

1-1-2000

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Recommended Citation

Casner, Paul (2000) "A Selected Bibliography of Theology," *Leaven*: Vol. 8: Iss. 3, Article 11.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol8/iss3/11>

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A Selected Bibliography of Theology

For Ministers and Church Members

BY PAUL CASNER

Introduction

This bibliography intends to provide some resources by which people who have read few, if any, theological works may gain access to theological literature, especially contemporary theological literature. Since doing theology is in essence learning how to acknowledge and appreciate what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, this bibliography attempts to aid us in our meditation on Christ. Without such meditation, all that we attempt as a church will be unsteady at best and foolhardy at worst. As you scan the entries, keep in mind that the list offered is far from exhaustive. It is both a place to begin and an invitation to do so.¹

Electronic Theological Libraries for Ministers

It does no good to produce a bibliography like this without offering access to a theological library—or a lot of money. Unfortunately, most theological libraries offer little help to ministers or

laypersons attempting to do serious research. This problem has been eased somewhat by the Vanderbilt Divinity School. Its Kessler Circulating Library enables ministers from all denominations to access the Divinity School Library through the World Wide Web and to check out library resources through the mail. Photocopies and reference information are also available. This program does require registration, and no more than two items may be checked out at a time; still, it is a wonderful resource for ministers without access to a good theological library. For more information, go to the Vanderbilt Library home page at <http://acorn.library.vanderbilt.edu>. For the Kessler program, click “other databases,” “site index,” then “divinity.”

Church Histories

A good knowledge of church history is crucial to understand-

ing the development of Christian theological ideas. The best resource for the uninitiated is the concise, yet scholarly, overview by Martin E. Marty entitled *A Short History of Christianity*, now in its second edition (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). *Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity*, ed. Tim Dowley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), is out of print but available in many libraries. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (rev. ed.; New York: Scribner, 1985), a standard one-volume work, and the two-volume set by Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), provide fuller resources for the maturing student. A good introductory resource for American church history is *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christianity in America*, ed. Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, George M. Marsden, David F. Wells, and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

Histories of Theology

The place to go after consulting the appropriate church histories is a narrative history of Christian theology. For a scholarly and accessible work, see William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983). Getting into primary sources (the writings of historical figures, as opposed to writings about them) is essential to cultivating an understanding of the history of Christian thought. Placher's two-volume set, *Readings in the History of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), offers a concise, yet well-selected, series of primary readings.

It is also important to be conversant with the theological history of your particular tradition. Richard T. Hughes' recent work, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), is a helpful intellectual history of the Churches of Christ. A useful supplement to this work is Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene: ACU Press, 1988). The standard histories of the Restoration movement should be consulted as well,² along with Hans Rollmann's Restoration movement site on the World Wide Web (www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/restmov.html). Rollmann's Web site includes a wealth of material, especially primary sources of early Restoration leaders.

Theological Dictionaries and Handbooks

Once you have a grasp of the general development of Christian theology, you may want to focus on the history of a certain doctrine or on a particular theologian. The place to begin is a theological dictionary or encyclopedia. These offer a brief introduction to an idea or person under consideration and a bibliography. Unfortunately, there is no good one-volume theological dictionary suited for pastors and laypersons. In light of this, perhaps the best place to start is *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson, rev. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1983). A good deal of information, as well as bibliographical material, can be gleaned from *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. Frank L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone. This standard work has recently been released in a third, but highly expensive, edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), a work edited by the British theologian Colin E. Gunton, you can find scholarly and up-to-date discussions of the main themes of Christian doctrine, as well as a useful summary of recent developments. An accessible work produced from an evangelical point of view is *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christian Belief*, ed. Robin

Keeley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms: Their Meaning and Background Exposed in Over 300 Articles* (New York: Collier, 1964) is old but still useful for concise definitions of unfamiliar terms and phrases encountered in theological study. A more up-to-date wordbook is Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996). While this volume offers definitions that are shorter than Harvey's, it includes a much larger number of terms and phrases. For help with the philosophical backgrounds to theological ideas, consult Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985). It offers concise treatments of major thinkers in the Western tradition, including Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and others, while addressing their role in the development of Christian thought.

