

Introductions

Here are listed different introductions to the subject.

[Stoughton, John. *An Introduction to Historical Theology: Being a Sketch of Doctrinal Progress from the Apostolic Era to the Reformation* .](#) Written by an influential 19th-century English Nonconformist minister and historian, this work offers a clear, structured framework for understanding the organic development of Christian doctrine. Rather than focusing on external ecclesiastical politics or institutions, Stoughton centers his analysis squarely on the evolution of ideas. He traces how early raw biblical concepts were systematically defined, debated, and codified across several key historical epochs: the Patristic age, the Scholastic medieval era, and the dawn of the Reformation. Highly regarded for its fair-mindedness and educational structure, this text serves as an ideal primer for students trying to grasp how historic orthodoxy took shape over fifteen centuries.

[Crippen, T. G. *A Popular Introduction to the History of Christian Doctrine* . 1883.](#) Written by a 19th-century Congregationalist minister and hymnologist, this accessible work was explicitly designed to bridge the gap between heavy, multi-volume academic dogmatics and the interested layperson or theological student. Crippen systematically traces the historical trajectory of core Christian beliefs—such as the Trinity, the Atonement, the sacraments, and eschatology—from the sub-apostolic age down to the modern era. By breaking down the history of dogma topically rather than purely chronologically, this handbook serves as an excellent, readable primer on how the Church clarified its central convictions in response to internal debates and changing cultural landscapes.

[Cunningham, William. *Historical Theology: A Review of the Principal Doctrinal Discussions in the Christian Church since the Apostolic Age* . 1863.](#) A towering achievement of 19th-century Reformed scholarship, this two-volume classic represents the peak of historic Presbyterian polemical historiography. William Cunningham, one of the founding fathers and principal theologians of the Free Church of Scotland, constructed this work from his extensive lectures at New College, Edinburgh. Rather than presenting a mere catalog of historical names and dates, Cunningham delivers a rigorous, polemical review of the major theological turning points in church history—including the Arian controversy, Pelagianism, Scholasticism, the Council of Trent, and the subsequent rise of Arminianism and Socinianism. Written with immense logical precision, this text remains an essential primary source for the defense of classic Westminster Calvinism against historic departures from orthodoxy.

[Bromiley, Geoffrey W.](#) *Historical Theology: An Introduction* . 1978. ([Read on-line](#)) Written by one of the 20th century's most prolific translators and historical theologians (famed for translating Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics and Kittel's TDNT), this work remains a classic textbook standard. Bromiley approaches historical theology chronologically, breaking the history of the Church into four distinct eras: Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and Modern. Rather than providing an exhaustive encyclopedia, he selects the most influential thinkers of each era—such as Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Schleiermacher—and lets them speak in their own words via primary source summaries. It is an exceptionally lucid, reliable guide for students tracing the main highway of Christian thought.

[McGrath, Alister.](#) *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* . 1998. ([Read on-line](#))

A contemporary classic by one of the world's leading Christian theologians and apologists, this text is specifically engineered for students encountering the history of dogma for the first time. McGrath brilliantly balances chronological history with thematic analysis. The book is structured around four major historical periods, detailing the cultural contexts, key theological developments, and case studies (such as the Donatist controversy or the debate over justification) that defined each era. Highly praised for its clarity, pedagogical features, and objective tone, this volume serves as an outstanding, modern entry point into the development of Christian doctrine.

Extended Works

Here are listed mainly multi volume works which cover the whole history of Christian doctrine.

[Schaff, Philip.](#) *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes* . 1877. This monumental three-volume set remains the absolute gold standard for the study of symbolics (the study of creeds and confessions) in the English language. Philip Schaff, the towering Swiss-American church historian, meticulously compiled the definitive statements of faith from across the entire span of church history.

