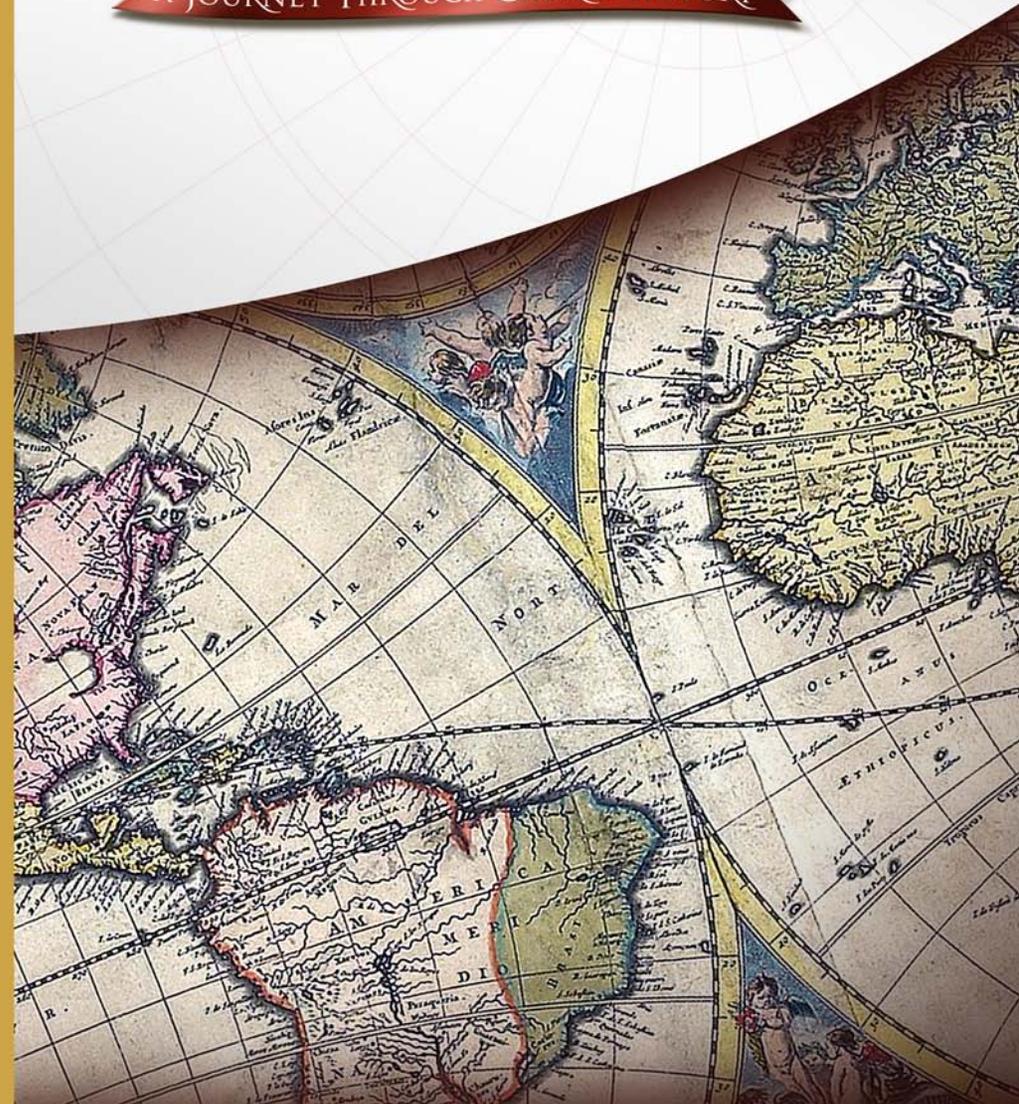


EPIC

A JOURNEY THROUGH CHURCH HISTORY



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About *Epic: A Journey Through Church History*

The history of the Catholic Church is the story of our family. It is the epic story of our ancestors in the Faith—the heroic men and women who shaped civilization and spread the Gospel throughout the world. Knowing this story is crucial to our identity as Catholics. Just as we would uncover exciting and interesting stories of our ancestors through the study of our family genealogy, we can uncover our Catholic past through the study of Church history. Knowledge of our Catholic story helps provide meaning to the present, and the present determines the future.

Many in our society misunderstand and even attack the Church for its supposed past misdeeds. Topics such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, and Galileo are used in an attempt to discredit the Church and its role in the world. What is the truth concerning these events and persons? How can you answer the objections?

Teachers and historians Steve Weidenkopf and Dr. Alan Schreck developed *Epic: A Journey Through Church History* to help Catholics learn their family story and answer common objections about the Church. Utilizing the same structure as *The Great Adventure*, *Epic* divides the two thousand years of Church history into twelve time periods. Central to the program is the *Epic* Timeline Chart, which illustrates each time period and identifies the main events in Church history, culture, and politics, as well as the popes, martyrs, saints, and doctors of the Church. Each time period is color-coded by the main theme of the period in order to facilitate memorization.

