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IAN A. MCFARLAND is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Emory University. His publications include Difference and Identity: A Theological Anthropology (2001) and The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God (2005).

DAVID A. S. FERGUSSON is Professor of Divinity and Principal of New College at the University of Edinburgh. His recent publications include Church, State and Civil Society (Cambridge, 2004) and Faith and Its Critics (2009).

KAREN KILBY is Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Nottingham and President of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain. She is the author of A Brief Introduction to Karl Rahner (2007) and Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy (2004).

IAIN R. TORRANCE is President and Professor of Patristics at Princeton Theological Seminary. He is the author of Christology after Chalcedon (1988) and co-editor of To Glorify God: Essays in Modern Reformed Liturgy (1999) and The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology (2007).
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Edited by

IAN A. McFARLAND, DAVID A. S. FERGUSSON,
KAREN KILBY, IAIN R. TORRANCE
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Contributors

William J. Abraham is Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies and Altschuler Distinguished Teaching Professor at the Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. Revelation
Nicholas Adams is Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology and Theological Ethics at the University of Edinburgh. Frankfurt School, German Idealism
Allan Heaton Anderson is Professor of Global Pentecostal Studies and Director of the Graduate Institute for Theology & Religion at the University of Birmingham. Pentecostal Theology
Andreas Andreopoulos is Lecturer in Christian Theology and Director of the Centre for Orthodox Studies at the University of Wales, Lampeter. Transfiguration
Edward P. Antonio is Harvey H. Potthoff Associate Professor of Christian Theology and Social Theory at the Iliff School of Theology. Black Theology
Kenneth Appold is the James Hastings Nichols Associate Professor of Reformation History at Princeton Theological Seminary. Justification
Willem J. van Asselt is Senior Lecturer of Church History in the Department of Theology at Utrecht University and Professor of Historical Theology at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Louvain. Synod of Dort
Paul Avis is the General Secretary of the Council for Christian Unity. Episcopacy
Christine Axt-Piscalar is Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the Institutum Lutheranum in the Theological Faculty of the Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen. Liberal Theology
Lewis Ayres is Bede Professor of Catholic Theology at the University of Durham. Arian Controversy, Augustine of Hippo, Creeds, Council of Nicaea
Vincent Bacote is Associate Professor of Theology and Director of the Center for Applied Christian Ethics at Wheaton College. Abraham Kuyper
Gary D. Badcock is Associate Professor of Divinity at Huron University College. Vacation
John F. Baldwin, S. J., is Professor of Historical and Liturgical Theology in the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College. Priesthood
Hans M. Barstad is Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Studies in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. Biblical Theology
The Revd Dr Michael Battle is Provost and Canon Theologian at the Cathedral Center of the Anglican Diocese of Los Angeles. Nonviolence
The Revd Mgr Dr F. J. Baur is Regent of the Priesterseminars St. Johannes der Täufer in Munich. Occasionalism
Tina Beattie is Professor of Catholic Studies at Roehampton University. Abortion, Assumption, Human Rights, Immaculate Conception, Mariology, Nuptial Theology
Dana Benesh is a PhD student in theology at Baylor University, with an interest in the history of exegesis. Excommunication, Secularization, Tolerance
Michael Bergmann is Professor of Philosophy at Purdue University. Reformed Epistemology
Nigel Biggar is Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford. Moral Theology
André Birmelé is Professor of Dogmatics at the Faculté de Théologie Protestantte in Strasbourg. Ecumenism, World Council of Churches
C. Clifton Black is Otto A. Piper Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. Kingdom of God
Paul M. Blowers is Dean E. Walker Professor of Church History at the Emmanuel School of Religion. Maximus the Confessor, Monotheletism
H. Russel Botman is Rector and Vice-Chancellor at Stellenbosch University. African Theology
John Bowlin is the Rimmer and Ruth de Vries Associate Professor of Reformed Theology and Public Life at Princeton Theological Seminary. Aristotelianism
Ian Bradley is Reader in Practical Theology in the School of Divinity at the University of St Andrews. Pilgrimage
List of Contributors

Lucy Bregman is Professor of Religion in the Religion Department of Temple University. Death and Dying

Luke Bretherton is Senior Lecturer in Theology and Politics and Convener of the Faith and Public Policy Forum at King’s College London. Constantinianism, Divine Command Ethics

James T. Bretzke, S. J., is Professor of Moral Theology in the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. Casuistry

Lynn Bridgers is Director of Intercultural Religious Research at the College of Santa Fe. William James Burgess is the James Henry Snowden Professor of Systematic Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Baptism

Stanley M. Burgess is Distinguished Professor of Christian History at the Regent University School of Divinity. Perfectionism

David B. Burrell, C. S. C., is Hesburgh Professor Emeritus in Philosophy and Theology at the University of Notre Dame and the Uganda Martyrs University. Islam and Christianity

Jason Byassee is the Director of the Center for Theology, Writing and Media at Duke Divinity School. Allegory, Typology

Euan Cameron is Henry Luce III Professor of Reformation Church History at Union Theological Seminary, New York. Reformation

Amy Carr is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Western Illinois University. Temptation

Mark J. Cartledge is Senior Lecturer in Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology at the University of Birmingham. Glossolalia

Augustine Casiday is Lecturer in Historical Theology and Director of the MA in Monastic Studies at the University of Wales, Lampeter. Hesychasm, Gregory Palamas, Platonism

Christophe Chalamet is Assistant Professor in the Department of Theology at Fordham University. Dialectical Theology

The Revd Dr Mark D. Chapman is Vice-Principal of Ripon College Cuddesdon, Oxford, and member of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oxford. Ernst Troeltsch

