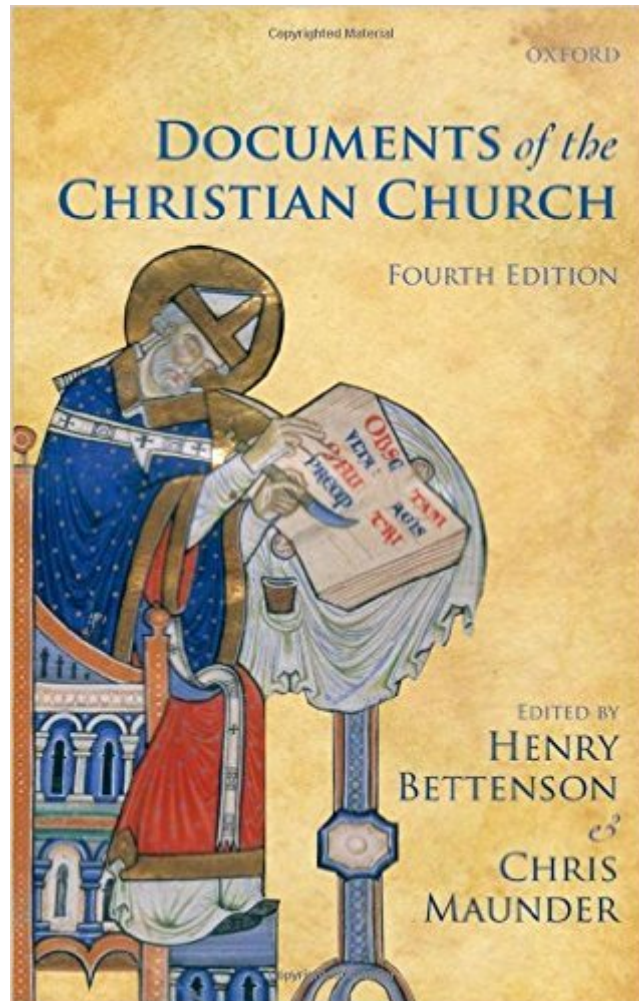


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Documents Of The Christian Church



Synopsis

This selection of writings from the most important moments in the history of Christianity has become established as a classic reference work, providing insights into 2000 years of Christian theological and political debate. While retaining the original material selected by Henry Bettenson, Chris Maunder has added a substantial section of more recent writings. These illustrate the Second Vatican Council; the theologies of liberation; Church and State from 'Thatcher's Britain' to Communist Eastern Europe; Black, feminist, and ecological theology; ecumenism; and inter-faith dialogue. The emphasis on moral debate in the contemporary churches is reflected in selections discussing questions about homosexuality, divorce, AIDS, and in-vitro fertilization, amongst other issues. This further expanded fourth edition brings the anthology up-to-date with a new section looking at issues facing the twenty-first century churches. This includes extracts exploring the churches' responses to questions of social justice, international politics, trade and debt, environmental change, and technological development. New material also covers the global growth of Christianity, the progress of Christian unity, and mission in multi-faith and postmodern societies.

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Customer Reviews

Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder have done a great job of collecting some of the most important documents of the Christian religion from the beginning until today. Almost every major controversy in the universal Church is represented by a document or two. For instance, Arianism, Montanism, Sabellianism, etc, are all covered. Sometimes the writings of the heretics are thrown in for a more balanced perspective. As the authors move past the Reformation, the book becomes less useful.

