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A Christian Intellectual — Jaroslav Pelikan Dead at 82

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Jaroslav Pelikan, one of the Christian tradition's greatest historians of doctrine, died Saturday, May 13, 2006, of lung cancer. Pelikan had served for many years as Sterling Professor of History at Yale University — holding the university's most prestigious professorial title. He was also a prolific author, writing more than thirty books, ranging from classical studies to considerations of Bach and Faust.

His monumental work was the five-volume history of doctrine, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. In this great work, Pelikan offered what I believe to be the quintessential definition of Christian doctrine: “*What the church of Jesus Christ believes, teaches, and confesses on the basis of the word of God.*”

Professor Pelikan described doctrine as “the business of the church.” And, even as he titled his great work *The Christian Tradition*, he warned that tradition must be distinguished from traditionalism: “*Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.*”

In his 1965 work, *The Christian Intellectual*, Professor Pelikan wrote with a prophetic pen:

The Protestant Reformation was launched by a cadre of intellectuals, but the latter-day heirs of the Reformation sometimes seem determined to do everything they can to live down this past. Luther, Melancthon, Bucer, Zwingli, Calvin, Cranmer, Hooker — all thought that they stood, as in fact they did, in the vanguard of intellectuals of their time.

Professor Pelikan's contribution to Christian scholarship should inspire others to reverse that trend, and to reclaim the calling of the Christian intellectual.

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