

Preface

The enterprise of Christian theology today is both varied and exciting. In this book, we want to invite you to enter into this world, to participate in the activity of religious reflection along with the group of people whose thought you will encounter in the pages that follow. “We” are a group of some fifty theologians and scholars of religion. We belong to many Christian traditions, and we do not all share the same convictions about how theology needs to be done, or what its precise role may be in today’s world. But we are all—Protestant and Catholic, women and men, people of color and Caucasians, gay and straight—committed to working in collaboration to uncover the continuing importance of the ancient traditions of Christianity for the very different world of today. This book is testimony to these commitments.

There are so many things in the Christian theological tradition today that we can no longer take for granted. While many people remain proudly members of this or that historic Christian church or denomination, many others move much more freely between traditions or construct a personal religious outlook that draws elements from various places both inside and outside the Christian tradition. Still others live more or less comfortably on the edge of religious conviction but retain a sense of what Christianity was and is and how it may be of continuing importance to the world. Representatives of all these approaches are included within the authorship of this book, just as you, our reader, will in all probability find yourself somewhere in this spectrum.

At the same time as we recognize, celebrate, and illustrate pluralism, we also offer here a vision of the common historical foundations that lie behind today’s very different situation. Ancient traditions and teachings remain alive in us even as, and perhaps especially when, we try to speak to the world of today. To adapt a wise and witty saying that has been attributed to many different authors, while we reject a traditionalism that is “the dead faith of the living,” we believe in the continuing importance of that tradition that is “the living faith of the dead.”

One of the striking things about the world of Christian scholarship at the present time is the degree of collaborative work. No current approach to Christian theology, we are confident, exhibits more evidence of this working together than the one that lies before you. We warmly invite our readers to

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join us in the extended argument that is Christian theology today. You will find here the fruits of five years of discussion and collaboration, and it can only be improved by the contribution that you will make as you engage with us in constructing theology anew.

Finally, we must recognize those individuals and groups who have made this work possible. We have received substantial funding from the Louisville Institute and the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Religion and Theology. We are grateful for the confidence they have shown in us, without which we could not easily have reached this point. We are also enormously grateful to the staff of Fortress Press, particularly Michael West, who has undertaken here an editorial task of monumental proportions, and has never—to our knowledge—despaired in the least of its coming to fruition. Finally, to all those past members of the Workgroup, whose labors built up both the traditions we inherited and the healthy financial situation that helps to support our meetings, we express our gratitude and our hopes that they too will find this text a worthy Workgroup venture.

Serene Jones

Paul Lakeland