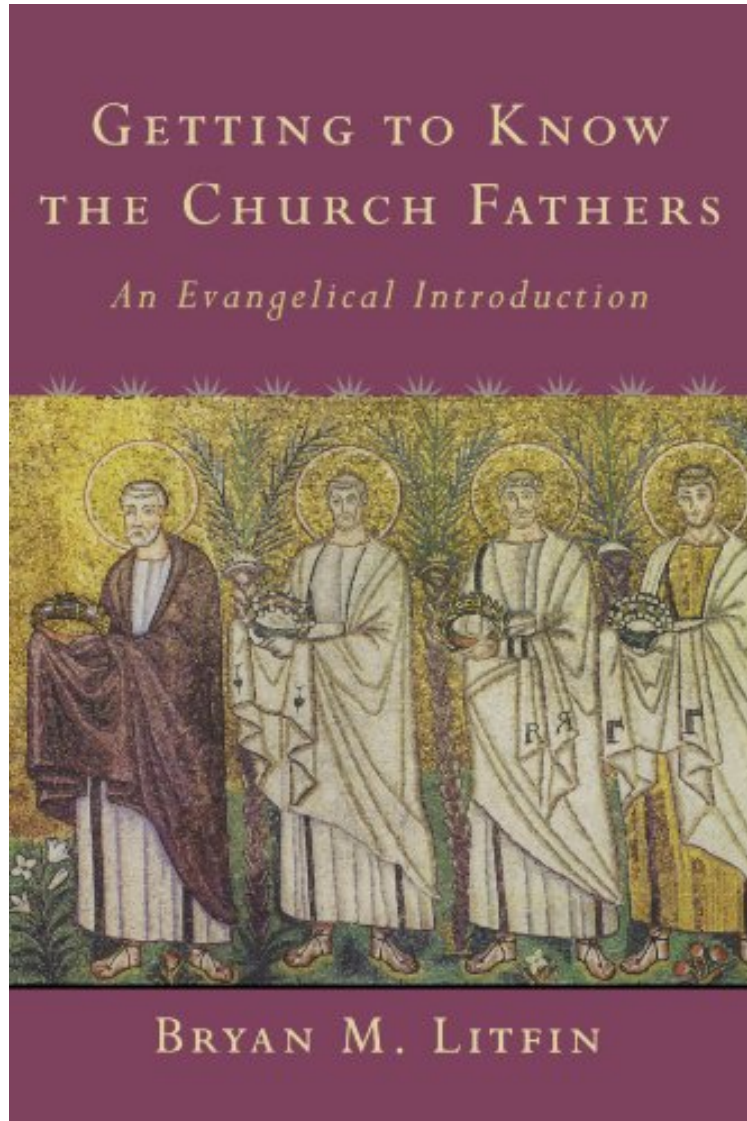


[FREE] Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction

Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction

Bryan M. Litfin

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#417907 in Books 2007-10-01 2007-10-01 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.00 x .69 x 6.00l, 1.12 #File Name: 1587431963304 pages | File size: 46.Mb

Bryan M. Litfin : Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wow what an eye opener! By Bob Cho I had to actually do a book review for class for this particular book. Below is my review: Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction was written by Bryan M. Litfin, a professor in the Theology Department at Moody Bible Institute. Litfin received a master's degree in historical theology at Dallas Seminary and a Ph.D. in ancient church history at the

University of Virginia, which makes him very well qualified to present the material in this book. It is apparent in Litfin's writing style that he does have a teacher's heart. Some examples of this is: how he helps the reader with some of the more difficult names by providing a pronunciation guide the first time the name is mentioned, e.g. Irenaeus (pronounced "eer-eh-NAY-us") and Manicheism (pronounced Man- ih-KEE-ism), or how he puts "provocative questions" at the end of each chapter to get the reader to think more deeply about the contents of that chapter, or how he gives additional resources at the end of each chapter in case the reader wanted to "go deeper" and read more about a particular church father.

Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction introduces the reader to the early church fathers from the early second century to mid-fifth century and the impact they had on Christendom. Among the church fathers included in this book are: Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, Perpetua (the only woman), Origen, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Augustine, and Cyril of Alexandria. Litfin dedicates one chapter (between twenty-two to twenty-six pages) for each of the ten pioneering church fathers in generally chronological order. He organizes each chapter by first giving a contemporary example of some event or story that draws the reader in and relates it to the church father in mind, though many of the introductory examples could equally apply to any of the other church fathers. He then gives an introduction to the church father--his life before becoming a Christian, how he converted, how he lived and/or died as a Christian, and the significant contributions he made in regards to defining or protecting Christian theology at the time. Along the way, the reader is introduced to the political, economic, and social factors experienced by each of the church fathers, which is key to understanding why the church fathers did what they did. Litfin ends each chapter with his reflection on the church father discussed, questions for the reader to ponder, additional resources, and a small taste of the church father's writing.