[Volume 1](#) , [Volume 2](#) , [Volume 3](#)

More from Philip Shaff at www.ccel.org

[Sheldon, Henry Clay. *History of Christian Doctrine* . 1886.](#) Produced by a long-serving professor of historical theology at Boston University, this comprehensive two-volume work stands as a premier example of late 19th-century American Methodist scholarship. Sheldon structures his history by dividing the life of the Church into distinct chronological periods, and within each period, he systematically tracks specific doctrinal loci—including the doctrine of God, Christology, anthropology (sin and grace), soteriology, and eschatology. Known for its clear prose, dense primary source footnotes, and relatively objective analysis, Sheldon's work was widely utilized as a standard seminary textbook. It remains highly valuable for researchers looking for a well-organized, distinctively evangelical yet fair-minded mapping of how Christian dogmatics evolved over eighteen centuries.

[Volume 1](#) , [Volume 2](#)

[Harnack, Adolf. *History of Dogma* . Vols. 1–4. 1893.](#) A towering monument of late 19th-century German liberal Protestant scholarship, Harnack's *History of Dogma* is one of the most influential and fiercely debated works in the history of the discipline. Harnack famously argued that early Christian doctrine was the result of the "Hellenization of the Gospel"—the process by which the simple, practical, ethical message of Jesus was translated into, and ultimately obscured by, the metaphysical categories of Greek philosophy. While his thesis has drawn immense criticism from conservative and Orthodox theologians alike, this massive, erudite study remains essential reading for understanding modern critical historiography and the historical development of early Christology and Trinitarian dogma.

[Fisher, George Park. *History of Christian Doctrine* . 1896.](#) Written by a celebrated Congregationalist theologian and long-serving professor of ecclesiastical history at Yale, this comprehensive, single-volume survey was part of the renowned International Theological Library series. Fisher traces the evolution of Christian thought from the close of the apostolic age down to the end of the 19th century. The work is particularly noted for its fairness, balanced judgment, and exceptionally strong coverage of post-Reformation developments, including the rise of deism, German rationalism, and early American theology (such as the New England Theology). It remains a highly reliable, beautifully written classic reference text for student research.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. 5 vols. 1971–1989. Widely considered the absolute gold standard of 20th-century historical theology, Pelikan's magisterial five-volume set is a peerless achievement of objective, empathetic, and

staggeringly wide-ranging scholarship. Pelikan famously defined doctrine as "what the Church believes, teaches, and confesses," shifting the focus away from idiosyncratic individual thinkers to the corporate mind of the Church.

Volume 1 - [Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition \(100–600\)* . \(Read on-line\)](#)

Volume 2 - [Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom \(600–1700\)* . \(Read on-line\)](#)

Volume 3 - [Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Growth of Medieval Theology \(600–1300\)* . \(Read on-line\)](#)

Volume 4 - [Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Reformation of Church and Dogma \(1300–1700\)* . \(Read on-line\)](#)

Volume 5 - [Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture \(since 1700\)* . \(Read on-line\)](#)

[McGrath, Alister, ed. *The Christian Theology Reader* . Blackwell Publishing, 2007. \(Read on-line\).](#)

A reader with excerpts from different theologians during the centuries of church history which are ordered by subject and year. Recommended!

Periods and Traditions

Church Fathers

[Eusebius of Caesarea. *The Church History of Eusebius* . NPNF2-01.](#) Commonly hailed as the "Father of Church History," Eusebius, the 4th-century bishop of Caesarea, wrote the absolute foundational narrative of the early Christian movement. Covering the first three centuries of the Church from the time of Christ up to the victory of Constantine, this work is an irreplaceable repository of early Christian history. What makes it uniquely invaluable is that Eusebius quotes directly and extensively from numerous ancient letters, treatises, and official Roman edicts that have since been completely lost to history. McGiffert's translation in the

NPNF series stands out for its staggering, comprehensive critical footnotes, which provide an exhaustive historical and textual commentary on every page.

