

# 17th & 18th Century Christian Writers

A Reference Chart of Key Authors, Works, and Historical Significance | Confessional Orthodoxy, Pietism & Evangelical Revival

WRITER	ACTIVE PERIOD	PROMINENT WORKS	SIGNIFICANCE & HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE
Protestant Scholasticism & Confessional Orthodoxy			
<b>Francis Turretin</b>	fl. c. 1648–1687 AD	Institutes of Elenctic Theology (3 volumes); Disputations	Francis Turretin of Geneva is the supreme systematician of Reformed scholastic orthodoxy and the theologian whose work defined high Calvinist doctrine for two centuries. His three-volume <i>Institutes of Elenctic Theology</i> — organized as a series of questions debated against opposing positions — became the standard textbook of Reformed theological education, used at Princeton Seminary well into the 19th century and directly shaping Charles Hodge's own <i>Systematic Theology</i> . His precise formulations on Scripture's inspiration and inerrancy, the covenant of works, limited atonement, and the nature of justification set the terms for Reformed confessional debate from the Synod of Dort onward. No theologian did more to give high Calvinism its intellectual backbone, and every subsequent Reformed theologian — whether defending or revising him — must engage his framework.
<b>Johann Gerhard</b>	fl. c. 1606–1637 AD	Loci Theologici (9 volumes); Sacred Meditations; Theological Commonplaces	Johann Gerhard is the greatest theologian of Lutheran scholastic orthodoxy — the man who gave Lutheranism its most comprehensive and rigorous post-Reformation systematic theology in his nine-volume <i>Loci Theologici</i> , which remained the standard reference work for Lutheran dogmatics for over two centuries. His <i>Sacred Meditations</i> — brief, devotionally intense reflections on the spiritual life — reveal the other side of his genius: a capacity for warm personal piety alongside technical precision that kept Lutheran orthodoxy from becoming merely academic. His work on Scripture, justification, the sacraments, and eschatology defined the parameters of Lutheran theological education from his generation through the age of Lutheran pietism. He is the Lutheran counterpart to Turretin and together they represent the summit of Protestant confessional scholasticism.
<b>Westminster Assembly (Documents)</b>	1643–1649 AD	Westminster Confession of Faith; Larger Catechism; Shorter Catechism; Directory for Public Worship	The Westminster Standards — produced by the assembly of 121 divines convened by the Long Parliament — constitute the most influential confessional documents in the history of English-speaking Protestantism. The Westminster Confession of Faith became the doctrinal standard of Presbyterian churches worldwide and, in modified forms, of Congregational and Baptist churches as well. The Shorter Catechism — opening with 'What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever' — has been memorized by more Protestant children than any other catechism and remains in wide use. The documents define a thoroughly Reformed theology of Scripture, covenant, election, the law, the church, and the sacraments with a precision and comprehensiveness that no subsequent Reformed confession has surpassed. They are the constitutional documents of the global Presbyterian and Reformed tradition.
<b>Jakob Arminius</b>	fl. c. 1588–1609 AD	Declaration of Sentiments; Examination of Perkins's Pamphlet; Works (collected posthumously)	Jakob Arminius is the theologian whose name defines one of the most consequential and enduring fault lines in Protestant theology. His critique of high Calvinist predestination — arguing that God's election is conditioned on foreknown faith, that Christ died for all, and that saving grace is resistible — was condemned at the Synod of Dort (1618–19) but survived and flourished, eventually becoming the dominant soteriology of Methodist, Pentecostal, and most evangelical Christianity worldwide. The Arminian-Calvinist debate he initiated has never been resolved and continues to define the theological divide between Reformed and Wesleyan-Arminian Protestantism. Though he died before Dort, his <i>Declaration of Sentiments</i> is the clearest primary statement of his position and the founding document of the Arminian tradition.
