



Church History, Volume One: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context

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Church History offers a unique contextual view of how the Christian church spread and developed. It did so, not in a vacuum, but in a setting of times, cultures, and events that both influenced and were influenced by the church. Church History looks closely at the integral link between the history of the world and that of the church.

Volume One explores the development of the church from the days of Jesus to the years prior to the Reformation. Filled with maps, charts, and illustrations, it offers overviews of the Roman, Greek, and Jewish worlds; insights into the church's relationship to the Roman Empire, with glimpses into pagan attitudes toward Christians; the place of art and architecture, literature and philosophy, both sacred and secular; and much more, spanning the time from the first through the thirteenth centuries.

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From Reader Review Church History, Volume One: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context for online ebook

Brenton says

This is a very fine text that works well at the seminary level. Ferguson is a careful scholar that has obviously read widely in primary sources. He constantly points his readers to classic texts in church history. His personal judgments are infrequent, but quite insightful when they come. For instance, when explaining the Christological controversies prior to Chalcedon, he writes, "Church leaders always seem to prefer to fight new battles in terms of old controversies with whose arguments they have become comfortable."

The text maintains a good narrative flow and incorporates insights from art, architecture, theology, and general history. Ferguson is careful not to subsume the entire medieval church under the auspices of the papacy. He has a good discussion of Celtic, Carolingian, and Orthodox varieties of the faith. He also ventures into eastern Christianities on occasion, but has a primarily western focus.

One criticism is his fairly cursory handling of the Crusades. The first is covered adequately, but later crusades receive minimal attention.

The subtitle is open to interpretation. "From Christ to the Pre-Reformation" means he brings you up to the Pre-Reformation, but does not include the Pre-Reformation. Ferguson concludes with Boniface VIII, and a tacit reference to the Avignon papacy and Babylonian captivity. Nothing is said of Conciliarism or early reformers like Wycliffe and Huss. (These may be left for a second volume.)

I've noticed that some reviewers have described it as "dry." Perhaps it says something about me, but I found it quite interesting. Then again maybe those of us who cut our teeth on Kenneth Scott Latourette, find almost anything delightful by comparison.

I plan to adopt this as a text for my church history class.

Je lis donc je suis says

This was a very informative book and I am glad I read it, but I think I worked on it for nearly 8 months. I love the topic and read two other books on the same topic while reading this one, but we will just say the author, though delightfully thorough is no David McCullough.

Normally I find it challenging to read through Church history once I pass the era of Saint Augustine, but it is amazing to see the vitality & light that none-the-less runs through the entirety of the history of the church, even if that light seems fainter in some epochs than others. The following (long) quote is from Saint Anselm of Canterbury who lived in the opening days of the 2nd millennium. It is people like this, who with a vitality like King David the poet of old and a mind like Solomon, beautifully shatter the stereotypes many of us hold of those who lived in this era by the inheritance of words that they have left to us:

"I pray, O God, to know you, to love you, that I may rejoice in you. And if I cannot attain to full joy in this

life, may I at least advance from day to day, until that joy shall come to the full. Let the knowledge of you advance in me here, and there be made full. Let the love of you increase...Meanwhile, let my mind meditate upon it [truth]; let my tongue speak of it. Let my heart love it; let my mouth talk of it. Let my soul hunger for it; let my flesh thirst for it; let my whole being desire it, until I enter into your joy, O Lord, who are the Three and the One God, blessed for ever and ever. Amen." (Proslogion 26)

Mark says

A good, comprehensive overview

This work of history by Everett Ferguson provides a good balance. It is comprehensive enough and provides enough details without become bogged down in minutiae that only academics would likely find interest. Rather than descriptions of historical events in isolation, they are placed within a narrative framework that includes how the past has influenced it and how the event influences the future. The events are described in the context of surrounding cultural, social, political, and other historical events. Even though ultimately the work describes the Western church, its connection to the Eastern church and other less known areas of the world are incorporated.

This book is written foremost as history. It describes both the good and bad of the church's history. It does not seek to defend negative actions, but seeks to explain how and why they happened.

The history of the church is the story of conflicts: doctrinal, ecclesiastical, political, philosophical. It gives credence to the saying, "There is nothing new under the sun." Nearly all church conflicts being experienced in the 21st century have similarities with past conflicts.

Some of the earlier chapters dealing with the first and second generations of the church provide context that help with interpretation of New Testament text.

The writing is very readable and accessible. I think every Christian ought to read it. This would be a good reference work for every church leader to own.

(This review is based on an advance review copy supplied through NetGalley and provided by the publisher.)

