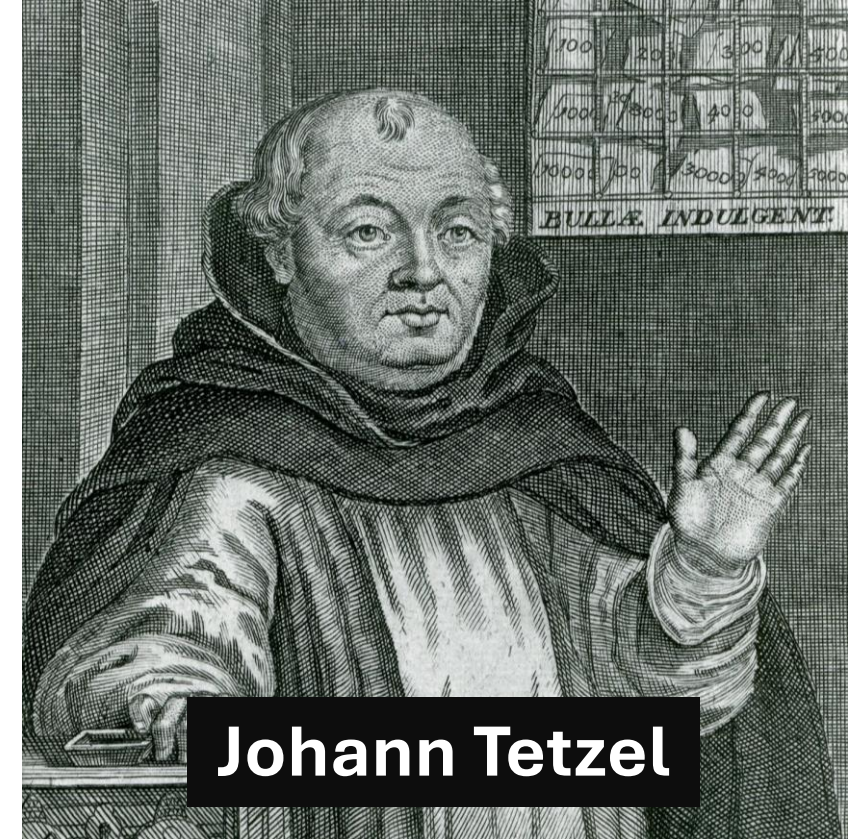


Old St. Peter's Basilica (318 – 1505)



St. Peter's today





The Characters

- Pope Leo X – Needed funds for St. Peters
- Albert of Brandenburg – Archbishop of Mainz (Germany), needed funds to pay off a loan used to buy positions. Partnered with Leo to split indulgence income 50/50.
- Johann Tetzel – hired by Albert to sell indulgences and went rogue.

95 Theses (1517)

- **Author:** Martin Luther
 - German, Augustinian monk
- **Summary:** Luther's formal challenge to the Catholic Church's sale of indulgences sparked the Protestant Reformation by questioning papal authority and calling for spiritual reform.
- Written in Latin for debate
- Posted to door of Castle Church in Wittenberg Germany



The 95 Theses

Key Points

- Thesis 1: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance"
- Thesis 32: Those trusting in indulgences for salvation are "eternally damned"
- Core Message: Scripture alone, not church tradition, determines salvation



Gutenberg Printing Press



Luther's Revolutionary Principles

- Sola Scriptura - Scripture alone as authority
- Sola Fide - Salvation by faith alone
- Priesthood of All Believers - Direct access to God
- Vernacular Bible - Scripture in common language
- Hymn singing





Trial: Diet of Worms

(1521)

"Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience would be neither right nor safe. God help me. Here I stand, I can do no other."



