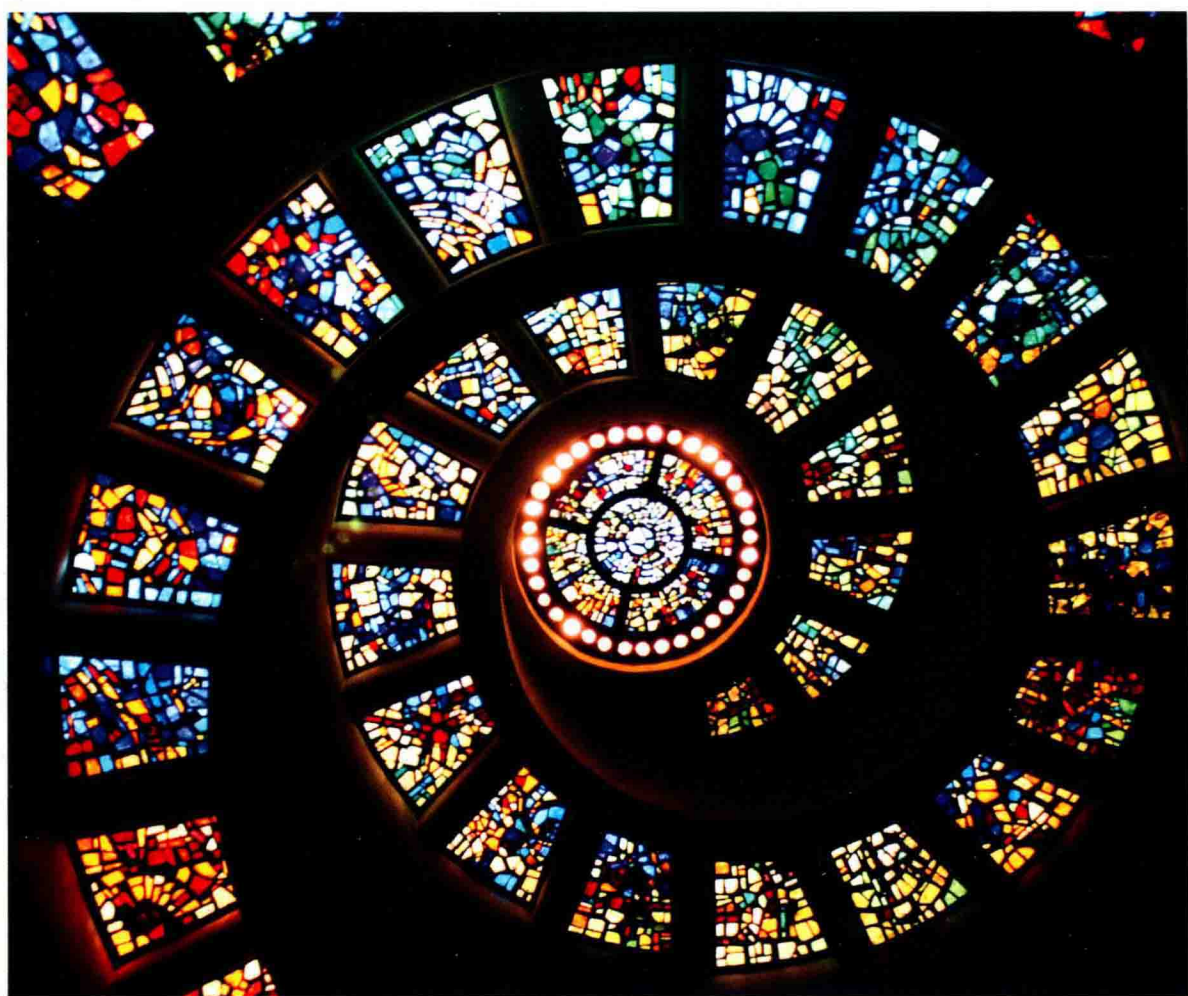


The Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought



Edited by Chad Meister
and James Beilby

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO MODERN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

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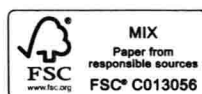
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THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO MODERN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

This Companion provides an unrivalled view of the field of modern Christian thought, from the Enlightenment to the twentieth century and beyond. Written by an outstanding team of theologians and philosophers of religion, it covers the following topics:

- Key figures and influencers
- Central events and movements
- Major theological issues and key approaches to Christian theology
- Recent topics and trends in Christian thought.