Joshua says

I've read a number of books on Church History and really enjoyed this one. His explanation of various aspects of doctrine is clear. I like the details he put in many of the stories that other writers left out. The earlier part of the book was better than the final section in my opinion. Otherwise, there are no complaints with this work.

JAnn Bowers says

This was your typical book about Christian Church and its faith. I guess I have read so many that I was just hoping maybe this one had something better to offer than the rest. If you study religion or an historian then

maybe you would enjoy this book more. Even though I found this book to be like the rest, I did like Everett's writing and researching abilities. I do give him kudos on that share of this book.

I received this book through NetGalley for an honest review.

Brent McCulley says

A fantastic release by Zondervan in a two part volume series, Everett Ferguson really wrote a comprehensive and well-balanced study in his *Church History: From Christ to Pre-Reformation*. I found Ferguson engaging and tactile, always offering a fair historical analysis without clouding down pages with his own historiography; however, he does offer such fresh batch of insights when he does present various opinions to the historiography, letting the historical pendulum swing naturally and freely.

Ecclesiastical history from the rise of the church to St. Augustine had be captivated, but even post-Augustine--notwithstanding most others--Ferguson writes in such a compelling way that I was charmed and interested in the progression of the Medieval Church, and in fact broadened my knowledge and scope of the given time period that had been hitherto very limited. In short, this is a fantastic piece of literature that serves well for engaging conversation from personal growth to a lecture-hall. Glad to have this text on my shelf.

Brent McCulley

Kyle Johnson says

This was my second experience of being assigned Ferguson's text, and this time I especially appreciated the consistent clarity Ferguson offers over an incredible breadth of topics. He remains fairly objective, though someone with a background in Restoration History could note a few occasions in which he provides extra emphases on matters like believers baptism, the development of instrumental music, or his perspective on the fallibility of the pope. A final upside of this text is his appetizer offering of primary sources throughout the chapters, lending readers a hand in deciding which primary sources to further pursue and study.

Nina says

Thorough, and well-researched, this would be a great book if Ferguson paid attention not only to the great accomplishments in the history of the Church, but also to atrocities it orchestrated, supported, or failed to condemn. Persecution of Jews, Muslims, heretics, torture, murder, expulsion are mentioned in passing, if at all, and Eastern Christianity receives a lot less attention than Catholicism in this study.

Sophia says

Extremely dry but packed full of everything having to do with the church history - All the way from Jesus to the middle ages.

Yes, reading a chapter a week was very challenging I admit. But I do know ALL about the popes :p

Bill says

Another good Church History survey. Attractively presented (photos, sidebars, charts, online content etc), reasonably comprehensive (550 large format pages provides plenty of space), appropriately balanced. Quite readable, although not enough to bust out of the expected "boring survey" genre. Everett Ferguson's heavyweight scholarship in the field would lead me to rank this above other comparable surveys.

Kim says

I read this for my Church History class at seminary. It's readable and has some interesting material, but at times, but it wasn't as exciting as some other histories I've read.

Eustacia Tan says

Church History, Volume One is like what it says, about the history of the Church from the first century to the thirteenth century. I'm not even going to attempt to summarise contents, but the book basically looks at events, trends, and notable people in Church history. Each chapter also comes with a list of recommended resources, so you could (ideally) use this book as a starting point and then delve into certain issues or events.

I found this book easy to read and follow, even for someone like me, who has no formal education in Church history (apart from what I learnt in Sunday School). In fact, I was listening to one of my cousin's lectures of the Holy Spirit (she records her teachers and shares them with those interested) and I realised that it was easier to understand what the lecturer was saying, in part because I had already encountered the concepts and events mentioned in this book.

But though the book does explain the basics of certain theological issues (like the nature of Christ), because a certain level of understanding is needed to comprehend why the disputes were a big deal, I still found myself wishing for a theology textbook that I could use as a reference. So while the theology explanations are definitely adequate, they are not sufficient. Still, this is a history book so I shouldn't be quibbling.

And since Silence is still on my mind, or rather, it has been on my mind more than normal, I found myself particularly struck by the explanation of Christian persecution in Ancient Rome. In those times, religious functions were also used as expressions of political loyalty. And since Christians would not offer such sacrifices, they were seen as a threat to the Roman state. I thought that this was remarkably similar to the persecution depicted in Silence, which explains why it was controversial.

Oh, and while I'm on this topic, I also wanted to share that there was some discussion on whether Christians be persecuted on the basis of "the name" (aka being known as Christians) or for the crimes attached to the name. Christian apologists wanted it to be the latter, since they knew they were innocent, but guess which side won out?