Castle Church,
now All Saints' Church,
Wittenberg, Germany





Luther knocked the door down,
Calvin built the house

Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536-1559)

- **Author:** John Calvin
 - French theologian, moved to Geneva
- **Summary:** A systematic presentation of Protestant theology covering God's sovereignty, salvation, and Christian living.
- Church governance, education, theology
- Key contribution: biblical interpretation

JOHN CALVIN

INSTITUTES of the
CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Translated by Henry Beveridge



The Four Book Structure

- Book 1: Knowledge of God the Creator
 - Book 2: Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ
 - Book 3: The Way We Receive the Grace of Christ
 - Book 4: The External Means by Which God Invites Us into Fellowship
-

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Relevance to the Restoration Movement

- While Restoration Movement churches reject Calvin's predestination doctrine, they embrace many of his interpretive principles:
 - scripture as sole authority,
 - systematic Bible study,
 - the importance of returning to biblical patterns.
- Calvin's emphasis on educated ministry and careful biblical interpretation influenced the movement's approach to preaching and teaching.
- His call for church reform based on Scripture alone resonated with Restoration leaders like Alexander Campbell, even when they disagreed with specific doctrines.

Scripture must be interpreted in its historical context

- **Example: The Corinthian Head Covering Passage (1 Corinthians 11:2-16)**
- **The Difficult Text:** Paul's instructions about women covering their heads during worship has confused many readers. Without historical context, it seems like an arbitrary rule about fashion or an outdated restriction on women.
- **Calvin's Historical Context Approach:**
 - **Cultural Setting:** In first-century Corinth, head coverings indicated a woman's marital status and social respectability
 - **Religious Context:** Unveiled women in pagan temples were often associated with temple prostitution
 - **Social Context:** The Corinthian church was struggling with issues of propriety and order in worship

Scripture must be interpreted in its historical context

- **The Interpretation:** When understood historically, Paul wasn't establishing a universal dress code, but addressing specific cultural issues that were disrupting worship and potentially damaging the church's reputation in Corinth. The principle behind the passage—maintaining order and respectability in worship—remains timeless, while the specific application was culturally conditioned.
- **Modern Application:** Rather than requiring literal head coverings today, we apply the underlying principle: Christians should worship in ways that maintain dignity, avoid unnecessary offense, and reflect proper relationships within the church.

Scripture's Primary Purpose is to Reveal Christ

- **Example: The Old Testament Sacrificial System (Leviticus 16 - Day of Atonement)**
- **The Detailed Ritual:** Leviticus 16 describes an elaborate ceremony involving two goats—one sacrificed, one sent into the wilderness—along with detailed instructions about blood, incense, and priestly garments.
- **Calvin's Christ-Centered Approach:** Rather than getting lost in ceremonial details, Calvin taught that these passages primarily point to Christ:
 - **The High Priest** entering the Holy of Holies = Christ entering heaven as our High Priest (Hebrews 9:11-12)
 - **The Sacrificial Goat** = Christ bearing our sins in His death (Isaiah 53:6)
 - **The Scapegoat** sent away = Christ carrying our sins away forever (Psalm 103:12)

Scripture's Primary Purpose is to Reveal Christ

- **Annual Repetition** = Shows inadequacy of animal sacrifices, pointing to Christ's once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-4)
- **The Christ-Centered Reading:** Calvin would say the primary purpose isn't to teach us about ancient Jewish ritual, but to reveal our need for atonement and point us to Christ as the ultimate sacrifice. As Jesus said in Luke 24:27: "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

Difficult Passages Understood in Light of Clear Ones

- **A Classic Example: James 2:24 vs. Romans 3:28**
- **The Apparent Conflict:**
 - **James 2:24:** "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone."
 - **Romans 3:28:** "For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."
- **The Problem:** These verses seem to directly contradict each other. James appears to say we're justified by works, while Paul says we're justified by faith without works.

Difficult Passages Understood in Light of Clear Ones

- **Applying Calvin's Principle**
- **Step 1: Identify the Clear Passages** The New Testament has numerous clear passages about justification by faith:
 - Romans 3:23-24: "All have sinned... being justified freely by his grace"
 - Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith... not by works"
 - Galatians 2:16: "A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ"
- **Step 2: Examine the Difficult Passage in Context** Looking at James 2:14-26, we see James is addressing people who claim to have faith but show no evidence of it in their lives. He's not talking about *how* we're justified, but about *what kind of faith* actually justifies.

