
Church History Literature Survey

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Some knowledge of church history is vitally important not least because of the wisdom that can be gained from the experience of Christians in previous generations. There are many books in the field and the ones I have chosen for this survey are a somewhat idiosyncratic selection. I make no claim for this to be a representative survey of recent historical literature. While I have included recent books that deserve attention, I have also included books that interest me, or I have read for preparation for teaching or have simply come my way. Inevitably this survey reflects my tastes and interests and there are many books I could have included that I haven't. Like other contributors to these theological literature surveys I will in this initial one in my area mention some books published before the past two years.

General surveys

Until relatively recently we have had to rely for general surveys of church history on older works such as Philip Schaff, Williston Walker and Kenneth Scott Latourette, but in recent years some excellent new surveys have been published. A very stimulating and promising one is the first volume of *History of the World Christian Movement* by Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist.¹ This is the first volume of a projected two-volume work surveying the history of Christianity not so much in its institutional forms but as a very multi-faceted global movement. The treatment of the early church is mildly critical, but on the whole it takes the biblical record at face value. The particular strength of this book is its treatment of the development of Christianity in the east. There are fascinating accounts of the spread of Christianity along the trade routes to China. Irvin and Sunquist also deal particularly well with the rise of Islam and its encounter with Christianity. I am sure this will be a standard work for years to come. For sheer narrative power *The Faith—A History of Christianity* by Brian Moynahan² is hard to beat. While not an academic this beautifully produced book is a well researched, gripping and sympathetic retelling of the story of Christianity full of poignant vignettes and details. The dark side of church history is not ignored, but the achievements of Christianity are celebrated. In attempting to be even handed to Protestant and Catholics Moynahan gets some things distorted, especially during the Reformation. There are odd obsessions so that, for example, there is a whole chapter on witchcraft. Its greatest weakness is its relative neglect of the eastern churches. From an evangelical perspective Nick Needham's *2000 Years of Christ's Power* is really excellent. So far Needham has published two volumes covering the early church and Middle Ages, which I mention below, and I assume two more volumes are on their way. I will review each of these volumes later, but this is my recommendation for a good survey. They are not as strong in the narrative, but for breadth and understanding of the spiritual and doctrinal development of the church they will be hard to beat. In a previous issue I mentioned *The Story of Christian Theology* by Roger Olsen.³ Olsen tells the story of historical theology well, but unfortunately he does so with an Arminian agenda that distorts the story. Calvin is demoted in stature and Arminius elevated. I think readers would be better served by other historical theologies.

Let me mention a few surveys that are more specific in scope. **Mark Noll's** *The Old Religion in the New World*⁴ is essentially a condensed version of his 1992 *History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*. Noll has been criticised for being too reductionist and for conforming too much to the canons of the academic community. While there may be some truth in this, I think Noll and others like him have injected a dose of necessary academic rigour and sophistication into evangelical church history. In this work Noll looks at how European Christianity adapted to its new North American context. There is much here to stimulate thinking on the cultural adaptation of Christianity not only in North America but wherever the gospel engages its culture. A related book is the *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* by **Randall Balmer**.⁵ While endlessly fascinating this is a rather odd work. Written entirely by Balmer it covers many aspects of evangelical Christianity but in a very uneven fashion. You can find out about obscure evangelists and Bible schools, but oddly there are no separate articles on Gresham Machen (he comes under Westminster Seminary) or Martyn Lloyd-Jones (although John Stott gets an entry). This makes great bedtime reading but I am not sure how valuable it is as a reference work. *Firestorm of the Lord* by **Stuart Piggin**⁶ is an historical as well as theological treatment of the subject of revival. I think it is on the whole a very good book that is critically sympathetic to Dr Lloyd-Jones's understanding of revival. It is weak in dealing with revival among Roman Catholics, but even so readers will find it not only intellectually stimulating but also spiritually challenging. For various reasons women often got overlooked in church history, but with a little effort their contribution can be unearthed. **Marie A. Conn** has done something of that in *Noble Daughters—Unheralded Women in Western Christianity, 13th to 18th centuries*.⁷ Conn examines four periods—the Beguines in the 13th century, Anabaptist woman martyrs in the 15th, women and witch crazes in the 16th and the nuns of the Port Royal Convent with which Pascal and the Jansenists were associated in the 17th. There is a slight feminist tinge to these studies, but they are real eye-openers and may help us to look at church history somewhat differently. The chapter on the suffering of the female Anabaptists is deeply moving. Finally in this section I must mention *A Light in the Land—Christianity in Wales 200–2000* by **Gwyn Davies**.⁸ Lavishly illustrated with plenty of time lines and charts, this delightful book is a wonderful survey of the history of Christianity in Wales. Davies tells the story of the work of God in Wales through 20 centuries and while much of the story inspires more recently it moves us to pray for God to work again as he did in the past.

