

Church History

Unit 1

Historical Methodology

Manuscript



thirdmill

Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

© 2014 by Third Millennium Ministries

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, Third Millennium Ministries, Inc., 316 Live Oaks Blvd., Casselberry, Florida 32707.

ABOUT THIRDMILL

Founded in 1997, Thirdmill is a non-profit Evangelical Christian ministry dedicated to providing:

Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.

Our goal is to offer free Christian education to millions of pastors and Christian leaders worldwide who lack sufficient training for ministry. We are meeting this goal by producing and globally distributing an unparalleled multimedia seminary curriculum in English, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Spanish. Our partner ministries are also translating our curriculum into more than 20 additional languages. Consisting of graphic-driven videos, printed instruction, and internet resources, Thirdmill curriculum is designed to be used by schools, groups, and individuals, both online and in local learning communities. We also offer free, structured, certified biblical and theological training in multiple languages through our Thirdmill Institute.

Over the years, we have developed a highly cost-effective method of producing multimedia lessons of the finest content and quality. Our graphic designers, illustrators, and producers adhere to the highest production standards and use state-of-the-art equipment and techniques. Our writers and editors are theologically trained educators, our translators are theologically astute native speakers of their target languages, and our lessons contain the insights of hundreds of respected seminary professors and pastors from around the world.

In order to accomplish our distribution goals, Thirdmill has forged strategic partnerships with churches, seminaries, Bible schools, missionaries, Christian broadcasters, satellite television providers, and other organizations. These relationships have already resulted in the distribution of millions of video lessons to indigenous leaders, pastors, and seminary students. Our websites also serve as avenues of distribution and provide additional materials to supplement our lessons, including audio sermons, lectures, electronic books, and materials on how to start your own learning community.

Thirdmill is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) corporation. We depend on the generous, tax-deductible contributions of churches, foundations, businesses, and individuals. For more information about our ministry, and to learn how you can get involved, please visit www.thirdmill.org.

Contents

WHAT IS CHURCH HISTORY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?	1
Why is it important to study church history?	1
Why is it important for historians to examine the meaning and significance of past events?	2
How should the doctrine of God’s providence affect our understanding of history and historiography?	5
Why is it important for the church to understand God’s involvement in history when developing a Christian philosophy of history?	7
HOW SHOULD WE GO ABOUT THE TASK OF CHURCH HISTORY?	8
What do we mean by the term “history”?	8
How should we distinguish between history and historiography?	8
How important is perspective in history and historiography?	9
When and how did the academic position of the historian develop in classical society?	10
Is it possible to reconstruct an accurate picture of the past following the scientific method?	10
Did ancient peoples believe that their myths were true and accept them as historical accounts?	12
What is the one critical piece of information you would want to impart to a student about church history or from church history?	12
What strategies can students of history use in order to draw lessons from it for their own lives?	13

Church History

Unit One: Historical Methodology

With

Dr. R Scott Clark
Dr. Donald Fairbairn
Dr. Joseph D. Fantin
Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin
Dr. Todd M. Johnson

Dr. Craig S. Keener
Dr. Lin Yuan I
Dr. Bruce Little
Dr. Scott Manor
Dr. Dinorah B. Méndez

Rev. Timothy Mountfort
Dr. Las Newman
Dr. Paul Sanders
Dr. James D. Smith III
Prof. Jeffrey A. Volkmer

WHAT IS CHURCH HISTORY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Why is it important to study church history?

Dr. Paul Sanders

People who don't know their past, don't have roots, and they don't have identity, and they can drift. It's very important to understand from where we've come. Many evangelicals in particular have the impression that they came directly from the Acts of the Apostles, and to know that there were twenty centuries of history between then and now is extremely important. Being aware of history not only as the study of history, of dates and places and people, but also trends and movements, and seeing the wider view, more interdisciplinary view, of looking at history. So, it's about who we are; from where we've come. And hopefully better understanding where we're going.

