



The History of the Catholic Church: From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium

James Hitchcock

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The Catholic Church is the longest-enduring institution in the world. Beginning with the first Christians and continuing in our present day, the Church has been planted in every nation on earth. The Catholic Church claims Jesus Christ himself as her founder, and in spite of heresy from within and hostility from without, she remains in the twenty-first century the steadfast guardian of belief in his life, death, and resurrection. The teachings and redemptive works of Jesus as told in the Gospels are expressed by the Church in a coherent and consistent body of doctrine, the likes of which cannot be found in any other Christian body.

The history of the Catholic Church is long, complicated, and fascinating, and in this book it is expertly and ably told by historian James Hitchcock. As in the parable of Christ about the weeds that were sown in a field of wheat, evil and good have grown together in the Church from the start, as Hitchcock honestly records. He brings before us the many characters some noble, some notorious who have left an indelible mark on the Church, while never losing sight of the saints, who have given living testimony to the salvific power of Christ in every age.

This ambitious work is comprehensive in its scope and in incisive in its understanding, a valuable addition to any school or home library.

The History of the Catholic Church: From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium Details

Date : Published December 1st 2012 by Ignatius Press (first published October 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9781586176648

Author : James Hitchcock

Format : Hardcover 580 pages

Genre : History, Religion, Christianity, Catholic, Nonfiction, Spirituality, Theology



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From Reader Review The History of the Catholic Church: From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium for online ebook

Baltazar Soto says

A great history of the Catholic church that answers many questions concerning the faith. All Catholics should be aware of their own history.

Joe Valentine says

Thought-provoking detailed summary

covering 2000 years of history in a single volume is a daunting task, and the author succeeds on many levels. the number of events and person identified and discussed is amazing. Fundamental to the book is the author's respect for the faith tradition and for the ongoing guidance provided to the church whose history is recorded here.

Fr. says

I really wanted to like this book. Hitchcock has a good reputation, his *Recovery of the Sacred* is an important and worthwhile book, and I'd like to know a good readily available book on the history of the Church.

But the problem is that his command of theology is not as good as he thinks it is. From the introduction:

Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares teaches that good and evil exist together in the world, and the reality of human freedom provides the only satisfactory explanation of moral evil—God's mysterious willingness to grant that freedom and permit its full exercise, even when it is used to thwart His divine plan.

God's plan cannot be thwarted, and human freedom is not at all the only explanation for evil. The tendency to blame freedom for evil is a *very* modern one--I have an early Twentieth Century textbook whose authors knew better. (Grace, Actual and Habitual (Volume 7); A Dogmatic Treatise; the primary author was a Jesuit, so my views on this point are not just a function of my Dominican leanings.)

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a sometimes excessive concern for doctrinal clarity that was motivated by both the Greek passion for philosophical certitude and the religious passion to be faithful to the Gospel.

An example would be handy. As it is, I have no idea what he's talking about.

Some books (Esther, Maccabees) appeared in the Septuagint but not in other compilations

Parts of Esther are in the Septuagint and not elsewhere, but most of it is right there in the Hebrew sources.

But despite Augustine's enormous prestige, the Council [of Orange] stopped short of fully embracing his own statement of the question, and it condemned the doctrine of predestination.

No, the Council of Orange did not condemn predestination (again, my Jesuit author and his translator/editor have a lot to say about it). You can look at the canons from the Council of Orange for yourself and see.

That's where I quit reading. You can call me overly picky if you like, but here's the deal: When I read a non-fiction book, I have to trust the author. When he gets things wrong that I know about, how can I trust him on things I don't know about?

Jason Hallmark says

An excellent survey of 2000 years of church history. Well organized, and very fluid writing make this book a very accessible read. Helped point me to a number of follow up sources I would eventually like to study.

Kenneth says

A good summary of Catholic history. Reads like an encyclopedia while having enough narrative style to keep the interest of the reader throughout. Can be used for reference or read straight from start to finish.

The author is a "conservative" Catholic. For that genre the treatment is fair with only a few foundational omissions. Apologetic in tone in addition to covering the breadth of material in a short volume, Hitchcock has done an admirable job of mass marketing Catholic history for the laymen in the pews.

The book is stamped with the praise of high churchmen as well as neoconservative political writers associated with Ignatius Press. This type of thing I suppose qualifies for the "nihil obstat" (an essential mark of sanctioned Catholic literature in, say, the good old days of Sheed & Ward).