Sathianathan Clarke is Bishop Sundo Kim Professor of World Christianity at the Wesley Theological Seminary. Dalti Theology

Philip Clayton is Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Claremont Graduate University and Ingrams Professor at Claremont School of Theology. Panentheism

Francis X. Clooney, S. J., is Parkman Professor of Divinity and Professor of Comparative Theology at Harvard Divinity School. Hinduism and Christianity

Basil Cole, O. P., teaches Moral, Spiritual, and Dogmatic Theology at the Dominican House of Studies, Washington, DC. Seven Deadly Sins

Tim Cooper is Lecturer in Church History in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Otago. Antinomianism

Paul Copan is Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics at Palm Beach Atlantic University. Moral Argument

M. Shawn Copeland is Associate Professor of Theology at Boston College. Womanist Theology

John Cottingham is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Reading and an Honorary Fellow of St John’s College, Oxford. Cartesianism

S. Peter Cowe is the Narekatsi Professor of Armenian Studies in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles. Armenian Theology

James L. Cox is Professor of Religious Studies in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. Traditional Religions and Christianity

William Lane Craig is Research Professor of Philosophy at the Talbot School of Theology. Cosmological Argument, Middle Knowledge

Shannon Croga-Snell is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University. Patriarchy, Supernatural existential

Andrew Crisp holds the Blake Chair in the History of Christianity at Virginia Commonwealth University. Asceticism

Garry J. Crites is Director of Evening and Weekend Courses at Duke University. Fasting

The Revd Dr Anthony R. Cross is Fellow of the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage at Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford. Joachim of Fiore

Richard Crouter is John M. and Elizabeth W. Musser Professor of Religious Studies, Emeritus at Carleton College. Enlightenment

Lawrence Cunningham is the Revd John A. O’Brien Professor of Theology in the Department of Theology of the University of Notre Dame. Catholic Theology
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Mary B. Cunningham is Lecturer in Theology at the University of Nottingham. Divine Energies, Iconoclasm

Ivor J. Davidson is Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Otago. Catechesis, Catechumen, Council of Chalcedon, Jerome

Douglas J. Davies is Professor in the Study of Religion at Durham University. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

Andrew Dawson is Lecturer in Religious Studies at Lancaster University. Base Communities

Juliette Day is Senior Research Fellow in Christian Liturgy at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford. Canon of Mass

Gavin D’Costa is Professor of Catholic Theology in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Bristol. Anonymous Christianity, Inculturation, Religious Pluralism, Karl Rahner

Celia Deane-Drummond is Professor of Theology and the Biological Sciences and Director of the Centre for Religion and the Biosciences at the University of Chester. Ecotheology

Paul J. DeHart is Associate Professor of Theology at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. Postliberal Theology

Ralph Del Colle is Associate Professor of Theology at Marquette University. Mortal Sin, Penance, Venial Sin

Gary Dorrien is the Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary and Professor of Religion at Columbia University. Social Gospel

Geoffrey D. Dunn is an Australian Research Fellow at the Centre for Early Christian Studies, Australian Catholic University. Tertullian

Mark W. Elliott is Lecturer in Church History in the School of Divinity at the University of St Andrews. Nominalism, Pelagianism

Noel Leo Erskine is Professor of Theology and Ethics at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Caribbean Theology; Martin Luther King

Wendy Farley is Professor in the Department of Religion at Emory University. Phenomenology

Douglas Farrow is Professor of Christian Thought in the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University. Ascension and Session

Richard Fenn is Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Christianity and Society at Princeton Theological Seminary. Purgatory

Paul S. Fiddes is Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Oxford and Director of Research at Regent’s Park College, Oxford. Baptist Theology

Stephen Fields, S. J., is Associate Professor of Theology at Georgetown University. Symbol

Duncan B. Forrester is Honorary Fellow and Professor Emeritus in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. Political Theology

Paul Foster is Senior Lecturer in New Testament in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. Logos

Nancy Frankenberry is the John Phillips Professor of Religion at Dartmouth College. Natural Theology

Mary McClintock Fullerson is Professor of Theology at Duke Divinity School. Feminist Theology

Simon Gathercole is Lecturer in New Testament Studies in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. Paul, Quest of the Historical Jesus

Michelle A. Gonzalez is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami. Latino/a Theology, Mujerista Theology

Todd Gooch is Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Eastern Kentucky University. Rudolf Otto

Bruce Gordon is Professor of Reformation History at Yale Divinity School. Heinrich Bullinger, Conciliarism

Elaine Graham is Grosvenor Research Professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Chester. Practical Theology

Gordon Graham is Henry Luce III Professor of Philosophy and the Arts at Princeton Theological Seminary. Commonsense Philosophy

Janette Gray, R. S. M., is Lecturer in Theology at the Jesuit Theological College, the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne. Celibacy

Joel B. Green is Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Associate Dean for the Center for Advanced Theological Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. Soul

Niels Henrik Gregersen is Professor of Systematic Theology in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Copenhagen. Nordic Theology