Each entry is clear and accessible, making the book the ideal resource for students of Christian thought and the history and philosophy of religion. It is also a valuable reference for professional theologians and philosophers.

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CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>Notes on contributors</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
CHAD MEISTER AND JAMES BEILBY	
PART I	
Key figures	3
1 Immanuel Kant	5
PAMELA SUE ANDERSON	
2 Friedrich Schleiermacher	17
ANDREW C. DOLE	
3 G. W. F. Hegel	27
CYRIL O'REGAN	
4 Charles Hodge	38
PAUL KJOSS HELSETH	
5 Ludwig Feuerbach	49
DOUGLAS MOGGACH AND WIDUKIND DE RIDDER	
6 Charles Darwin	62
MICHAEL RUSE	
7 Søren Kierkegaard	73
R. ZACHARY MANIS AND C. STEPHEN EVANS	
8 Abraham Kuyper	86
JOHN BOLT	
9 William James	95
MICHAEL R. SLATER	

CONTENTS

10 Friedrich Nietzsche	107
BRUCE ELLIS BENSON	
11 Adolf von Harnack	117
GEORGE NEWLANDS	
12 Rudolf Bultmann	127
DAVID FERGUSON	
13 Paul Tillich	138
RUSSELL RE MANNING	
14 Karl Barth	152
KEVIN W. HECTOR	
15 Charles Hartshorne	163
DANIEL A. DOMBROWSKI	
16 Henri de Lubac	173
SUSAN K. WOOD	
17 Karl Rahner	184
MARK F. FISCHER	
18 Hans Urs von Balthasar	196
EDWARD T. OAKES, S.J.	
19 Simone Weil	207
ANN LOADES	
20 Dietrich Bonhoeffer	217
JOHN W. DE GRUCHY	
21 Jürgen Moltmann	227
THOMAS R. THOMPSON	
22 Rosemary Radford Ruether	238
KRISTA E. HUGHES	
 Part II	
Major events and movements	251
23 Enlightenment	253
GARRETT GREEN	
24 The Scientific Revolution	264
JOSHUA M. MORITZ	
25 Pietism	277
CRAIG D. ATWOOD	
26 Existentialism	288
KYLE A. ROBERTS AND SILAS MORGAN	
27 Fundamentalism	301
HARRIET A. HARRIS	

CONTENTS

28 Liberal theology	315
J. B. STUMP	
29 Deism	326
ALAN CHARLES KORS	
30 Romanticism	338
DANIEL N. ROBINSON	
31 Phenomenology	349
DERMOT MORAN	
32 Vatican II	364
FRANCIS SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA	
 PART III	
Theological loci	377
33 Prolegomena	379
CHARLES TALIAFERRO	
34 The Bible	392
WILLIAM J. ABRAHAM	
35 Doctrine of God	403
BRIAN HEBBLETHWAITE	
36 Christology	412
GERALD O'COLLINS, S.J.	
37 Theological anthropology	423
D. LYLE DABNEY	
38 Eschatology	435
PHILIP TALLON AND JERRY L. WALLS	
39 Ecclesiology	445
SCOT MCKNIGHT	
40 Missiology	457
DARRELL L. GUDER	
41 Pneumatology	468
PETER ZIMMERLING	
42 Soteriology	482
PAUL K. MOSER	
43 The Trinity	493
THOMAS H. MCCALL	
44 Apologetics	503
JOHN G. STACKHOUSE, JR.	

CONTENTS

PART IV

Theological approaches	515
45 Anglican theology MARK CHAPMAN	517
46 Roman Catholic theology LAWRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM	527
47 Eastern Orthodox theology ARISTOTLE PAPANIKOLAOU	538
48 Evangelical theology ROGER E. OLSON	549
49 Liberation theology ANDREW BRADSTOCK	560
50 Process theology JOHN B. COBB, JR.	573
51 Feminist theology ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER	584
52 Black theology ANTHONY G. REDDIE	598
53 African theology EDWARD P. ANTONIO	610
54 Asian theology SEBASTIAN C. H. KIM	623
55 Pentecostal and charismatic theology AMOS YONG	636
56 Radical orthodoxy D. STEPHEN LONG	647

PART V

Recent currents	659
57 Christian theology of religions GAVIN D'COSTA	661
58 Theology and ethics LINDA ZAGZEBSKI	673
59 Theology and science JOHN POLKINGHORNE	682
60 Panentheism PHILIP CLAYTON	692