A pleasure to read, albeit other books have been written in this vein quite often. This new effort deserves some added attention. The work will be read by the choir on the whole. Of particular note however due to the shelf space provided in the pitiable selection on religion in most corporate book stores.

Jeff Miller says

A one volume history of the Catholic Church is quite an undertaking and to do it in a bit over 530 pages is not a simple task. Writing only 500 pages on any century of the Church would be a difficult task. Creating a one volume history imposes many expected limitations, but if done well can provide a very valuable service. There are several one volume histories of this type, although I have mainly read either the multi-volume sets such as The History of Christendom by the late Warren H. Carroll or histories covering specific area.

What James Hitchcock has pulled off is quite exceptional. This is a summary history that sweeps through the

ages of the Church. While it leaves you wanting to know many more details of the history described, still you are given the best overview possible for this format.

For the most part this is a sequential sweep through the history of the Church from its birth to the present. While mostly the history is sequential some of the chapters are focused on specific areas and can contain large sweeps of history regarding that topic. I was hooked from the introduction on. The information is presented in topic focused paragraphs with a topic title displayed to the right or left of the text. The topics are usually only a couple paragraphs in length. I really liked the format of the book because I will be using it in the future as a reference. Besides the lengthy index the topic headings next to the text make it very easy to scan and find specific information you might want to go back to.

I have heard complaints about Harry Crocker's one volume history "Triumph: The Power and the Glory of the Catholic Church" for being triumphalistic (doesn't that go with the title). So you might wonder how James Hitchcock presents the history of the Church. Well to sum it up the history of the Church can be described using Charles Dickens' start of "A Tale of Two Cities".

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* starts off "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age." This history displays that tension and does not whitewash the history of the Church. He does not gloss over serious evils that occurred. This history is nicely balanced as a presentation and this is certainly the way I prefer it. Really the history of the Church is sort of a proof for the Catholic Church. If it was just up to us Catholics the Church would be a historical footnote by now. If she were not a divinely given institution she would have passed like all man-made institutions. It does the Church no good to minimize what has happened and it is always a temptation to do this. For example some apologists will minimize witch-hunting as something that mainly occurred among Protestants. As he states witchcraft persecutions were an "activity carried out by Catholics and Protestants with equal zeal." So while the low points are not left out, neither are the glories of Christendom reduced.

This is simply a great history of the Church that gives a topological summary giving you the birds-eye view. I really like how he crafted the topic summaries to pack in the information. This succinctness I am sure took some serious work to pull off. I also like that there is little editorializing of history while still delivering some fine insights. Plus peppered throughout were little details at times that added to the enjoyment. At times I thought that perhaps he might have left something out only to find it a couple of paragraphs later or separated into one of the more topic focused chapters.

To sum it up I think this is a quite a major work and just a great one volume look at Church history. There was only one time in the whole book where I scratched my head a little where a footnote regarding Joan of Arc read "She was canonized in 1920. Her sanctity is problematical insofar as she acted merely as a French patriot, but her canonization was based on her heroic virtue.". Although if you can go through 500 plus pages of a book of Catholic history and only have one quibble, that is a pretty amazing accomplishment.

Brian Wirth says

An excellent comprehensive view of Catholic Church History with an easy to use topical index to locate many different subjects. Hitchcock is one of the very best.

Robb says

A good quick reference. However as cover to cover reading it is dry and moves too quickly. As a scholarly work it lacks depth, references, and a bibliography.

Blake Solomon says

I hungered for a bit more narrative but overall this is an incredible text. I had the thought “how did we get popes”, found this book and here we are. Curiosity: sated.

Jerry Gause says

very comprehensive, scholarly and well documented. Covers history from time of Christ and Apostles to 2010 before Pope Francis.

Adam DeVille, Ph.D. says

An appallingly slipshod, error-strewn work that is an enormous disappointment not only coming from Hitchcock, but also from Ignatius Press, which used to be a reliable outfit. This book should not be recommended or read for reasons I discuss in part here: <http://easternchristianbooks.blogspot...>

Aaron says

Very informative

Clare Cannon says

HS to review @ www.GoodReadingGuide.com

Anthony says

September 2, 2013

A Review by Anthony T. Riggio of James Hitchcock's History of the Catholic Church (From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium).

I am neither a philosopher nor a theologian but am a Catholic interested in knowing more about the origins of my own Faith. I do love history and the evolution in the Catholic Church is a lesson in history that takes all of us through the development of Western Civilization. As a history major in college and the product of a parochial school education, I have studied Western man's history over many years and only recently was able to conclude the ubiquity of the Catholic Church's impact on man's thinking and philosophical quest for knowledge and meaning of life.