<b>Johannes Cocceius</b>	fl. c. 1640–1669 AD	Summa of the Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God; biblical commentaries; Lexicon of Hebrew and Aramaic	Johannes Cocceius is the founder of federal (covenant) theology as a systematic hermeneutical framework — the approach that reads all of Scripture as the progressive unfolding of God's covenantal dealings with humanity, from the covenant of works in Eden through the covenant of grace culminating in Christ. His covenantal hermeneutic, developed as an alternative to the more philosophical method of scholastic theology, became enormously influential in the Reformed tradition and is the direct ancestor of the biblical-theological method that shapes conservative Reformed scholarship today. His approach to prophecy — reading the Psalms and prophets as direct predictions of specific New Testament events — was both innovative and controversial. Federal theology as he developed it became the framework within which Westminster theology was increasingly interpreted.
Puritanism & English Nonconformity			
<b>John Owen</b>	fl. c. 1643–1683 AD	The Death of Death in the Death of Christ; Communion with God; On the Holy Spirit (7 volumes); Biblical Theology; On Schism	John Owen is the greatest theologian of English Puritanism — a prolific, massively learned, and spiritually profound writer whose works span systematic theology, biblical commentary, ecclesiology, and devotional writing at a level of sustained excellence unmatched in his tradition. His <i>Death of Death in the Death of Christ</i> is the most rigorous defense of particular (limited) atonement ever written, still the standard reference for that doctrine. His multi-volume work <i>On the Holy Spirit</i> is the most comprehensive Protestant pneumatology of the 17th century. His <i>Communion with God</i> describes the believer's personal fellowship with each person of the Trinity with a warmth and theological precision that made it a devotional classic. As Vice-Chancellor of Oxford and adviser to Cromwell he was also a major figure in the political theology of the Interregnum. C. S. Lewis's tutor claimed Owen was the greatest theologian England ever produced.

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<b>Richard Baxter</b>	fl. c. 1645–1691 AD	The Reformed Pastor; The Saints' Everlasting Rest; A Call to the Unconverted; Christian Directory; Autobiography (Reliquiae Baxterianae)	Richard Baxter is the most practically influential Puritan pastor-theologian — a writer whose works shaped the devotional and pastoral life of English Nonconformity more deeply than any other figure of his century. The Reformed Pastor is the most challenging and practical account of pastoral ministry in Protestant literature, built on his own experience in Kidderminster where his systematic household visitation transformed a nominally Christian parish into a vibrant congregation. The Saints' Everlasting Rest — a massive meditation on heaven written during a serious illness — became one of the most widely read devotional works in English. His ecumenical instincts, his modified Calvinism (sometimes called 'Baxterianism'), and his refusal to conform to either strict Calvinist or Arminian positions made him controversial but also uniquely bridging. His autobiography is a primary source for 17th-century English church life.
<b>John Bunyan</b>	fl. c. 1656–1688 AD	The Pilgrim's Progress (Parts I and II); Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners; The Holy War; Mr. Badman	John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress is the most widely read work of Christian literature after the Bible itself — translated into over 200 languages, never out of print since 1678, and the foundational text of Protestant popular piety across the English-speaking world and far beyond. Written during his imprisonment for unlicensed preaching, it narrates the journey of Christian from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City through allegorical landscape of extraordinary imaginative vividness — the Slough of Despond, Vanity Fair, Doubting Castle, the Delectable Mountains. Its characters (Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Faithful, Giant Despair, Hopeful) entered the English language as permanent archetypes. Grace Abounding, his spiritual autobiography, is the most searching account of evangelical conversion anxiety in Protestant literature. A tinker with no formal education, Bunyan produced what many regard as the greatest work of English prose fiction before the 18th-century novel.
<b>Blaise Pascal</b>	fl. c. 1646–1662 AD	Pensées (posthumous); Provincial Letters; Memorial	Blaise Pascal is simultaneously the greatest French prose stylist of the 17th century, a mathematician and scientist of the first rank (probability theory, the vacuum, the hydraulic press), and the most penetrating Christian apologist of the modern era. His Provincial Letters — a series of satirical open letters attacking Jesuit casuistry — are the most effective polemical prose in the French language and dealt lasting damage to Jesuit moral theology. His Pensées, fragments of an unfinished apology for Christianity assembled after his death, contain some of the most quoted sentences in Western thought: the 'wager' argument for belief in God, the observation that 'the heart has its reasons that reason does not know,' and his account of Jesus as 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — not of the philosophers.' His Memorial — a mystical record of his night of fire in 1654 — is one of the most intense conversion documents of the Christian tradition.
