

THE NEW CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

What is Christian doctrine? This Companion guides students and scholars through the key issues in the contemporary practice of Christian theology. Including twenty-one essays, specially commissioned from an international team of leading theologians, the volume outlines the central features of Christian doctrinal claims and examines leading methods and theological movements. The first part of the book explores the ten most important topics in Christian doctrine, offering a nuanced historical analysis, as well as charting pathways for further development. In the second part, essays address the most significant movements that are reshaping approaches to multiple topics across disciplinary, as well as denominational and ecclesiastical, borders. Incorporating cutting-edge biblical and historical scholarship in theological argument, this Companion serves as an accessible and engaging introduction to the main themes of Christian doctrine. It will also guide theologians through a growing literature that is increasingly diverse and pluriform.

**Michael Allen** is the John Dyer Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean at Reformed Theological Seminary. He is the author, most recently, of *The Fear of the Lord: Essays on Theological Method* and *The Knowledge of God: Essays on God, Christ, and Church*.

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THE NEW CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Edited by

Michael Allen  
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## Preface

The study of Christian doctrine continues into this third millennium without any signs of ceasing. Its practitioners have multiplied and diversified. Its resources – translations and editions of texts produced throughout the centuries and publication of new essays and books from theologians around the globe – expand year by year. Various movements and approaches have arisen in recent years, whether to introduce new concerns or to summon a revival of some older concerns in a fresh way. Significant things are afoot in the world of Christian divinity.

In 1997, Colin Gunton edited the first iteration of this companion. It marked a significant revival of interest in the discipline on the far side of mid-century skepticism about its possibilities, whether in the guise of Bultmannian demythologization or of doctrinal criticism. Its chapters from many mid-career and a few senior voices oriented the student to the passion and principles of the theological task. Twenty-five years have passed, and this *New Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* seeks to serve as a fresh resource that might aid the reader in a like manner for the years ahead. The task of theology is no less important and the need for illuminating initiation into its practice even more necessary today.

Part I focuses upon topics (*loci*) of Christian theological interest. They seek to outline where recent work has turned and to explore its relationship to deeper streams of Christian theological reflection. Entries here turn to scripture, to elements of the historic Christian tradition, and to a range of pertinent conversation partners. They also evince a range of methodological approaches, as contributors to Part I represent a snapshot of ecclesiastical traditions (including Orthodoxy in various Eastern churches, Roman Catholicism, and a spate of Protestant traditions). This new companion seeks to manifest the diversity of ecclesiastical contexts more fully than the first edition.

Part II considers major theological movements or conversations. Some constitute a sensibility or concern though they do not exactly

involve a school with a particularly homogenous or unified coherence. Some constitute something with significantly greater commonality, while still other conversations are by their very nature far more diverse. Several of these conversations wind up involving many, if not all, major Christian doctrines. Analytic theology, for instance, has been turned to consider doctrines ranging from theology proper to Christology to anthropology and human moral psychology. Similarly wide-ranging spectrums of attention can be identified for several other movements or disciplinary sensibilities explored in Part II. Attentive readers will observe overlap between Parts I and II at many points, where either topical analysis takes in one or more such movements and their contribution to that theme or where exposition of a given movement unfurls its relevance to particular doctrinal topics.

The companion guides and equips the new practitioner about the old ways and some new opportunities, for Jesus did say that “every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matt. 13:52). The chapters that follow span many of the topics that constitute the content of Christian doctrine, though they are not comprehensive in scope. Selections have been made regarding topics and later trajectories or movements to help initiate and equip the reader to engage later with other matters that are not discussed at any length herein. For instance, analogies or parallels between feminist theology and liberation theology, suggest that the chapter on the former will help prepare (though not render moot) later engagement of the latter project in a way that has been prepared by engagement of the former. Each chapter also concludes with a list of further recommended reading, signaling the goal of this companion to help the theologian in training to journey further along the path and to introduce them to a capable host of other texts.

It remains to thank those who have contributed significantly to the production of this companion. It has been a pleasure to work with Beatrice Rehl of Cambridge University Press as well as her capable team. The contributors have all worked diligently to meet deadlines and to fine-tune writing. The value of this volume surely depends on their insight and clarity more than anything else. It goes without saying that while the contributors might agree on a number of things, they also surely diverge from one another (and from the editor) in a range of judgments, both great and small. The companion introduces the student

to compelling versions of varied perspectives to Christian doctrine, and it makes no effort to avoid or downplay divergences. It is hoped that engaging each of these chapters will help guide the theological student along a pedagogical path that is marked by skill and good cheer, by real seriousness and abiding hope. Thinking well about God demands no less and, thankfully, continues to promise so much more.