Mike Grimshaw is Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies in the School of Philosophy and Religious
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Studies at the University of Canterbury.
Post-Christian Theology
David Grumett is Research Fellow in Theology at the University of Exeter. Nouvelle théologie, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin
Ruben L. F. Habito is Professor of World Religions and Spirituality at the Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. Buddhism and Christianity
Roger Haight, S. J., is Scholar in Residence at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Juan Luis Segundo
Douglas John Hall is Emeritus Professor of Christian Theology at McGill University. Neo-Orthodoxy
The Revd Stuart George Hall is Professor Emeritus of Ecclesiastical History in the University of London at King's College. Historical Theology
The Revd Dr Harriet A. Harris is Chaplain of Wadham College at the University of Oxford. Orders
John E. Haught is Senior Fellow in Science and Religion at the Woodstock Theological Center, Georgetown University. Natural Science
Nicholas M. Healy is Professor of Theology and Religious Studies and Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at St John's University. Apostolic Succession, Thomas Aquinas, Ecclesiology, Infallibility, Marks of the Church, Vatican Council I
The Revd Dr Brian L. Hebblethwaite is Life Fellow of Queens' College, and formerly Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. The Transcendentals
Charles Helfling is Associate Professor of Theology at Boston College. Liturgical Movement
György Heidi is Associate Professor at the Center for Patristic Studies at the University of Pécs. Origenism
S. Mark Heim is the Samuel Abbot Professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Theological School. Religion
Scott H. Hendrix is Professor Emeritus of Reformation History and Doctrine at Princeton Theological Seminyary. Lutheran Theology, Sola Scriptura, Two Kingdoms
Alasdair Heron is Professor of Reformed Theology at the University of Erlangen. Reformed Theology
Michael Higgins is President and Vice-Chancellor of St Thomas University, New Brunswick. Canonization

Mike Highton is Senior Lecturer in Theology in the Department of Theology at the University of Exeter. Adoptionism, Anhypostasis, Christology, Communicatio Idiomatum, Hans Frei, Homooseusios, Hypostasis, Hypostatic Union, Incarnation, Neo-Chalcedonianism
Mary Catherine Hilbert is Professor in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. Edward Schillebeeckx
Harvey Hill is Associate Professor of Religion at Berry College. Modernism
Kenneth Einar Himma is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Seattle Pacific University. Ontological Argument
Bradford Hinz is Professor of Theology at Fordham University. Tübingen School (Catholic)
Andrew Hofhecker is Professor of Church History at Reformed Theological Seminary. Charles Hodge, Princeton Theology
Christopher R. J. Holmes is Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics at Providence Theological Seminary. Ludwig Feuerbach
Edward Howells is Lecturer in Christian Spirituality at Heythrop College, University of London. Teresa of Avila
Richard T. Hughes is Senior Fellow of the Ernest L. Boyer Center and Distinguished Professor of Religion at Messiah College. Restorationism
The Revd Mgr Kevin W. Irwin is Dean of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America. Eucharist
Lisa Isherwood is Professor of Feminist Liberation Theologies and Director of the Centre for Theological Partnerships at the University of Winchester. Queer Theology
Timothy P. Jackson is Professor of Christian Ethics at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Adoption
Paul D. Janz is Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology at King's College London. Metaphysics
Werner G. Jeanron is Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow. Hermeneutics
Willis Jenkins is Margaret A. Farley Assistant Professor of Social Ethics at Yale Divinity School. Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Robin M. Jensen is the Luce Chancellor's Professor of the History of Christian Art and Worship at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. Icons and Iconography
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Darrell Jodock is Drell and Adeline Bernhardson Distinguished Professor of Religion at Gustavus Adolphus College. Adolf von Harnack, Alfred Loisy
Mark D. Jordan is Richard Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School. Body, Sexuality
David G. Kamitsuka is Associate Professor of Religion at Oberlin College. G. W. F. Hegel
James F. Kay is Joe R. Engle Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics and Director of the Joe R. Engle Institute of Preaching at Princeton Theological Seminary. Rudolf Bultmann, Demythologization
Henry Ansgar Kelly is Professor Emeritus in the Department of English at the University of California, Los Angeles. Devil
Daren Kemp is a Director of Kempress Ltd and Co-Editor of the Journal of Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies. Christian Science
Fergus Kerr, O. P., FRSE, is Honorary Fellow in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh and Editor of New Blackfriars. Thomism
Thomas S. Kidd is Associate Professor of History at Baylor University. Revivalism
Fr George Kilcourse is Professor of Theology at Bellarmine University. Thomas Merton
Sebastian C. H. Kim is Professor of Theology and Public Life in the Faculty of Education and Theology at York St John University. Korean Theology
Masami Kojiro is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Tokyo Union Theological Seminary. Japanese Theology
Steven Kraftchick is Director of General and Advanced Studies and Associate Professor in the Practice of New Testament Interpretation at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Myth
Alan Kreider is Professor of Church History and Mission at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Conversion
Peter A. Kwasniewski is Professor of Theology and Philosophy and Instructor in Music at Wyoming Catholic College. Teresa of Lisieux
Lai Pan-chiu is Professor and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the Divinity School of Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong. Chinese Theology
Dirk G. Lange is Associate Professor of Worship at Luther Seminary. Divine Office, Inclusive Language, Lex orandi lex credendi, Community of Taizé
Jacqueline Lapsley is Associate Professor of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary. Ten Commandments
Emmanuel Y. Larney is Professor of Pastoral Theology, Care and Counseling at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Pastoral Theology
Gordon W. Lathrop is Charles A. Schieren Professor of Liturgy Emeritus at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Liturgy, Prayer
David R. Law is Reader in Christian Thought at the School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, University of Manchester. Kenotic Theology
Frederick Lawrence is Professor of Theology at Boston College. Bernard Lonergan
Bo Karen Lee is Assistant Professor of Spirituality and Historical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. Hildegard of Bingen
Sang Hyun Lee is the Kyung-Chik Han Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. Asian-American Theology. Jonathan Edwards
Mark R. Lindsay is Director of Research at the Melbourne College of Divinity. Israel
Thomas G. Long is the Bandy Professor of Preaching at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Homiletics
Janice Love is Dean and Professor of Christianity and World Politics at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Kairos Document
Robin W. Lovin is Cary Maguire University Professor of Ethics at Southern Methodist University. Reinhold Niebuhr
Walter Love is Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Immanuel Kant
Morwenna Ludlow is Lecturer in the Department of Theology of the University of Exeter. Apostolic Fathers, Patristics
F. Thomas Luongo is the Eva-Lou Joffrion Edwards Newcomb Professor at Tulane University. Catherine of Siena
Randy L. Maddox is Professor of Theology and Wesley Studies at Duke Divinity School. Methodist Theology
Lois Malcolm is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary. Theodicy
### LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

