

Q & A

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Christian History in Seven Sentences *A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic*

May 18, 2021 | \$18, 184 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5477-6

Jennifer Woodruff Tait (PhD, Duke University) is the managing editor of *Christian History* magazine, the author of *The Poisoned Chalice: Eucharistic Grape Juice and Common-Sense Realism in Victorian Methodism*, and a priest in the Episcopal Church. She lives in Berea, Kentucky, with her husband, Edwin, and their two daughters.

Why Study Christian History?

IVP Academic Editor, David McNutt: Our *Seven Sentences* series offers readers brief introductions to entire disciplines by exploring seven representative sentences. How did you come up with your sentences for Christian history?

Jennifer Woodruff Tait: It was very difficult to select from the hundreds if not thousands of possibilities! Since there is also a book planned in the series called *Theology in Seven Sentences*, I was encouraged to consider sentences from documents that had significantly shaped the historical context of the church. This led me in the direction of creeds, councils, edicts, and proclamations. I also wanted a good balance of sentences from all eras of the church, so I ended up with two early church sentences, two medieval ones, an early modern one, and two from the modern era.

Why should Christians today concern themselves with the history of the church, which is so often removed from us by time, culture, language, and more? What can we hope to learn from earlier Christians?

Tait: I've taught church history as an affiliate professor at Asbury Theological Seminary. I often tell my students that they should think of figures in church history not as names and dates to memorize but as brothers and sisters in Christ who just happen to be with Jesus now. From them, we can learn how to wrestle with difficult questions, spread the Gospel, and be faithful disciples of Christ. Sometimes (for example, the Crusades, the burning of heretics, the German state church during Nazism), we learn this from looking at them and deciding not to do what they did. I'm particularly inspired in this by G. K. Chesterton, who once said—I quote him in the book, in fact—that "tradition means giving a vote to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors." I look at church history as inviting them into the conversation.

I'll give you the chance to mention a couple of the other sentences that you might have chosen for the book. What else do you wish you could have included?

Tait: My favorite piece of writing in the entire history of the Christian church is Athanasius's *On the Incarnation*, especially its central affirmation: "Christ was made man that we might be made God." I urge you to go read the whole thing right now—I'll wait. Try to find the version with the introduction by C. S. Lewis (which is also one of my favorite pieces of Christian writing).

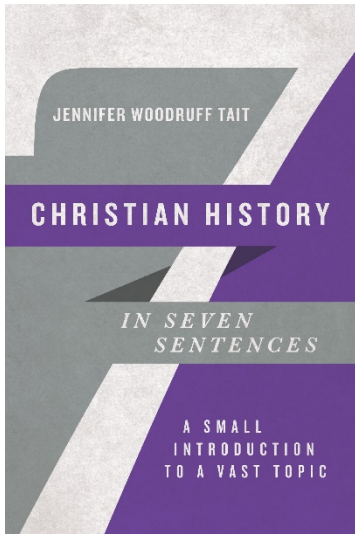
As an Anglican, I also wish I could have used the collect for the first Sunday of Advent from the *Book of Common Prayer*: "Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall



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come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and forever. Amen." (Yes, that's a very long sentence.)

Finally, as someone from a Wesleyan-Arminian background, I would love to have included John Wesley's famous report of his experience at Aldersgate: "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

In addition to serving as the managing editor of *Christian History* magazine, you are an ordained priest in the Episcopal Church. How does knowing church history inform your ministry?

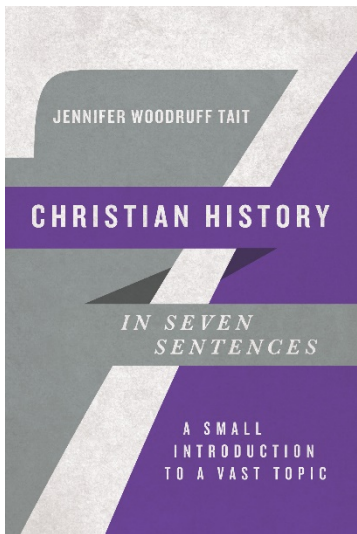
Tait: One of my mentors, Mthr. Margaret Shanks, said once as she was training acolytes, "Every mistake that can be made in the church has been made, and Christ is still worshipped." Knowing church history helps me remember that, and it's a heartening thought. When I preach and when I lead Christian education and formation, a knowledge of church history also helps me give context as to how the Bible has been interpreted through the centuries.



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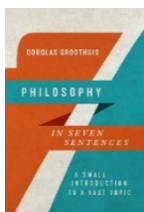
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Introductions in Seven Sentences

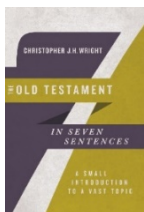
What if large topics such as philosophy, theology, and biblical studies could be boiled down to seven key sentences each? What if just a few phrases could distill an overwhelming area of study into the seven most pointed teachings in that field? The Introductions in Seven Sentences series does just that. The accessible primers in this collection act as brief introductions to an academic field, with simple organization: seven key sentences that give readers a birds-eye view of the most pivotal truths on that subject.

With engaging, thoughtful, and sometimes humorous language, these books invite readers to reflect on quotations that many have heard but perhaps have not explored in depth. As experts in their individual disciplines, the authors use their experience as skillful teachers to illuminate perennial questions in the field. Other titles in the Introductions in Seven Sentences series include:



Philosophy in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic by Douglas Groothuis
January 6, 2016 | \$18, 160 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4093-9

Philosophy is not a closed club or a secret society. It's for anyone who thinks big questions are worth talking about. In this lively introduction, Douglas Groothuis unpacks seven short yet pivotal sentences from the history of Western philosophy, including key ideas from Protagoras, Socrates, Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Pascal, and Kierkegaard.

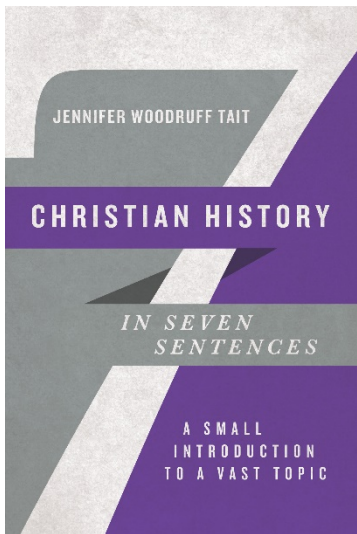


The Old Testament in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic by Christopher J. H. Wright
May 28, 2019 | \$18, 184 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5225-3

It's easy to see the Old Testament as confusing, out of date, or irrelevant. Using seven key sentences drawn straight from the Old Testament, Christopher J. H. Wright fits the pieces together, shows us the coherent whole, and points us toward Jesus. This short survey shows God's faithfulness and love for his people and illuminates how the Old Testament Scriptures prepared for the identity and mission of Jesus.



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The New Testament in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic by Gary M. Burge
October 8, 2019 | \$18, 152 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5476-9

To understand the breadth of the gospel's message, we need to perceive the full tapestry of Scripture. Using seven key sentences from the New Testament, Gary M. Burge demonstrates how the themes of fulfillment, kingdom, cross, grace, covenant, spirit, and completion set a theological rhythm for our faith, outlining the broader pattern of Scripture that illustrates what God has done—and is bringing to fulfillment—in Christ.



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