The Introduction sets the stage for this book. Litfin explains the richness of church history and why it should still be studied today. He acknowledges that many books have been written about church history but hopes to add a "personal" touch to help us "get to know some folks who are part of your own spiritual legacy and heritage of faith" (p. 16). Litfin succeeds in going beyond writing facts about the church fathers, he encourages Christians to grow in their faith and continue to run the race set before them just as the church fathers had done. Litfin also addresses three misconceptions that people have about the church fathers, as follows: "the church fathers were not biblical" (p. 20), "the church fathers were Roman Catholic" (p. 22), and "the church fathers represent the 'fall' of Christianity" (p.24). Many of the misconceptions simply come from lack of knowledge and making assumptions without due research, much like pagans did with Christianity during the early stages of Christian history.

Out of all the church fathers discussed in this book, Perpetua seems to be the most out of place. There is no denying that her passion account, *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*, was incredible and truly showed the faith and resolve of martyrs in the early church. Her faith and steadfastness are an encouragement to anyone who reads this chapter, but unlike the other church fathers discussed here, she was not attributed to any theological advances. I wonder if it might have been better to omit Perpetua and give more substance to the remaining nine church fathers, though an extra two to three pages for each of the remaining chapters may not have made much of a difference. On the other hand, Perpetua was named as a saint as opposed to Origen and Tertullian who were not (p. 157). Also, Litfin discusses Montanism, which Perpetua was associated with, but does not mention that Montanism, including the orthodox North African Montanists, were eventually forced into schism (cf. Ferguson, *Church History Volume 1: From Christ to Pre-Reformation*).

In terms of the physical design of *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction*, for a book that seeks to change the way we think about the church fathers, the design of the cover unfortunately is bland and old-fashioned. The colors also do not jump out and catch the eye. If this book were on a bookshelf at a bookstore it would most likely be lost among other books since it does not pop out enough for a potential customer to pick it up and want to examine. Also after reading through the book, I found that the binding on the book started to fall apart from the front inside cover half way through the spine. Three hundred pages may not seem like much, especially since whole volumes of books have been written focusing on just one church father, but Litfin does an excellent job of introducing the reader to the early church fathers. The information is presented in a concise and easy-to-read format accessible to many age groups and education levels. Although this book seems to have been written for people who are new to early Christian history, it is a book that can also be used as a reference tool for anyone who wants to get a quick summary of any one of the ten church fathers Litfin writes about or can potentially be used in a small group setting with its built-in questions at the end of each chapter. Those who are new to early church history will undoubtedly come away with a new respect for the church fathers and their faithfulness as I myself have.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Church history for the rest of us! By Jim G Church history can be as dry as dust. But Litfin has written a work that is compelling and accessible to even the most "lay" of laymen. Giving each of a select group of church fathers their own chapter, each chapter is a vignette into the life of a man (or woman) who was an early leader of the Christian church. Each chapter reads as an autobiography of the subject but each is engaging in its own way. In particular, the story of Perpetua's life is especially striking. I would challenge anyone to read her chapter and not be emotionally moved!

30 of 30 people found the following review helpful. a brilliant broad swathe through the ancient Xtn fathers By musicnbooks Bryan Liftin has written a very inclusive and dynamic book about the early church fathers, an excellent narrative of historical, biographical and theological themes. Full disclosure: I am not an evangelical Christian so I

cannot comment from that perspective whether the book fulfills a need for that community. However, as one studying more about Eastern Orthodox Christianity I can say without fear of contradiction that this book provides anyone interested in the origins and development of the Christian ideas and beliefs which are still current in modern times a broad and intelligent introduction. Lifkin covers the trail blazed by the early Fathers in a linear approach, looking both at the history of the life of each one but also how each develops the important articles of faith and determination of the sacred texts from their predecessors. One can read how the theology of the Trinity, for example, accepted by almost all Christian faiths of today was painstakingly developed and resolved in a sometimes conflicting and contradictory manner. The reader is readily engaged by Lifkin in this pursuit and can follow a path made very clear despite so many fits and stumbles during those early days. You can easily see how dedicated the Fathers were to the insistence on truth and true knowledge and understanding of Christ as a living person and as the transcendent eternal son of the Father. All of us who have believed in Christianity owe a great debt to the precision and life-long dedication of these remarkable historical figures and their writings concerning the true faith. Lifkin spends very little time proselytizing about the evangelical Christian's perspective, which really adds much to the fact that I think anyone of Christian belief will find this work enlightening, well documented, and 'orthodox', meaning the one truth unchanged as it was given to the Fathers from the Apostles. There's no question that he is opening a new door for fundamentalist Christians by acceding to the idea that the tradition which was given to the Church and maintained through the early Fathers is extremely relevant to evangelicals as it is to Eastern Orthodox and the Church of Rome and its various off-shoots such as the Anglican, Lutheran and Calvinist faiths.

Augustine. Tertullian. Origen. For too many Christians such names are abstract, one-dimensional legends, innocuous voices from antiquity no longer relevant to modern needs and concerns. However, a closer look at these church fathers reveals writers whose reflections on the apostolic teachings edify all generations of believers. Bryan Lifkin helps readers understand the fathers as individuals who cared deeply about preserving the core tenets of the Christian faith, and debunks misconceptions about their religious status and treatment of Scripture. An unveiling of these ten personalities demonstrates how much the fathers can teach us about the doctrines of our faith and the enduring community of which we are a part.

About the Author Bryan M. Litfin (PhD, University of Virginia) is professor of theology at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois. He is the author of several books, including *Early Christian Martyr Stories*, and has written numerous scholarly articles and essays.