



Catholic Church Milestones: People and Events That Shaped the Institutional Church

William Frank Smith

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Catholic Church Milestones is a concise, easy to read introduction to the people and events that have shaped the Institutional Catholic Church from its beginning to the present day. Counting over one billion members worldwide, the Catholic Church is the world's largest Christian denomination and over the course of the last two thousand years has played a significant role on the world stage. Milestones presents the reader with both the good and not-so-good people and events in the church's history. Included are brief summaries of all twenty-one ecumenical councils; the highlights of several of the most notable papacies; introductions to several of the spiritual mystics who have enriched the church; and, descriptions of some of the world events that played a role in moving the church to where it is today. This is an ideal book for shared group discussion, as well as for personal reading and reference.

Milestones starts with a basic understanding that Jesus did not found a "church," rather his apostles and followers began small communities of believers after Jesus' Resurrection. In each of eight discrete time periods, the principle people and events are listed and discussed. Starting with the early local communities founded by the apostles, the first time period encompasses the early persecutions faced by the followers of Jesus and the transition of this new Way from a sect of the Jewish faith into a completely separate, mostly gentile religion. By the fourth century we see the dramatic change as this new belief system becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire, followed by the even more dramatic changes as the Roman Empire splits and then falters, leaving the Pope in Rome as a major player in the political life of the western part of the former Empire throughout the middle ages.

At the beginning of the eleventh century the first major split occurs in the Catholic Church, as most of the Eastern Churches reject the leadership of the Pope and form a new "Orthodox" union that exists to this day; followed some five hundred years later by a major split in the West, as Martin Luther and other reformers call for changes in the church, which Rome soundly rejected. Instead the Catholic Church turned inward and put up further walls of separation in its counter-reformation?attitudes it would staunchly hold for the next four hundred years, even as the world changed with: the industrial revolution; scientific breakthroughs; communism; and, then two world wars during the first half of the twentieth century. Finally we look at the changing face of the church following the Second Vatican Council.

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