Dr. James D. Smith III

One of the most significant characteristics of human life is our appreciation of story. We're telling stories by the living of our lives, and as we recall the past we look back to deeper roots and so forth; we look ahead at stories that may yet be composed. I think that's, if I can go devotional for a moment, part of what's so beautiful about Revelation 1 where it says that our Lord is revealed as the one "who is and the one who was and who is to come." And so, the church has a story, and we are a part of that. God's story is, in part, told through the lives of his people. And so, in various ways, we might say that the study of church history, knowing it, is valuable because our ability to work with a story is going to be central to our living of human life with others who have an appreciation of that dimension. So, we could say specifically about Christian history, what are some reasons to study church history? Because church history, Christian history, is everywhere in our culture. There are still symbols and stories and celebrations that find their deepest root in the Christian tradition. We should know that. Church history also liberates you from the tyranny of the present and of the recent past. This isn't the only way things can be done. This isn't the only wisdom that we can gain. We have some deep, deep sources for that wisdom. Life's too short, also, to learn by experience. We don't want to get all of our understanding by mistakes or by denying that we made mistakes — "no regrets." We want to look

back to moments where there are real lessons and real regrets, and we can draw life wisdom from that. Some have said as poets, the deeper our roots the higher we grow. Sometimes in reading Christian history, I find that it roots out my prejudice, that I understand that there are fascinating people in the past and reasons that they were involved in things, that help me stretch and understand them and my own generation.

It's also the case that Christian history shows how we got where we are today as a church, as denominations, as movements of Jesus' followers globally, to understand that in all the different peoples of the world. When we read history we're reminded of our mission. It prepares us to see over the years how people have received and embraced the gospel in their cultures. Christianity is a historical religion, it's based on a historical person, Jesus himself, and the roots before that in classic Judaism. And so, church history is comprehensive. It's really an extension of the biblical covenants. It is a discipline concerned with both *credo* and *communio*, if I can say that — what we believe, but also how we relate. It is an ally and a resource of theology, of missiology, and of Christian liberty and spirituality. And, as one of my teachers, George Williams, once said, "No one group can express the fullness of Christ." And that's a humility and a great blessing that we have... We are polyglots, we learn to translate eras and language across time and space. What a blessing it is to know the history of God's people behind that, the hands of our Lord who leads us toward his kingdom.

Why is it important for historians to examine the meaning and significance of past events?

Dr. Dinorah B. Méndez, translation

The study of history is fascinating precisely because it helps us understand ourselves. It's a science of interpretation — not exact — but it's not enough to know only dates, names of people, or places. Everything has a meaning. Everything has an implication for the present. So, when I was studying history in high school, or on a secular path — let's say in the secular schools — I didn't like history. I didn't get a feel for it. I didn't find a purpose in knowing dates or knowing names, but when I began to study Christian history, I realized that it made sense for many things — why we are now Christians, and why we are the church, and why we don't do certain things.

So history really helps us understand who we are. It helps us understand why we are who we are and how we have come to be who we are. That is, it gives us a whole series of panoramas, a whole series of explanations about our identity as human beings, and as Christians in particular. So, it seems to me that the study of history should be seen in this dimension. And one of the things I usually tell my students is that studying history helps us to understand ourselves, and so we should find it fascinating; we should see the importance of studying Christian history. If you continue seeing, let's say, history as simple events in the past — this happened; that happened — and you don't find the meaning, the purpose of this, it will not be interesting; it will not be important. But if it helps you understand — "Ah, now I

understand why we are seeing this phenomenon; where this doctrine came from; who had such an idea” — then that gives us explanations for our present and also gives us ideas that we should avoid. Sometimes we think that something is new, that we should try some kind of change, but it’s happened before, and it brought disastrous consequences. So, it gives us clues, gives us ideas of things we should avoid. So, history is very useful, and it’s a tool that we should use to understand each other better and to do the work of God better — to do it in a way that we don’t make the same mistakes, in a way that we understand better those who think differently from us. That is to find the purpose of the study of history, the implications, which is something more than simply records of events and of dates. I think that is a key in the study of history — above all, of Christian history.

