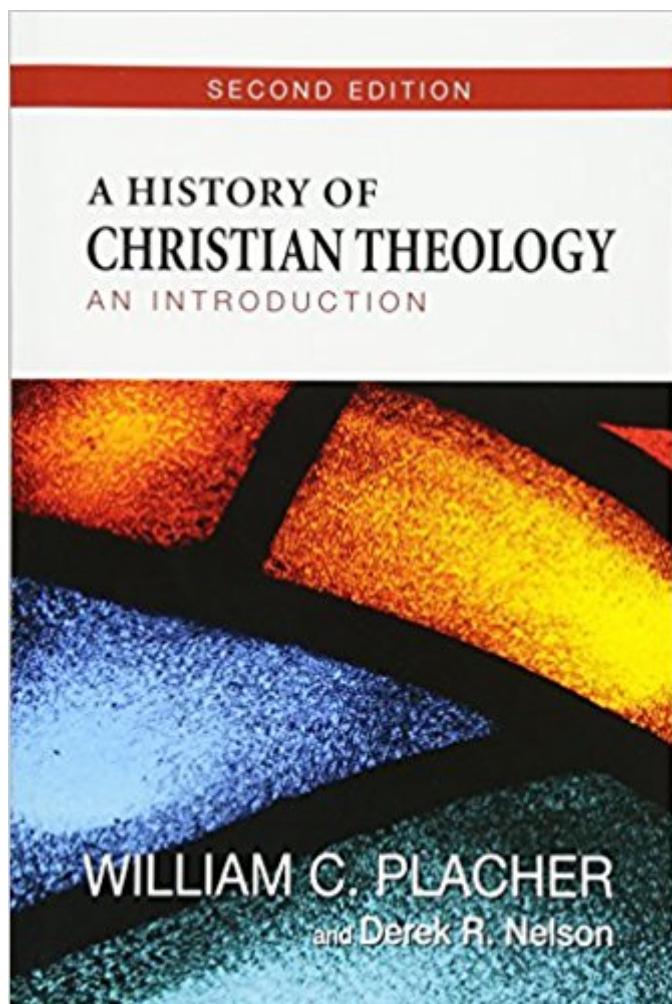


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# A History Of Christian Theology, Second Edition: An Introduction



## Synopsis

A modern classic, *A History of Christian Theology* offers a concise yet complete chronicle of the whole of Christian theology, from its background in the history of Israel to the liberation and postliberal theologies of recent years. This updated 30th anniversary edition includes expanded treatments of theological developments at the end of the 20th century, and preliminary trajectories for theology in the 21st century. It also includes updated bibliographies and revised chapters on important innovations in biblical studies, and their impact on theology. This updated and revised edition will continue to aid the work of both students and faculty for years to come.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"William C. Placher . . . is to be congratulated for having done what many would have considered impossible. In slightly more than 300 pages he has chronicled the whole history of Christian theology, from its background in the history of Israel to the various modes of liberation theology in the late 20th century. Moreover, he has touched almost all of the important bases and has dealt with significant figures, issues, movements in an incisive and illuminating manner. This intellectual history, a story of people and their ideas, is a delight to read. I predict it will be widely used not only in college and seminaries, but also in lay institutes and study groups." — The Christian Century

William C. Placher was Charles D. and Elizabeth S. LaFollette Distinguished Professor in the Humanities and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Wabash College in

Crawfordsville, Indiana. He was the author or editor of a number of books including *Essentials of Christian Theology*, published by WJK. Derek R. Nelson is Associate Professor of Religion at Wabash College.

perfect in every way a huge asset for my studies.