| Mark H. Mann | Research Associate in the Faculty of Education and Theology at York St John University. **Personalism** |
| William E. Mann | Mark A. McIntosh is Van Mildert Canon Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Durham. **Hans von Balthasar, Beatific Vision, Contemplation, Faith, John Henry Newman, Spirituality** |
| Neil A. Manson | Steven A. McKinion is Associate Professor of Theology and Patristics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. **Cyril of Alexandria, Council of Ephesus** |
| George M. Marsden | The Revd Mgr. Paul McPartlan is Carl J. Peter Professor of Systematic Theology and Ecumenism in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America. **Henri de Lubac, Vatican Council II** |
| Bruce D. Marshall | Nestor Medina teaches Theology at Queen's Theological College, Queen's University. **Mestizaje** |
| Hjamil A. Martinez-Vazquez | M. Douglas Meeks is the Cal Turner Chancellor's Chair in Wesleyan Studies and Theology at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. **Hope** |
| Rex D. Matthews | Linda Mercadante is Professor of Theology in the B. Robert Straker Chair of Historical Theology at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. **Theology of Trauma** |
| William C. Mattison III | Paul Middleton is Lecturer in New Testament Studies in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Wales, Lampeter. **Martyrdom** |
| Bruce Lindley McCormack | Daniel L. Migliore is Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary. **Lord’s Prayer** |
| Joy Ann McDougall | Bruce Milem is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Coordinator of the Religious Studies Program at the State University of New York, New Paltz. **Meister Eckhart** |
| Bernard McGinn | R. W. L. Moberly is Professor of Theology and Biblical Interpretation at Durham University. **Prophecy** |
| David A. S. Ferguson | Paul D. Molnar is Professor of Theology at St John's University. **Karl Barth** |
| Karen Kilby | The Revd Dr Andrew Moore is Fellow of the Centre for Christianity and Culture at Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford. **Realism and Anti-Realism** |
| Iain R. Torrance | Susan Hardman Moore is Senior Lecturer in Divinity in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. **Deism** |