Dr. Las Newman

I am a historian and I love history. I’ve loved history from high school. But, you know, my friends didn’t like history because for them history was about facts and dates and chronology. But when I learned history, I learned history as biography. History was about people, it was about their life and the significance of their life and what they did, how they created culture, how they created a society and so on. So, history for me became an exciting course of study because I was learning what people did, how they lived their life, what their life meant to themselves, their families, their community, to their nation. But importantly, what was the meaning of all of this? So, for me I was always searching for meaning in history, in historical events. The First World War, the Second World War, or any event that occurred in history, I wanted to know why, what caused it, what contributed to it, could it have been avoided, what lessons were learnt from it, and so on. And I later discovered that in history ... history is involved in everything. I mean, if you go to the doctor, you get sick for example, you become ill and you go to the doctor, the doctor would examine you, and he’d want to know about your past, you know, how you lived, what you ate, what you did before and what may have caused or contributed to your illness. So, history is dealing with this — causation. But it is also dealing with impact, it’s dealing with meaning and significance. So, history and philosophy kind of go together in the sense that historical occurrences are occurrences which take place in history, but one has to also find why or in what ways. What caused these things, and what can we learn from them? You know, is there anything to be learned from history? Otherwise, you keep repeating history. As I said, you know, if you never really stop to consider these things, you repeat them. And so, history is very important that way. And it’s important for people who study history to always be looking for meaning and significance, because it’s in the meaning and the significance of events that occur that you understand the importance of dates and chronology and so on. So, to me, history is a very exciting thing. I know friends of mine really do not like history and do not like the study of history, but I think it’s important to pursue it because it enriches your life when you discover why things occur and what you can learn from them.

Dr. Lin Yuan I, translation

If historical studies only explore the events themselves, then historical studies are completely meaningless, because historical analysis actually includes an interpretation of history. So, whether it be history itself, the philosophy of history, or the theology of history, we all need to enter into an interpretation of history before we can find the true meaning of history. For a Christian historian, this is of the utmost importance. Ordinarily, history is viewed through the lens of philosophy, so it can go in all sorts of different directions. But the interpretation used in the theology of history is to think about all of history from the point of view of God or the Bible. The result of this interpretation can better help a Christian think about the past and can lead to a way of life that is more spiritual, or rather, more in line with the truth. We need to interpret history in order to understand its true meaning. That is the true direction we should take.

Dr. Bruce Little

Historians ought to consider not just the facts, dates, events when considering history. They must also consider meaning and significance. And why is that important? Well, it's important because, first of all, as human beings we're not interested in just the facts. We really want to know the meaning of something. If we see an event, we then think to ourselves not, "Oh, there was an event," we say, "Ah, how did that happen? Why?" ... So just naturally humanity is going to ask that question, hence historians must look for an answer. It's what we would call "doing intellectual history," that there is significance behind an event. Again, if events are only the result of some kind of a mechanical cause and effect without anything outside intervening, that if I do not have any choice in the matter of what happens, if I am just doing what my DNA tells me to do, or my chemical reaction in my brain caused an event, then, of course there isn't any meaning. But that goes against everything we are as human beings. We do want to know about meaning. We do want to know, what is the significance of this? Now, not only that, not only is it because we're human beings, but also for the sake of humanity itself, because if we just see an event without its meaning or significance, then we don't know whether that event should be repeated or not. So, if we know what the significance was or the meaning was, then it clues us in to say, "You know, we ought to do something so that doesn't happen again," or "We ought to do more of that because it has really great significance to us." So, I would say, on two levels. One is it's intuitive for humanity to ask the "Why?" question. Everybody knows that have had children, that's some of the first questions they ask. Nobody told them to ask that question. They aren't just interested in the facts. So, that's one reason we ought to do it, because it meets the need of humanity. But the second thing is it helps to secure humanity in that we recognize, "Oh, that wasn't just an event, it had significance, it had meaning." And maybe the meaning is not what we wanted, so then we look back and say, "Maybe we need to do a corrective here."