CONTENTS

61 Christian naturalism	703
JEROME A. STONE	
62 Systematic theology	713
KEVIN J. VANHOOZER	
63 Biblical theology	728
T. DESMOND ALEXANDER	
64 Christian philosophical theology	739
STEPHEN T. DAVIS	
65 Theology and postmodernity	751
JOHN R. FRANKE	
66 Environmental theology	763
JAY MCDANIEL	
67 Ecumenical theology	772
MARTIN E. MARTY	
68 Theology and race	783
WILLIE JAMES JENNINGS	
69 Theology and culture	795
ROBERT K. JOHNSTON	
70 Christianity in the majority world	806
HARVEY COX, JR.	
71 Neurotheology	821
WESLEY J. WILDMAN AND IAN R. COOLEY	
72 Astrotheology	838
TED PETERS	
<i>Index</i>	854

INTRODUCTION

Chad Meister and James Beilby

Christians comprise roughly 30 percent of the world's population. The history of Christianity is vast and variegated, and its global influence over the centuries is incalculable, forming the fabric and structure of many medieval and modern societies. One way to divide up the central ideas and intellectual influences of Christianity is through the historical bifurcation of pre- and post-Enlightenment eras. The Enlightenment is typically understood to be the historical period of western thought and culture that began in the mid-seventeenth century and reflected radical rethinking in the realms of philosophy, science, ethics, aesthetics, and religion. This involved an evolution from medieval European Christian thought which was characterized by the authority of tradition and myth, the unquestioning adherence to historic doctrines and creeds, and a view that progress (perhaps most notably theological progress) is bad, to Enlightenment thinking, which was characterized by freedom of thought and expression, an appreciation of cultural and theological change and development, and religious and political equality and freedom, all grounded in human reason. While the historical reality is much more complex than this simple bifurcation suggests, there was indeed a general shift in human consciousness in Europe that challenged traditional religious and social thought that, by and large, emerged in the Enlightenment era. That is where this volume begins.

As the title of this volume indicates, it is a companion – a survey, assessment, and guide – to modern Christian thought. By “modern” in this context we are referring to Christian thought at the apex of Enlightenment thinking. This *Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought* is an authoritative collection of essays addressing over seventy major issues relevant to Christian thought in the modern era. The team of scholars we have selected is first rate, some well known and widely recognized, others up-and-coming leaders in their particular areas of study.

The book is divided into five parts. Part I includes twenty-two chapters, each one covering a central figure in the history of Christian thought. We obviously had to be quite selective, and there were many thinkers whom we wanted to include but simply could not, due to space constraints. We have attempted to include diverse individuals from different streams of thought and tradition. Readers will likely think of others who, in their minds, would have been better choices here or there. Nevertheless, most scholars would consider those included to be relatively significant thought leaders in fields relevant to modern Christian faith.

Part II contains ten chapters on major movements and events of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought. Beginning with the Enlightenment itself, the chapters move through the Scientific Revolution to fundamentalist and liberal movements to the high peak of Catholic thought in the modern era: Vatican II.

In Part III there are twelve chapters on theological loci. These chapters are not merely overviews or summaries of theological positions; they are fresh and insightful perspectives on the development of key topics at the center of Christian theology during the modern age.

Part IV consists of twelve chapters on theological approaches. The first three comprise the major theological approaches of Anglican theology, Roman Catholic theology, and Eastern Orthodox theology. The obvious missing chapter here is Protestant theology. The reason for this is that Protestant theology has a number of prominent approaches within it, and we thought it best to have individual essays covering each of them. So the rest of the chapters in this section can be seen as variations of Protestant thinking. Of course, some of these approaches could be considered within the Roman Catholic rubric (perhaps most notably, liberation theology), but again we thought it would be beneficial to address each of these approaches in separate chapters.

The final part of the book, Part V, covers recent currents in modern Christian thought. Through developments in the hard sciences, in sociology and psychology, in religious and intercultural studies, to name a few areas, Christian thought has been widely, and in some cases radically, influenced. The world is now a global community, and much thought is now involved in how Christians might (should) engage with their intellectual and intercultural neighbors. Several chapters are devoted to this general theme. The various sciences have reflected explosive advances in recent decades, and how these new ideas and insights relate to our understanding of God, of creation, of social interaction, of environmental awareness, are at the cutting edge of Christian thought. Several chapters are devoted to these themes as well.

Our hope is that this book will be a useful guide to careful thinking about many of the ideas of Christianity over the last several centuries up through today, and that it fosters a genuine interest and even excitement in understanding where post-Enlightenment Christian thought has been and where it may be headed.