A fascinating look at how and Christian thinkers throughout history grappled with seemingly intractable issues. The greatest weakness is the introductory material, a brief history of OT and NT theology interwoven with Jewish history, which adopts the radical liberal theory - founded on pretty much nothing more than fantasy - of how the Biblical record came about, i.e. some folks made up stories to create a unifying identity, and continued to do so and speculate on God in order to explain their situation. This naturalistic theory fails to account for the message of the OT, which lambasts the founders, priesthood, monarchy, people and nation of Israel, serving none of them, unlike any other sacred or tribal history. It also proffers the long-debunked view that Christians borrowed from mystery cults - which we now know (and have known for decades) is bunk, since Christianity pre-dated those cults! This was disappointing. If you can stomach this naïf/Æ'Â vetÃƒÂ©, the rest of the book is a rewarding read.

### Good Book

A fascinating (and fast!) journey over three thousand years of theological thought. Good for beginners as well as serious students seeking a quick but thoughtful review of the subject/s.

finally a history of christianity presented in an easy way. Bought the book for Theo 100 class and was positively surprised.

Students of history will often encounter the presence and influence of religion and for Europe, the significance of Christianity. Students of Christian Theology will realize that they cannot get away from the study of history. Both history and theology are tightly connected. Unfortunately, there are various quarters in educational circles that see history as boring. They view theology as dry. Imagine putting "boring history" and "dry theology" together? Thankfully, there are books that demonstrate that a study of history, of Christian Theology, and the historical development of Christianity can be very interesting and educational. More importantly, it shows us again that

modern problems and controversies may not necessarily be solved but can be beneficially understood through the study of the historical events and contexts leading up to the issues. The author, the late William Placher who published this book's first edition in 1983 was a distinguished Professor at Wabash College until his untimely death in 2008. This second edition has been followed up by his past student and currently Associate Professor of the same college, Derek Nelson. With a very able and respectful summary of the late Professor Placher's overall theological stance, Nelson has given Placher a honourable tribute for the theological contributions given in a postmodern climate. The book is about a history of Christian people and their ideas. Unlike traditional books on Church history or the history of Christianity, it is a reflection on theology has been shaped over time, in particular, about individuals rather than institutions; of theology rather than doctrine; to raise new questions rather than new answers. Placher's work focuses on five particular theological tensions:1) Person of Christ (Humanity vs Divinity)2) Faith in Revelation vs Reason for Belief3) Works and Grace4) Spirit and Structure5) Church and State. Placher's conviction is that the Bible ought to be read as how it reveals Christ rather than a mere book of theological facts or doctrinal information. Like many history textbooks, Placher uses a chronological approach, beginning with the history of Israel, how it was the hope of the world, and how through Israel God reaches out to the Gentiles. He tackles the issues of the New Testament Church quite early, dealing with the issue of women, slavery, homosexuality, and observes that the Apostle Paul stopped short of going into more specifics. The key point is that Paul's writings need to be understood from the perspective of unity, redemption, and freedom. He traces the development of Christology. He traces the early beginnings of Orthodox Theology, which arises largely out of the threats of Gnosticism. (Downside of Orthodoxy is the rise of hierarchical structures). He looks at the influence of Philosophy on Christian Thought. (Downside of Philosophy is the rise of intellectual sophistry). He looks at the background and contexts leading up to the Nicene Creed; the rise of the iconoclastic controversy in 700s-800s AD; clerical abuses and emperor relationships in the early 1000s; how the Dark Ages force people then to look beyond religious issues toward survival matters; and the development of a time in which people are generally predisposed toward a God and salvation theology taught through the Church. The Reformation impacts not just the Protestant side, but also reinvigorated a renewed emphasis within the Roman Catholic Church toward their inner Reformation as well. With the forming of the Council of Trent, much of Catholic theology was established or reaffirmed. There is the rise of Calvinism in the 16th-17th Century; the Renaissance in the 17th-19th Century which pits the age of reason with the eyes of faith. Gradually, Placher covers the impact of the North American revivals, mentioning George Whitefield, Jonathan