Difficult Passages Understood in Light of Clear Ones

- **Step 3: Harmonize Based on Clear Teaching** The clear passages establish that justification is by faith alone. Therefore, James 2:24 must be understood as describing:
 - The *evidence* of true justifying faith (works demonstrate genuine faith)
 - The *kind* of faith that justifies (living faith, not dead faith)
 - *Vindication* before people (showing our faith is real through actions)
- **The Resolution**
- Calvin's principle helps us understand:
 - **Paul** addresses *how* we're justified before God (by faith alone)
 - **James** addresses *what kind* of faith justifies (faith that produces works)
 - Both are teaching the same gospel truth from different angles

Difficult Passages Understood in Light of Clear Ones

- **Why This Principle Matters**
- This interpretive method:
 - **Prevents contradiction** - Scripture doesn't contradict itself
 - **Maintains biblical authority** - lets Scripture interpret Scripture
 - **Avoids eisegesis** - imposing our ideas on difficult texts
 - **Builds systematic theology** - creates coherent understanding of doctrine

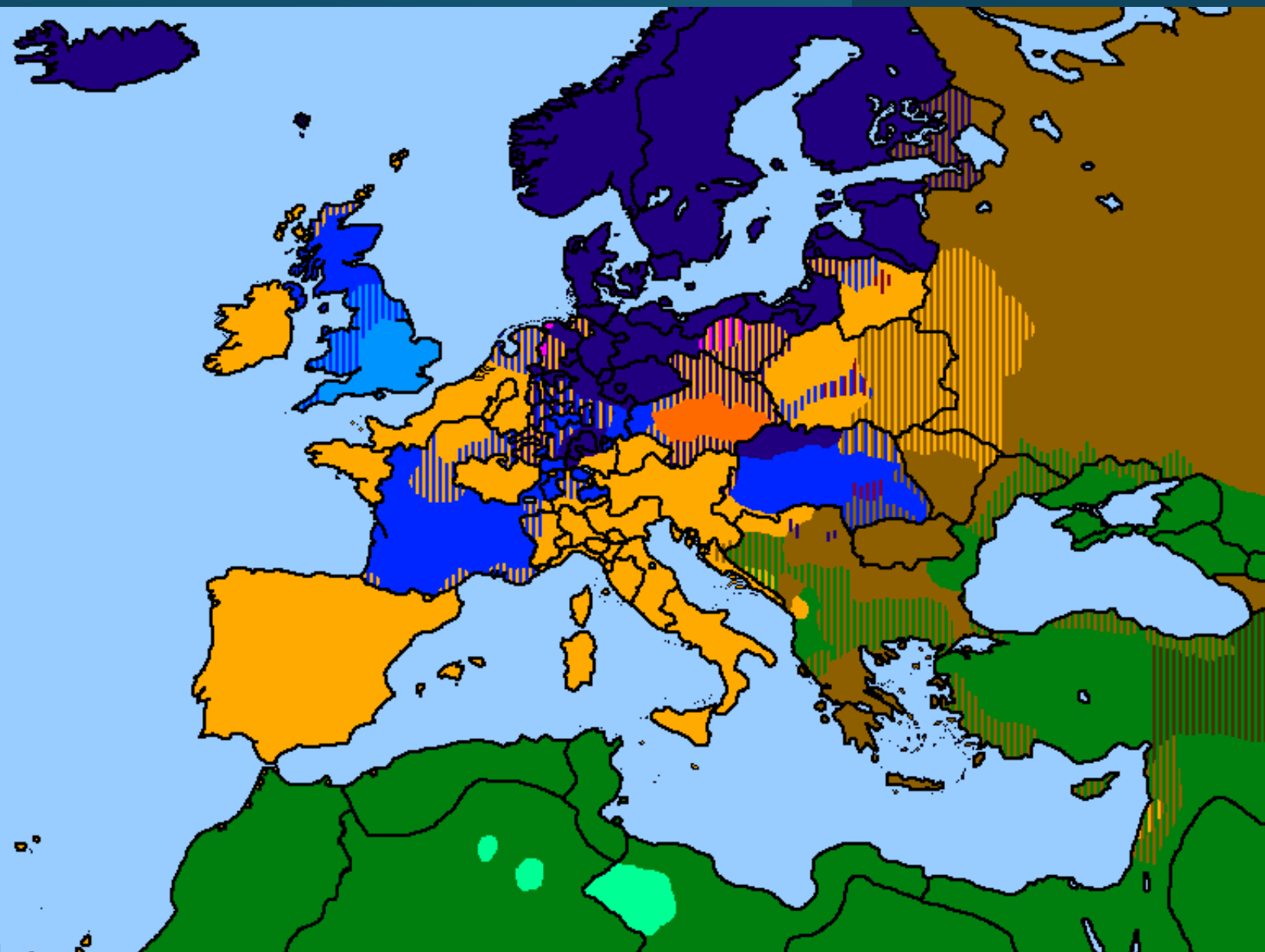
Regulative (vs Normative) Worship

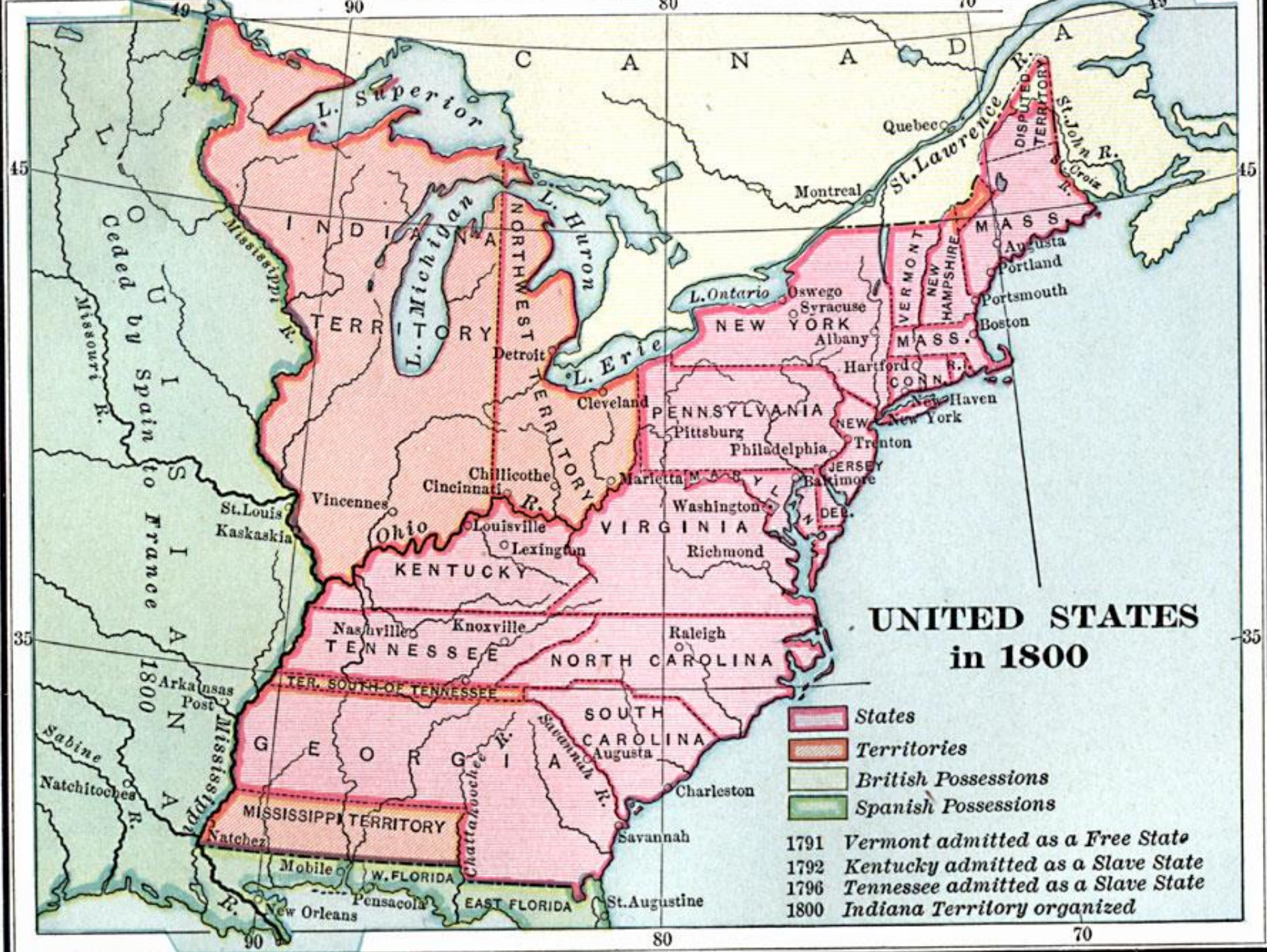
- Worship only included elements explicitly commanded in New Testament:
 - **Preaching**
 - Prayer
 - Singing Psalms
 - Sacraments: Baptism and Lord's Supper
- Elements excluded:
 - **Liturgy**
 - Ornate rituals
 - Icons
 - Elaborate musical performances



