Praise for the previous edition

“Useful in undergraduate courses, as well as in introductory seminary ones. McGrath’s prose is clear and precise. He is very good at articulating distinctions between concepts.... Historical Theology would be a valuable reference book to have in one’s library.... As one already hooked on historical theology, this reader found her interest renewed and expanded numerous times by McGrath’s book.”

The Journal of Religion

“This approach is very well-pitched for the intended readership, particularly those who are teaching themselves. Historical Theology is an excellent resource, both for the teacher and student.”

Morwenna Ludlow, St John’s College, Oxford

“Perhaps for the first time an expansive and ecumenical survey of Christian Theology has been produced that can be read with the same ease as a serious but gripping novel.... This book will serve as an invaluable tool: it locates theological innovation and controversy in its context-specific situation.”

G.W.P. McFarlane, London Bible College

This popular introduction to the history of Christian thought has been thoroughly revised and expanded for a second edition. It features substantial new material, including additional coverage of orthodox theology, the Holy Spirit, and medieval mysticism, alongside new sections on liberation, feminist, and Latino theologies, as well as on the global spread of Christianity.

Covering the entire history of Christian thought, this textbook provides all the material needed for a broad understanding of Christian theological development, from the earliest days of the Church Fathers right up to the present day. The book is ordered into four distinct periods, the Patristic period, the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the Reformation and post-Reformation, and the modern period, addressing the key ideas, processes and people in each. Readers are encouraged to interact with the material through case studies and study questions at the end of each section which explore central themes, and primary texts are included to facilitate deeper understanding of the issues discussed.

A set of comprehensive glossaries encompass theologians, theological developments, and important words, names, and phrases.

Meeting the demand for a vibrant, chronological historical treatment of the subject, this authoritative and accessible volume is a welcome new edition of a bestselling textbook. Additional resources to support the book are available at www.wiley.com/go/mcgrath.

ALISTER E. MCGRATH is the Head of the Centre for Theology, Religion & Culture at King’s College London, having previously been Professor of Historical Theology at the University of Oxford. He is one of the world’s leading Protestant theologians and has long been involved in theological education. McGrath is also the author of some of the most widely used theology textbooks, including the bestselling Christian Theology: An Introduction (2010, Wiley-Blackwell), now in its fifth edition. He is in constant demand as a speaker at conferences throughout the world.

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Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough, Second Edition (2011)
Darwinism and the Divine: Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology (2011)
The Order of Things: Explorations in Scientific Theology (2006)
A Brief History of Heaven (2003)
The Blackwell Companion to Protestantism (edited with Darren C. Marks, 2003)
The Future of Christianity (2002)
Historical Theology: An Introduction (1998)
The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought (edited, 1995)
A Life of John Calvin (1990)
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How to Use this Book

This book aims to introduce you to historical theology as an important and interesting subject. It is also a very large topic; to do justice to it, at least five substantial volumes would be required. This book is an introduction to its aims and themes, which aims to pack as much useful information into a single volume as is realistically possible, using approaches which have been tried and tested in classrooms in Europe, North America, and Australasia. The book makes use of some material already presented in the best-selling work *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, which has been reconfigured for the specific purpose of introducing students to the discipline of historical theology. Although much new material has been added and some existing material rewritten, the basic approach and some contents of this earlier work have been retained.

The guiding principle which lies behind this volume is *selective attention*. It is like a map, giving you a good idea of the landscape, filling in enough detail to help you make sense of things, and making it easier to move on to a more detailed engagement with any of its features. It is assumed that you do not have the time to become familiar with every aspect of the history of Christian thought, but want a general familiarity with its most important aspects. The approach adopted is to begin by painting a scene using some very broad-brush strokes, and then filling in the fine detail in selected areas of importance. This will allow you to come away from reading this book with a good general understanding of the development of Christian theology. Despite its brevity, however, the work includes a lot of material – considerably more than is included in most introductions of this kind.

The book opens with an Introduction which tries to explain what historical theology is, how it fits into the study of theology as a whole, and why it is a subject worth studying. You are strongly recommended to read this Introduction before proceeding further, as it will help you get a sense of orientation as you approach the subject.

To break the material down into manageable sections, the history of Christian thought has been divided into four broad periods. While this division of history is useful, it is important to realize that it is slightly arbitrary at points. We need to heed the warning of the Cambridge historian G. M. Trevelyan (1876–1962) on this matter: “Unlike dates, periods
HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

are not facts. They are retrospective conceptions that we form about past events, useful to focus discussion, but very often leading historical thought astray.” These four divisions are:

Chapter 1   The Patristic Period, c.100–451
Chapter 2   The Middle Ages and the Renaissance, c.500–1500
Chapter 3   The Reformation and Post-Reformation Periods, 1500–1750
Chapter 4   The Modern Period, 1750 to the Present Day

These divisions, though a little arbitrary, have proved useful in a teaching context, and have therefore been retained. Each chapter contains two major sections, as follows:

1.  A general overview of the period in question, which identifies the historical background to the period, and its main theological developments, individual theologians, and schools of thought or theological movements which you need to know about. It also introduces the basic theological vocabulary which you will need to know to make sense of other theological works. You should read this overview before exploring the individual case studies that follow. If you need a very brief overview of the history of Christian thought, you are recommended to read only the four historical overviews, and leave the individual case studies for study at a later date.

2.  A series of individual case studies that examine some of the themes of the period in question in much greater detail. This allows you to supplement a general understanding of the period with a specific knowledge of some of its significant themes. In some cases, the case studies are text-intensive, allowing you to engage with primary texts of importance. Here, you will be given some guidance as to how to read the texts and gain the most from them. Other case studies may take the form of general surveys, aiming to pack as much information as possible into a limited space.

If you are using the book to teach yourself historical theology, it is recommended that you read the chapters in the order in which they are presented. If you want to do nothing more than gain an overview of each period, you need only read the historical overviews; the detailed engagement with specific themes in the case studies can be left for another time.

This volume works on the basis of “explain it the first time round.” Thus the material on the medieval period assumes that you know about the patristic period, the material on the sixteenth century assumes that you know about the medieval period, and so forth. However, if you are using the book in conjunction with a taught course, you can easily work out which sections of the book relate to the ordering of material used by your teacher. If in doubt, ask for guidance. A closing section entitled “For Further Reading” will allow you to identify books or articles which will be helpful to you if you want to follow up on anything that interested you, and which you would like to explore in greater depth.

If you come across terms you don’t understand, you have two options. First, try the glossary at the end of the work, which may give you a brief definition of the term and refer you to a discussion of the relevant material in the text. Second, try the index, which will provide you with a more extensive analysis of key discussion locations within the volume.