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978-0-521-51433-0 - The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology

Edited by Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

This Companion offers an up-to-date overview of the beliefs, doctrines, and practices of the key philosophical concepts at the heart of Christian theology. The sixteen chapters, commissioned specially for this volume, are written by an internationally recognized team of scholars and examine topics such as the Trinity, God's necessary existence, simplicity, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, goodness, eternity and providence, the incarnation, resurrection, atonement, sin and salvation, the problem of evil, church rites, revelation and miracles, prayer, and the afterlife. Written in nontechnical, accessible language, they not only offer a synthesis of scholarship on these topics but also suggest questions and topics for further investigation.

Charles Taliaferro is professor of philosophy at St. Olaf College in Minnesota. He is the author and editor of several books, including *Evidence and Faith: Philosophy and Religion since the Seventeenth Century* and *Consciousness and the Mind of God*.

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Charles Taliaferro  
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Charles Taliaferro  
Chad Meister



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## Introduction

The field of philosophy of religion today includes a growing, ambitious range of projects. The main topics that have been at the heart of the field since the mid-twentieth century (What is the meaning of religious belief? Does God exist? What is the relationship between religion and science?) are all up and running, but are now considered alongside distinctive philosophical projects that are specific to religious traditions. Today, philosophers in the Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions not only contemplate themes that are of shared interest across religions, but are also concerned with themes that arise within their religions. Many philosophers, for example, have taken up questions about the Trinity, incarnation, atonement, and the divine attributes, examining these topics and more from the Christian tradition. This enterprise is often described as *philosophical theology*, which may be seen as a branch of the overall field of philosophy of religion.

The subject matter of our Companion is Christian philosophical theology. It is Christian insofar as it concerns the Christian tradition, with its beliefs and practices, but the enterprise of Christian philosophical theology is not limited to Christian philosophers or inquirers. Not only are many of the tenets of Christianity shared by other religious traditions and so the study of Christian philosophical theology can contribute to philosophical reflection on other theistic faiths, but we should make clear that Christian philosophical theology is not the same thing as Christian apologetics. Any philosopher committed to thinking through topics such as the Trinity in the Christian tradition (critically examining different models of God's triune life) is practicing Christian philosophical theology even if her or his intention is to argue for the incoherence or implausibility of Christian traditional beliefs. Because of this, it should be clear that engaging in Christian

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philosophical theology is not, ipso facto, a project of convincing others of the truth of Christianity. Because the project of Christian philosophical theology is philosophically interesting only if there are plausible accounts of Christian theological convictions, each chapter in this volume seeks to demonstrate the consistency and plausibility of the theological claims addressed. However, it should be clear that such constructive accounts are an essential prelude to the project of developing rigorous counterarguments.

Our goal in this volume, then, is to put on exhibit some of the most exciting work being done today in Christian philosophical theology. Our hope is that this Companion may provide you with an accessible doorway into this growing field, irrespective of your own religious convictions (if any). Our claim, minimally, is that the work this Companion displays is deeply *philosophically significant*. It is also interesting socially and culturally insofar as readers are looking for ways in which philosophers have been developing a vocabulary and set of arguments that have a bearing on a very large, living religious tradition.

This Companion is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the being and attributes of God. Although other themes could have been included, those discussed in the first six chapters cover topics considered central to Christian theological discourse throughout the centuries. The second part includes ten chapters regarding God's activities with respect to creation, including God's actions through Christ, the church, revelation and prayer, and the natural world. We have chosen leading philosophers in the field to contribute their unique insights and analyses on the topics, and each of the chapters presents the authors' distinct views and approaches to the material. In addition, each chapter includes a list of further readings to enhance your studies of the subject at hand.

We hope that the chapters in this Companion inspire you to deeper reflection on God and God's relation to the world.