Edwards, Lyman Beecher, Charles Finney, with brief notes on the Mormon, the Unitarian, and others. The final three chapters round up the discussion with Placher's personal take on it all. He says that the age of reason during the Renaissance, fits the need of that period where people increasingly finds it necessary to understand the reason for faith. People like Schleiermacher and Samuel Taylor Coleridge move beyond reason toward "its inspiration." There are people like Hegel, Kant, Kierkegaard, who are significant movers in theological field in the 19th Century. His chapter on the "End of Western Christendom" may sound initially pessimistic, but if readers are patient, they will find that they provide the seed of the beginning of liturgical reforms, particularly the de-emphasis of hierarchical structures toward a "people of God" with the incorporation of many ideas from existentialism, Augustinian theology, rationalism, to other reflections on the reasons behind liberation theology and the social gospel. He notices a growing engagement between theology and science, but also cautions us about the risks of secularism as the desire to engage the outside world grows. He makes some good observations that secularism affects not only Christians, but people of other religions as well. Remarkably, Placher notes that historically, whenever there are problems, theology had thrived. There is a movement of the center of Christianity toward the global South. Theological disagreements and disputes have often strengthened doctrine and theological stance. Most poignantly, Placher believes that it is theology that is influencing the secular more, even as most presume their own societies as secular. So What?=====Placher has wisely limited himself to a few significant figures and theological milestones in the writing of this book. While there are merits in putting toward a lot more material to know more about the past, it is more important to get a sense on where history is taking us into the future. By tracing the chronological development of events through history, we are able to see how people have adapted through the years. Some are driven by economic necessity. Others are caused by power struggles, the fight for theological purity against the heretics, the decline of one generation and the rise of another, and so on. Only when we are not sucked into too much detail are we able to see the forest without being distracted by the trees. It takes a knowledgeable and discerning writer to put together a book of this nature. When I first picked up this book, I thought it was going to be another historical text on Christianity. As I read more, it seems like there is a subtle shift of power and religious influence from the East to the West, and from the West to the South. It all begins with religious thought, which is now manifested more in pluralistic ways. More importantly, I am encouraged to read Placher's perspectives of theology thriving on problems. Indeed, we are often too predisposed toward being nice to one another at the expense of truth seeking. The early Christians and the many controversies along the way are bold attempts to seek out truth honestly and earnestly. If our

current generation can learn from them about how to fight or debate well and respectfully, we will all benefit from the pursuit of truth. However, if we prefer to adopt positions of "let sleeping dogs lie" without any desire to dig out truth for truth's sake, we will not only impoverish our current generation. We do the next generation a disservice as we plunge ourselves into the deadly waters of spiritual apathy. Rating: 4.5 stars of 5. conrade This book is provided to me courtesy of Westminster John Knox Press and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. All opinions offered above are mine unless otherwise stated or implied.

In *A History of Christian Theology* 2nd Edition, Derek R. Nelson and the late William C. Placher, present more than 3000 years of theological thought in 275 pages. The book is not primarily about ideas or doctrine, but the historical background which shaped the lives of those who formed much of the Christian faith, going back as far as the Old Testament. The authors rarely inserted themselves, allowing luminaries such as Luther, Calvin, and Augustine to speak in their own words. This book is a whirlwind tour of those who have impacted the world of Christian theological thought. *A History of Christian Theology* was an interesting undertaking for someone who isn't as familiar with Church History as much as she would like. The preface was sometimes needlessly wordy, seemed to have liberal undertones, and a bit esoteric, but reading it was necessary in understanding the structure and themes of the book. However, once the book begins, it tells an interesting and effective story of the men and women who have impacted much of Church History. It was a pleasant surprise to see John Calvin and Martin Luther treated fairly, and Augustine given his due. The last forty pages or so was a challenge, as a lot of information was condensed. The book would have been stronger had it gone into more detail of the last 150 years. Perhaps the reader was tired. All in all, *A History of Christian Theology* was interesting and informative. I give it three out of five stars. I was given a free copy from the publisher in exchange for my honest review.

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