



History of Christian Theology: An Introduction

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A History of Christian Theology offers a concise yet complete chronicle of 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. This book is an intellectual history, a story of people and their ideas. It will be valuable for college and seminary students as well as lay study groups.

History of Christian Theology: An Introduction Details

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Heath Henwood says

A History of Christian Theology,
Second Edition
By William C. Placher, Derek R. Nelson
Publisher: Westminister John Knox Press

The first edition of this wonderful reference has been utilised by students for over three decades. It outlines the importance and vast history of theology. This updated version brings together developments and thinking from the last thirty years with Placher vast knowledge in the previous volume.

A History of Christian Theology engages the reader / student in an interesting and educational text.

The book pulls together five tensions of Christianity, expounding on their affect of society and reflecting on how they have shaped theology:

Humanity vs Divinity

Faith in Revelation vs Reason for Belief

Works and Grace

Spirit and Structure

Church and State.

While best suited for the professional theologian and Bible College student, lay people will gain valuable insight into theology and the development of the ideals that we take as truth today.

Jessica says

"It is the shift in the place of religion rather than changes in any particular doctrine that makes this period, often called "the Enlightenment," one of the watersheds in the history of Christian theology. In the Middle Ages and the Reformation, believers thought that their own lives mattered only because they fit into the story of God's activity in history. Now they tended to think that God mattered because he could be fit into the story of their lives—whether as a rational guide to a moral life or as the cause of a conversion experience. Many of the details might remain the same, but the center of the story moved from God to human beings."

J. Ewbank says

Placher has done a remarkable job of presenting a history of Christian theology. It is difficult to write about such a broad sweep of theological history and secondly to write in such a way that it is intelligible. Because I am a Methodist I wish he had treated John Wesley with a more complete rendition of his ability to bring various concepts together in theology, however, one can't always have everything. A good job.

J. Robert Ewbank author "John Wesley, Natural Man, and the Isms" "Wesley's Wars" and "To Whom It May Concern"

Katherine Wacker says

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.

Jacob Aitken says

I've mixed feelings here. The 3 stars might indicate that I didn't like the book, yet that would not be entirely true. Instead of giving an involved narrative of the book, I'll simply state the pros and cons and leave it at that.

Pros:

1. He does a decent job in showing history as a narrative.
2. Although pedantic, his writing style is remarkably clear (Placher was a known prose stylist).
3. Good section on Hebrew theology: The Hebrews' theology arose from the narratives.
4. Occasionally good insights on patristic and medieval theology.
5. Great section on post-Enlightenment theology.
6. Each chapter ends with an annotated bibliography.

Cons:

1. As noted above, the writing style has a pedantic, sing-songy-sunday-schooly cadence at times.
2. Too brief--much too brief.
3. He tries to argue that Augustine and Aquinas affirmed sexual pleasure in marriage as a good and not as a

lesser-good or a sinnish goodo. This is simply false. Augustine's worst exegesis imaginable is his attempt to argue that Adam and Eve--if they had sex before the fall (and he doesn't really think they did)--wouldn't have enjoyed the sexual pleasure part of it.

4. Placher relies upon Perry Miller's reconstruction of New England covenantalism, and recent theology (ala Muller) has shown this to be false. With that said, there is much in New England theology that is simply inadequate from a Reformed liturgical perspective.

Conclusion:

I picked up this book for .25 cents. It can be found online for cheap. If you have read any historical theology prior to this (and I prefer Gonzalez's account), you won't get much out of this.

Ryan says

By far one of the greatest single volume resources for theological studies. Placher presents the complicated history of theology in a very simple way. Without glossing over controversy, or offering a false illusion of unity where diversity reigned, Placher's history clearly communicates the ideas and the contexts from which they developed. At the end of each chapter, Placher gives a detailed bibliography for further research. Highly informative and readable for anyone interested, Placher's history is indispensable for theology students.

Patrick says

Insightful and readable.

Thom says

I gave it three stars, but only because I find theology hard to read. I did thoroughly enjoy it in small chunks. The historical focus was also beneficial for me in keeping my interest. In the end, I was able to arrive at a list of basic theological questions folks have been struggling with for more than 2000 years. Not a bad way to frame a study.

Greg says

A concise and easy to read history of the different theologies that emerged over the centuries. A good book to get an overview before selecting a specific line of theology.

Tim says

Placher's book is an overview of all of Christian theology and it flies high and surveys widely. As such an overview it, of course, may frustrate the expert and certainly will frustrate the would-be expert. But for the

common reader his overall narrative and individual descriptions are excellent and clear. He is not biased (the English Puritans get perhaps too hard a rap, but I may be overly defensive), he defends Christian thought from some of its worst abusers, while acknowledging faults. It may have been written as a textbook, but it is a winsome one that I will crib from mercilessly for my own teaching.