How should the doctrine of God's providence affect our understanding of history and historiography?

Rev. Timothy Mountfort

If you understand God's providence with the help of historic confession, for example like the *Westminster Standards*, you come to realize that providence is something that is very uniquely, very directly tied into history and historiography. In the *Westminster Catechism* providence is defined as "God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing of all his creatures and all their actions." And so, combining that with a passage, say for example, Acts 17:26 where we see God ordaining every human being to live where they live and at what time they live, we come to understand pretty clearly that history and historiography — which is how we view history, how we study history, how we process history — are very much a part of God's providential hand, working things out in the lives of human beings for his purposes.

Dr. Donald Fairbairn

One of the preconditions for the modern approach to writing history, or for modern historiography, if you want to call it that, is that the researcher be impartial and be as objective as possible. But the problem with that understanding is that historical material isn't impartial. The significance of any historical event doesn't lie with the bare fact of the event itself. It lies with the way that it is interpreted. And if you try to remove any hint at interpretation, you're trying to do something that's impossible. It is better to be honest about the way we're trying to interpret events than to pretend that we can simply describe them without any interpretation. So, for example, when a modern secular historiography says, "I am just trying to be impartial," what he's actually doing is removing any divine causality from history and looking only at human causes of events. But from a Christian point of view, that would be a miswriting of history because we believe that God has been very adamantly involved, very fervently involved in the history of his people, obviously so in the time of the Bible, but we believe that about God's working in the history of his people in the church as well, even after the end of the Bible. And so, from a Christian point of view, we should be open to interpretations of history which try to make good estimates of what God's providential action might be. In the case of biblical history, the interpretation given to us in the Bible includes God's providence. In the case of Christian history after the Bible, we don't have a divinely-inspired interpretation, but we can still make good guesses and good estimations about the way God's hand has been at work in the events of history.

Dr. Joseph D. Fantin

The doctrine of God's providence, which of course is incredibly important for all of us, on the one hand it shouldn't affect our viewing of history because history is going to unfold, but on the other hand, we always have to remember that God himself is in absolute control of everything. However, I think sometimes when we think of that in a more popular setting, it tends to come off as almost robotic, predetermined, etc. But

I think God's providence is complex enough to handle what appears to us and what actually is, I guess, factually the unfolding of history. So, on the one hand there are events that do contribute to the spread of the gospel. For example, you have Alexander the Great in his conquests made it possible for Greek to be spoken essentially from, you know, the Greek area all the way through to India, and once you get the Romans it goes all the way out to Spain. You have events like the Maccabean revolt which provided New Testament topics like the distinction between Jew and Gentile, that fighting being more acute because of this. And God could have spread his gospel any way he chose. He could have easily come down from Pluto with a golden message and done everything, but for some reason he chose to work through history. And therefore, we can see that as providential, but like I said, I think it's important to recognize that our idea of "providential" may be far too limiting for God. And when we actually observe it, it looks like natural flowing of history.

Dr. Dinorah B. Méndez, translation

I think it's essential to consider that the providence of God affects our understanding of history and historiography, and we would have to make a distinction between these two concepts. History could be understood as the real events that occurred, but it's not the same as what is recorded, which is what we study through historiography. We really never could say that we know history fully or in an impartial or neutral way. We always have lenses that depend on the historian who recorded the events — what he chose to record and what was set aside. It is his own perspective. Later, the historians who review what was recorded also have their own lenses. Therefore, they'll understand from what was recorded what seems to them to be the most important, and they will put aside what they don't consider to be important or what they do not like or what they do not agree with through their own lenses or way of thinking. Therefore, history differs — the real or the reality is different from what is recorded for us, which would be what we clearly understand of that reality. So, the providence of God for us as Christians is fundamental. It is God who controls this reality in which we live. It's also a doctrine, a teaching of the Bible, that God did not create the universe and humanity and let it go — we could say "abandoned it" — without any worry, without any care, without any support, but he is always vigilant or controlling this history. Therefore, this is why Christians say that God is the Lord of history. It is he who controls history. So, that is the teaching of divine providence. If God is seeing what is happening in the 20th or 21st century, he is seeing it from eternity; he has a complete perspective. This is what his providence consists of. I can catch a glimpse only as far as my life reaches — 50, 70 or 80 years. My perspective is minimal, but God has the complete picture.