The Early Church

The first volume in **Nick Needham's** *2000 Years of Christ's Power*⁹ deals with the age of the early church fathers. The subtitle is important, as Needham wants us to engage, as evangelicals are perhaps unused to doing, with the church fathers and their theology. One of the strengths of this work is the inclusion of extracts from the fathers so that we can read for ourselves what they said. And while they said some things we may object to they said much more that should not only make us think more deeply but also worship more fervently. There are some magnificent prayers and hymns here. Somewhat different is *The First Christian Centuries*¹⁰ by **Paul McKechnie** which is not so much a history of the early church, although it follows the story line, but a discussion of the perspectives of various ancient and church historians on the early centuries of the

church. Those with a general interest may find this volume a bit too specialised, but it is well written and is very helpful as a guide through some of the scholarly discussions of this period. *The Origins of Western Christendom* is a collection of papers delivered at a conference and edited by the Mennonite historian **Alan Krieder**.¹¹ Some of these papers are more interesting than others. Krieder's own 'Changing patterns of conversion in the west' is a fascinating account of how the understanding of conversion changed as the church expanded. Other papers take up the theme in relation to regions such as northern Italy or groups such as women. There is an interesting discussion of catechesis in evangelism and initiation by Everett Ferguson. There is also a paper on defining heresy by Rowan Williams that may be of interest once he becomes the next Archbishop of Canterbury. If I understand him he thinks that heresy is a social construction. One of the figures common to all the books in this section that I have mentioned is Augustine of Hippo. **David Bentley-Taylor** has given us a short and very readable introduction to this great man in *The Apostle from Africa*.¹² For a much fuller appreciation of Augustine consult *Augustine through the Ages* edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald, OSA. This is an encyclopædia covering every possible aspect of Augustine's life, times and theology. While indispensable to scholars this is a treasure trove for anyone interested in Augustine. Next time you are in a library dip into this book for a half hour and perhaps you will catch the Augustine bug (in its Protestant form) as I have.

The Middle Ages

Again we're in debt to **Nick Needham** for the second volume of *2000 Years of Christ's Power*.¹³ In this volume we are introduced to a period with which evangelicals are even more unfamiliar. Perhaps understandably because of the state of the church on the eve of the Reformation we think the middle ages has nothing to teach us. How wrong we are. I particularly recommend the preface that explains the value of studying this period. Thereafter Needham deals with Islam, the Crusades, Russian and Eastern Orthodoxy and much else. Of related interest is **Hughes Oliphant Old's** third volume on the medieval church in his epic series *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*.¹⁴ This volume covers almost exhaustively the preaching of the Byzantine period after 540, the mission to the Barbarians in northern Europe, the preaching of the monastic and preaching orders, the German mystics and the reform movements. Readers will be surprised by what Old uncovers such as Thomas Aquinas' lunchtime Bible teaching in Naples. I understand that the next volume on the preaching of the Reformation is soon to be published.

