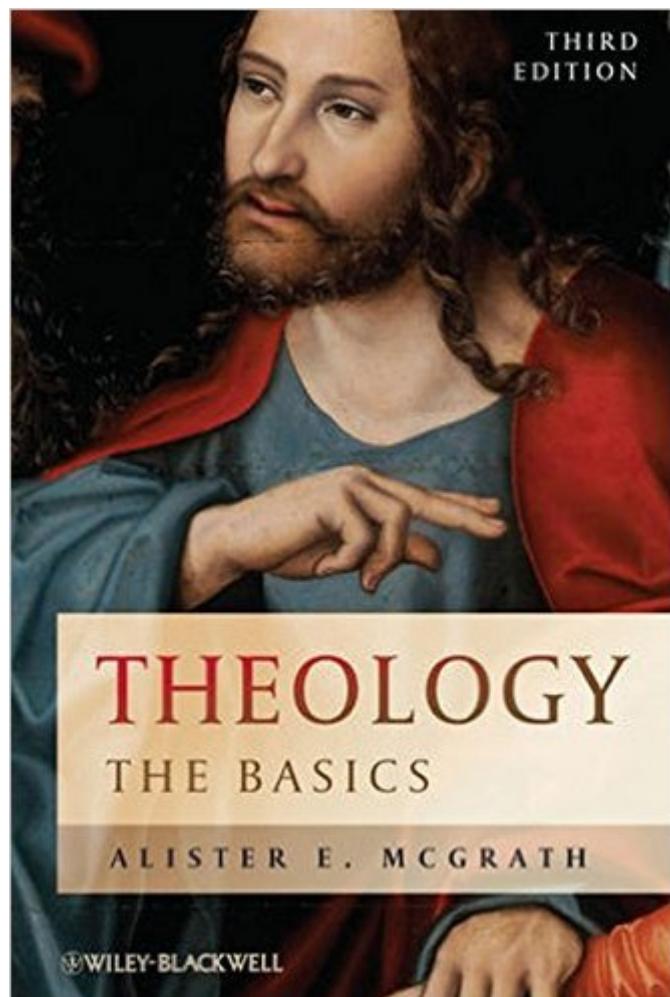


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Theology: The Basics



Synopsis

Completely updated and expanded, this third edition from one of the world's leading theologians introduces students to key theological issues, contextualizing them within the bible and the works of seminal theologians. Introduces readers to key theological issues such as God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, faith, creation, salvation, atonement, religious history, and heaven Thoroughly updated, with the addition of a new chapter on the Holy Spirit Now includes images and more pedagogical features to engage the reader Each chapter offers an overview of an important theme, presents relevant biblical passages, and summarizes the contribution of a major theologian Expands the range of theological positions discussed within the book, especially those of contemporary and feminist theologians Maintains the user-friendly structure of the previous edition, with the Apostle's Creed as a framework Concludes with suggestions on how readers can take their study further Can be used alongside the new edition of *Theology: The Basic Readings* for a complete overview of the field

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Customer Reviews

Alister McGrath is an author I rely upon frequently for helping to teach theology. He has a broad-based, ecumenical approach useful and accessible to Catholics and Protestants; firmly grounded in the long history of Christendom and intellectual developments arising out of the early church forward, there is much that Orthodox Christians would also find interesting and helpful. His works on Christian spirituality, historical theology, and his excellent one-volume introduction to theology are constant references of mine. This particular volume, produced by Blackwell (one of my

favourite presses, particularly for theological works), is meant to serve as both an introduction and survey of the basic themes of Christian theology. McGrath takes the Apostles' Creed, one of the creeds of the early church that most every Christian agrees upon as a statement of some authority, as the overall framework for this text. In his introduction, McGrath explains the different methods of studying theology (highlighting particular theologians, or tracing the history), and some of the disadvantages of working with those methods. He explains the basis of following the Apostles' Creed to highlight ideas, which in turn draws in discussion of particular theologians and theological schools, denominational differences as applicable, and the major source elements of scripture, tradition, and reason. The Apostles' Creed itself is rather short and basic - each line of the creed focuses upon one aspect of the faith, and McGrath uses these lines as the topics for the chapters. Elaborating on these basic themes, McGrath pulls in discussion and references from biblical texts and images, major theologians from past and present, and general trends in history.

Something I have kept in the back of my mind for awhile now is to be on the alert for a short book delineating Christianity in its broadest categories. For me, the utility of such a book - were it to exist - would consist in having something to give to friends and acquaintances from different religious backgrounds, who are interested in what Christianity is generally about. Without wanting to sound melodramatic, let me say that Dr. Alister McGrath's book, *Theology: The Basics*, has filled that gap and freed up some memory in the back of my mind. *Theology: The Basics* is arranged very simply around an ancient Christian formula known as the Apostles' Creed. What McGrath discusses, whether faith, God, creation, Jesus, salvation, the Church, or heaven, is found in germ form at least in the Apostles' Creed. As a scholar of historical theology, McGrath manifests a depth of understanding for Christian thought and its development over the centuries with each subject he treats. Frequent mention is made of such thinkers as Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, etc. Some readers will find helpful the selected Christian texts, which are placed at the end of each chapter, accompanied by a few questions for further reflection. This feature makes *Theology: The Basics* amenable for discussion groups. From the perspective of someone, who might like to distribute a copy of this book to non-Christians, let me offer three reasons in support of this gesture: Firstly, *Theology: The Basics* is a clear presentation of Christianity with the selected subjects dealt with in a mature fashion. Secondly, McGrath showcases an ecumenical spirit citing from Protestant and Roman Catholic sources alike, though perhaps the majority of citations come from the former.

Possibly the greatest treasure of the Catholic Church is its two millennia of reflection and study of

Revelation and the Mystery of God, namely theology, the "sacred science." Theology is little known to lay Catholics in typical parish life, as it may be confused with elementary instruction or religious education. Catechetics and most faith formation programs pose definitive and conversation-ending answers to those who have yet to ask the piercing questions. Theology, by contrast, begins with philosophy and seeks the mind and wisdom of God, in disciplined and systematic ways, in order to address the hungers of the human heart. Theology and its laborers know that this science can never balance its books, for its object (and passion, really) is the mind and soul of God. From Apostolic times the Church has thrived on the organized thinking and writings of its gifted theologians, beginning with Paul and the Evangelists, and continuing down to our time in the works of Augustine, Aquinas and Rahner. Inevitably the question arises as to the provenance of the sacred science. Is it a project of seminarians and clerics, or is the privilege of exploring the sacred Tradition of the very essence of Baptismal right and responsibility? I would argue the latter, in that we cannot love a God we do not know nor can we celebrate that love without the passion or thrill that mystery arouses. A clarity achieved with no effort is a loveless marriage. Alister McGrath's work is both an invitation and a roadmap. He introduces the layman and the cleric to the questions posed by a divinely created universe and the time tested formulas of belief around which Catholic thought has organized itself since the Nicene Creed was promulgated in the fourth century.

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