---

| Mark H. Mann | Associate Professor of Theology and Director for the Wesleyan Center for 21st Century Studies at Point Loma Nazarene University. **Rationalism** |
| William E. Mann | Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vermont. **Anselm of Canterbury** |
| Neil A. Manson | Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Mississippi. **Teleological Argument** |
| George M. Marsden | Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame. **Fundamentalism** |
| Bruce D. Marshall | Professor of Historical Theology at the Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. **Judaism and Christianity** |
| Hjamil A. Martinez-Vazquez | Assistant Professor of Religion at Texas Christian University. **Bartolomé de Las Casas** |
| Rex D. Matthews | Assistant Professor in the Practice of Historical Theology at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. **John Wesley, Wesleyan Quadrilateral** |
| William C. Mattison III | Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at the Catholic University of America. **Divorce, Marriage** |
| Bruce Lindley McCormack | is the Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. **Atonement** |
| Joy Ann McDougall | Associate Professor of Theology at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. **Androcentrism, Sin** |
| Bernard McGinn | Naomi Shenstone Donnelly Professor Emeritus of Historical Theology and of the History of Christianity in the Divinity School and the Committees on Medieval Studies and on General Studies at the University of Chicago. **Mystical Theology** |
| Alister McGrath | Professor of Theology, Ministry, and Education at King's College London. **Protestantism** |
| John A. McGuckin | is Ane Marie and Bent Emil Nielsen Professor in Late Antique and Byzantine Christian History at Union Theological Seminary (New York) and Professor of Byzantine Christian Studies at Columbia University. **Ecumenical Councils, Origen of Alexandria** |
| Esther McIntosh | is Assistant Editor at the International Journal of Public Theology and Research Associate in the Faculty of Education and Theology at York St John University. **Personalism** |
| Mark A. McIntosh | is Van Mildert Canon Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Durham. **Hans von Balthasar, Beatific Vision, Contemplation, Faith, John Henry Newman, Spirituality** |
| Steven A. McKinion | is Associate Professor of Theology and Patristics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. **Cyril of Alexandria, Council of Ephesus** |
| The Revd Mgr. Paul McPartlan | is Carl J. Peter Professor of Systematic Theology and Ecumenism in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America. **Henri de Lubac, Vatican Council II** |
| Nestor Medina | teaches Theology at Queen's Theological College, Queen's University. **Mestizaje** |
| M. Douglas Meeks | is the Cal Turner Chancellor's Chair in Wesleyan Studies and Theology at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. **Hope** |
| Linda Mercadante | is Professor of Theology in the B. Robert Straker Chair of Historical Theology at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. **Theology of Trauma** |
| Paul Middleton | is Lecturer in New Testament Studies in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Wales, Lampeter. **Martyrdom** |
| Daniel L. Migliore | is Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology Emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary. **Lord’s Prayer** |
| Bruce Milem | is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Coordinator of the Religious Studies Program at the State University of New York, New Paltz. **Meister Eckhart** |
| R. W. L. Moberly | is Professor of Theology and Biblical Interpretation at Durham University. **Prophecy** |
| Paul D. Molnar | is Professor of Theology at St John's University. **Karl Barth** |
| The Revd Dr Andrew Moore | is Fellow of the Centre for Christianity and Culture at Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford. **Realism and Anti-Realism** |
| Susan Hardman Moore | is Senior Lecturer in Divinity in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. **Deism** |
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Christopher Morse is the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Professor of Theology and Ethics at Union Theological Seminary, New York. Soteriology Christian Moser is a staff member of the Institut für Schweizerische Reformationsgeschichte at the University of Zurich. Huldrych Zwingli Rachel Muers is Lecturer in Christian Studies in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds. Quaker Theology Francesca A. Murphy is Reader in Systematic Theology at King’s College in the University of Aberdeen. Aesthetics, Étienne Gilson David Nash is Reader in History at Oxford Brookes University. Blasphemy Mark Thiessen Nation is Professor of Theology at Eastern Mennonite University. Mennonite Theology Olga V. Nesmiyanova is Professor at the St Petersburg School of Religion and Philosophy. Russian Theology Craig L. Nessan is Academic Dean and Professor of Contextual Theology at Wartburg Theological Seminary. Orthopraxis Peter Neuner is Professor Emeritus at the Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich. Joseph Maréchal Damayanthi Niles is Associate Professor of Constructive Theology at Eden Theological Seminary. D. T. Niles Paul T. Nimmo is the Meldrum Lecturer in Theology in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. Scottish Theology The Hon. John T. Noonan, Jr, is a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, with chambers in San Francisco, California. Usury Simon Oliver is Associate Professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Nottingham. Radical Orthodoxy Thomas O’Loughlin is Professor of Historical Theology in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Nottingham. Celtic Christianity Roger E. Olson is Professor of Theology at the George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University. Arminianism Kenan B. Osborne, O. F. M., is Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the Franciscan School of Theology, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California. Confirmation Gene Outka is Dwight Professor of Philosophy and Christian Ethics at Yale Divinity School. Love Aristotle Papanikolaou is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Co-Director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Program at Fordham University. Orthodox Theology David Parker is Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology and Director of the Centre for the Editing of Texts in Religion at the University of Birmingham. Biblical Criticism George L. Parsenios is Assistant Professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary. Mount Athos Paul Parvis is an Honorary Fellow in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. Irenaeus of Lyons, Recapitulation Bonnie Pattison is Adjunct Professor of Theology at Wheaton College. Poverty George Pattison is Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford and a canon of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. Soren Kierkegaard Amy Plantinga Pauw is Henry P. Mobjley, Jr, Professor of Doctrinal Theology at the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Election Lori Pearson is Associate Professor of Religion at Carleton College. History of Religion School Michael Davey Pearson has served as Assistant Professor of Theology at Solusi University in Zimbabwe and is currently writing two books on the Holy Spirit for Andrews University Press. Adventism Clark Pinnock is Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at McMaster Divinity College. Open Theism Sarah Pinnock is Associate Professor of Contemporary Religious Thought at Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas. Holocaust Alyssa Lyra Pitstick is Assistant Professor of Religion at Hope College. Glory Paul-Hubert Poirier is Professor in the Faculté de Théologie et de Sciences Religieuses at the Université Laval. Gnosticism Jean Porter is the Revd John A. O’Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. Natural Law Robert W. Prichard is Arthur Lee Kinsolving Professor of Christianity in America and...
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Paul Rorem is Benjamin B. Warfield Professor of Medieval Church History at Princeton Theological Seminary. 
Dionysius the Areopagite

Christopher Rowland is the Dean Ireland Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture at the University of Oxford. 
Apocalyptic

Fr Neil J. Roy is a priest of the diocese of Peterborough, Canada, and teaches liturgy and sacramental theology at the University of Notre Dame. 
Saints

Tina Ruparell is Assistant Professor and Graduate Coordinator in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary. 
Pantheism

Norman Russell is an independent scholar and translator. He is the author of several works on the Greek fathers and the translator of texts by several contemporary Greek theologians. 
Defication

Robert John Russell is Director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS) and the Ian G. Barbour Professor of Theology and Science in Residence at the Graduate Theological Union. 
Divine Action

Don E. Saliers is the William R. Cannon Distinguished Professor of Theology and Worship Emeritus at Emory University. 
Theology and Music

Marcel Sarot is UUF Chair for the History and Philosophy of Theology and Head of the Department of Theology at Utrecht University. 
Diaconate, Patripassianism, Philosophical Theology, Theopaschite Controversy

Hans Schwarz is Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the Institute of Protestant Theology at the University of Regensburg. 
Descent into Hell, Eschatology, Heaven, Hell, Universalism

Fr Johannes M. Schwarz is Visiting Professor at the International Theological Institute, Gaming, Austria. 
Limbo

Fernando F. Segovia is Oberlin Graduate Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. 
Latin American Theology

Frank C. Senn is Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Evanston, Illinois and has taught at Seabury-Western and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminaries. 
Liturgical Calendar

James W. Skillen is President of the Center for Public Justice in Washington, DC. 
Covenant
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Natalia Smelova is Researcher in Syriac Studies at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg. Syriac Christian Theology

J. Warren Smith is Associate Professor of Historical Theology at Duke Divinity School. Cappadocian Fathers

James K. A. Smith is Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Calvin College. Deconstruction, Postmodernism

Luther E. Smith, Jr, is Professor of Church and Community at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Howard Thurman

John Snarey is Professor of Human Development and Ethics at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. William James

W. Becket Soule, O. P., is the former Dean of the Pontifical Faculty and Associate Professor of Canon Law at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, DC. Canon Law

R. Kendall Soulen is Professor of Systematic Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary. Scriptural Reasoning

