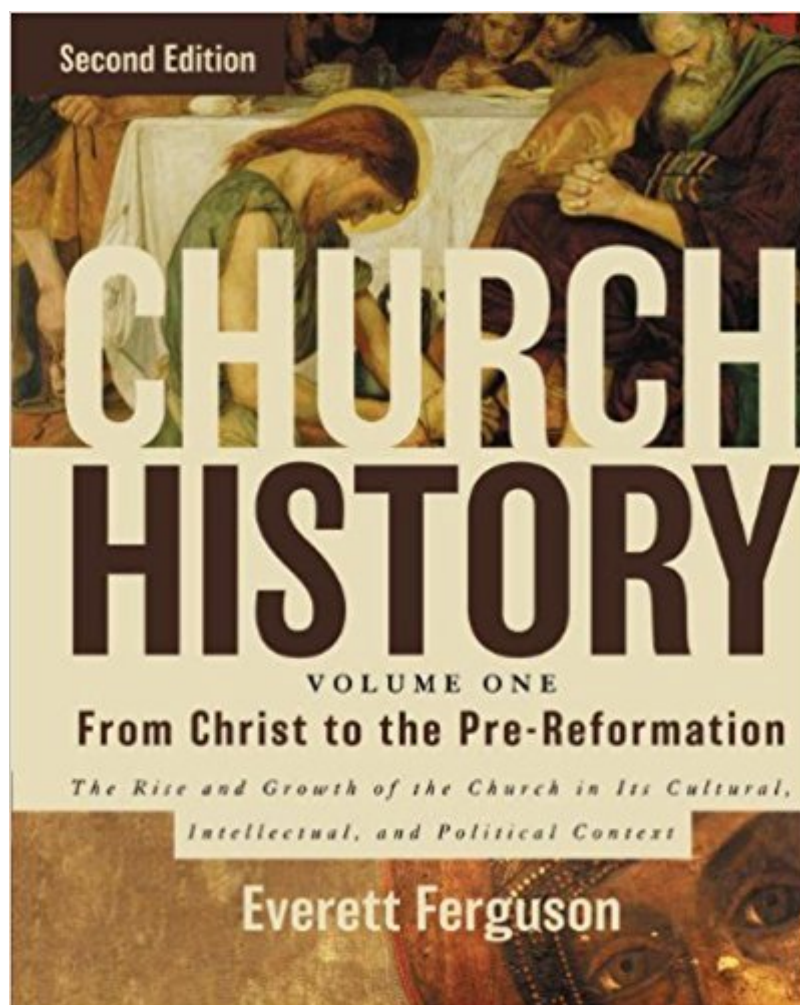


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Church History, Volume One: From Christ To The Pre-Reformation: The Rise And Growth Of The Church In Its Cultural, Intellectual, And Political Context





Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

Everett Ferguson (PhD, Harvard) is professor emeritus of Bible and distinguished scholar-in-residence at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas, where he taught church history and Greek. He is the author of numerous works, including *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, *Early Christians Speak*, and *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries*. He was also general editor of the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*.

Hard to review. Good read but could have been a bit more easier to read.

Just what son needed for school

Excellent and reliable history in a nice layout.

It was the text book I needed for school and I got it on time

I love history, but I'm not a historian. I especially love church history as it's important to know where you come from and who's in your family tree. With that being said, I won't be reviewing this book in respect to the accuracy of details. I'm sure you can find a review like that elsewhere. My review will focus on broad strokes. First, unless you are in school and forced to read through a particular church history book, you will want to find one that's readable. That can be difficult because the major market is academic. I found Church History strikes somewhere in the middle. It's certainly geared for academic study, but much of it is readable. I don't think your average Christian who enjoys reading will find moving through its pages difficult. Also, from my experience your every day Christian is least familiar with the early church (imprecisely called, but I'm using it regardless, for say, the years of 100AD-500AD). Many Protestants know enough about the Roman Catholic Church after 500AD and also are familiar with the Reformation in general. There's something shadowy in a lot of people's mind with the early church. I found Dr. Ferguson's discussion of the developments in this portion of history helpful. I thoroughly enjoyed the time he spends on major figures during this period. He's frank when discussing their strengths and weakness. He provides enough biographical detail to peek interests without slogging the reader down. This review is short, but I want to encourage those interested in church history--purchase a solid church history book you can use to learn your heritage and also for reference. I believe Dr. Ferguson has given us a solid resource in this regard. For its equal share of comprehensiveness, readability, and reference, Church History won't disappoint.