RELIGIONS OF EUROPE - 1700

- Catholic Christianity
- Lutheran Christianity
- Reformed Christianity
- Orthodox Christianity
- Anglican Christianity
- Hussite Christianity
- Armenian Christianity
- Unitarian Christianity
- Anabaptist Christianity
- Sunni Islam
- Ibadi Islam

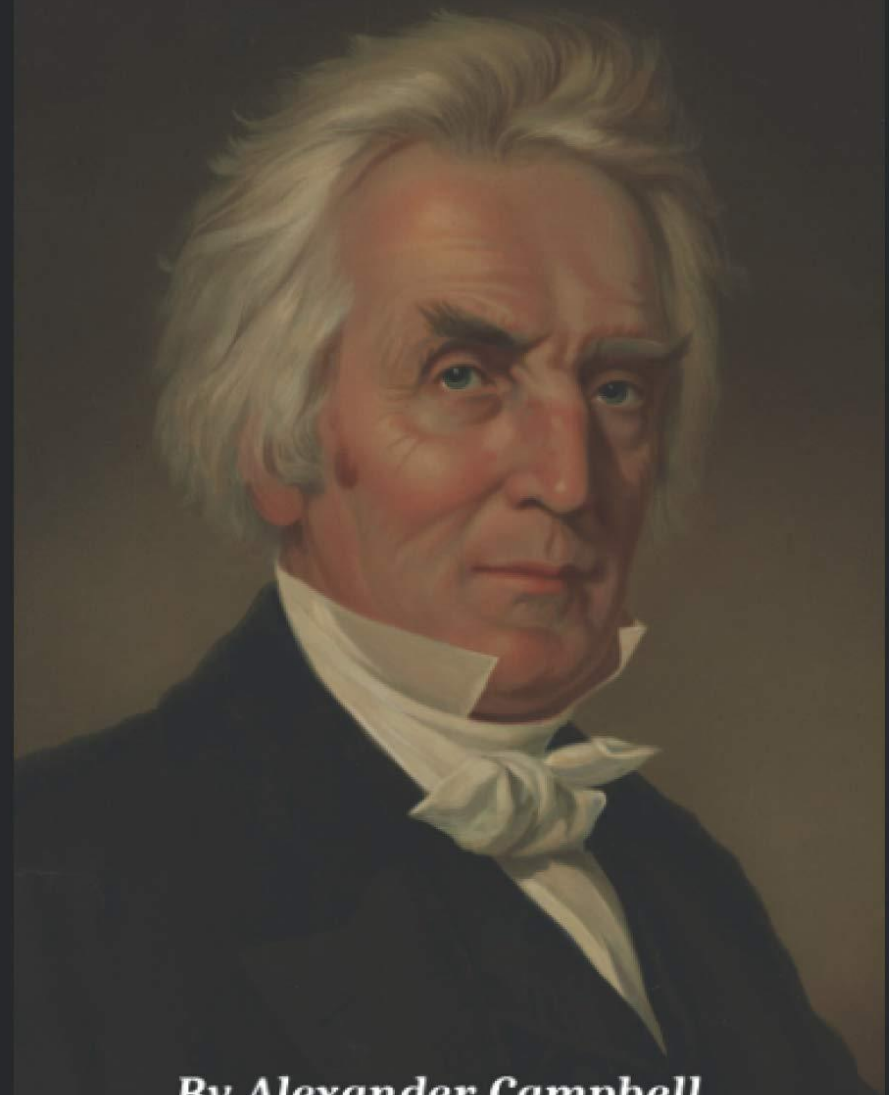




The Christian System (1835)

- **Author:** Alexander Campbell
 - Scots-Irish American, Restoration Movement
- **Summary:** Campbell's systematic presentation of New Testament Christianity advocated for Christian unity based solely on biblical authority, rejecting denominational creeds and traditions.
- **Quote:** "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."

