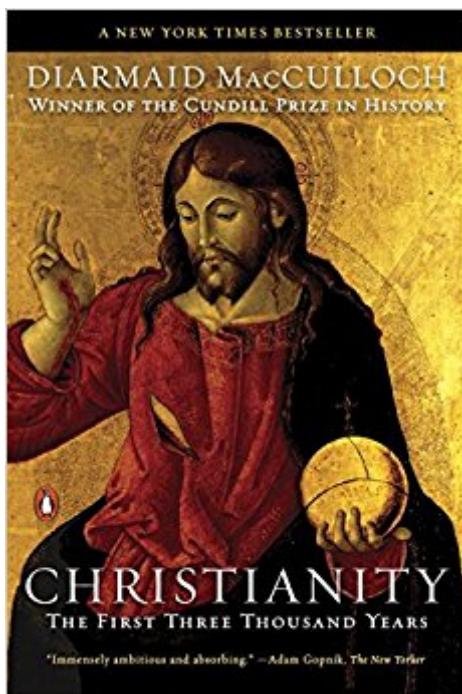


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# Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years



## **Synopsis**

The New York Times bestseller and a definitive history of Christianity for our time—*from the award-winning author of The Reformation and Silence*—A product of electrifying scholarship conveyed with commanding skill, Diarmaid MacCulloch's Christianity goes back to the origins of the Hebrew Bible and encompasses the globe. It captures the major turning points in a Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox history and fills in often neglected accounts of conversion and confrontation in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. MacCulloch introduces us to monks and crusaders, heretics and reformers, popes and abolitionists, and discover Christianity's essential role in shaping human history and the intimate lives of men and women. And he uncovers the roots of the faith that galvanized America, charting the surprising beliefs of the founding fathers, the rise of the Evangelical movement and of Pentecostalism, and the recent crises within the Catholic Church. Bursting with original insights and a great pleasure to read, this monumental religious history will not soon be surpassed.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Where does Christianity begin? In Athens, Jerusalem, or Rome? How did the early creeds of the church develop and differentiate? What was the impact of the Reformation and the Catholic Counterreformation? How have vital Christian communities emerged in Asia, Africa, and India since the 18th century? Award-winning historian MacCulloch (*The Reformation*) attempts to answer these questions and many more in this elegantly written, magisterial history of Christianity. MacCulloch diligently traces the origins and development of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christianities,

and he provides a more in-depth look at the development of Christianity in Asia and Africa than standard histories of Christianity. He offers sketches of Christian thinkers from Augustine and Luther to Desmond Tutu and Patriarch Bartholomew I. Three appendixes contain a list of popes, Orthodox patriarchs, and a collection of Christian texts. Assuming no previous knowledge on the part of readers about Christian traditions, MacCulloch traces in breathtaking detail the often contentious arguments within Christianity for the past 3,000 years. His monumental achievement will not soon be surpassed. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** MacCulloch signals the parameters of his prodigious scholarship when he brackets the Resurrection as a riddle no historian can resolve, then marvels at how belief in the Risen Lord has transformed ordinary men and women into martyrs—and inquisitors. Despite his refusal to affirm the faith's founding miracle, MacCulloch demonstrates rare talent for probing the human dynamics of Christianity's long and complex evolution. Even when examining well-known episodes—such as the Church Fathers' fight against Gnosticism or the stunning conversion of Constantine—this capacious narrative opens unexpected perspectives. Readers encounter, for instance, surprising connections between Christian doctrine, on the one hand, and ancient Greek philosophy interlaced with Roman politics on the other. As the chronicle fractures into Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant strands, MacCulloch exposes unfamiliar but unmistakably human personalities who have shaped the worship of the divine. Readers meet, for instance, Gudit, a savagely anti-monastic Ethiopian queen, and Filofei, an irrepressibly ambitious Russian monk. Much closer to our time, we confront Christian enthusiasms that militarists harnessed in World War I, Christian hatreds that Nazis exploited in World War II. Concluding with the perplexities of evangelists facing an implacably secular world, MacCulloch leaves readers pondering a problematic religious future. A work of exceptional breadth and subtlety. --Bryce Christensen --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If you are in the market for a comprehensive 1000 page overview of the history of Christianity this is the one. Diarmaid MacCulloch has written a masterful synthesis. He covers all that one might reasonably expect in such a volume -- moving from ancient Greece, Rome, and Israel up to the contemporary culture wars, including the Orthodox East as well as the Latin West. He transitions seamlessly from topic to topic and is almost never merely superficial. He successfully balances the need to relate relevant details with the virtue of concision. His interpretations are often stimulating