My first class in Christian history and, thanks to the assignments in it, I'm finding no mistakes but some interesting omissions. Not huge ones, mind you, but enough to bring it down a star. The second star is just because... it is a textbook. Let's face facts, there are very few textbooks in existence that are also entertaining enough to keep a person awake while reading them. This is not one of them.

I got this book when I started church history classes at the seminary. It was very useful for me as I

reviewed the subjects the teacher talked about later every day, and got more information about them. In my opinion, this edition has a good amount of contents and a good balance of details. In general, if someone needs more details about an event, it is better to read a specific book instead of a general one. For me, this book fulfills its premise, which is to be a general history book, that provides the reader with information about the main events in the church history. I also must highlight the illustrations. Every topic has pictures and images relevant to it, which enriches the reading/studying experience. Even though it is a good history book, it is not an easy read for the casual reader, but students, theologians and people in general who want to study the topic will find it very useful. Disclaimer: I received a copy from Netgalley in exchange for my honest review.

Use the knowledge of the past to help navigate the present toward the future. This is the underlying conviction of authors of history books and historians at large. This comprehensive Church history textbook, now into its second edition, is no different. Ferguson is Distinguished Scholar at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas as well as an author of numerous books especially on Church history. As an experienced historian, he wisely advises students to adopt these perspectives which I paraphrase as follows: 1) Big Picture Understanding: Know the data and details, but notice more the religious life of the people and the perspectives during that era; 2) Imitating the Good: For the periods and moments of faithfulness in the past, rejoice and reaffirm the imitation of them; 3) Avoid Repeating the Bad: For the periods and moments of unfaithfulness, learn from them and avoid repeating mistakes of the past; 4) Storying the Greatest Event in History: That Church history is to be studied because it is about the greatest thing ever to happen to mankind through the coming of Christ; 5) Compass for the Road Ahead: With historical consciousness of the past, one is better equipped to deal with the present and the future. Like many Church history textbooks, most of the "narrative thread" in this book will be on Western Christianity. Compressing the time of Christ to the Pre-Reformation means trying to frame nearly 1400 years into a 544 pages volume. This is a tough mountain to climb but having climbed it, Ferguson provides readers a bird's eye view from the summit. He sets the stage by helping readers appreciate the contexts in the Roman world, the Jewish world, and the Greek world, calling them the "three concentric circles of influence" for early Christianity. He brings readers through the life, the ministry, and the death of Jesus Christ, plus constant emphases on key doctrinal beliefs and theologies. On the Early Church, he begins with Antioch and slowly makes his way through the many churches mentioned in the book of Acts. He points out the many tensions that existed among the Christians in the first two centuries. There were the ritual disputes between the Hellenistic and Jewish believers; the battle against Gnostic