Dr. Bruce Little

The doctrine of providence has a great importance to how we should study or understand history or historiography. If we understand providence as God's intervention, God's involvement in some kind of a daily dynamic way, then that will affect how we view history and how we write history, thinking of historiography. So, in that case we would say, we don't live in a closed system, that history is not simply

a series of cause and effect, whether it be chemical, biological from the brain activity, or however one thinks of that, that history is more than just cause and effect of material matters. If we take providence realistically and take it at its face value that God really does work in time and space, then we have to say, when we look back over the past, we have to recognize that some of the events are not the result of a human cause and effect, material cause and effect, or some would say a physical cause and effect, but rather, it's God who has intervened. So, we can look at the biblical narrative, for example, in the Old Testament, and there we can see where — for example, the parting of the Red Sea. Well, that's a part of history, and though people have tried to figure out some kind of a naturalistic way to explain that, that in effect, that shows up what their philosophy of history is. Or of course we could take a more phenomenal example, and that would be the resurrection of Christ. How is it that we explain an empty tomb? Well, if you don't have the notion of providence, then you will try to find some kind of a naturalistic explanation that will explain why the tomb was empty. So, understanding the providence of God will have, I would say, a great impact on our view of history and our view of historiography.

**Why is it important for the church to understand God's involvement
in history when developing a Christian philosophy of history?**

Dr. Paul Sanders

Our understanding of history is so clear and so much linked to our theology, and so, if we're looking at history from a Reformed perspective, for example, we look at it as the action of God's sovereignty and the reflection of his glory in history. And so, we use that as a grid from which we analyze, not simply the events that are taking place, but what God is trying to do through all of this. It's basically, in a word, trying to make sense of what God has done in the past. Even in the period of the Middle Ages when so many people, evangelicals in particular, would think that somehow God might have been on vacation. If we try to see how that whole period of history, in Western church history, for example, fits into God's wider purposes, then we have a wider view of what God is doing, and we have a wider view of our place in this tapestry of history which goes from eternity to eternity. That is, theologically reading history. And, of course, when we read history we want to do it more than just theologically, we want to be interdisciplinary, we want to use the other approaches to history, human society, how psychology and the other disciplines of human sciences help us to understand better what has taken place, what has taken place. For me, and as a student of theology, I think it's so important that we read church history through a theological grid.

HOW SHOULD WE GO ABOUT THE TASK OF CHURCH HISTORY?

What do we mean by the term “history”?

Dr. Donald Fairbairn

The word “history” is complicated by the fact that it is really used in two quite different ways. One would be to say, history is what really happened, and that’s sort of the popular use of the word history. But another way of using the word history is to say that history means that which we can verify by the methods and the techniques of historiography. So, for example, if we say that somebody disappeared from history after a certain point in life, obviously we don’t mean that nothing else happened to him. What we mean is that we don’t have any records of what happened to him after that point, and so we can’t write history according to the canons of historiography about that person’s life.

Prof. Jeffrey A. Volkmer

History is a complicated and, indeed, sometimes misleading term. It can mean at least two things, as I, sort of, have read histories and read historiography. So, history can refer to the actual events that happened in times past. Like, “I crashed my car yesterday.” Well, that’s history. Well, that refers to an event. History can also mean the narrative that weaves historical events together... History, oftentimes, is meant to refer to just the historical facts themselves. So, it’s good to kind of have that in mind, that ... you can’t get away from the fact that there is a narrative involved. Someone comes in and writes a story that can connect these events together.

How should we distinguish between history and historiography?

