



A Concise History of Christian Thought

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A Concise History of Christian Thought offers a succinct, readable survey of key Christian thinkers and significant theological developments from the church's inception to the present. In addition to surveying over one hundred important Christian thinkers from Justin Martyr to Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), the book also covers major creeds, councils, and documents. Representative extracts allow the reader to hear from each of the key thinkers in his or her own words. After having sold more than 50,000 copies in its earlier editions, the current edition has been refined and updated throughout and includes new material on key contemporary thinkers. It will appeal to church leaders, interested laity, and students.

A Concise History of Christian Thought Details

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Daniel Alvers says

This completes my required reading for Church History II. The work is definately concise and definately filled with a ton of frustrating stuff. It does not include figures such as Billy Graham or Charles Spurgeon. It covers a great deal of liberal theology and neo orthodoxy but very little in regards to pivotal missions thinking. I found the work to be extremely limiting and not a good introduction to a study of actual church history. It is definately a good addition to other works. Left on its own it would be a great waste of time.

Honza Prchal says

This is one of the most influential books I ever read.

I learn better through history, intellectual concepts, and short epigrams. This is the perfect combination of all three.

The history in the modern era is a bit trendy, and so over-emphaizes the people who made main-line Protestantism a dying proposition, even if they were not all Protestants, but the history of the Church Fathers, the Church Councils (and creeds) and the Reformation and Counter-Reformation is top notch, with perhaps a smidge too little on John Knox, someone I'd not realized was as thoroughly decent a person as Phillip Melancthon and Erasmus.

Making history and theology come alive in a format well suited for bathroom or night-stand reading is no easy feat, and this book does it.

Scott says

A great resource. Has nearly every major movement, creed, confession, person in the history of Christianity with a short little section introducing the topic. Remarkably, Lane is able to do that in a slim book (comparatively speaking).

James Ruley says

This work by Lane is a valuable resource cataloguing the primary theologians and documents of Christianity, from the Early Church to the end of the 20th Century. Lane provides a brief summary of each theologian's life, followed by a summary of his (or in a few cases, her) teaching and a catalogue of the most important books he or she authored. Lane also helpfully provides a minimum level of critique, clarifying the orthodoxy (or lack thereof) of a given theologian's teaching. This is a resource I will likely revisit many times in the years to come, and it provides a good starting point for further study.

Jesse says

This is a very readable history of ideas in the New Testament church. In less than 300 pages we are chronologically given brief articles about influential people, councils, or developments within the church. Very enjoyable and easy to remember format. .

Christaaay says

Oh my gosh. I loved this book.

I've always enjoyed history, but this book took it to a new level, for me. One of my university classes used this as a textbook; it felt, somehow, nicer than your usual, average textbook. Tony Lane's writing is so smooth!

This takes the reader from the very beginning of Christian thought--with it's basis immersed in Greek Philosophy--all the way to the present day, in which all sorts of denominations are hashing out their issues and searching for truthful Theology. The book incorporates portions of texts from 100 different thinkers, including Roman Catholics, Liberals, Neo-Orthodox, Evangelicals, and everyone else. Origen and Justin Martyr to Martin Luther, to Martin Luther King Jr. to Karl Barth...I just LOVED this book.

If you are at all interested in learning about Christian Thought, this is the book to read.

It IS very concise though--no pictures. It's all writing, page to page. But it's so meaty!

Which, of course, means it's delicious! :)

Matthew says

I thought this truly excellent; a very useful read, a broad and yet also thorough review of the history of Christian ideas about God, from the early fathers (up to 500 AD), through the medieval times (500-1500 AD), the reformation (1500-1800), and the post-reformation period (1800-current); it also includes viewpoints from the Eastern Orthodox (as opposed to the Western/Roman Catholic) tradition for the medieval period, and, for the modern era, a discussion of the Protestant vs Catholic dichotomy. Each section is represented by a few key thinkers, with Lane giving a short factual introduction to their life and work, a few quotes from their writings, and then a summing up of where he stands with respect to their views. This presentation is incredibly useful; it is a good jumping off point for anyone wanting to dig deeper; in and of itself it shows in context the evolution of certain ideas, such as the nature of Christ, how to define predestination, infant baptism, etc, etc; as such it also shows as an unfolding narrative the process by which the church has come to be fragmented into various denominations.

It is funny (or maybe more appropriately, it is disturbing) how the church fathers struggled for centuries about some basic questions which today I take very much for granted. The first 500 years seems to be one big quarrel about whether Jesus was god or man, or something in between, or both, etc. Another assumption of the early period was that of God being non-passible (not affected by emotions) -- this apparently derived from Greco-Roman conception of divinity -- and was the basis for a lot of thought; I think this assumption is fairly discredited today in light of OT scholarship. In medieval times the issues multiplied though again a few key issues echo down the centuries; there were a lot of people tortured and killed for what I consider a fairly trivial argument about whether infants should be baptized or not; this was also the period of the Crusades and religion was extremely politicized. Other aspects of this period are shoots of attempts to reconcile Christianity with humanism, and with rational/scientific inquiry.

It is interesting to me to read that the concept of predestination first arose from Augustine (not Calvin centuries later); the basic premise, which Augustine came to late in his life, was that even faith is a gift from God, thus salvation is entirely dependent on God -- which implies that God must have chosen an elect. I

think I would quarrel not with the first statement, but with its implication. I note that this concept has been debated through the centuries (e.g. Jakob Arminius in 1500s arguing that God's grace precedes, but man must choose to accept). The concept in fact was originally a step away from rather than toward elitism -- salvation depending on God's grace means that it is not just the rich and worthy who can attain it, everyone can potentially attain it; only later did the implication of there then being a spiritual elect creep in. Much later, in the 1900s, Barth solves this issue (to me) by arguing that it is Christ who is elect, and we are all in Christ (and all humanity can potentially be).

Another personal bone of contention is that of blessed assurance. Again this is not actually biblical but became a formal doctrine after Wesley; there were periods of and part of the church that sees personal assurance as distinct from saving faith. I think my overall point here is that much of contemporary teaching may or may not be based on the evolution of reading the Word rather than from the Word itself -- and this lends weight to my belief that each must think/read for him/herself.

For more recent times, there is some good discussion of the modern liberal tradition (based on historical criticism of the Bible), which generally Lane finds unconvincing (and I agree). Finally and most fascinatingly, the discussion on the modern Catholic church -- post the Second Vatican Council -- suggests that a significant part of the theological differences between Catholic and Protestants have been resolved -- e.g. the original point of division, which is justification by faith rather than by works, seems to be a point on which the Catholics have moved to the Protestant position; though there are of course other key areas of difference, such as papal authority, etc.

All in all, balanced rather than ideological, readable and valuable.

Ray says

Excellent historical summation of the past two millennia. This should be required reading for Christians, it would clear up a ton of infighting.

Matt says

Substantial and succinct treatment that works directly from the primary sources. Lane sees the issues and clarifies the controversies better than any historical theologian I've read.