The Christian System

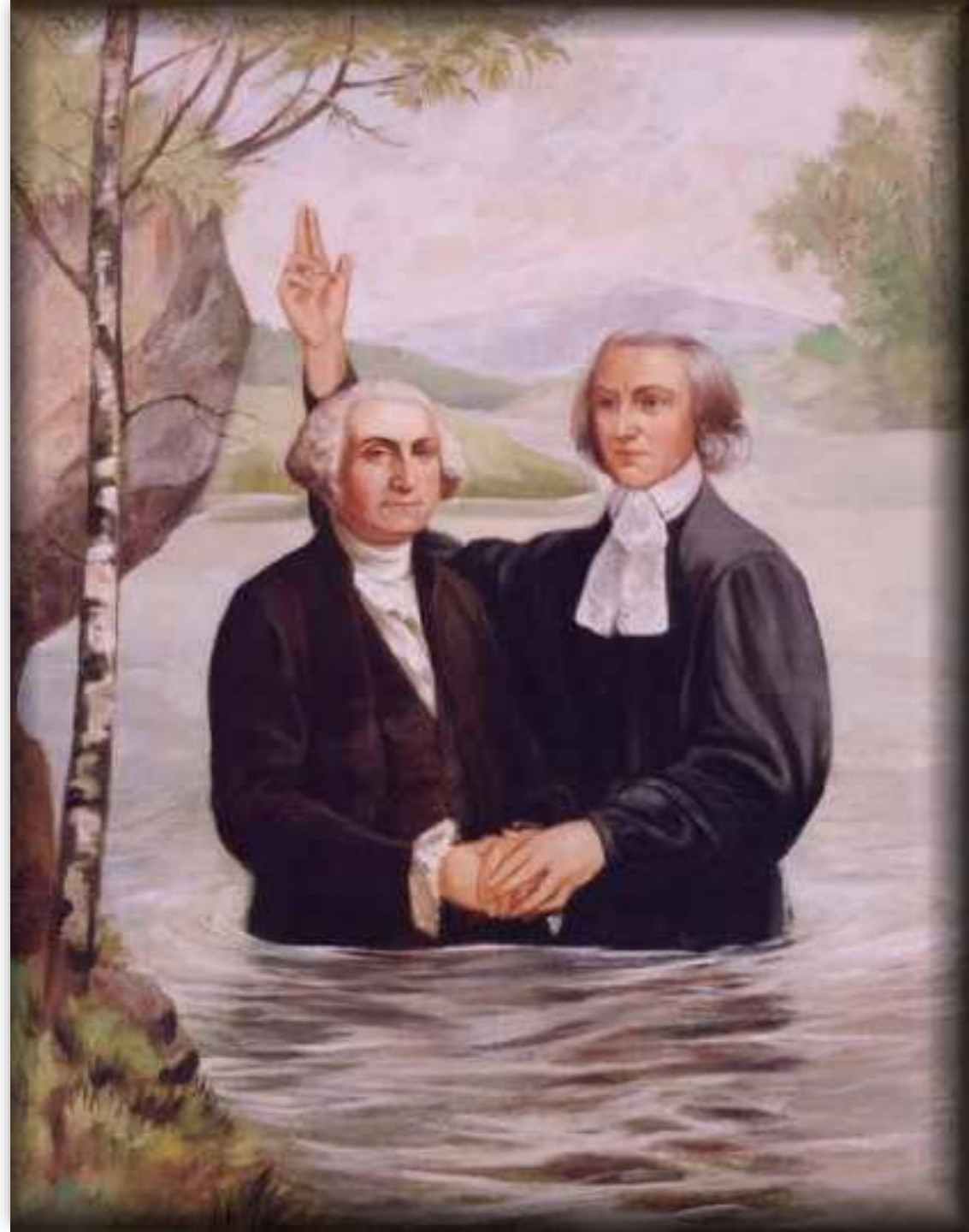


By Alexander Campbell

The Reader's Edition

Restoration Principles

- Baptism: Immersion for remission of sins
- Communion: Weekly observance
- Church Government: Congregational autonomy
- Worship: Simple, biblical pattern
- Ministry: Plurality of elders, deacons
- Biblical reasoning



