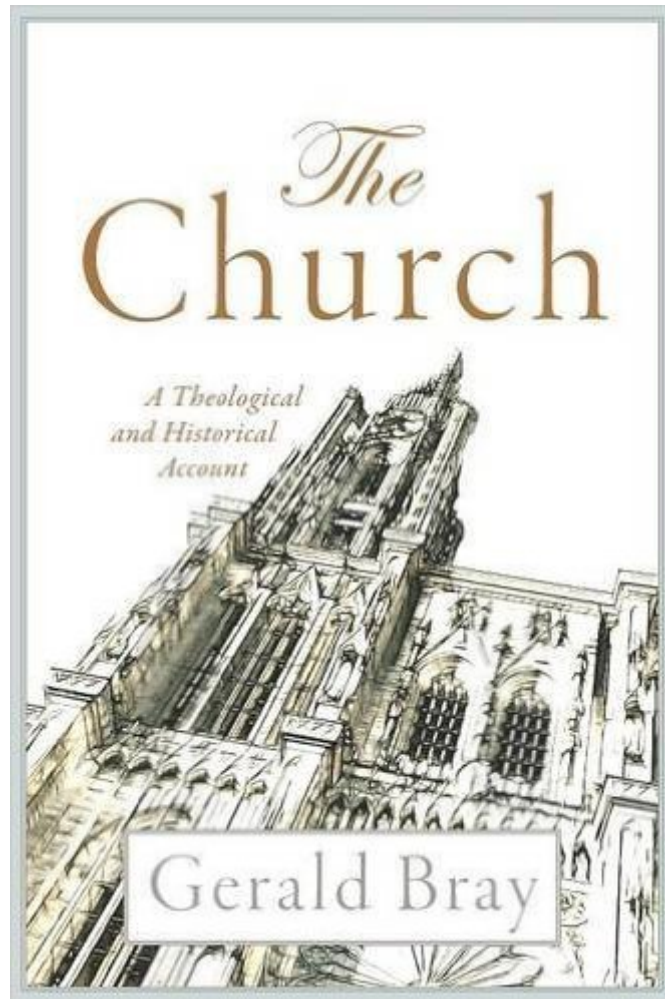


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# The Church: A Theological And Historical Account



## Synopsis

Renowned evangelical theologian Gerald Bray provides a clear and coherent account of the church in biblical, historical, and theological perspective. He tells the story of the church in its many manifestations through time, starting with its appearance in the New Testament, moving through centuries of persecution and triumph, and discussing how and why the ancient church broke up at the Reformation. Along the way, Bray looks at the four classic marks of the church--its oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity--and illustrates how each of these marks has been understood by different Christian traditions. The book concludes with a look at the ecumenical climate of today and suggests ways that the four characteristics of the church can and should be manifested in our present global context. This accessible introduction to the church from an evangelical perspective explores ecclesiology through the lenses of church history and doctrine to reveal what it means for us today. Bray discusses the church as a living reality, offering practical ways churches and individuals can cooperate and live together.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The focus is on "one, holy, catholic, apostolic" church. Who noticed there were four adjectives to describe the church? Gerald Bray noticed. The book is peppered with useful insights like this. An analysis of these four adjectives, particularly the last ("apostolic"), results in this highly readable church history with copious footnotes. For congregations trying to be like the early church, Bray tells us what is unknown about the early centuries after Christ and why it's impossible to replicate early

Christian gatherings. This book summarizes many documents that might make up part of a theology course, but it's pitched at the ordinary reader - you don't have to be a priest or pastor to enjoy the book. Analyzing "one", Bray looks at Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant arms of the church. There are copious references for people who want to read more about a particular denomination or learn more about various Eastern Orthodox branches of the church. The Celtic Church, Crusades, Augustine and the Pope are all explored. The interested reader gets details from the references - the pages focus on historical highlights. Plenty of authors have written about holiness and holiness movements, so I thought the book might analyze what is considered holy today by different church regions and branches, but it doesn't go so far. It does go into the Holy Roman Empire in some detail and mentions Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit and the Holy Land in looking at holiness. There is intense mention of "apostolic" throughout the book, and Bray describes in some detail the schisms that have developed between apostolic and postapostolic churches in the nineteenth century. The book looks at what the church ought to be through the four adjectives and by the end it concludes steps towards this ideal take time and change has historically been incremental. He notes that many congregations feel the need to be part of their community and this may help churches survive. It is a useful book for anyone wanting to learn how the various Councils and Creeds which developed Christian traditions came about. The book might be useful to the prospective theology student to give a rapid overview of church history. I enjoyed the book tremendously, having first met Dr Bray when I was a student.

In the year 381 AD, a council of men came together, what we now know as the First Council of Constantinople. This council built on the First Council of Nicea's meeting in 325 AD and sought to outline the essential confessions of what Christian orthodoxy is. In this meeting, a key phrase was added: The Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Centuries later, we are still finding ourselves, as the Body of Christ, the global ekklesia, adhering to these four qualifiers. This is what makes us, truly, an orthodox Church. But what does it look like to have these four qualities? How did we get here, based on church history and the developments over the centuries we have seen? J.I. Packer calls Gerald Bray's *The Church* a "superlative survey" of these questions. Bray is a distinguished and well-respected professor, author, and historian. There is no one more fit for the task of unpacking how these one, holy, catholic, and apostolic have fleshed themselves out ecclesiology than Bray. Bray continually reminds us, through *The Church*, that ecclesiology deeply matters, and in order for us to best understand what the Church is (chapter 6) and what the Church should be (chapter 7), we have to

return to our roots (chapters 1-5). Here's what The Church does so well. Bray does a wonderful job of highlighting the major movements, while also getting to the ground level and taking us into the timeline, seeing how theology and culture developed along the way as time went on. He uses a chronological survey of the development of the church, from the Old and New Testaments, through the Protestant Reformation and into our context, to build us into the big crescendo of "now what?" Throughout the book, we find helpful analysis and made distinctions of key components of Church matters, which Bray articulates well. For example, on page 114, Bray examines the difference between schism and heresy, and how each affected the imperial church. There is a discussion of the medieval church, the Eastern Orthodox movement, Aristotle's influence, the development of the Episcopate, and many more topics. All this to say, this book is chock full of a variety of talking points, almost working like a historical and systematic textbook to help us get a solid survey of the Church historical. My main critique of The Church is found in the first two chapters, Bray's analysis of the Old and New Testament Church. Bray, on numerous occasions, is found expressing mystery, continually following up points with "we do not know." I had dozens of marks where Bray uses a phrase to the effect of "we do not know." While I appreciate Bray's commitment to avoiding eisegesis and avoiding endless speculations about details simply not in Scripture, I wished Bray would have used his historical and theological prowess to make a few more assertions in his book. At multiple points, it felt as if Bray simply did not have an opinion on the matter. Some make the mistake of having too many extra-biblical opinions, but I also think standing for some interpretations matters as well. As the book progressed, this critique lessened and lessened. I don't find it to be a major issue, for what it's worth. The Church is important because if we are ever to learn more about where we are going, we should keep one eye on where we have been. As in all of life, our past as a culture, as a people, can help us avoid mistakes along the way, and help us not fall into the traps our ancestors did. Bray, an Anglican himself, helps us think through ecumenicalism, becoming a Nicene-like "one, holy, catholic, apostolic" Church who is united in doctrine and purpose. This book helps us mightily, and will be beneficial to church history students, pastors, and church leaders everywhere.

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