influences; the persecutions that seemed to grow unabated from early Pharisaic challenges to brutal Empire executions. If the first century was marked by persecutions and executions, the second century was notable through heresies and schisms. Ferguson helpfully highlights the lessons learnt through both good and bad times. For example, Ferguson poses the question of whether our doctrines and orthodoxy has been shaped by the presence of heresies. The conclusion is that orthodoxy was already present prior to any heretic beliefs. When the heresies came up, Church leaders were forced to ratify or to put down the Orthodox beliefs in writing. Century by century, Ferguson traces the development of Christianity as world powers fought one another; Church factions argue East and West; and political and religious lines demarcated in an increasingly complex world. Thankfully, the missionary movements continued to grow both East and West. On the East, despite problems such as the Iconoclastic controversy, the Islamic threat, and the terrible Crusades, the Byzantine church continued to flourish from the 9th to 11th Century, partly due to the strength of the Byzantine Empire. Just like the Eastern missionary movement that managed to reach out to the Slavs and Bulgars in Central Europe, the West too had their shining stars happening in the churches of England and Ireland. If Patrick was the "apostle to Ireland," Ninian was the "apostle of Scotland." Another major turning points of the Church and State relationships happened at the coronation of Charlemagne. Slowly but surely, perceptive readers will sense that the dark ages actually became fodder that planted the seed for Reformation. With power increasingly being used (and abused) by both imperial powers as well as the Church papacies, the Church descended upon a regrettable phase of the Crusades, the Inquisitions, and overt display of power. With the Crusades lied greater alienation between the West and the Greeks. With the holy wars laid discontentment among the peasants. During these times, the Monastic movement began its quiet rise in influence and positive developments for the society. There was the rise of Scholasticism with impressive advancements in theology and schools of learning. Commentaries were written. Theology becomes alive. Scholars such as Abelard, Anselm, and Aquinas led the way. The Augustinians, the Benedictines, and the Cistercians brought about new monastic vitality. Not only that, they were active in charitable causes, and helped spread the other developments such as arts, education, literature, rhetoric, and many aspects of modern culture. These positive developments were negated somewhat by "portents of decline" toward the end of the 13th century. The Church needed to be reformed. Heresy continued to be a problem. The political situation was increasingly unstable. It is at this point readers will be enticed to look forward to Volume 2 of this history series. So What?=====Appreciating Church history is perhaps one of the most important and effective way in understanding our modern culture. If we do not know our past, how can we

appreciate our present? How can we then anticipate our future. If we fail to learn from the past, we are likely to repeat the mistakes of the past. Ferguson moves through a noticeable chronological order of things which helps readers keep track of where they are. Sometimes, it can be a little confusing when the developments are happening at the same time but at different places. It is important to use the chapter titles as a marker when reading this book. Sometimes, it may be necessary to bookmark the table of contents and refer to them regularly so that one will not be lost among the details. I appreciate this book for four reasons. Firstly, it gives us a good bird's eye view of the development of Christianity from persecutions to coronation, that the gospel is powerful. Whether it is external persecutions or internal controversies of doctrines and heresies, it reminds me of the power of the Spirit to help the growth of the gospel regardless of circumstances. In fact, in the hands of a few, God will multiply. God will spread the gospel. God will make himself known as Jesus is lifted high up. Secondly, it helps us appreciate the roots of modern Christianity. For example, many modern atheists, agnostics, skeptics, and even believers will often point to the Crusades as the big black mark in Church and Christianity. While in some way that is true, in other way it can be unfair and misguided. The Crusades happen not merely because of religious motivations. It is more to do with political greed and cultural pride. Ferguson paid quite a lot of attention on the Islamic and Christian tussles, pointing out the parallels between the battles among kings and popes, and the unfortunate embrace of holy war that totally undermines the Ten Commandments and the laws that meant to protect rather than destroy. Come to think of it, suppose the Church was non-existent at that time, and there is a religion called "whatever," chances are, armies throughout Europe and Asia will be battling out in the name of "whatever" against the "non-whatever." This is because regardless of the religions per se, the human condition is sinful. Thirdly, the book is brutally honest about the nature of history. Both the ups and downs are boldly laid out. The mistakes are there for us to learn. The highs are there for us to remember how God had been faithful throughout history. It would have been tempting to try to put a positive spin on everything, and to downplay the negatives. Ferguson did not do that. He explains it as they are, so that readers can make their own interpretations and to recognize that we live in an imperfect world, and the past is no less imperfect than our own world. Fourthly, I appreciate Ferguson's weaving of all cultural, political, intellectual, and religious contexts. After all, religion not only shapes the culture around, the culture also shapes the religion. This is one reason why the title "Church History" can throw people off into thinking that it is merely a religious text or a text about Church. While the title is understandable to Christians, students, and seminarians, it may give non-believers an impression that it is limited only to Church. That is why in some places, people use "History of Christianity" instead. Finally, just like the way the Old Testament

ends in Malachi, where there seems to be an incomplete story, this book ends with the very brief summary of the narrative ups and downs. I suppose this is intentionally done, as Church history does not end at the 14th or 15th Century. It is the beginning of the continuing story of the greatest story ever told over and over again. I find myself wanting more. On to Volume 2. Rating: 5 stars of 5. conrade This book is provided to me courtesy of Zondervan and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. All opinions offered above are mine unless otherwise stated or implied.

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