People who participate in an *Epic* study will learn:

- The two thousand-year story of the Church by understanding the main themes of each of the twelve time periods.
- The true story of the Crusades and the Inquisition.
- The revolutionary character of the Protestant Reformation.
- Why Mary Tudor, the Catholic daughter of Henry VIII is known as “Bloody Mary” in England while Queen Elizabeth, persecutor of Catholics, is known as “Good Queen Bess.”
- The real story of Galileo and the Church.
- The massive persecution of Christians in the twentieth century.
- The workings of the Holy Spirit throughout Church history and how your own faith story fits into “His-story.”

Participants will also be able to answer these questions and identify these events:

- How did a tiny band of brothers (i.e., the apostles) convert the greatest Empire in the world?
- Who built Western Civilization?
- Gregory the Great, Leo the Great and Nicholas the Great.
- Atheists; cannibals; baby killers.
- The Spanish Armada: great victory or lost hope for England?
- *In hoc signo vinces.*
- Where did the Christmas tree come from?
- October 7, 1571: Our Lady’s day.
- Martin Luther: reformer or revolutionary?
- The Crusades: pilgrimages or wars of conquest?
- Before September 11, 2001, there was September 11, 1683.

Materials

1. DVD/CD lecture series. Twenty, fifty-minute talks by teacher and historian Steve Weidenkopf. These presentations form the core of the *Epic* study.

2. Study Set

- *Epic 20-Week Study Workbook*. Your guide for the study. Contains background historical information for each lesson, discussion questions, an appendix with maps, helpful tables to follow complex historical events, and answers to the discussion questions.
- Full-color *Epic* Timeline Chart. The essential tool to understand and remember the great story of Church history in one handy, fold-out chart.
- *Epic* Bookmark. Holds your place in the study workbook. Lists all twelve time periods, provides the names and dates of all twenty-one ecumenical councils, and explains the reason for each time period color.

Eleven Effective Ways to Increase Attendance

Many people think history is nothing more than the boring memorization of names, dates, and events. However, when presented as a narrative, history is an exciting adventure story full of heroes, villains, great battles, and immense drama. When seen in this light, people want to spend the time to learn the story of the Church. Here are some practical and effective ways to increase attendance at your *Epic* study.

1. Place an announcement in your parish bulletin several weeks prior to the start of the study. (Samples are available on the Epic website: www.CatholicTimeline.com.)
2. Post promotional posters around your parish (We will send you full-color, 11" x 17" posters with your order).
3. Ask your pastor to announce your *Epic* study from the pulpit.
4. Show the [Overview DVD](#) after all Masses to generate enthusiasm and allow people to register at that time. (Announce this two weeks prior.)
5. Invite neighboring parishes to attend. Ask them to place an announcement in their bulletins and post flyers around their parish.
6. Use your parish website to announce the study.
7. Place an ad in your diocesan newspaper.
8. Run free community calendar announcements on Catholic, Christian, or secular radio stations.
9. Commission a group of five to ten “inviters” to personally invite people they know and encourage attendance. A personal invitation is extremely effective.
10. Ask participants to bring at least one friend with them.
11. Allow late registrations, even after the study has begun.

Course Outline

Session	Title
1	<i>Introduction/Mustard Seed</i>
2	<i>Persecution – Part I</i>
3	<i>Persecution – Part II</i>
4	<i>Conversion and Councils – Part I</i>
5	<i>Conversion and Councils – Part II</i>
6	<i>Missionaries and the Emperor – Part I</i>
7	<i>Missionaries and the Emperor – Part II</i>
8	<i>Crusaders and Scholars – Part I</i>
9	<i>Crusaders and Scholars – Part II</i>
10	<i>Crusaders and Scholars – Part III</i>
11	<i>Weak Leaders and Schism – Part I</i>
12	<i>Weak Leaders and Schism – Part II</i>
13	<i>Protestors & Defenders – Part I</i>
14	<i>Protestors & Defenders – Part II</i>
15	<i>The Catholic Reformation – Part I</i>
16	<i>The Catholic Reformation – Part II</i>
17	<i>Revolutions and Modernism</i>
18	<i>A World at War</i>
19	<i>The New Springtime</i>
20	<i>The Threshold of Hope/Conclusion</i>

Organizing a Church History Study Group

1. Form your group

There should be a group facilitator for every eight to twelve people. Group facilitators need not be expert historians or trained catechists, as the answers to the discussion questions are provided in the Study Workbook. Nonetheless, for a large group, there should be a leader (a priest or a catechist) to guide the group as a whole and to answer questions.

