

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT



ALISTER E. McGRATH



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In this text, Alister McGrath utilises the successful historic chapters from *Christian Theology: An Introduction, Second Edition* and builds on them to provide all the material that students will need to understand the development of Christian theology from its beginnings.

Historical Theology Details

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David Varney says

Another helpful volume from McGrath's theological set aimed at undergraduate studies (that go alongside his Theological Reader and Christian Theology titles). Yes, there is some repetition in his style but that is down to the way the book is laid out and is done on purpose to aid quick access to the relevant material. This is not a book to be read stepwise.

Joel Ickes says

This comprehensive text engages the historical context and explains Christian theology in regard to history. This text is perfect for a 300-level and up course in Christian theology. It covers the basics of historical theology, the patristic period, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods, and the modern period. However, the text does not engage the early roots of Christianity in postmodernism. It also contains important case studies in Christian theology and interesting inlets in the text on key terminology and popular figures in Christian history.

Tyler says

This is a very good handbook for understanding major theological developments and controversies of the history of the church. McGrath's organization is simple and the overview brief. He splits church history into four major movements (Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, and Modern Periods). In each section he briefly provides a chronology, a selection of important theologians, and then a more detailed set of case studies of theological conversations in that time period.

For me, McGrath is more helpful in the first sections than the latter ones. In the reformation era, it feels as if some of his Anglican background shades his focus. I was rather frustrated in his modern section about what topics he chose to address as important. The way he portrayed it, it seemed that Christianity took a massive step backwards after the post-reformation era. I'm willing to concede that I may have rel this way because I (a reformed presbyterian) felt that none of my parties major thinkers got any attention for their contributions (he essentially stops reformed theology with Barth).

Bobbi Martens says

Read this as a sophomore in college, and should read it again. So many theologians and ideas brought into the light here, and it's very readable with its short sections, clear section headings, and clean layout. Dr. Leithart used & still uses this during his theology class, and perhaps that should be recommendation enough without my two cents' of words.

JR Snow says

Very good. A bit off historically at times, especially in the chapter about the Reformation. Not super great at communicating his subject. quite dense for an entry-level textbook. I would expect this reading level more for graduate reading than Seminary/undergraduate stuff. Took me several years to slog through.

Vaughn says

This text gives an easy to read, well organized account of key events spanning the early church through the reformation. As an introduction, it is better than average, but it won't be the only book in your church history library.

Nick says

This book is highly repetative. Whole segments are the exact same. McGrath is trying to provide easy access to material, however if things are clearly marked (as they are here) I find frequent repetition annoying.

Jason Wilson says

A good ,if brief, overview of major points in theological history. I'd have liked more on important stuff such as the creeds but this is satisfying and there are good overviews of individual thinkers, and of twentieth century trends .

Danny Daley says

I love theology. But rarely can I actually say that a single theology book literally changed my perspective in a paradigm shifting sort of way. This book did that for me. Although I'm an evangelical, I can say that since I read this book in 2012 I read far more theological books from outside of my tradition than from within it, and this is the book that sent me on my journey beyond my own spheres of influence, and taught me that my own tradition does not always properly perceive the theological outlook of the Scriptures. McGrath deals fairly with most outside perspectives, and allows the reader to see a fuller picture of theological interpretation than from within the lens of rigidly defined orthodoxies. An excellent introduction to historical theology.

Melissa Bowers says

This book is a valuable resource for any student of theology. It covers theological movements and influential figures from the early church fathers until the present day. There is an extensive "For Further Reading" section at the end of the book. McGrath does a good job of simplifying complicated issues.

Craig Prather says

McGrath does a good job of presenting the theological positions of the early church fathers through the mid 20th century. I wish some of the chapters were more engaging, however it's a descent read in historical theology.

Joshua Lawson says

Michael Blecker said, "To do theology without history is to study cut flowers, not living plants." Read this book and you'll understand why.

Lydia says

This is a great introduction. It was easy to read, simple enough to understand, and the content was organized very well. I also enjoyed the extra content or the many other sources to turn to when looking to research a specific subject more. A very helpful book to keep on your shelf!

Thomas Reeves says

Read for use with training and teaching with parishioners. Have read multiple books before, but was disappointed with the usual Evangelical Pietistic Anglican approach to treating the core Patristic Church fathers as "Mascots" in CORE AREAS to be read and interpreted through, Luther, Calvin, and current modern theological lenses. Only read up until the Reformers and will still likely use this as reference and teaching application.

Michael says

A helpful overview of historical theology. The book is divided into four sections: the Patristic (16-76), the Middle Ages and Renaissance (77-123), Reformation and Post-Reformation (124-181), and Modern Period (182-168).

McGrath does an outstanding job connecting the development of ideas, especially his expertise on justification. He provides helpful overviews, and key words/names are in bold and explained in the side or in text boxes. Plus there is a helpful glossary for students.

McGrath provides not only helpful overviews on various ideas, but gives a window into current scholarship on various issues. For example, he gives a fine background to the two Medieval views of Scripture as articulated by Heiko Oberman (150-152). He provides clarity for students who might otherwise miss nuances such as the fact that it is anachronistic to refer to "Protestants" before the Council of Spiers in 1529 or the

fact that it is incorrect to refer to Geneva as part of a "Swiss Reformation" since Geneva was an independent city until 1815 (127-128). Thus the term "Reformed" is preferred over "Calvinist" to describe such theology. Such details show the care the author has to pay attention to the little details.

More important are his broad overviews of concepts and ideas. He also links certain recurring ideas that are debated. For example, he compares the ecclesiology of the Anabaptists as essentially a rehash of the Donatist controversy (171). I also appreciate his broad overviews about doctrines such as the Trinity and the Sacraments, which can serve as a useful starting point for students.

Overall I plan to recommend that we use this as a textbook and as a resource for doctoral students preparing to take their comprehensive exams in the area of historical theology.