The Reformation period and the 17th century

I have surprisingly little to note in this period, but there are several books that are well worth reading. **Bernard Cottret** has produced a splendid new study of John Calvin simply entitled *Calvin—A Biography*.¹⁵ There is not a lot new in this biography, but Cottret presents a compelling portrait of Calvin that does justice to his theology, personality and impact on the reform movement, culture and history. By digging under the surface of Calvin's writings Cottret enables us to meet a more human Calvin. Another book on the reformation period is **Diarmaid MacCulloch's** superb *Tudor Church Militant*.¹⁶ This study of the reign of Edward VI was originally delivered as the Birkbeck Lectures at Cambridge. Freed from Protestant hagiography and Catholic and

secular caricature Edward's short reign is revealed in MacColloch's hands as a dynamic period that determined the ultimate direction of the English reformation. Archbishop Cranmer is seen as a far stronger figure than often thought. This book is a good antidote to the popular disparaging of the Reformation by Catholic historians such as Eamon Duffy. **David Bentley-Taylor's *My Dear Erasmus***¹⁷ is an excellent introduction to a man who played a key part in the Reformation even though he was not part of it. Luther, Calvin and many others owed much to Erasmus's Christian humanism. In *Sons of Calvin*¹⁸ **Alan Clifford** offers us three short and moving portraits of Huguenot pastors who in different ways are representative of the best of French Protestantism.

Among the Puritans of the 17th century John Owen stands out as a major theologian as recent studies have confirmed. In *Redeem the Time*¹⁹ **Steve Griffiths** examines Owen theology in the light of his doctrine of sin. Griffiths avoids putting Owen into a theological straight jacket but does show how the theme of sin and grace shaped Owen's theology in relation to individuals, society, the church and the pursuit of holiness. I am not sure why the book is titled as it is, but as it is it is a fine introduction to Owen's theology of the Christian life. Of a different nature but also a fine introduction to Owen is the forthcoming (in December) collection of papers delivered at the 2000 John Owen Centre conference. Entitled *John Owen—the man and his theology*,²⁰ this book contains chapters on Owen's life (Robert Oliver), Owen as a theologian (Carl Trueman), his doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit (Sinclair Ferguson), the challenge of the Quakers (Michael Haykin) and his doctrine of the church (Graham Harrison). One area of historical theology related to Owen that in recent years has undergone revision is that of Protestant scholasticism. Far from being the theological *bete noire* it has been portrayed as, it has recently been re-examined as an intellectual movement that for theologians like Owen was more a servant than a master as they sought to relate to the intellectual discourse of their day. One of the foremost scholars in this area is Carl Trueman who contributes to a collection of papers entitled *Reformation and Scholasticism*²¹ edited by **Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker**. Much historical theology, not least that dealing with the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, has been plagued by a lack of historical perspective and consideration of context. This volume helps to put that right.

The 18th Century

For the 18th century I enthusiastically recommend two books by **W.R. Ward**, the Emeritus Professor of Modern History at Durham. While a 'secular' historian Ward has done much work on Methodism and British and continental Protestantism in this period. His 1992 work *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*²² has recently been republished in paperback and is must reading for people interested in this period. The strength of this book is the way Ward puts the Great Awakening in its larger European cultural context. Most of us are aware of Count Zinzendorf and the Pietists, but Ward shows us that a lot more was going on in central Europe and even Siberia. Ward casts his net more widely in *Christianity under the Ancien Regime 1648–1789*.²³ Here Ward covers the story of European Christianity from the end of the Wars of Religion to the eve of the French Revolution. He shows how both Protestantism and Catholicism adapted to changing political, cultural and social circumstances. I don't agree with

everything he says and in particular have reservations about his talk of revival strategies, but his perspective is very helpful in understanding this important period.

