



St. Francis Virtual House of Studies

**THE HISTORY
OF CHRISTIANITY**
An Introductory Bibliography



This is the largest cluster of bibliographies for three reasons. First, the discipline of history encompasses all of human thought, action and behavior, at least those things that have left a record. Second, the phenomenon of Christianity is more than two millennia old and has antecedents that reach much farther back. Third, this bibliographer spent his career as a Professor of History, and there is a professional bias at work here.

This and the other bibliographies in this section will cite works of analytical and interpretive scholarship and collections of primary documents. It will not contain listings for works that are exclusively descriptive or that present a chronology and little more. In spite of “History as Names and Dates” to which many of us were subjected in High School, the discipline is not dedicated to a compilation of one random fact after another in chronological order. The origin of the word “History” is from the Greek: ἱστορία, meaning knowledge gained through inquiry. The emphasis is on *knowledge*—not *information*, and on *inquiry*—not *memorization*.

Because History is an analytical and interpretive discipline, almost all of what follows will have some elements of the theological specialty called Ecclesiology. The two clusters of bibliographies will have some overlap, but there will be some distinct differences. For example, Hans Küng’s *The Catholic Church: A Short History* appears only in the historical bibliographies, his *The Church and Christianity: Essence, History and Future* appear only in the ecclesiological bibliographies, and the two volumes of his *Memoirs* appear in the both the historical and ecclesiological bibliographies. The first work has some ecclesiological insights but the major emphasis is on an explanation of the dynamic interplay between faith structures and external conditions (cultural, economic, social, intellectual, and political) creating both change and continuity. The next two works contain some historical insights, but both are intended as a systematic study of the nature of the Church. The two volumes of the memoirs have

Ecclesiology and History so intertwined that they belong in both sets of bibliographies.

1. Surveys of the History of Christianity

This section lists a representative variety of overviews: 1) one-volume useful “Through the History of Christianity with a Whoop and a Holler” treatments which are especially recommended for those who have no prior background in the History of Christianity; 2) more extensive two-volume treatments; and 3) more comprehensive multi-volume sets.

Justo L. González, ***The Story of Christianity, Volume 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation.*** New York: HarperOne, 1981.

Justo L. González, ***The Story of Christianity: Volume Two - The Reformation to the Present Day.*** New York: HarperOne, 1985.

Gonzales has arguably authored the best two-volume series presently available on the sweep of the History of Christianity. He is both thorough and concise and offers the reader a variety of different perspectives and historical methods.

Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, ***History of the World Christian Movement, Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453.*** Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001.

The authors assembled a consultation team of over 50 scholars from around the world and across a variety of Christian traditions to produce this work. They follow the spread of Christianity from the Middle East to Asia and Africa as well as to Europe. We look forward to the second volume of this valuable addition to surveys of the History of Christianity. When that appears, Gonzales may have some serious competition.

Hans Küng, ***The Catholic Church: A Short History.*** New York: Modern Library, 2003.

Küng usually write long books, and sometimes very long books. This remarkably comprehensive and insightful overview is contained in a mere 272 pages.

Timothy Paul Jones, ***Christian History Made Easy: 13 Weeks to a Better Understanding of Church History.*** Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing Company, 1999.

This is a useful book for those who want a brief (about 200 pp.) overview before tackling more comprehensive works.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500*, with a new foreword and supplemental bibliographies by Ralph D. Winter. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1975.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Reformation to the Present*, expanded to cover the tumultuous significant years 1950 to 1975 with a new foreword and supplemental bibliographies by Ralph D. Winter. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1975.

Originally published in 1953 and updated in 1975, this 1500 page two-volume work has no peer among surveys for meticulous detail. The volumes are encyclopedic, and frankly one can best use them in that way. The excellent index will allow quick access for valuable information on a myriad of topics. It does not have the sustained thematic and analytical focus of either the González or Irvin and Sunquist works, but is highly recommended as a resource book.

Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.

This is both excellent history and excellent ecclesiology. The author is particularly good at correlating the evolution of Catholicism with social and cultural change.

The Penguin History of the Church, Edited by Owen Chadwick. 7 Volumes. 2nd Edition. New York: Penguin, 1990 – 1993.

In the second edition some of the volumes have been updated and some have not. Nevertheless, the series remains a good introduction to the institutional history of the Church, but from an overwhelming European perspective. The constituent volumes are:

Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*. (1993)

R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*. (1990)

Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (1990)

Gerald R. Craig, *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648-1789*. (1990)

Alexander Roper Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution, 1789 to the Present Day*. (1990).

Owen Chadwick, *A History of the Church in the Cold War*. (1992)

Stephen Neill and Owen Chadwick, *A History of Christian Missions*. (1990)

A People's History of Christianity: The Lived Religion of Christians in the First Two Thousand Years, Edited by Denis Janz. 7 volumes. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005-2008.

Insightful essays by more than 100 excellent scholars on the wide variety of social and cultural contexts of Christianity throughout the world and over two millennia make this a rich resource. Excellent guides to additional reading are a wonderful bonus. The constituent volumes are:

- Christian Origins*, Edited by Richard A. Horsley. (2006)
Late Ancient Christianity, Edited by Virginia Burrus. (2005)
Byzantine Christianity, Edited by Derek Krueger. (2006)
Medieval Christianity, Edited by Daniel Ethan Bornstein and Denis R. Janz. (2007)
Reformation Christianity, Edited by Peter Matheson. (2006)
Modern Christianity to 1900, Edited by Amanda Porterfield and Denis R. Janz. (2007)
Twentieth-Century Global Christianity, Edited by Mary Farrell Bednarowski. (2008)

Bruce L. Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language*. 3rd Edition. New York: Thomas Nelson, 2008.

This is an excellent "starter" book for those with no background in the field but who want a more comprehensive introduction.

2. Specific Topics

Some scholars have produced works on the sweep of the history of Christianity concentrating on specific topics. All of the following are by one author, Jaroslav Pelikan, the late Sterling Professor of History Emeritus at Yale University. Although Pelikan produced excellent works in more specialized areas (and you will see his work cited elsewhere) he has also left a great legacy of more general treatments. Although there are other very good scholars who have produced meritorious works on specific topics in the general history of Christianity, Pelikan stands out in the field. The following titles are self-explanatory and appear without annotation.

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. 5 volumes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971 -1989.

The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition: 100-600. (1971)

The Spirit of Eastern Christendom: 600-1700. (1974)

The Growth of Medieval Theology: 600-1300. (1970)

Reformation of Church and Dogma: 1300-1700. (1984)

Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture since 1700. (1989)

Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, 1999.

Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in History and Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

3. Resource Books

Documents of the Christian Church, Edited by Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder. 3rd Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

This is a useful introductory sampling of the huge variety of documentary evidence for the History of Christianity.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone. 3rd Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 2003, 2005.

*This is an important resource book for the History of Christianity and all fields in Theology. The third edition has been released thrice in slightly different forms, but it is worth looking for the 1997 original which you can purchase for a fraction of the price of the two later versions. For causal use, one can also do well with **The Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2nd revised edition** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).*