Theological progression

Luther → Challenged papal authority with Scripture

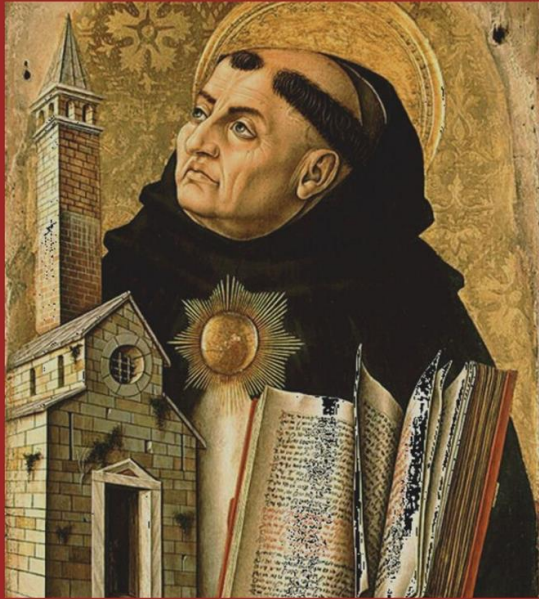
Calvin → Systematized Protestant theology

Campbell → Restored New Testament pattern

Common Thread: Scripture as ultimate authority

Next week: Knowing the character of God

SUMMA THEOLOGICA



THOMAS AQUINAS

THE
CHRISTIAN DEVOTIONAL
CLASSIC

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY

MORE
THAN
500,000
COPIES
SOLD

A. W. TOZER

J. I. PACKER

KNOWING GOD

*Fiftieth
Anniversary
Edition*

Books,
ranked
by
reading
level

Rank	Title	Author	Reading Grade Level	Difficulty	
1	Summa Theologica	Thomas Aquinas	Graduate/16+	Most Difficult	★★★★★
	The City of God	Augustine	Graduate/16+	Most Difficult	★★★★★
	Institutes of the Christian Religion	John Calvin	Graduate/16+	Most Difficult	★★★★★
4	Divine Comedy	Dante Alighieri	College/14-16	Very Difficult	★★★★☆
	The Christian System	Alexander Campbell	College/14-16	Very Difficult	★★★★☆
	The Everlasting Man	G.K. Chesterton	College/14-16	Very Difficult	★★★★☆
7	Orthodoxy	G.K. Chesterton	College/13-15	Difficult	★★★☆☆
	Religious Affections	Jonathan Edwards	College/13-15	Difficult	★★★☆☆
9	Confessions	Augustine	College/12-14	Difficult	★★★☆☆
10	The Imitation of Christ	Thomas à Kempis	High School/11-13	Moderately Difficult	★★★☆☆
	Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God	Jonathan Edwards	High School/11-13	Moderately Difficult	★★★☆☆
12	The Pilgrim's Progress	John Bunyan	High School/10-12	Moderately Difficult	★★★☆☆
	Luther's 95 Theses	Martin Luther	High School/10-12	Moderately Difficult	★★★☆☆
14	How Now Shall We Live	Chuck Colson	High School/9-11	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
	Knowing God	J.I. Packer	High School/9-11	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
	The Knowledge of the Holy	A.W. Tozer	High School/9-11	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
	The Cost of Discipleship	Dietrich Bonhoeffer	High School/9-11	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
18	Mere Christianity	C.S. Lewis	High School/8-10	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
	The Screwtape Letters	C.S. Lewis	High School/8-10	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
	The Lord of the Rings	J.R.R. Tolkien	High School/8-10	Moderate	★★☆☆☆
21	The Pursuit of God	A.W. Tozer	Middle School/7-9	Moderately Easy	★★☆☆☆
	The Practice of the Presence of God	Brother Lawrence	Middle School/7-9	Moderately Easy	★★☆☆☆
23	Chronicles of Narnia	C.S. Lewis	Middle School/6-8	Easy	★☆☆☆☆
	Radical	David Platt	Middle School/6-8	Easy	★☆☆☆☆
	Crazy Love	Francis Chan	Middle School/6-8	Easy	★☆☆☆☆
	In His Steps	Charles Sheldon	Middle School/6-8	Easy	★☆☆☆☆
27	The Purpose Driven Life	Rick Warren	Elementary/5-7	Easiest	★☆☆☆☆