<b>George Fox</b>	fl. c. 1647–1691 AD	Journal; Letters; epistles; Book of Miracles	George Fox is the founder of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) — one of the most radical and distinctive Christian movements to emerge from the 17th-century ferment of English religion. His Journal is a primary source of great historical importance for the religious and social upheaval of the Interregnum and Restoration periods, and one of the most vivid spiritual autobiographies in the language. His central convictions — that the Inner Light of Christ illuminates every person, that outward sacraments and ordained ministry are unnecessary, and that truth requires plain speech and the refusal of all social deference — produced a community whose influence on religious liberty, prison reform, abolition, and pacifism far outweighs its numbers. The Quaker tradition he founded shaped William Penn, John Woolman, and the broader Anglo-American tradition of principled nonconformity.
<b>Catholic Mysticism &amp; Spirituality</b>			
<b>Francis de Sales</b>	fl. c. 1597–1622 AD	Introduction to the Devout Life; Treatise on the Love of God; Letters of Spiritual Direction	Francis de Sales is the most important Catholic spiritual director of the 17th century and the theologian who democratized the contemplative life — insisting, against the prevailing assumption, that deep personal holiness was not the preserve of monks and nuns but was available to and required of every lay Christian in their ordinary vocation. His Introduction to the Devout Life, written originally as letters of spiritual direction to a laywoman, became the most widely read Catholic devotional book of the century. His Treatise on the Love of God is a comprehensive mystical theology of charity. He is also the patron saint of journalists and writers for his use of popular publishing in Catholic evangelization. His gentle, humane spirituality — in striking contrast to the severity of much Counter-Reformation piety — influenced Jane de Chantal, Vincent de Paul, and ultimately the entire tradition of French spiritual direction.
<b>Miguel de Molinos</b>	fl. c. 1675–1685 AD	Spiritual Guide; Letters	Miguel de Molinos is the central figure of Quietism — the mystical movement that pushed the Pseudo-Dionysian tradition of pure passive contemplation to its logical extreme, arguing that the soul must achieve complete annihilation of will and total passivity before God, abandoning all active prayer, resistance to temptation, and concern for one's own salvation. His Spiritual Guide (1675) was initially approved by the Inquisition and became enormously popular, but was condemned in 1687 and he died imprisoned. The Quietist controversy he ignited spread to France, drawing in Madame Guyon and Fénelon and producing the most significant Catholic debate about mystical prayer of the century. Historians of Catholic spirituality, the boundaries of mystical orthodoxy, and the Inquisition's role in policing inner religious experience all engage his case as a defining episode.
<b>18th Century — Pietism, Evangelicalism &amp; Enlightenment</b>			

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<b>Philip Jakob Spener</b>	fl. c. 1670–1705 AD	Pia Desideria (Pious Wishes); The Spiritual Priesthood; Theological Considerations	Philip Jakob Spener is the Father of German Pietism — the reform movement within Lutheran orthodoxy that prioritized personal conversion, small-group Bible study (the collegia pietatis he founded became the model for the class meeting), and practical holiness over doctrinal precision. His Pia Desideria (1675) is the founding manifesto of the movement, diagnosing the spiritual deadness of institutional Lutheranism and proposing six practical reforms including intensive lay Bible study, the priesthood of all believers in practice, and experiential rather than merely notional faith. Pietism transformed German Lutheranism and its influence extended through Zinzendorf and the Moravians to John Wesley — making Spener a more distant but genuine grandfather of the Methodist revival and modern evangelical Christianity. The tension between orthodoxy and pietism he ignited remains alive in Protestant debates about the relationship between doctrine and experience.