2. Order the following materials:

- The *Epic: A Journey Through Church History* Starter Pack (contains the twenty-part presentations in DVD format and one copy each of the Study Workbook, Chart, and Bookmark)
- An *Epic: A Journey Through Church History* Study Set for each participant.
- One copy of this Leader's Guide (included with group orders; available as a PDF file at www.CatholicTimeline.com).

3. Plan your schedule

Plan for at least a ninety-minute session every week. A twenty-week study can be held between mid-September and mid-February (allowing time for the holidays). As an option, you can hold two, ten-week sessions, or even two seven-week sessions followed by one six-week session. Brief overview presentations are included on the *Epic* DVD set to help break up the study into smaller segments.

4. Prepare to lead the study

Leaders and facilitators should be familiar with the program before it starts. All team members should view the first DVD session (or listen to the CD) *Introduction/Mustard Seed* before the beginning the study with the group. Team leaders should also familiarize themselves with the Study Workbook, especially the answers in the back.

Suggested Session Plans

Sessions 1–20

Step 1: Ensure that all participants have the necessary materials:

- *Epic* Church History Timeline Chart
- *Epic* 20-Week Study Workbook
- *Epic* Bookmark

Step 2: Open with a prayer, asking God to open your hearts and minds to learn the story of His Church and grow closer to her.

Step 3: Review the previous week's session. You may want to read the "Establish the Context" section to help everyone remember what was discussed in the previous week.

Step 4: Watch the DVD (or listen to the CD) presentation of Steve Weidenkopf's talk to learn the story.

Step 5: Discuss the questions in the "Take a Deeper Look" section (see "Facilitating the Lesson in a Small Group" below).

Step 6: If there is time, utilize the recommended responses in the appendix to further group learning—or remind participants to review the recommended responses at home before next week's lesson.

Step 7: Remind participants to read the "Establish the Context" section for next week's lesson. Close with the prayer found at the end of this guide.

Facilitating the Lesson in a Small Group

The following guidelines explain how to approach each section of the completed session when facilitating a group discussion of the questions. The section headings correspond to headings in the session format. Suggested times are based on a total lesson time of no more than ninety minutes.

A. Establish the Context (five minutes)

Use this section to help provide context to the time period. The presentations cover only the main points of each session and are time constrained, so many details are not discussed. This section "fills in the blanks" and provides the necessary background to the story. Read this section as a group before watching/listening to the DVD/CD, and remember to have the participants read next week's section as homework. After the first session, use this time to review the previous week's lesson.

B. Learn the Story (fifty minutes)

The DVD (and CD) presentations convey the main themes of each time period, as well as tell the story of the Church throughout history. Many people

come to the study with preconceived notions of historical events that are often formed by erroneous modern “pseudo-history” (often presented by the media and academia). This study provides a thoroughly Catholic perspective on the key historical events of Western civilization. Be aware that many participants may never have heard history explained from such a worldview. Encourage participants to focus on the main theme of the particular time period. Some may have difficulty remembering a specific pope or king, but that’s OK! The focus in *Epic* is on learning the main parts of the story, not every detail. Use the chart and highlight the main section (i.e., the numbered events) to help focus the participants’ learning.

C. Take a Deeper Look (thirty to forty-five minutes)

This section is crucial as it helps the participants learn the history of the Church by answering questions designed to provoke discussion. Here, the role of the facilitator is vitally important. A few things to keep in mind:

Understanding the Questions and Responses

Most of the questions have actual, expected answers, but there are a few where answers may vary. While the responses given at the end of the Study Workbook provide additional information and are helpful for remembering the story of the Church, the group should be encouraged to answer the questions before looking at the responses.

The Goal of Group Discussion

In this study, the goal of group discussion is to reinforce the main teaching points of each session, i.e., to help everyone learn the main points of each time period and thereby learn the story of the Church.

The Role of the Facilitator

The role of the facilitator is not to teach but rather to guide participants through the study questions and encourage further learning in Church history. Though it is not necessary for group facilitators to be trained catechists, it is desirable for them to have some experience or training. It is helpful if they have previously attended an *Epic* seminar. Here are some specific suggestions to help with facilitating the study questions:

1. When facilitating, ask questions that draw out a response rather than “yes”/“no” questions.

2. Allow participants to wrestle with particular questions and develop their answer—as opposed to having them read the answer provided in the workbook.
3. To ensure that you have adequate time to discuss every question, it may be helpful to assign someone the role of timekeeper to keep things on track. If a question is asked that no one can answer—and if the answer cannot be found in the *Epic* materials—assign someone to research the answer. Have them report back to the group the following session. If you need additional assistance, please contact us at www.CatholicTimeline.com.
4. Keep things on track. Be aware of “bunny trails,” i.e., questions asked that are off the “main trail.” Don’t let the topic get bogged down in side discussions; intervene and get the group back on the “main trail.” Come back to any “bunny trail” questions as time permits.