Twelve Unifying Themes

1. **The Foundation of Faith** - What we believe and why
2. **Knowing God's Character** - His attributes and nature
3. **Authentic Conversion** - What real faith looks like
4. **The Cost of Discipleship** - Following Christ isn't easy
5. **Pursuing God's Presence** - Intimacy with the Divine
6. **Spiritual Warfare** - The battle for our souls
7. **Defending the Faith** - Christianity makes sense
8. **Engaging the World** - Faith and public life
9. **The Pilgrim's Journey** - Life as movement toward God
10. **Faith, Reason, and Wonder** - Christianity appeals to the whole person
11. **Life's Purpose** - Why are we here?
12. **The Unity of Truth** - How it all fits together

Great Christian Literature Course Schedule

Woodlawn Christian Church - Fellowship in Christ Class

Week	Date	Theme	Description	Texts		
1	July 13	The Foundation of Faith	Explore how the Reformation's call back to Scripture laid the groundwork for returning to biblical simplicity.	<i>Luther's 95 Theses</i>	<i>Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion</i>	<i>Campbell's The Christian System</i>
2	July 20	Knowing the Character of God	Discover God's attributes through three different eras showing He is both knowable and beyond full comprehension.	<i>Tozer's The Knowledge of the Holy</i>	<i>Packer's Knowing God</i>	<i>Aquinas' Summa Theologica (selections)</i>
3	July 27	The Journey of Conversion and Confession	Examine authentic spiritual experience from autobiography's father to America's greatest theologian.	<i>Augustine's Confessions</i>	<i>Edwards' Religious Affections</i>	
4	Aug. 3	The Cost of True Discipleship	Challenge comfortable Christianity through voices that demand everything in following Christ.	<i>Bonhoeffer's The Cost of Discipleship</i>	<i>Platt's Radical</i>	<i>Chan's Crazy Love</i>
5	Aug. 10	The Pursuit of God's Presence	Discover that God desires intimate fellowship with ordinary believers across three centuries of seeking.	<i>Tozer's The Pursuit of God</i>	<i>Brother Lawrence's The Practice of the Presence of God</i>	<i>Thomas à Kempis' The Imitation of Christ</i>
6	Aug. 17	The Reality of Spiritual Warfare	Explore the spiritual battle for human souls through wit and fire-and-brimstone warnings.	<i>Lewis' The Screwtape Letters</i>	<i>Edwards' Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God</i>	
7	Aug. 24	Defending the Faith	Witness the golden age of Christian apologetics demonstrating Christianity's intellectual credibility.	<i>Chesterton's Orthodoxy</i>	<i>Chesterton's The Everlasting Man</i>	<i>Lewis' Mere Christianity</i>
8	Aug. 31	The Christian Worldview and Society	Understand how Christians should engage the world through voices from Rome's fall to modernity's rise.	<i>Augustine's The City of God</i>	<i>Chesterton's Orthodoxy (selections)</i>	<i>Colson's How Now Shall We Live</i>
9	Sept. 7	The Pilgrim's Journey	Experience the Christian life as a journey toward God through cosmic vision, everyman allegory, and practical action.	<i>Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress</i>	<i>Dante's Divine Comedy (selections)</i>	<i>Sheldon's In His Steps</i>
10	Sept. 14	Faith, Reason, and Wonder	See how Christianity engages both mind and imagination through rational foundation and imaginative power.	<i>Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia (selections)</i>	<i>Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings (selections)</i>	<i>Aquinas' Summa Theologica (selections)</i>
11	Sept. 21	Purpose and Meaning in Life	Compare contemporary approaches to purpose with insights from earlier authors on life's fundamental question.	<i>Warren's The Purpose Driven Life</i>	<i>Selections from various authors</i>	
12	Sept. 28	The Unity of Christian Truth	Demonstrate the remarkable unity of Christian truth across 1,600 years of faithful witnesses.	<i>Synthesis of major themes</i>	<i>Brief readings from multiple authors</i>	