A unique insight into this period and beyond into the 19th century is **Owen Thomas's** *The Atonement Controversy*.²⁴ First published in Welsh in 1874 as part of the biography of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist preacher John Jones, Talsarn, this is an account of the intense theological debates that raged in the various denominations. While there may be too much unnecessary detail in the account the book is testimony to the theological seriousness of these men who were engaged in the work of the ministry. This is not a rarified academic debate, but rather a debate on the message that was to be preached. We have much to learn, both positively and negatively, from the substance of the debate and the way it was conducted. More specific studies of key figures in 18th century evangelicalism are offered in three books. **Faith Cook** has written an excellent biography of *Selina Countess of Huntingdon*.²⁵ The Countess has not been the subject of a substantial biography in spite of her seminal role in the Great Awakening in Britain, but Cook has remedied that as well as adding to the growing body of literature on the role of women in church history. **L. Gordon Tait** has written a fascinating biography of John Wetherspoon, Scottish Presbyterian minister, president of Princeton and signer of the American Declaration of Independence. Entitled *The Piety of John Wetherspoon*²⁶ this book gives us an insight not only into the period, but also in the political and social impact of Scottish Calvinism. Many of the seminal political ideas of the Scottish Reformation and of men like Knox, Melville, Henderson and Rutherford came to fruition in the American Revolution. Finally **Alan Clifford's** biography of Philip Doddridge *The Good Doctor*²⁷ is on the whole an excellent biography of the great 18th century Congregational minister in Northampton. What an inspiration Doddridge is to gospel ministry. Unfortunately the book is marred by the author's polemical Amyraldian agenda. While this is somewhat evident in the main body of the work it is most evident in a rather tendentious appendix that has little to do with Doddridge and much more to do with the author. Remove that and the book would be very good.

The 19th Century

Recently several books have appeared that deal with the early part of the century with particular reference to evangelicalism. In *The Silent Revolution & the Making of Victorian England*,²⁸ **Herbert Schlossberg** chronicles the profound impact of the 18th century evangelical awakening on 19th century English culture and society. Much of this impact was the result of the work of voluntary societies such as the London City Mission, the subject of **Donald M. Lewis's** *Lighten their Darkness—the Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828–1860*.²⁹ Originally published in the United States in 1989 but republished here last year, this book uses the LCM and urban mission as a lens to look at evangelicalism in general and at how it related to the city in particular. This subject is dealt with from a different angle in **Ian Shaw's** forthcoming *High Calvinists in Action—Calvinism and the City, Manchester and London, c.1810–1860*.³⁰ Focusing on Manchester and London, Shaw shows how the theology of high Calvinists such as William Nunn (Anglican), William Gadsby (Strict Baptist), Joseph Irons (independent Calvinist at Grove Chapel) as well as more 'moderate' Calvinists as William McKerrow (Presbyterian) and Andrew Reed (Congregationalist) among others was expressed in their considerable social ministries.

The chapter on the lamentably forgotten Reed who had a remarkable ministry in the East End of London is inspiring as well as informative. **Ian Farley** reminds us of another urban ministry in *J.C. Ryle—First Bishop of Liverpool*.³¹ Ryle's Liverpool ministry is often neglected and Farley shows how he worked hard to reach the working people of Liverpool with the gospel. Unfortunately in spite of great sympathy for the poor and concern for the lost Farley believes that Ryle's tenure was not a success. He does not seem to have been the right man for the position, which if true probably says less about Ryle and more about the nature of Anglican episcopacy and the challenges Christianity was beginning to face in the late 19th century.