D. Application (five minutes)

This section can add much to the general discussion, as it helps participants apply the lessons of Church history to the issues of today. It shows how many contemporary crises have been dealt with successfully in the past and how the Holy Spirit has consistently and constantly upheld the Church. If time does not permit its inclusion, encourage the participants to work on it privately.

E. Wrap-up (five minutes)

Review the time period color, asking participants to study the period on the *Epic* Chart. Ask someone to present the theme of the period and to summarize its key events and its relation to the larger story. Ask other participants to contribute as needed.

F. Further Reading (optional)

This section highlights some of the excellent resources for participants to delve deeper into Church history. Time permitting, if someone has read one (or more) of the works listed, ask them to give his or her opinion of the book.

Prayer

The following is offered as a suggested prayer to end your weekly study. It will help the group to remember the time periods and their main themes. Close with a *Glory Be* or a *Hail, Mary*.

Leader (L): The history of the Church is *our* story. It is the story of the great men and women before us who brought the saving mission of Jesus to the world. Let us pray in the name of Jesus:

R: *Lord, help us as we learn our story!*

Mustard Seed

L: The Church began as small as a mustard seed but grew through the efforts of holy men and women.

R: *Help us to be faithful members of the Church and may the Church continue to grow.*

Persecution

L: Your holy martyrs were the “seeds” of future Christians.

R: *May we always be ready to “give an account for the hope that is within us.”*

Conversion & Councils

L: The Holy Spirit converted the Roman Empire to the Faith and guided the bishops in the development of doctrine.

R: *Come, Holy Spirit; renew the face of the earth and guide bishops and theologians in their work.*

Missionaries & the Emperor

L: You sent holy men and women into the world to spread the Gospel.

R: *Fill us with missionary zeal to emulate those who came before us so that others may embrace the Faith and your Church.*

Crusaders & Scholars

L: Men and women of this age used their talents for the defense of the Faith physically and mentally.

R: *May we use our talents to defend the Church from all attack.*

Weak Leaders & Schism

L: The men called by you and entrusted with the role of leadership in your holy Church failed in their duties and wounded the Body of Christ:

R: *We pray for our bishops, priests and deacons, may they imitate the Lord as servant leaders of the People of God.*

Protestors & Defenders

L: The Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, yet she has been cloven by separation.

R: *Lord, as you prayed, make the Church one.*

L: The Catholic Reformation

Filled with holy men and women, the Church is reformed and made stronger.

R: *The Church is always in need of reform. Send forth authentic reformers guided by the Holy Spirit.*

Revolutions & Modernism

L: The world is turned from God through physical and intellectual revolution.

R: *May the Church continue to proclaim the truth and be a bulwark against those who desire to remove God from the public square.*

A World at War

L: The rise of totalitarian regimes brings about horrendous violence that claims the lives of millions:

R: *Give us peace and an end to all violence.*

The New Springtime

L: The Church is oriented toward bringing the Gospel to a world in desperate need of the Redeemer through the work of the Second Vatican Council.

R: *May the Council be “a sure compass by which we take our bearings” in the New Millennium.*

The Threshold of Hope

L: You gave the Church Pope John Paul II to usher in the civilization of love by crossing the threshold of hope:

R: *Help us to be your instruments in building up a culture of life and love.*

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Can the DVDs be viewed without using the other materials?*

Yes, for private use. For group study, however, we highly recommend the use of the full-color *Epic* Timeline Chart and Study Workbook because of the added depth these materials provide.

2. *Can the Epic Study Set be done as a stand-alone Church history study, i.e., without using the DVDs?*

No. The DVDs are integral to the Study Set. Specific information needed to answer the discussion questions is contained only in the DVD presentations. While much of this information could be gleaned from other books on Christian and secular history, these works typically do not approach the subject from a Catholic perspective and will not provide one with an full and authentic understanding of the history of the Catholic Church.

3. *Do the DVD presentations answer every question found in the Study Workbook?*

Yes. In addition, the responses provided in the back of the Study Workbook give participants additional historical information to help them learn the story of the Church more fully.

4. *What if we still have questions after watching the DVD and no one in the group knows the answers?*

The Study Workbook provides a listing of recommended resources at the end of each period. These additional sources can be consulted to answer further questions. Also, the *Epic* website (www.CatholicTimeline.com) contains additional resources of information that can be downloaded as a PDF file. You can also contact the Epic team with any questions.

5. *Is the study appropriate for middle or high school use?*

In its current form, the *Epic* study is intended for adults. This being said, many high school students could also benefit from the program with a knowledgeable instructor as a guide. A teen version of the program may be developed in the future. Visit the *Epic* website (www.CatholicTimeline.com) for updates on upcoming *Epic*-related studies and initiatives.