I have read four very significant works which have whetted my appetite for understanding how my Church began and survived the times for more than two thousand years. The Catholic Church as an organization is the longest continuing institution Man has ever witnessed. In those two thousand years it has grown, albeit with many phases and continuing clarifications on practices but never on dogma.

I have read and reviewed "The Sword of Constantine" by James Carroll; "Christianity" by Diarmaid MacCollouch; "A Concise History of the Catholic Church" by Thomas Bokenkotter; "The Future Church" by John L. Allen Jr., and rated them accordingly on both Goodreads and Amazon.

After reading The Future Church, I came across the current book by Hitchcock from an Amazon notification and immediately bought it and left it on my book shelf for a couple of months as I needed a respite from reading about the Catholic Church and waited until the Spirit moved me to crack open this book in mid-August 2013 and completed it on September 1, 2013. Like all tomes on History (especially religion) it is a slow reading effort and initially I found myself a little bored by the repetitive outline of the Church's history.

As I continued my struggle, the book became somewhat exciting and the reading was enlightening and I came to a thought of why we need the Catholic Church. Of course there are a multitude of reasons that can be raised and argued, but for me, it was the realization that the Church has never changed from its core belief tenants' right from day one. And it is quite simple in its outline. Christ was born into the world to save mankind (all of Mankind) and certain teachings he presented (The Gospels) included the purposes he gave to his Apostles during the short period of his ministerial life including instructions for a hierarchy, as he appointed Peter as the "rock" upon which will build his church. As simple in his education as Peter was and as human as he was to deny Christ and then beg forgiveness, the Church needed a great intellect to give thought substance His message He accomplished this through "other" apostle, Saul/Paul. Paul provided the reasoning and intellectual structure to the Church as well as the *raison de etre* for teaching to the Gentiles or non-Jews. Christ's invitation remains open to all Jews providing they accept the invitation.

As the belief system of Christ's teachings was beginning to be formulated, many developed interpretive views of Christ and his teachings, questioning his divinity and purpose. Through the efforts of the early Church fathers, formal structure was added and clarification of beliefs was spiritually achieved.

I began to think, as I read, that man is such an intelligent being and the diversions he attempted to impact on Christ's Church was akin to the concupiscence man encountered either in the Garden of Eden or at some point in the evolutionary process where Man could believe he was as smart as God. It is the Prometheus moment where Man became Man. Some would argue that Man became desirous or "sinful". I believe, that Man being Man used his own ego to interpret God's message.

This is clearly evidenced as one reads the History of the Catholic Church. The Christian belief system first became the pawn or tool for secular leaders and rulers and then the playground for thinkers and philosophers. This unfortunately included Men who were members of this church. Separations and Schisms' were developed taking and using those parts of the Church teachings that they wanted or despised.

The book goes through all of the history of Western Civilization and the Catholic Church's impact on all men in the Western world. It is a fascinating read and presented in a very readable format by topics with great margins for note takers that like to highlight or note significant passages in the book.

The author describes all of the "breakaway" or schismatic belief systems using the example of intersecting circles, where each new belief system's circle intersects with the circle representing the Catholic Church but only embraces a part of the Catholic circle. Which is similar to what I was taught growing up and that is the Catholic Church was the pie and each slice out of that pie represented the breakaway churches.

Many of my Protestant brothers would argue that one will get to heaven through the acceptance of Christ as his personal savior and Hitchcock's book makes it very clear that "Solo Scriptura" may be insufficient for salvation by itself. The author emphasizes tradition and doctrine of the Catholic Church is just as important and perhaps more so.

In any event doctrinal differences aside, I found the book most interesting and the scholarship superb. I highly recommend reading this book both for its historical value as well as for a clear understanding of the many secular and spiritual hurdles the Catholic Church has encountered over the last two millennium. I gave the book five stars in my rating.

Kevin says

2000 years is a lot to cram into one volume, however James Hitchcock managed to do just that. His book provides a thorough yet concise summary of Catholicism. He doesn't pull any punches when he talks about the Schism with the Eastern Orthodox churches or the reasons for the Reformation. Yet he doesn't slam the church and ends his book being optimistic about the future of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic faith.

A good first read for anyone who wants to get a good summary of our church's history. Not a good read if you are more interested in studying a specific time period of that history.