Earlier in the century Evangelicalism was in the ascendancy in the Church of England, but many evangelical clergymen found their relationship with the Establishment a difficult one. In *Anglican Evangelicals—Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c.1800–1850*³² **Grayson Carter** gives us a fascinating study of a number of evangelical Anglicans who seceded from the Establishment, men such as Thomas Kelly in Ireland, the Oxford seceders Bulteel, Tiptaft and Philpot, some of the early Brethren and Spurgeon's friend Baptist Noel. While a number of influences were at work—Calvinism, millenarianism and restorationism—all shared in the general disillusionment of many in the educational and social elite with the Church of England. **Timothy Stunt** covers much the same territory in *From Awakening to Secession*,³³ which is both narrower and broader in scope in that it deals with the period 1815–35 but covers all of Britain and Switzerland. Stunt shows the appeal of continental Protestantism on British evangelicals as well as the ideal of the primitive church. The radical evangelicals as he calls them pushed hard for a more doctrinally and morally pure church both inside and outside state establishments. When they got disillusioned they often seceded. Readers will find Stunt's treatment of the Haldane brothers of particular interest, especially the context of Robert's ministry in Geneva. There was much more going on there before, during and after than is commonly known. Both these books are excellent and are particularly illuminating on the ambiguous relationship of conservative evangelicals now as then to the Church of England. Both authors highlight the connections between these radical evangelicals and John Henry Newman and his circle. Like many of them Newman had a middle class evangelical upbringing and went to Oxford at around the same time. This connection is more fully explored in **Frank Turner's**, *John Henry Newman—the Challenge of Evangelical Religion*.³⁴ This is a really splendid book that revises the generally accepted picture of the ecumenical Newman with a far more anti-evangelical Newman. Newman is generally seen through he own reinterpretation of his early life in the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Turner goes back to the angry young don and clergyman who was a bitter enemy of everything evangelical and who did much to not only undermine Protestantism but also the Christian faith by his attacks on the Bible. Unfortunately Turner's conclusion does not do justice to the body of the book. To attribute Newman's conversion to Rome to his desire for the company of other men in a monastic order not provided for in the Church of England and not to his Catholic doctrine is somewhat weak to say the least.

Several other books dealing with this period merit attention. *Scottish Christianity in the Modern World*³⁵ is an interesting collection of essays in honour of Prof. A.C. Cheyne of Edinburgh University. A wide array of subjects is covered, but of particular interest is the section on 'Faith and Doubt' where the theological transformation of the churches in

Scotland is explored. Ian's Campbell's essay on Thomas Carlyle's relationship with the Secession Kirk of his upbringing is especially illuminating. **David Bebbington's** Didsbury Lectures, *Holiness in the Nineteenth Century*³⁶ is a very readable and illuminating study of four approaches to sanctification and the Christian life—the High Church, Calvinist, Wesleyan and Keswick traditions. I do not think that Bebbington has done justice to the Calvinist tradition, either in its high or more moderate forms. Is it really right to say that Jonathan Edwards radically modified Calvinism? Nevertheless there is much here that is thought provoking. In *A Spiritual Home—Life in British and American Reformed Congregations, 1830–1915*³⁷ **Charles Cashdollar** gives us a fascinating study into what made members tick in Congregational and Presbyterian churches on both sides of the Atlantic. He covers things such as membership, social fellowship, buildings, Sabbath observance and so on. A book like this gets behind the scenes of more official church history. Its weakness is lack of theological perspective. Read from a conservative Reformed perspective the book is a testimony to the decline of Calvinism over this period. Women figure largely in this book as they do in **Linda Wilson's** *Constrained by Zeal—Female Spirituality among Nonconformists 1825–1875*.³⁸ Wilson uses Bebbington's famous quadrilateral defining evangelicalism—conversionism, crucicentrism, biblicism and activism—to examine how women understood and expressed their Christian faith. Using sources like church records and obituaries she looks at conversion experiences and home, chapel and devotional life. Another overlooked group in church history is the black community. In the United States the various African Methodist Episcopal groups share a remarkable history of preaching, evangelism and church life. **Love Henry Whelchel Jr's** *Hell without Fire—Conversion in Slave Religion*³⁹ tells this story, but it unfortunately does so through the lens of liberation theology so that conversion becomes primarily a form of protest rather than a genuine encounter with God.