<b>Count Nikolaus von Zinzendorf</b>	fl. c. 1722–1760 AD	Sixteen Discourses on Jesus; hymns (over 2,000); speeches and letters; Litanies of the Wounds	Count Zinzendorf is the founder and theological animator of the Moravian Brethren — the renewal of the old Bohemian Hussite tradition on his Herrnhut estate that became one of the most missionary-minded Christian communities in history. The Moravians sent missionaries to the Caribbean, Greenland, North America, and Africa decades before the Protestant missionary movement existed as a concept. Their influence on John Wesley during his voyage to Georgia — where Zinzendorf's Moravians modeled a peace and assurance Wesley lacked — was the direct trigger of the Aldersgate experience that launched Methodism. His Christ-centered, emotionally warm, and experientially focused theology — sometimes called 'religion of the heart' — represents the most developed 18th-century alternative to both cold orthodoxy and rationalist Enlightenment Christianity.
<b>Jonathan Edwards</b>	fl. c. 1731–1758 AD	Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God; Religious Affections; Freedom of the Will; The Nature of True Virtue; A Faithful Narrative; The End for Which God Created the World	Jonathan Edwards is the greatest theologian and philosopher produced by American Christianity and one of the most formidable intellects of the 18th century in any field. His Religious Affections is the most rigorous analysis of the psychology of Christian conversion and genuine spiritual experience ever written in English — a work that simultaneously validated the Great Awakening revivals and subjected them to searching critical scrutiny. His Freedom of the Will is the most powerful philosophical defense of Calvinist determinism against Arminian libertarian free will in the English language. The End for Which God Created the World presents a vision of God's glory as the ultimate ground and goal of all creation of stunning theological depth. As a revivalist he sparked the Great Awakening in New England; as a philosopher he engaged Locke and Newton on their own terms. He remains the unavoidable conversation partner for American evangelical theology.
<b>John Wesley</b>	fl. c. 1738–1791 AD	Sermons (151 standard sermons); Notes on the New Testament; A Plain Account of Christian Perfection; Journal; Letters	John Wesley is the founder of Methodism and one of the most consequential figures in the history of Christianity — a man whose movement, beginning with field preaching in England, eventually produced the Methodist, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions that together represent the largest family of Protestant Christianity in the world today. His doctrine of entire sanctification — the possibility of a 'second blessing' of perfect love that cleanses the heart of all sin — became the theological engine of the Holiness movement and through it of Pentecostalism. His organizational genius (class meetings, circuits, lay preachers, connexional governance) created a model of church structure that proved extraordinarily reproducible. His 151 standard sermons and Notes on the New Testament remain the doctrinal standards of worldwide Methodism. His Journal is a primary source for 18th-century English religious and social history of the first order.
<b>Charles Wesley</b>	fl. c. 1738–1788 AD	Hymns and Sacred Poems (with John); over 6,000 hymns including 'Hark! the Herald Angels Sing,' 'O for a Thousand Tongues,' 'Love Divine All Loves Excelling,' 'And Can It Be'	Charles Wesley is the greatest hymn writer in Christian history by volume and arguably by quality — his approximately 6,500 hymns constitute a body of congregational theology in verse that shaped the worship and doctrinal formation of Methodism and evangelical Christianity worldwide. Where John provided the organization and theology of Methodism, Charles provided its devotional voice — hymns of such theological density, emotional warmth, and lyrical beauty that they transmitted Wesleyan doctrine to millions who never read a systematic theology. 'O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing,' 'Hark! the Herald Angels Sing,' 'Love Divine All Loves Excelling,' and 'And Can It Be' are among the most sung hymns in Christian history. His hymns are primary theological documents as well as devotional ones, and historians of Methodist theology treat them as authoritative expressions of Wesleyan doctrine alongside his brother's prose.
<b>George Whitefield</b>	fl. c. 1737–1770 AD	Sermons; Journal; Letters	George Whitefield is the greatest preacher of the 18th-century evangelical revival and the man whose transatlantic itinerant ministry made the Great Awakening a genuinely intercontinental phenomenon rather than a series of local revivals. Preaching to crowds of tens of thousands in open fields across England, Scotland, Wales, and the American colonies — before microphones, in an age when such gatherings were logistically extraordinary — he reached more people directly than any previous preacher in history. Benjamin Franklin, who admired him without converting, carefully calculated that Whitefield could be heard by 30,000 people at once. His Calvinist theology put him in permanent tension with the Wesleys, but his friendship with John Wesley survived their disagreements. His impact on American colonial religious culture was enormous and historians of the Great Awakening, American evangelicalism, and transatlantic Protestantism treat his journals and correspondence as primary sources.