I think that people interested in learning more about Church history should consider picking up this book. It's

accessible, and I was able to follow what the author says without additional lectures - though I'm sure that lectures and discussions would have made it even better.

Disclaimer: I got a free copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for a free and honest review.

This review was first posted at Inside the mind of a Bibliophile

Sojourner says

This is a very comprehensive work of history by Everett Ferguson which provides an overview of Church history. Zondervan has done a commendable job in bringing out a two-volume work on the history of the church. The author's work is laudable as he has done a fine job in balancing a clear but concise work without being bogged down by too much detail.

The writing is very eloquent, and the style greatly enjoyable. Both serious students and casual readers of church history will find the volume immensely valuable. It is a must for personal, church and Christian seminary libraries.

Josh says

Zondervan has released a two volume set of textbooks covering church history. They come in at around 1300 pages total and they look to be a great resource for students of all sorts.

These books are formatted beautifully. Zondervan did a real service by allowing plenty of room in the margins to let the reader make notes and doodles...assuming it is used in a lecture format. They also provided some great charts that summarize neatly large portions of important information.

There are no discussion or review questions included at the ends of the chapters. That may be a negative to some but I had no problem with it. I do not usually utilize them, but always feel a bit burdened with them sitting there...like I am doing a disservice to the book by not answering the question in 1000 words, double spaced in Times New Romans 12 point.

The books have in the back a wonderful, I repeat wonderful, timeline that shows in parallel columns political rulers, writers/thinkers, events and bishops. It allows the student to see events and people in perspective and is just plain old interesting.

Is the content of the book accurate? I can only assume so based on the reputation of Zondervan but I could offer no insight of my own into that question. That is simply beyond my knowledge. What I do know is that both of these books are approachable, informative, and entertaining and I would love to have these be a text in a Christian history course.

I received review copies to look at and provide an honest review.

Dr. Trent says

This review, by Dr. Nicholson, has been provided courtesy of Desert Bible Institute (www.desertbibleinstitute.com).

There was only one overwhelming problem with Everett Ferguson's book Church History Volume 1: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation. He waited until I was out of school to write it.

Right from the onset, I was impressed with this book. I remember, from my years back in college in the 80s, my history texts being filled with double rows of tiny type. I remember authors drowning on-and-on with circuitous sentences riddled with both archaic terms and unpronounceable jargon. Here instead is a book with beautiful graphics, relevant illustrations and photos, clearly identifiable, related materials, and an obviously coherent structure. I actually leaned over to my wife while reading this, who recently finished her advance degree in education, and she was shocked at how much thought, about the way students learn, was given to the structure of this book.

The wording of this book is as clear and well-organized as the format and the typeface. It is an unusually comfortable book to read. The author and the publisher obviously took time to proof the sheets in a way that allows the eye to flow over the page. This allows for both a faster and more relaxed reading of the text and therefore giving the student a higher retention of the material.. Additionally, the numerous maps, illustrations, and photos were placed in locations in which to optimize their effectiveness. The visuals used were large, clear, and always relevant to the topic being discussed.

Ferguson writes in a clear, professional style that is both accessible and academically challenging. He uses a recursive structure from chapter-to-chapter that is useful in seeing how a given instance in history had multiple repercussions on the modern day church. The only challenge to this is that he early on develops an information base and then steadily builds on it. The problem would be if professors skipped around in the book (not all that uncommon of a practice) they would need to be careful to explain some of the terminology or references that the author is making.

Oddly enough, one of my favorite parts of this book was the shaded margins that the author uses to add relevant but disconnected material. In this section, the author puts in quotes, verses, little known facts, and other forms of enrichment material that wasn't necessary to understand the narrative of the text but was nonetheless interesting and engaging. When there wasn't much in the way of additional material the author would occasionally use this space to overlap pictures part in and part out of the text proper. This, in combination with the myriad other formatting issues, makes this book perfect for the visual learner. It was a great pleasure to read a book that was written by an author aware enough about metacognition to format a book in a manner that facilitates better learning.

Trent Nicholson, Ph.D., D.Min.
Desert Bible Institute, President

Dr. Nicholson reviews academic, Christian living, and fiction books for a variety of publishers in an array of formats. He is never paid for any of his reviews. He writes these strictly as a courtesy to his students at Desert Bible Institute and for any other readers that might find his insights valuable. For more reviews or information, visit Dr. Nicholson's blog at drtnicholson.wordpress.com.

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NetGalley.com for the opportunity to both read your advanced copy and to provide this unpaid evaluation. All opinions in this review reflect the views of the author and not DBI, NetGalley.com, or the publisher.