[Schaff, Philip, ed. *Ante-Nicene Fathers* . ANF01–ANF10. 1885. \(www.ccel.org\)](#) An absolute monumental classic of Christian publication, this 10-volume set remains the most widely utilized and highly recommended English translation of the earliest Christian writers outside the New Testament. Spanning from the sub-apostolic age down to the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), this collection features the complete surviving English corpus of foundational figures like Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. For any serious student of historical theology, these primary sources are vital for studying the immediate post-apostolic interpretation of Scripture, the emergence of the rule of faith, and the horrific realities of Roman persecution.

[Schaff, Philip, ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* . NPNF1 and NPNF2. 1885. \(www.ccel.org\)](#) Picking up where the Ante-Nicene series concludes, this colossal 28-volume research library stands as the absolute gold standard for studying the golden age of patristic theology (4th to 8th centuries). Divided into two distinct series, it captures the critical era when Christianity became the imperial religion and systematically hammered out its core Trinitarian and Christological creeds.

First Series (NPNF1, 14 vols.): Dedicated entirely to the massive literary outputs of Saint Augustine and Saint John Chrysostom.

Second Series (NPNF2, 14 vols.): Gathers the works of the great Greek and Latin Doctors, including Athanasius, Jerome, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose, and the critical historical narratives of Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen.

An essential, top-tier recommendation for any academic or pastoral library, this entire treasury is accessible for digital study on CCEL.

Assyrian Christianity

[Wigram, W. A. *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church, 100–640 A.D.* .](#) Written by a prominent English missionary and scholar who lived extensively among the Assyrian Christians, this classic work remains a foundational cornerstone for Western study of the

Church of the East. Wigram tracks the history of the East Syriac Christian community from its obscure first-century roots through its complex relationship with the Zoroastrian Sassanid Empire up to the dawn of the Islamic conquests. For church historians, this volume provides critical insights into how this vast communion developed an independent ecclesiastical structure completely outside the Roman Empire. Wigram offers an empathetic, detailed look at the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and defends the Assyrian Church against the simplistic "Nestorian" label, showing how linguistic and political barriers, rather than rank heresy, isolated them from Western Christendom.

Download as: [DJVU](#) , [PDF](#)

Coptic Christianity

[Butler, Alfred Joshua.](#) [*The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt* . 1884.](#) ([Read on-line](#)) A pioneering milestone in Western ecclesiology and art history, Butler's two-volume survey remains one of the most comprehensive architectural and liturgical records of Christian Egypt ever published by an outsider. Writing at a time when Coptic history was largely ignored by European scholars, Butler meticulously documented the design, structural layouts, altars, vestments, and liturgical vessels of the historic churches in Cairo, Alexandria, and the Nitrian Desert monasteries. Beyond the physical architecture, Butler provides valuable historical analysis of the Coptic rites, offering modern researchers an irreplaceable window into the material culture and preserved liturgical traditions of a church that survived centuries under Islamic rule.

[Kamil, Jill.](#) [*Christianity in the Land of the Pharaohs: The Coptic Orthodox Church* . \(Read on-line\)](#)

Produced by a respected scholar of Egyptian antiquities, this highly accessible volume provides a comprehensive historical narrative of the Coptic community from its first-century foundations to the contemporary era. Kamil deftly traces the unique synthesis of ancient pharaonic culture and early Christian thought, illustrating how the landscape of Egypt shaped distinct monastic and theological identities. The book is particularly valued for its balanced handling of the post-Chalcedonian isolation, the Arab conquest, and the modern cultural and political challenges faced by the Coptic minority today. Combining scholarly rigor with an engaging narrative style, it serves as an excellent modern introduction for students and travelers alike.

[Malaty, Tadrous Y.](#) [*Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church* . \(Read on-line\)](#) Written by one of the most celebrated and prolific contemporary theologians of the Coptic Church, this comprehensive primer offers an invaluable insider's perspective on one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. Fr. Malaty beautifully introduces the distinct heritage of Christian

Egypt, tracing its history from the evangelistic mission of Saint Mark through centuries of monastic development and persistent martyrdom. Crucially for students of historical theology, the book clarifies the Coptic Church's Miaphysite Christology, correcting centuries of Western misconceptions by explaining how Alexandria views the unified nature of Christ without confusing or separating His divinity and humanity. It is an indispensable, accessible guide to the spirituality, liturgy, and dogmatic heart of Oriental Orthodoxy.