Bryan D. Spinks is Professor of Liturgical Studies at Yale Divinity School. Sacramentology

Max L. Stackhouse is Professor of Reformed Theology and Public Life Emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary. Civil Society

Brian Stanley is Professor of World Christianity and Director of the Centre for the Study of World Christianity in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. Missiology

Stephen J. Stein is Chancellor’s Professor, Emeritus, in the Department of Religious Studies at Indiana University. Jehovah’s Witnesses

James Steven is Lecturer in Theology and Ministry at King’s College London. Charismatic Movement

The Right Rev Dr Kenneth W. Stevenson is the former Bishop of Portsmouth, England. Blessing, Sacrifice

Dan R. Stiver is Professor of Theology at Logsdon Seminary, Hardin-Simmons University. Religious Language

Jonathan Strom is Associate Professor of Church History at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. Pietism

George W. Stroup is James B. Green Professor of Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary. Narrative Theology

Elizabeth Stuart is Professor of Christian Theology at the University of Winchester. Anointing of the Sick

Phillip H. Stump is Professor of History at Lynchburg College. Council of Constance

Marjorie Hewitt Suchoki is Professor Emerita at the Claremont School of Theology. Process Theology

R. S. Sugirtharajah is Professor of Biblical Hermeneutics at the University of Birmingham. Colonialism and Postcolonialism

Steven Sutcliffe is Lecturer in Religion and Society in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. New Age

John Swinton is Professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care at the University of Aberdeen. Disability Theology

Mark Lewis Taylor is the Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Theology and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary. Paul Tillich

M. Thomas Thangaraj is the D. W. and Ruth Brooks Associate Professor of World Christianity, Emeritus, at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University. South Asian Theology

John E. Thiel is Professor of Religious Studies at Fairfield University. Tradition

Deanna Thompson is Associate Professor of Religion and Chair of the Department of Religion at Hamline University. Cross and Crucifixion

N. J. Thompson is Lecturer in Church History at the University of Aberdeen. Martin Bucer

Susannah Ticciati is Lecturer in Systematic Theology at King’s College London. Job

Terence N. Tice is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Michigan. Friedrich Schleiermacher

David Tombs is Lecturer and Programme Co-ordinator in Reconciliation Studies at the Irish School of Ecumenics. Liberation Theology

Joseph Torchio, O. P., is Professor of Philosophy at Providence College. Manichaicism

Jonathan Tran is Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics at Baylor University. Excommunication, Secularization, Tolerance, Virtue Ethics

Daniel J. Treier is Associate Professor of Theology at Wheaton College. Doctrine, Evangelical Theology, Wisdom

Carl J. Trueman is at Westminster Theological Seminary. Assurance, Federal Theology, Ordo salutis, Puritanism
Christopher Tuckett is Professor of New Testament at Pembroke College, University of Oxford. 

John the Evangelist

Lucian Turcescu is Associate Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. Sobornicity, Dumitru Stânileae

Max Turner is Professor of New Testament Studies at the London School of Theology. Pentecost

Cornelis P. Venema is President and Professor of Doctrinal Studies at Mid-American Reformed Seminary. Predestination

Medi Volpe is an Honorary Lecturer at Durham University. Dorothee Soelle

Andrew Walker is Professor of Theology, Culture, and Education at King's College, London. Charismatic Movement

Lee Palmer Wandel is Professor in the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Humanism

Bernd Wannenwetsch is University Lecturer in Ethics at the University of Oxford. Just War, Virtue

Kevin Ward is Senior Lecturer in African Religious Studies at the University of Leeds. Anglican Theology, Thomas Cranmer, Richard Hooker

Patricia A. Ward is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Vanderbilt University. Quietism

Brent Waters is Stead Professor of Christian Social Ethics and the Director of the Stead Center for Ethics and Values at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Bioethics, Procreation

Francis Watson is Chair of Biblical Interpretation at Durham University. Scripture

Darlene Fozard Weaver is Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies and Director of the Theology Institute at Villanova University. Conscience

Stephen H. Webb is Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Wabash College. Animals

Timothy P. Weber is Visiting Professor of Church History at Fuller Theological Seminary, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Premillennialism

John Webster is Professor and Chair of Systematic Theology at the University of Aberdeen. Divine Attributes

Timothy J. Wengert is Ministerium of Pennsylvania Professor of the History of Christianity at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Martin Luther

Merold Westphal is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University. Atheism

David Wetsel is Professor in the School of International Letters and Cultures at Arizona State University. Blaise Pascal

The Very Revd Stephen R. White is the Dean of Killaloe in County Clare, Ireland. Agnosticism

Jane Williams is Tutor in Theology at St Mellitus College, London. Angels

Stephen N. Williams is Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological College, Belfast. Friedrich Nietzsche

Thomas Williams is Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida. John Duns Scotus, Voluntarism

Ben Witherington III is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary. Dispensationalism

John Witte, Jr, is Jonas Robitscher Professor of Law and Director of the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University. Law

Susan K. Wood is Professor of Theology at Marquette University. Laity

Thomas Worcester, S. J., is Associate Professor of History at the College of the Holy Cross. Papacy

A. D. Wright is Reader in Ecclesiastical History at the University of Leeds. Council of Trent

N. T. Wright is the Bishop of Durham. Resurrection

Randall C. Zachman is Professor of Reformation Studies in the Department of Theology of the University of Notre Dame. John Calvin
Editors

Ian A. McFarland is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Emory University's Candler School of Theology and a Lutheran lay theologian. He is a member of the American Academy of Religion and of the Nashville-based Workgroup for Constructive Theology. His most recent book is *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God* (2005).