Since there are so many documents from various denominations, it becomes impossible to fit all of them in one small book. The Church of England is heavily represented, as are other religious movements in England. The documents of the Roman Catholic Church are represented, including documents of Trent and Vatican II. Luther's entire '95 Theses' are included. Some of the modern documents relate to issues of women's ordination, black theology, social justice, homosexuality, ecumenical relations, and AIDS. These are useful because they give documents from our own time. Overall this is a good collection. However, for every document included, there were 20 more that could have been added. This is just the nature of the book. The editors did a great job of choosing relevant documents. So it's a good collection that will scratch the surface, acting as an introduction, but is by no means the only book someone studying Christian thought in-depth would need. However, the book provides original texts, which many people rarely get to read, so that is quite a treat. While the book is small, the print is tiny, so they manage to squeeze in a lot of material in 461 pages! As a collection of primary texts, this is one of the best introductions to the thought of the Church from its birth until today.

There are several ways that one may study history. Firstly, one may read secondary sources: books about a particular period or event. Secondly, one may buy volumes of primary sources, using copious amounts of time to painstakingly go through each volume. Thirdly, one may read a one-volume collection of texts that are considered to represent the major trends in the historical period they represent. This book falls into the third category. Documents of the Christian Church is wonderfully organized: thematically by historical period. Hence, one reads the early Christian apologists of the 2nd century and then immediately after that one reads of the theologies of martyrdom; one reads of the disputes over the incarnation of Christ before one reads about debates over transubstantiation; one reads Vatican II documents before one reads liberation theologies. The writings of saints and heretics, Doctors and others, popes, councils and relevant non-Christian writers all appear between the covers of this book. Of course, it ought to be noted that the excerpts are sometimes tremendously short - only a few lines or so. However, each reference is cited so that the curious reader who wants to go and read volumes of primary texts can do so; for those less inclined to do so, this book is an excellent first-hand introduction to the development/s of Christian thought. However, the documents are largely confined to the Western church. The documentary history of the Eastern churches is largely absent for almost 1000 years: between 1054 (the Great Schism between the Eastern and the Western church) and the beginning of the ecumenical movement in the 20th century. So, if the reader wants to learn about the Palamite controversy or the

Hesychast revival or the monastic influence of the Russian Orthodox monks, one will have to look elsewhere (although, I confess, I do not know where). Nonetheless, this is an excellent compilation. The reader will learn plenty about recent theological developments, including various perspectives on sexuality, sex and gender, social work, feminist theology and liberation theology. How many of these more recent theological movements and trends will prove to be of long-lasting import remains to be seen, but since they are relevant now, it is important for the reader to be somewhat familiar with them. All things considered, this is a wonderful collection.

If you want to know more about the history of the church, and you want to read the original documents, this is the book. This book will take you deeper into doctrine origination and debate throughout the history of the church. There are many typed of documents represented from Augustine to more modern documents on Jesuits. I appreciate the fact they do some limited notes for you to help you understand dates, but otherwise leave you to figure out for yourself what these documents mean, and if they are valid or not. It leaves it up to you, not someone telling you what they think. Good compilation & scholarship. Joseph Dworak

You'll be amazed at how much is provided in just over 450 pages. A vast amount of the essential writings of Western Christianity are collected here: early church fathers, heretics, synods, councils, popes, eucharistic treatises, various dogmas, monastic rites, scholasticism, reformers, etc. As I noted, this is largely focused on Western Christianity with little on Eastern Orthodoxy...which is good because if Eastern Orthodoxy were included, then much material would have to be sacrificed. Bettenson was the Bishop of London, which explains the great amount of Anglican writings included; however, Catholics and Protestants (mainly Lutherans, Calvinists, Baptists, and Methodists) are well covered. The 3rd edition includes contemporary issues such as ecumenism, feminist theology, liberation theology, and contraception. Even though feminist theology has become largely irrelevant and liberation theology has proven useless, they are still important to understand as products (relics?) of the 20th century, although feminist theology will surely become even more radicalized and continue in a cultish fashion among the academic "elite." All in all, this is an essential reference book of primary sources for those studying the history of Christian doctrines. This, of course, should be supplemented with secondary sources such as Robert Louis Wilken (Roman Catholic), Jaroslav Pelikan (Greek Orthodox), and Henry Chadwick (Anglican)...the big three of early church studies.

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