Eastern Medieval Thought

[Meyendorff, John. *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* . 1973.](#) A landmark work by one of the 20th century's premier Eastern Orthodox theologians, this volume serves as the definitive introduction to the mindset and evolution of Christian thought in the Byzantine Empire. Meyendorff brilliantly structures the book into two distinct halves: a historical survey tracing the major controversies from the post-Chalcedonian era to the fall of Constantinople, followed by a thematic analysis of core Byzantine doctrines. He provides masterfully clear expositions on highly distinct Eastern concepts, such as the theosis (deification) framework, the distinction between God's essence and energies, and a liturgical, non-scholastic approach to pneumatology and ecclesiology. It is an indispensable bridge text for Western students seeking to understand how the Christian East formulated its theology outside the boundaries of Latin Scholasticism.

Western Medieval Thought

[Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* . Vol. 3: *The Growth of Medieval Theology \(600–1300\)* . \(Read on-line\)](#)

The third volume of Pelikan's monumental history explores the crucial centuries that defined Western medieval Christendom. Pelikan masterfully tracks how the Church in the West transitioned from late antiquity into a highly structured theological system. Rather than viewing the Middle Ages as a stagnant period, he highlights the intense intellectual and spiritual vitality of the era. Key thematic threads include the development of the sacramental system, the evolving doctrine of the papacy, Mary's changing place in devotion, and the shifting understanding of the Atonement. The narrative moves seamlessly from the early monastic renewals and Carolingian debates over predestination to the brilliant intellectual heights of Scholasticism, culminated by figures like Anselm, Abelard, and Thomas Aquinas. It is a peerless resource for understanding how the core tenets of Roman Catholic dogma were codified prior to the Reformation.

Reformation Thought

[Fisher, George Park. *The Reformation* . 1873.](#) A masterfully balanced single-volume synthesis, this 520-page classic by the eminent Yale historian remains highly recommended for

its multi-dimensional approach to a complex era. Fisher avoids the trap of treating the Reformation exclusively as a theological dispute or a political rearrangement. Instead, he deftly weaves together the intersecting political, historical, and theological perspectives across different European regions—including Germany, Switzerland, France, England, and Scotland. Beautifully organized and remarkably comprehensive for its size, this text is an exceptional entry point for anyone seeking a complete, panoramic view of how the modern world was forged.

[Barth, Karl. *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God according to the Teaching of the Reformation* . 1938.](#) Comprising the prestigious Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of Aberdeen in 1937 and 1938, this book showcases twentieth-century dialectical theology engaging directly with its historical roots. Rather than delivering a dry academic lecture, Barth uses the classic Scots Confession of 1560 as a scaffolding to explain the core theological insights of the Reformers. Writing on the eve of World War II while facing the rise of German National Socialism, Barth's exposition of the absolute sovereignty of God and the duties of the Christian church functions as both a brilliant historical commentary and a sharp, contemporary political-theological manifesto.

[Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* . Vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma \(1300–1700\)* . \(Read on-line\)](#)

The fourth installment of Pelikan's magisterial five-volume masterwork is an incomparable guide to the evolution of Christian dogma from the late medieval crisis up through the era of post-Reformation confessionalization. Pelikan masterfully tracks how the unified Western consensus shattered into distinct, fiercely defended theological traditions. Rather than limiting his scope to Martin Luther and John Calvin, he gives thorough, balanced weight to the radical reformers (Anabaptists), the development of post-Reformation Protestant Scholasticism, and the dramatic dogmatic definitions of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation at the Council of Trent. It remains the definitive textual landscape for understanding the formal division of Western Christian thought.