David A. S. Fergusson is Professor of Divinity and Principal of New College at the University of Edinburgh. He has served as President of the Society for the Study of Theology (2000–2) and President of the UK Association of University Departments of Theology and Religious Studies (2005–8). He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. His most recent book is *Faith and Its Critics: A Conversation* (2009).

Karen Kilby is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Nottingham. She is President of the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain. Her most recent book is *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (2004).

Iain R. Torrance is President of Princeton Theological Seminary and Professor of Patristics. Formerly he held a Personal Chair in Patristics and Christian Ethics at the University of Aberdeen and served a term as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Divinity. He was Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (2003–4). He has been co-editor of Scottish Journal of Theology since 1982 and edits the Cambridge monograph series on Contemporary Issues in Theology. His interests are in early Christianity, and he is the author of *Christology after Chalcedon* (1988).
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Preface

There is no shortage of Christian theological reference works in print. Moreover, the proliferation of web-based resources (most notably the increasingly comprehensive Wikipedia) means that basic information about even the most obscure theological terms is rarely more than a few mouse clicks away. Under these circumstances the production of yet another theological dictionary may seem unnecessary at best and reactionary at worst. Consequently, before embarking upon this project, we discussed at some length what possible justification there could be for The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology.

In part we were encouraged by our sister publication, Robert Audi’s Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, which is widely recognized as having achieved remarkable compactness and accessibility without sacrificing accuracy or comprehensiveness. At the same time, we recognized that the extraordinarily pluriform character of contemporary Christian theology, including but also cutting across traditional confessional and juridical boundaries, raised particular challenges. Nevertheless, it seemed to us that there was a place – and, indeed, a need – for a single-volume reference work that was at once comprehensive in its coverage of topics, inclusive in the many perspectives of its contributors, and, most importantly, committed to a specifically theological examination of each topic considered. In short, we wanted a text that would exhibit what Hans Frei once referred to as a ‘generous orthodoxy’: coherent and capacious, but neither partisan nor blinkered.

In order to achieve these aims, we sought to enlist the services of a broad range of prominent theologians writing in English. Given the many commitments scholars face we have been able to reach this goal only very imperfectly, but we are all the more grateful for the generosity of the many colleagues who agreed to contribute to this volume. In enlisting their services, we judged it important to give the Dictionary a structure that would allow their individual contributions to be combined most effectively for the reader. Thus, while the Dictionary’s specifically theological (as opposed to historical or sociological) focus includes a comprehensive coverage of relevant topics, no less important than the range of material included is its level of integration. While the Dictionary is formatted conventionally, we have tried to ensure that the length and focus of individual articles make it as easy as possible for the reader to move between multiple entries in order to gain a well-rounded, appropriately contextual understanding of related theological concepts.

Entries range from a minimum of 250 to a maximum of 2,000 words in length. We settled on the minimum length of 250 words on the grounds that an important feature of a theological dictionary should be that it devotes enough space to terms and concepts to allow the reader to see how they are actually used in theological conversation. We have therefore not included any purely lexical entries. At the same time, we have opted for an upper limit of 2,000 words as an appropriate means of preserving the concision expected in a dictionary, which, we felt, would be eroded if individual entries were to encroach upon the length of a book chapter. Nevertheless, these longer entries contribute to the distinctive character of the Dictionary, since they provide a framework through which the various shorter entries are integrated both with one another and with larger conceptual fields.

Core Entries

We have conceived the 2,000-word articles as ‘core entries’. Although they comprise only about 10 per cent of the total number of listings, they take up around a quarter of the total volume of text. As such, they are designed to provide the conceptual ballast for the volume as a whole, serving as the superstructure around and in terms of which many of the other entries are conceived and composed. The core entries fall into five basic categories that together map the territory of systematic theology from distinct, though complementary, conceptual perspectives:

- traditional doctrinal topics or loci (e.g., creation, ecclesiology, revelation);
- confessional orientations (e.g., Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox);
- theological styles (e.g., evangelical, feminist, liberal);
- Christianity’s relation to other faith traditions (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam);
- academic disciplines (e.g., biblical theology, historical theology, systematic theology).
Preface

The inclusion of core entries on Christianity's relation to other faith traditions (as well as a range of articles of varying lengths on theologies emerging from non-western regions) is a feature driven by the recognition that the startling growth of Christian Churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, together with patterns of migration, make it likely that theology in the twenty-first century will cease to be dominated by western academic elites and that it will be increasingly conducted in close proximity with other religions.

The core entries include basic lexical orientation to the subject matter, historical and cultural contextualization, summary of key developments in the history of the topic, identification of continuing points of tension or debate, and evaluation of future prospects. Furthermore, core-entry authors were encouraged to use the comparatively large amount of space allotted to provide their own perspective on the topic as well as coverage of the basic conceptual terrain. The core entries were commissioned prior to the other articles, so that their content could be used by the editors to guide the composition of shorter articles on related topics. In this way, shorter entries are used to provide definition of and orientation to technical terms, freeing authors of core entries to sketch the main contours of their assigned topic without the need to make frequent explanatory digressions.

Needless to say, while the range of material covered by the core entries is large, it is not exhaustive. Some selection has inevitably been required in order to control the overall size of the volume, in line with our judgement of the relative significance of topics for the field as a whole. Thus, while all the major doctrinal loci feature in core entries, some significant theological styles (e.g., narrative and Queer theologies) have been assigned fewer than 2,000 words. Similarly, slightly shorter entries (generally between 1,500 and 1,750 words) have been allotted to other important topics that do not fall under any of the broader core-entry categories (e.g., baptism, monasticism, and philosophical traditions that have been important influences in the shaping of Christian thought). Finally, entries on the theologies associated with particular geographical regions vary widely in length and are, inevitably, somewhat arbitrary, though we have endeavoured to identify coherent centres of theological production both within (e.g., Scottish theology) and outside (e.g., South Asian theology) more established North Atlantic academic contexts. All these classes of articles function analogously to core entries, in that they have been used to help focus discussion on related topics.