The 20th Century

One of the most significant events in the early 20th century was the 1904–05 Welsh Revival. Much has been written about this, but **Noel Gibbard** comes at it from a fresh perspective in *On the Wings of the Dove*⁴⁰ in which he shows the international influence of the revival. There is much to inspire here, but I think a little more analysis and context would have been beneficial. The Welsh revival also figures in **Ian Randall's** very stimulating *Evangelical Experiences—A Study on the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918–1939*.⁴¹ Focussing on the interwar period Randall covers a wide array of movements and trends that influenced evangelicals in various ways—Keswick, liberal evangelicalism, Brethrenism, Pentecostalism, the Oxford Group and so on. I am not convinced that what Randall calls 'Orthodox Dissent'—the theological reaction of Nathaniel Micklem and others to liberal Nonconformity—falls in the category of evangelical as commonly understood. What stands out is the theological weakness of this period and the role of the Brethren in maintaining an evangelical witness. A key figure in British church life up into the inter-war period was John H. Shakespeare, the secretary of the Baptist Union in England from 1898 to 1924. In *The Making of a Modern Denomination—John Howard Shakespeare and the English Baptists*,⁴² **Peter Shepherd** examines the impact of this seminal figure. It was largely due to Shakespeare that the Baptist Union became the denominational

organisation it is today. He was also actively involved in the incipient ecumenical movement. What Britain did not have in this period was a figure like Gresham Machen who so valiantly fought the good fight in the United States. In *Towards a Sure Faith—J. Gresham Machen and the Dilemma of Biblical Criticism, 1881–1915*,⁴³ Terry **Chrisope** examines Machen engagement as a young man with biblical criticism. It caused a crisis of faith from which he emerged strengthened for defending the historic evangelical and reformed faith. Only after the Second World War did a similar and yet very different figure arise in Britain in Martyn Lloyd-Jones. **John Brencher's** study *Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) and 20th Century Evangelicalism*⁴⁴ is an important attempt to assess the impact of Lloyd-Jones on late 20th century evangelicalism in Britain. Overall Brencher is sympathetic and appreciative to his subject, but he does point out what he considers weaknesses. In itself I have no problem with that since Lloyd-Jones, like any other leader, had his faults, idiosyncracies, failures of judgement, imbalances and so on. Not to deal with these would not do justice to his true greatness. However I think that Brencher goes too far at some points and in particular exaggerates the significance of Lloyd-Jones's personality and Welshness in his attitude to Anglican evangelicals. I don't think Brencher has adequately interpreted what happened in 1966 or fully understood Lloyd-Jones's position. Whatever the specific facts are—and I am sure those closer to events will dispute some of them—Lloyd-Jones acted on clearly and strongly held principles and should be judged on that basis. But my main criticism of the book is that it does not really put Lloyd-Jones's ministry in the broader sweep of evangelical history in Britain. If Brencher had done that I think we would see the Doctor in clearer perspective. A book that certainly does take in the broad picture is **Iain Murray's** *Evangelicalism Divided*.⁴⁵ While not a complete history of the post-war period, this book is one of the most important recently published for understanding the history of evangelicalism in the later 20th century. Also of interest are two other books. The first is another by **Ian Randall** entitled *Educating Evangelicalism—the origins, development and impact of London Bible College*.⁴⁶ That LBC has without doubt played an important role in post-war evangelicalism is something of a barometer as to the state of evangelicalism in this country just as Fuller Seminary has been in the United States. While fairly non-judgemental Randall records the tensions within LBC as it developed and sought to reflect an increasingly diverse evangelical constituency. With **David Hilborn**, **Ian Randall** has also written *One Body in Christ—the history and significance of the Evangelical Alliance*.⁴⁷ This book is an informative if somewhat tame and predicable domestic history of the EA. Like LBC the EA is a barometer of evangelicalism in the broadest sense of the word with all the virtues and problems that involves. The question this book raises is that for all the good things the EA has done will it be able in the decades ahead to continue to be an umbrella for such a diverse constituency. One of the newer aspects of evangelicalism that the EA now reflects has been the growth in numbers and influence of Pentecostalism. **William Kay's** fascinating study *Pentecostals in Britain*⁴⁸ makes use of historical, sociological and theological analysis to give us a very insightful and comprehensive picture of the Pentecostal constituency. As many readers will like me be somewhat ignorant of these churches this book will prove very illuminating.