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<b>William Law</b>	fl. c. 1717–1761 AD	A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life; The Case of Reason; A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection; The Spirit of Prayer	William Law is the greatest English devotional writer of the 18th century — a Non-Juror whose refusal to take oaths to the Hanoverian succession cost him his Cambridge fellowship but freed him to produce a body of spiritual writing of extraordinary power. A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life is the most challenging and practically demanding devotional work in the English language after The Imitation of Christ, insisting with uncomfortable specificity that every aspect of ordinary life — how one uses money, time, conversation, and occupation — must be ordered to the glory of God. It directly converted both John Wesley and Samuel Johnson. His later mystical works, drawing on Jakob Böhme, moved toward a more speculative spirituality. His Case of Reason is an important early critique of Deism. He is essential for understanding the devotional background of both Methodism and 18th-century Anglican high churchmanship.
<b>Johann Sebastian Bach (theological significance)</b>	fl. c. 1703–1750 AD	St. Matthew Passion; St. John Passion; Mass in B Minor; over 200 cantatas; chorales; organ works	Bach does not belong in a list of writers in the conventional sense, but his musical output is so theologically dense and so significant as a primary source for Lutheran piety and doctrine that church historians and theologians increasingly treat it as such. His cantatas — over 200 surviving, written for the Lutheran liturgical year — are systematic biblical and doctrinal expositions in musical form, as rigorously theological as any sermon. He inscribed his scores SDG (Soli Deo Gloria — to God alone be glory) and described music as 'the harmonious euphony to the glory of God.' The St. Matthew Passion is the most profound musical meditation on the crucifixion ever composed. Karl Barth said that the angels play Bach when they make music for God. Historians of Lutheran theology, worship, and culture treat his work as primary evidence for how Lutheran doctrine was received, embodied, and transmitted in 18th-century Germany.
<b>John Newton</b>	fl. c. 1764–1807 AD	Olney Hymns (with Cowper); Letters; Authentic Narrative (autobiography); Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade	John Newton — former slave trader, evangelical Anglican minister, and author of Amazing Grace — is one of the most personally dramatic figures of 18th-century Christianity and an important primary source for three distinct historical conversations: the evangelical revival, the abolitionist movement, and the theology of conversion. His Authentic Narrative, detailing his years in the slave trade and his conversion, is the most widely read evangelical autobiography of the century after Wesley's Journal. His Olney Hymns, co-written with the poet William Cowper, produced some of the most enduring hymns in English including Amazing Grace, Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken, and How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds. His late Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade — a public recantation by a former insider — was an important document in the parliamentary campaign against the trade. His extensive pastoral letters are primary sources for evangelical spirituality and counseling.
<b>Jonathan Edwards Jr. &amp; New Divinity Movement</b>	fl. c. 1769–1801 AD	Works of Samuel Hopkins; Joseph Bellamy's True Religion Delineated; Edwards Jr.'s Salvation of All Men	The New Divinity movement — centered on Samuel Hopkins, Joseph Bellamy, and Jonathan Edwards Jr. — represents the first distinctly American school of systematic theology, built on the elder Edwards's foundations and pushing them in new directions. Hopkins developed the doctrine of 'disinterested benevolence' — that true virtue requires willingness to be damned for the glory of God — which became the theological engine of New England's reform movements including abolitionism (Hopkins was among the first prominent American clergymen to call for abolition). Bellamy's True Religion Delineated was the most widely read American theological work of the 18th century after Edwards's own. The New Divinity's modifications of Calvinist atonement theology (governmental atonement) directly influenced Charles Finney and the revivalist tradition. It is the necessary context for understanding American Protestant theology from Edwards to the Civil War.