Biographical Entries

Biographical entries fall into a separate category. Though in many cases individual theologians are directly relevant to the material covered in core entries and/or shorter articles relating to particular theological concepts or movements, we judged it important to treat significant thinkers in a more focused and deliberate manner. At the same time, because the number of figures who might qualify for entry is almost limitless, it was necessary to impose fairly severe limits on the number of figures granted individual entries. We have followed the practice of the New Dictionary of National Biography and the Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart in not assigning separate entries to living persons (though living theologians are in many cases mentioned in other articles). Even with this means of exclusion, however, the list of those who might have been included remains vast, and we acknowledge a degree of unavoidable arbitrariness in the selection of those to be included.

In order to provide as balanced a list of figures as possible, we have tried to prioritize those theologians whose influence on the shape of central doctrines (e.g., Athanasius, Irenaeus), the subsequent history of the tradition (e.g., Aquinas, Luther, Palamas), or contemporary theology (e.g., Barth, Rahner) is widely recognized. Since the sociological complexion of Christian culture up to the twentieth century virtually guarantees that these criteria will produce a list that is overwhelmingly male and European, we have also endeavoured to include a significant number of women and persons of colour whose voices, though not as prominent in traditional academic theology, indicate something of the genuine, if often unacknowledged, diversity of Christian thought over the centuries.

In order to allow the maximum amount of space to subject entries, the vast majority of biographical entries have been set at either 250 or 500 words, though a few major figures have been assigned 1,000 words or more. Although the article's assigned length will constrain what is possible in each individual case, all entries include a summary of the figure's life, reference to the debates or controversies
in which he or she was involved and the major ideas with which he or she is associated, identification of his or her most important works, and an evaluation of his or her influence.

Using the Dictionary

As already noted, articles are arranged alphabetically, with each entry clearly identified in bold type and small capitals (e.g., APOLOGETICS). Core entries are further set apart by being printed in all capital letters (e.g., CREATION). Small capitals without boldface are employed within articles as a means of cross-referencing: when the reader comes across a term in small capitals in the body of an article (e.g., SCRIPTURE), this indicates that the term has an article of its own elsewhere in the Dictionary. Occasionally, cross-referencing is indicated by the addition of the conventional designations, 'see' or 'see also'. Because the core entries provide the conceptual centre of gravity for the text, readers are encouraged to refer to them in order to acquire a fuller sense of how concepts covered in related shorter entries mesh with the larger themes of Christian theological discourse.

Most entries include a brief bibliography of between one and six works. Obviously, given the enormous amount of writing available on almost every one of the entry topics, these bibliographies could be extended almost indefinitely, but stringency was necessary in order to meet the requirements of a one-volume reference work. The items listed at the end of the articles are, correspondingly, proposed in the vein of 'suggestions for further reading' for those wishing to pursue the topic in greater depth. In addition to these more formal bibliographic entries, however, two further sorts of references to other works are found in the Dictionary. First, biographical entries in particular generally include in the body of the article the titles and dates of the most important texts authored by the figure examined. Second, within all articles works cited are referenced by an abbreviated title and (where a portion of text is quoted) page, paragraph, or section numbers in parentheses. The full titles, original composition/publication dates, and (where relevant) the English translations (ET) from which the citations were taken are listed alphabetically by author (or, where no author is indicated, by title) in the ‘References’ pages at the end of the volume.

Where material is cited from a modern or more contemporary edition of an older work, the date of the more recent edition is given in square brackets after the original publication date.

There are also a number of other, miscellaneous editorial conventions we have adopted in the Dictionary that the reader should note. First to note are the conventions we have adopted for biblical quotations. All such quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated, using the abbreviations for biblical and apocryphal books followed by the Journal of Biblical Studies; to save space we have also abbreviated the Old and New Testaments as OT and NT respectively. Second, throughout the volume we have chosen to use only Arabic numerals when referencing pre-modern texts (e.g., Against Heresies 3.20.3 means Book 3, Chapter 20, Section 3; The City of God 5.6–9 means Book 5, Chapters 6–9; Summa theologicae 1.93.2–4 means Part I, Question 93, Articles 2–4, and so forth). Third, we have uniformly referred to the Church of Rome as ‘Catholic’ rather than ‘Roman Catholic’. Although we realize that this decision begs some significant ecclesiological questions, it was the easiest way to ensure consistency and economy of expression across a volume including contributors from a range of confessional traditions. (For similar reasons, we refer to the Chalcedonian Churches of the East as ‘Orthodox’ rather than as ‘Eastern Orthodox’.) Finally, we have sought to provide dates for all figures mentioned within articles who do not have an article of their own elsewhere in the Dictionary. In most cases we have used dates of birth (if known) and death (where applicable), or, where both are unknown, fl. (Latin floruit, ‘flourished’). For popes and monarchs, we have opted to use the dates of their reigns (indicated by the letter ‘r’). There are, however, two exceptions to this last convention. First, because the onset of the Roman emperor Constantine I’s reign can be marked in several different ways, we have used his birth and death rather than reign dates. Second, in referring to the competing claimants to the papal throne during the Great Western Schism of 1378–1415, we have used birth and death dates to avoid confusion with respect to overlapping reigns, as well as disputed judgements regarding particular claimants’ canonical status.