Several works offer fuller histories of specific topics than can be found in a theological dictionary or wordbook. The most accessible is Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Webber, *What Christians Believe: A Biblical and Historical Summary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993). This work, however, has many drawbacks. The authors sometimes let their conservative stances unduly influence their judgments—especially in the discussion of scripture. The analyses of some figures (that of Karl Barth, for

instance) are inaccurate at times. Nevertheless, the readability of this volume and its straightforward presentation make it useful for the uninitiated. From here, you should examine the treatment of your topic in a standard survey such as Linwood Urban, *A Short History of Christian Thought* (rev. ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Surveys of Contemporary Theologies

Perhaps the best summary treatment of twentieth-century theology is David F. Ford, ed., *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* (2d ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1997). It includes articles, written by respected scholars, that introduce the thought of leading theologians and movements of the twentieth century. It also offers a helpful introduction to twentieth-century theology by Ford. A useful supplement to Ford's work is Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992).

An excellent collection of primary sources for leading modern theologians is the series edited by John De Gruchy of the University of Capetown, South Africa, entitled *The Making of Modern Theology: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987-).³ The series includes volumes on nineteenth-century figures such

as G. W. F. Hegel, Adolf von Harnack, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, as well as twentieth-century thinkers such as Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, and the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez. Each volume includes a helpful introduction to the life and thought of the theologian under consideration, a large number of selections written by that theologian, and a bibliography.

Introductions to Theology
Introductions to theology provide a sense of how the task of doing theology is currently being addressed by various thinkers, along with an author's own attempt to do so. The better introductions do not endeavor to say the last word on a topic, but invite readers to do their own grappling with the issues. The better works also do their theologizing within, and on behalf of, the church. The standard one-volume introduction is Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (rev. ed.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994). Guthrie offers a contemporary Reformed approach to theology. My favorite one-volume work is *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), written by Daniel L. Migliore, another Reformed theologian.

Selected Leading Contemporary Theologians

In this section I survey several leading theologians whose works offer fruitful means of entrance into the current discussion. Some

of the works by these theologians are difficult and not intended for the novice, but I include them so as to give you an awareness of important contemporary works.

Stanley J. Grenz

A well-known evangelical scholar from the Southern Baptist tradition, Grenz writes in a manner that is unusually accessible for the nonspecialist. His *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), written with Roger E. Olson, offers a good starting place for those intimidated by theological study. His *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) is an introduction to postmodern trends in Western culture. His most recent work is *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

Stanley Hauerwas

Hauerwas is a prominent thinker whose works are readable and practical. Unfortunately, he can sometimes be sarcastic and harsh, as well. Speaking primarily out of the Methodist tradition, Hauerwas focuses on questions of Christian ethics and the relationship between church and culture. Perhaps Hauerwas' most influential work is *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989). Here Hauerwas insists that the church must learn to live as a

minority voice in society as it endeavors not merely to “help people” but to tell people the truth about Jesus. Among Hauerwas’ other important works are *Unleashing the Scriptures: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) and *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

Jürgen Moltmann

Jürgen Moltmann was a German soldier in World War II who converted to Christianity at a POW camp in Britain. Moltmann offers rich insight on topics ranging from faith and suffering to the importance of the doctrine of the trinity for contemporary social questions. While beginners would not be advised to start their theological quests with Moltmann, they should nevertheless be aware of him and make engaging his works a goal for the future. He offers a series of “systematic contributions to theology” under the title Messianic Theology. Notable works in this series include *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God and God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (both works trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). A Lutheran, Moltmann is professor of systematic theology at the University of Tübingen, Germany.

Thomas C. Oden

Oden, who is from the Methodist tradition and teaches at

Drew University in New Jersey, endeavors to write theological reflections that serve both the minister and the average Christian reader. Among his popular works are *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) and *Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995). His formal work is *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; New York: HarperCollins, 1987–92). This work is a good summary of Christian theology for the pastor to have on the shelf.

William C. Placher

Placher’s best work, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), introduces trends in postmodern thought, then shows how justification of claims to knowledge of God can be approached within this context. Other important works by Placher include *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996) and *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994). Placher is professor of philosophy and religion at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana. He is from the Presbyterian tradition.

Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

A member of a famous theological family that includes his brother Alvin and his sister Amy, this minister of the Christian

Reformed Church and professor of theology at Calvin Theological Seminary offers fresh perspective on theological topics. Always readable, his chief work is *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). See also his *Assurances of the Heart. A Revised Edition of Beyond Doubt: Faith-Building Devotions on Questions Christians Ask* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).

Geoffrey Wainwright

A widely recognized authority on the history of theology and worship, Wainwright writes in accessible language with a desire to show the relationship between good theology and a life of praise. For an overview of his thought, see *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). Among his other works are *Eucharist and Eschatology* (rev. ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) and *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Wainwright is from the Methodist tradition and teaches at Duke Divinity School.

Sondra Ely Wheeler

Wheeler is assistant professor of Christian ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. She writes on Christian ethics with the pastor in mind. In *Wealth and Obligation: The New Testament on Possessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), she claims that wealth is a gift

from God and is intended to be used to serve others and to glorify God. She addresses the question of the role of the church in medical ethics in *Stewards of Life: Bioethics and Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

Nicholas Wolterstorff

Wolterstorff teaches at Yale Divinity School and has his roots in the Christian Reformed tradition. His works are demanding, and I would not include his name in a bibliography for beginners if it were not for his profound meditational work, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). It ranks among the most powerful contemporary Christian books I have read, reminiscent of C. S. Lewis' *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber, 1961; San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994) in its poignant reflections on the loss of a loved one.⁴ Here Wolterstorff offers meditations on his attempt to come to terms with his son's death in a 1989 mountain-climbing accident. This work is a must for those facing suffering and loss.

John Howard Yoder

The late John Howard Yoder is one of the greatest American Christian thinkers of the twentieth century. His works offer rich insight into the relationship between Christianity and culture, calling Christians to witness to the power of God in the world by imitating the humble love of Christ. His most influential work is *The Politics of Jesus* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

Originally published in 1972, it is a pioneering effort in Christian ethics. Other important works by Yoder include *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) and *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). Yoder is from the Mennonite tradition.

Conclusion

The Christian church faces many challenges today that demand that pastors and people in the pew learn to do theology thoughtfully and piously. Only through careful meditation on Jesus Christ can we respond faithfully to God's love and call others to do the same. I hope that this bibliography will encourage us to embark on these endeavors.

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Notes

¹ This bibliography does not include works that reflect feminist traditions, correlational theologies, or liberation theologies. These can certainly be fruitful, but they are not, in my opinion, the places to begin in learning how to do theology. Concerning the related field of Christian ethics, I follow Karl Barth, Stanley Hauerwas, and others in holding that ethics must function within theology rather than operating as a separate discipline associated with a general concept of "the good." Thus in my bibliography of authors below, I include theologians who follow this approach—see, for example, Hauerwas, Oden, and

Wheeler. These authors may be consulted for information on ethics.

² These include William E. Tucker and Lester G. McAllister, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publishing, 1975); Winfred E. Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1948); David Edwin Harrell, *Quest for a Christian America: The Disciples of Christ and American Society to 1866* (Nashville: Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1966); Harrell, *The Social Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ, 1865–1900* (Atlanta: Publishing Systems, Inc., 1973); James DeForest Murch, *Christians Only* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1962); Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, 4 vols. (Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1950–79; Germantown, Tenn.: Religious Book Service, 1987); and Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1981).

³ While this series is currently being published by Fortress Press, some volumes in it have appeared under the auspices of HarperCollins (San Francisco) and Orbis (Maryknoll, N.Y.).

⁴ Lewis' best work, besides *A Grief Observed*, is the classic *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952). This book is good for introducing the beginner to Christian theology if taken with some grains of salt. First, Lewis places too much emphasis on the question of God's reality, overshadowing his reflections on other Christian doctrines. Second, Lewis' argument for God's reality does not work as a rational proof of God, in spite of the fact that Lewis apparently intended it as such. Rather, the argument works as a reasonable witness to God, an invitation to faith consistent with the way many Westerners reason. Lewis' argument, in essence, dates from Plato and has been used by many Christian theologians throughout history. A good contemporary version of it is found

(Notes continued on p. 134)