Dr. Las Newman

How do we distinguish between history and historiography? Well, history is about the past. Historiography is about writing about the past... One of the historians I love is a Jewish historian called Eric Osborn, and he’s written a history of the nineteenth century, he’s written a history of the twentieth century, and also the eighteenth century. So, he writes about the centuries. He’s doing historiography. He is writing about how people think and write about history. That’s historiography. Historiography is writing about history. And you can discuss that in different ways because different people write from different perspectives about history. What history says is just what happened. It’s just telling the story of what happened. One of the amazing histories that I read is a history of the Mediterranean. You know, can you imagine somebody sitting down and writing the history of the Mediterranean Sea? Well, what’s that story? What is the story about? It’s going to tell you about the story, where it began and how it traveled and what countries it passed through and the shipping and the transportation routes and so on. And that’s history; that’s good history. Now, if somebody comes up and does another version of that, you compare

the two, and then you are producing historiography. You'd be writing about how those people wrote about history.

Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin

There's a real distinction between what we call history and historiography. Historiography is the study of history. It's the study of the methods, the philosophy of history, how it is that historians go about history. It's not actually the study of history itself. History, the events that take place, the investigation of the causes, the significance of those causes, etc., that's one thing. Historiography is the methodology by which we study history, the philosophy that we bring to the study of history.

How important is perspective in history and historiography?

Dr. Scott Manor

History and historiography are two separate but related things... And that's important because when you look at something like the early church, you will notice today that there are a number of different types of historiography happening, and so you would have something, for example, there may be a Catholic view historiographically, which is that this is the early church beginning with a long sequence of an apostolic succession to the bishops and popes that we have had over the centuries. You might look at something like the Reformation both through history and historiography. On the one hand the same events happened, but the way that we write about them, the way that we understand them, the way that we interpret them, it's creating a narrative that tells a story. And so, depending on where you stand and looking at what happened historically, that will influence the way you write about it. That will influence the way that you talk about it. So, a Catholic view of the Reformation, for example, will read very differently than a Protestant view of the Reformation. And you could divide that even further along. A Lutheran view of the Reformation would differ from a Calvinist view of the Reformation. And a lot of that is because we are approaching the same events, but we're doing so in a way that comes at it from a particular angle, and that angle is important because we all have it. It's inescapable. Whenever we talk about something we are going about the process of interpreting it in one way or another.

Dr. Todd M. Johnson

Because many people from many different backgrounds study history, they notice different things, and they report on those different things. Perspective plays a huge role in historiography... It might seem like a bad thing to not have access to actually what happened, or what actually happened in history, but this is actually good news because what it means is that all of us from all different perspectives highlight certain things, and we get a fuller picture of what's happening in history. But we should never think that we have full access to the story. It's something that requires many different people studying from different backgrounds and cultures in order to see what actually happened.

When and how did the academic position of the historian develop in classical society?

Dr. Craig S. Keener

In Greek and Roman society, they actually didn't have people who were full-time historians. Mostly what you had were orators who were professional public speakers. They would speak in political settings and sometimes in courts and so forth, and they would compile histories because histories were useful for giving examples for orators: moral examples, political examples, what to do or not to do in a military expedition, and so forth. So, they found meaning in history. They saw history as useful, but they also saw their role as being very careful to stick to the facts. And both historians and non-historians said that was the rule of historians. But again, it wasn't a full-time job just by itself. It was usually something that somebody did on the side. So, when we read about Luke being an historian and Luke being a physician, well, that was not atypical.

Is it possible to reconstruct an accurate picture of the past following the scientific method?