and characteristically judicious. The book either can be read profitably straight-through (for those with strong attention spans) or used as a reference source as the occasion arises. It helpfully contains extensive source endnotes, suggestions for further reading, and an index, plus page references for inter-related topics are noted parenthetically throughout the text. That the development of Christianity might be treated historically at all may seem heretical to some. History seldom consistently comforts belief. MacCulloch points out, for example, that right off the bat "one of the greatest turning points in the Christian story" may have been that the last days, as apparently expected by many early followers of the movement, had not arrived by the end of the first century CE. He emphasizes that certain major historical outcomes were contingent, not inevitable. For example, the victories of Christian over Islamic forces in 678 at Constantinople and in 732-33 near Poitiers helped shield the West from Islam and "preserved a Europe in which Christianity remained dominant, and as a result the centre of energy and unfettered development shifted west from its old Eastern centres." Later, he believes, the Church's response to Luther was unnecessarily heavy-handed, further dramatically re-shaping the West (not surprisingly, he is especially strong on the Reformation, the subject of his earlier well-received major work). MacCulloch does not shy away from lofty theology, often a turn-off to some readers of religious histories. Indeed, he seeks to demonstrate how seemingly rarified theological controversies have sometimes stirred the masses. He provides ample discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, the Chalcedonian controversy, disputes regarding the Eucharist, and the like, but never to the point of tedium. He traces how theological emphases shifted over time, including the emergence of elements of Christian belief that had little or no Biblical foundation. For instance, he calls the concept of Purgatory, which had taken root by the 1170s, "one of the most successful and long-lasting theological ideas in the Western church. It bred an intricate industry of prayer: a whole range of institutions and endowments," financing priests to devote their time to saving souls. MacCulloch attends to Christianity's engagements with worldly power and with political and societal issues. He provides plentiful material for readers to construct their own balance sheets of where Christians have stood through history regarding, for example, the roles of women, slavery and race, war and violence, concerns for the poor and the oppressed, religious tolerance, and (more recently) Fascism and Nazism. MacCulloch points out that "doubt is fundamental to religion. One human sees holiness in someone, something, somewhere: where is the proof to others?" He notes, for instance, that while the nineteenth century is typically seen as a period of skepticism, it was a period "crowded with visionaries both Catholic and Protestant" when Christianity ambitiously spread its global reach. Christianity has never been uniform. Its ability to mutate is one of its great strengths, particularly its ability to accommodate syncretist variations in

non-European cultures. MacCulloch concludes with the observation that, "It would be very surprising if this religion, so youthful, yet so varied in its historical experience, had now revealed all its secrets."

This book is over 1,000 pages long (excluding notes and index). Reading it is more like a way of life or a devotion than reading a normal book. I've been at it for months already, reading a little each day, and I'm determined to finish it -- because if I do, I will have learned the entire history of Christianity, all 3,000 years of it! It is a long and crazy history, but reading this book will give you a basis for being much more informed about Christianity's long and varied history, which has affected so much in our world. There are aspects of Christianity I simply had never heard anything about before -- for example, the Armenian church, the Orthodox church, Christianity in Africa, etc. It is very well written and dense but not difficult writing. I also watched the 6 part DVD that accompanies this. You can see Diarmaid MacCulloch's passion for the subject, which comes through in every page. He is a truly passionate scholar.

This work was assigned as the text for my Education for Ministry class this year. It made reading the bible in years one and two seem like short work. McCullough is indeed authoritative and comprehensive. It was a significant undertaking but he did a fabulous job of tracking global Christianity's development from before the time of Jesus to the 21st century. I gained an appreciation of how all of Christianity fits together (or doesn't) and the major historical forces that shaped the development of the religion.

Worth reading if you truly want to understand the history of Christianity with ALL its successes and failures. McColloch peppers facts with opinions which lend perspective to history. At times you may wonder if he has become a non-believer or opposed to certain Christian traditions but always realize well founded critique as well as praise serve a more accurate understanding of where Christianity is today. If you are open to critical analysis of your faith, regardless whether you are conservative or liberal Catholic, Fundamentalist or Pentecostal Protestant, Unitarian, atheist, agnostic or whatever, and want more than a superficial or biased history of Christianity you will find this book valuable. Some have criticized the author's writing style and at times you have to work with his sentence structures and flow of ideas. However, McColloch masterfully connects related and influencing events, traditions and experiences from different times and accurately weaves the inseparable histories of Christianity and the world. In the end you understand how we arrived in 2013,

secularism, particularly in Europe and turn to face the future with a surprising suggestion and optimism.

Diarmaid McCullough's "Christianity the 1st 3,000 years" is a NYT Best seller and Winner of the Cundhill Prize in History. It is the new text for the 3rd yr. of EfM Education for Ministry. In the past year I have learned more about the diversity, violence, and complexity of the Christian tradition. I highly recommend this book to anyone seeking a deeper knowledge of the good and the bad associated with the growth of Christianity. This is not a Sunday School book. It is a well thought out and organized history of the church, no punches pulled. When you finish you will have clearer understanding of the roots of the difficulties in the Middle East, Ukraine/Russia, Serbia/Bosnia/Herzegovina, the Sudan, South Africa, The Vatican, all of the Christian faith traditions (including many of which you have never heard) than you would ever have thought possible. If you choose to tackle it you will be richly rewarded, but it is not for the faint of heart.

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