



Early Christian Doctrines

J.N.D. Kelly

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This revised edition of the standard history of the first great period in Christian thought has been thoroughly updated in the light of the latest historical findings. Dr. Kelly organizes an ocean of material by outlining the development of each doctrine in its historical context. He lucidly summarizes the genesis of Christian thought from the close of the apostolic age to the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century--a time teeming with fresh and competing ideas. The doctrines of the Trinity, the authority of the Bible and tradition, the nature of Christ, salvation, original sin and grace, and the sacraments are all extensively treated in these pages. This revised edition of *Early Christian Doctrines* includes:

Sweepingly updated early chapters

Revised and updated bibliographies

A completely new chapter on Mary and the saints

Early Christian Doctrines Details

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From Reader Review Early Christian Doctrines for online ebook

Austin McGrath says

Great primer and outline on early christian doctrine! Will be a useful resource.

Connor Longaphie says

This is perfect. Not to long, but very thorough. An essential volume to any Christians library.

Richard Worden says

A classic study of the development of Christian doctrines. The book has a valuable introduction to Gnosticism.

Christian Proano says

Great book, just bear in mind that as accurate as he tries to be, you won't get the full picture and force of each Father's argument unless you actually read what they wrote and not just a quotation here and there. So feel free to use this as a to read list of Church Fathers.

Del Herman says

Magisterial book by the great Early Church scholar, theologian, and Anglican priest J.N.D Kelly, describing the development of doctrine in Early Christianity dating from the influences coming from the Greek and Jewish worlds through the Council of Chalcedon in the mid-5th Century. Incredibly informative and thorough on the main issues pressing up against the pre-Medieval church. Fascinating.

Brent McCulley says

Kelly simply does a fantastic job at surveying the history and evolution of early dogma through the fifth century. He treats each topic as its own, but runs through each one chronologically, and footnotes the Fathers in the primary sources voluminously.

We trace the history of the evolution of Theology proper, Christology, The Sacraments, Ecclesiology, Soteriology, Eschatology, and he even completes the book with the evolution of Mariology. Kelly's treatment is well balanced, and fair, and is the standard go to for then history of early dogma.

While more work and new research has pressed certain prevailing theories out of the way for new ones, especially in the area of Chalcedon theology, Alexandrian "school" vs. Antiochene, the theology of Theodore of Mopseustia, etc., the text as a whole is extremely well presented and has a scholarly precision and terseness that still makes this treatment go to for seminarians and theologians alike.

Phillip Howell says

This book was not fun to read but it is an amazing source of information. It is packed with content and depth. It is hard to keep track of all the people he talks about at times. It is likely only useful for serious students of church history. It is dry reading but I personally learned so much that it was worth the effort.

David Goetz says

An invaluable work. Kelly judiciously and lucidly expatiates doctrinal development and settlement in the Church from the Apostolic Fathers up through the Council of Chalcedon. He breaks the book up into three major parts: Prolegomena, Pre-Nicene Theology, and Nicaea to Chalcedon, with an Epilogue at the end covering eschatology and Mariology. Each part contains chapters on particular *loci*, so it's not only a great overall snapshot of development in the early Church but also an accessible and pretty concise reference for anyone looking to explore the early development of any particular doctrine and to get a brief introduction to the major players.

Erik Graff says

During my first evening at Union Theological Seminary an older student solicited my attention to certain boxes of books. He was about to graduate and wanted to unload his old coursebooks. One of them was John Norman Davidson Kelly's Early Christian Doctrines in an old edition which he assured me was still in use. I bought it and a host of other tomes. His advice was correct. Looking at it, I find notes in the margins and an almost indecipherable notecard. Reading it was like reading any well written, single-author textbook. It is dry and to the point.

Tiago Cunha says

A technical, extensive, and detailed account of the development of the Christian doctrines from the Apostolic Fathers to the Council of Chalcedon. Thematic approach.

Charlie says

A classic work on early Christian theology. Erudite, balanced, thorough. Age alone is beginning to wear at its usefulness.

Peter B. says

This was a valuable read. I would like to read more of the church fathers' own writings, but this was a great overview. While the early church was generally imprecise with its doctrines (although they could get very precise when that was needed, e.g. the Trinity), they often did a good job of grasping the foundations and spirit of Christianity, which is important for us to remember. This book helped me, not only learning what the early church taught, but also the process of development that goes on with theological understanding.

If you want a good understanding of what the early church taught and debated, this is the book to get.

Reese Walling says

An objective and extremely enjoyable examination of the patristic doctrines, J.N.D. Kelly does a great job of examining the key studies of Trinitarian, Christological, and Ecclesiastical from the post-apostolic age to the end of the fifth century. Littered with quotes from all the main church fathers (Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyril, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory, Augustine, etc.) and heretics (Pelagius, Donatus, Apollinaris, etc.), Kelly traces the main thoughts and developments of the pillars of the Christian faith, without adding in hardly any of his own personal beliefs or views on the subject (which, to me, is an incredibly impressive task given the nature of the subjects at hand). Through this book, I was able to catch a glimpse of the early church thought on the Christian's salvation (usually including the concept of deification), the nature of the Godhead in essence and in the economy of salvation, the incarnation of the Son and all it entails for both His person and how it relates to our salvation, and even an enjoyable examination on the early church fathers' views on eschatology (end times). This served well as an entry into the early patristic thought. Though lacking in in-depth analysis often, Kelly's goal set out from the beginning was to give a picture of the forest without looking too much at the trees. I couldn't have been more satisfied.

David Withun says

This book is a tour de force of early Christian beliefs. J.N.D. Kelly touches every major Father of the Church from the Apostolic Age to the 6th century as well as many relatively minor figures from the early Church. If you want to know what the early Christians believed, I highly recommend this book to you. I caution, though, that in order to get the most out of this book you must have a thorough knowledge of the history of Christianity for the first six centuries at least. This book is already 500 pages long, so there's little time for Kelly to stop along the way to explain historical developments. The book is not even done in chronological order other than perhaps separating the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists from the later Fathers into two different sections of the book; the primary division of the book, though, is thematic. Nonetheless -- read this book if you're interested in knowing what the earliest Christians believed!

Zack says

Well-written, well-organized by loci (heads of doctrine), and captivating. Though JND Kelly's goal in this

book is to outline and detail (to some extent) Christian Theology in the first four centuries of the church, he does not lose the feel of a narrative or story. There are times when he harps on “puritanical” religion in an anachronistic way, and some of his “between-the-lines” biases are out of line (pun intended), but overall, this book serves as an excellent introduction to early Christian doctrine. Reading level is between popular and technical. Works of the Fathers are cited, but the prose is accessible to educated and thoughtful popular audiences.