Dr. Donald Fairbairn

Many people in the modern period regard science as being a great authority and they say things like, "If you want me to believe something, you need to prove it to me scientifically. You need to prove it to me in a laboratory." What people often don't recognize, though, is that the science of history has a different set of criteria than sciences like chemistry or biology. You can't bring George Washington into a laboratory in order to study him and to try to prove what happened in his life. Historical verification of events follows a different kind of method than the scientific method. It is rigorous and can even be called scientific, but it's a historical method. It's not scientific method *per se*. Nevertheless, there is a lot about biblical history and the history of God's people that we can corroborate by means of sciences like archaeology, geography, anthropology, and we can also historically look at different sources and try to weigh the accuracy of those sources and can try to produce an accurate version of the story of what actually happened. So, there are various different sciences that are involved in history, and all of those sciences can be useful, but the bottom line is, something can have really happened even if we can't prove it, even if we can't demonstrate it in a laboratory, because, in fact, we can't demonstrate anything historical in a laboratory.

Dr. Craig S. Keener

The scientific method technically involves observation and experimentation. If something is true in terms of the laws of physics or so on, it should be replicable, you should be able to replicate it. History doesn't quite work that way, in that, we can't replicate it. That is, you want to find out how somebody died, you can't kill them again to get that information. You have to look at the surviving evidence that's there.

So, for history we especially work with witnesses, we especially work with records, we work with artifacts and so on. But we also look for patterns, but they're not replicable in the same way that the scientific method is.

Dr. Lin Yuan I, translation

Certainly, past historical studies have generally used the scientific method. It wasn't a completely fruitless endeavor, but neither can it completely understand how a particular event happened. The scientific method is highly credible but incomplete. This is one reason we cannot completely believe or rely on the scientific method. We indeed need an empirical method of study, but we also need an objective theological attitude to integrate with those methods. I believe that it is only when we can successfully integrate these methods that we can truly return to all of the spiritual lessons that God wants to teach us through this historical event. I'll say it again and again: we need the scientific method, but we also need theological methods. When we place these two methods together, then we'll more easily return to the spiritual lessons that the historical event wants to teach us.

Dr. R. Scott Clark

I think it is possible to reconstruct an accurate picture of the past. I'm not entirely certain that science has a great deal to do with it, because when we say "science" we think of a particular method, or at least when we boil it down to its sort of caricature or most basic elements, we think of something that we can reproduce in a laboratory. And so, obviously, when we're talking about history we're not talking about reproducing something, but I do think it is possible to tell the truth about the past. In fact, that's how I define my job. It is telling the truth about the past as best we can. If we don't say that we can tell the truth, then I think we've fallen into skepticism. So then, what are we doing? And, of course, there are some scholars who would say that, well, we can't know the truth about the past, and so, either we'll make things up or it's irrelevant. And again, I think that nihilism, futile, and unduly skeptical. At the same time, I add the qualifier "as best we can," because there are real challenges — people in the past lied; people in the past got things wrong; people in the past are dead; they're not still talking to us; people in the past didn't always leave records. The records they left are not always complete or not always accurate, or are misleading in some way. So, we have real challenges in interpreting the past. Nevertheless, I think history itself tells us that we can know the truth. At the same time, we're always correcting, so I never make fun of revisionism. Revisionism for me isn't an epithet. For me, it's a way of life. I've made my professional career, in a sense, or spent my time as a scholar in terms of my academic publishing, correcting the story about, for example, Reformed orthodoxy, which, for maybe a century or more, a century and a half, was fundamentally flawed and not particularly well-grounded in the facts and in primary sources. So, at the same time, I think we've been able to come back and tell a more accurate story by going back to what actually was, what actually was said, what actually was written. And so, I think that encourages me to think that yes, we can, over time, come to learn what was, or come close enough to be able to be confident about it.

Dr. Bruce Little

There is a question about whether or not using the scientific method we could reconstruct an accurate view of the past. Now, just being quite honest, the true scientific method would have no value for us, because a true scientific method requires some kind of repeat of an experiment, so we know that that's not what we're talking about. So, we're probably talking more about what we call "operational science" or maybe "origin science" instead of operational science. So, I'm going to suggest that probably scientific materialism, or scientific method, can't really help us a whole lot in that. But let's look at, is it even possible to reconstruct accurately the past, which we call history? And I would say, it's probably not possible to do it accurate. Of course, what do we mean by accurate? If we simply mean by accurate that we don't misrepresent, well then, I think that's possible, but I don't see how the scientific method could help us in trying to establish some kind of an "accurate," because scientific method works out of a philosophy, a framework, and so if they applied it, it wouldn't be of much help to us because their interpretation would be influenced by their philosophy. So, I think we'd have to look somewhere else if we want to try to construct a somewhat accurate view of history.

**Did ancient peoples believe that their myths were true
and accept them as historical accounts?**

Dr. Joseph D. Fantin

I think ancient people, much like ourselves, would have varied widely on whether or not they believed the myths and the stories that they were told. So, you would have a variety. I suspect a lot of people would have, they would have believed the stories as they were written. My suspicion is that more of the people who were more educated or better educated would have maybe questioned them a little bit more. But nobody would have probably questioned the importance of those stories and the meaning that they often had. And again, that reflects a lot like we might do today.

**What is the one critical piece of information you would want to impart
to a student about church history or from church history?**

Dr. Paul Sanders

The one critical lesson, from church history in 5 minutes... I think that I would tell this particular student that all of church history has meaning for his own identity and ministry, and not only the early church in the 1st century, but the rest of the early church period, and then into the middle ages. I would tell him also that all of church history, not just the history of the word "church" in the West, but also the history of the church in the East — which is often neglected in church history manuals — is so very, very important, and that the East and the West, Eastern and Western churches, together are church history. Not simply the Latin Church, the Western church. Often

in our church history courses, we divide between the Reformation, up until the Reformation, and then after the Reformation in the West. In the East, church history courses go up to the Great Schism in 1054. The whole mysticism and spirituality of the Eastern Church is often neglected in our Western church history courses. And so, having a view of church history that combines both the church in the East and the West, and understanding that all of that somehow is to be processed and integrated as part of our history and our identity is so very important, and that's what I would try to do, to give that wider view of what God is doing and has done in church history.

**What strategies can students of history use in order
to draw lessons from it for their own lives?**

Dr. Paul Sanders

One strategy is learning to take a step back from the events of one's own life, to look at one's own history, and to analyze from where one has come and, in light of that, to try to see more clearly where they are being led, where God is leading them because of their past. And *The Making of a Leader* is a famous book that tried to do just that, looking at one's own history. And, in the same way, as we look at the history of movements, our own denominational group, our own church, our own heritage as a people group of some sort, then taking a step back from that and looking at that history at those roots, extremely important. If we don't do that, then we become tributary to what's going on today, events of the present, without being able to take that step back and analyze what's happening to us. So, I think the general — whether it's individual lives, whether it's the groups to which we belong, whether it's the bigger picture of the church in its global nature, as well as it's past — that taking a step back. As we say in French, we take a step back to make a longer jump.

Dr. R Scott Clark is Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Westminster Seminary California.

Dr. Donald Fairbairn is Robert E. Cooley Professor of Early Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Charlotte, NC.

Dr. Joseph D. Fantin is Associate Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin is Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality, as well as Director of The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Todd M. Johnson is Associate Professor of Global Christianity and Director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Dr. Craig S. Keener is the F.M. and Ada Thompson Chair of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Dr. Lin Yuan I is Professor of Systematic Theology and Practical Theology at Bandung Theological Seminary in Indonesia.

Dr. Bruce Little is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Francis A. Schaeffer Collection at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Scott Manor is Assistant Professor of Historical Theology, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Dean of Faculty at Knox Theological Seminary.

Dr. Dinorah B. Méndez is Professor of Theology and History at Mexican Baptist Theological Seminary.

Rev. Timothy Mountfort is Academic Dean at Western China Covenant Theological Seminary.

Dr. Las Newman is President of Caribbean Graduate School of Theology.

Dr. Paul Sanders is the former International Director of International Council for Evangelical Theological Education.

Dr. James D. Smith III is Associate Professor of Church History at Bethel Seminary, San Diego, and Adjunct Professor of Religion at the University of San Diego.

Prof. Jeffrey A. Volkmer is Assistant Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Biola University's Talbot School of Theology.