
The *Cambridge History of Christianity*

Hugh MCLEOD

University of Birmingham / d.h.mcleod@bham.ac.uk

The *Cambridge History of Christianity* was published by the Cambridge University Press in nine volumes between 2006 and 2009. The first to appear were those relating to the earliest and the most recent periods of Christian history, while those covering the Middle Ages came out later. The project was planned by a Cambridge-based steering group which included a theologian and a sociologist, as well as historians. Approaches to potential editors began in 2000. These submitted plans which were considered by the steering group and usually approved after various amendments had been made. Once appointed, the editors were given a free hand in the selection of authors and the acceptance or rejection of their contributions, though the volumes shared a common format, each being approximately 700 pages long and comprising about thirty chapters. Most of those initially appointed as editors chose a co-editor, though three decided to work alone. All of the editors were based in British or North American universities and the great majority of the contributors came from English-speaking countries, though each volume included a few from other parts of Europe or from Israel. The confessional diversity of the United Kingdom and United States was reflected in the confessional diversity of the editors among whom there was an Anglican, a Catholic, an atheist, a Jew, a Baptist, a Methodist and a Quaker, as well as others whose confessional affiliation or non-affiliation I do not know.

The broad principles underlying the project were determined by the steering group at the outset and are reflected in the title of the volume covering the most recent history, namely *World Christianities, c.1914-c.2000*. The «circa» indicates that cultural and social history, where the boundaries are fluid, will be emphasised as much as those great ecclesiastical or political events that can be dated more precisely. The word «Christianities» in the plural is emphasised in many of the volumes and reflects a constant stress on the diversity of ways of being Christian. The editors of the first volume state that «Older models that regarded the earliest period as an inexorable evolution towards a recognised 'orthodoxy' have given way to an increasing attention to the range of persons who thought of themselves as 'Christian', while ar-

ticulating that faith and acting it out in ritual and ethics in quite different fashions»¹. «Heresy» indeed usually appears in quotation marks – except in the volume on the years 1815-1914 where one of the editors dispenses with the quotation marks when describing some branches of Catholic Modernism as heretical². In most of the volumes, movements branded as heretical receive sympathetic treatment. And the use of «World» reflects another leitmotiv, namely an emphasis on Christianity's global reach and regional diversity. Inevitably the volume on the 20th century includes two chapters devoted exclusively to Latin America, one to the Caribbean, six to Africa and Asia, and one to Oceania, as well as the six devoted exclusively to Europe and North America. But the volume on the years c.300-600 emphasises the fact that Christianity reached as far east as China and as far south as Ethiopia in that period. Editors were also required to focus on the experiences of the «ordinary Christian» and to consider the social and cultural impact of Christianity as broadly as possible. Another required field was the relationship of Christianity with other faiths or, in more recent times, with secularism and atheism. One major strategic decision by the steering group was to treat Eastern Christianity from the 12th century to the present day in a separate volume, while the other volumes covering this period would concentrate on Western Christianity and those forms of Christianity stemming from it.

Within this general framework editors were free to decide which themes to highlight and which kinds of historian to choose as collaborators. Margaret Mitchell and Frances Young in *Origins to Constantine* gave more space than the other editors to theology, a major part of the volume being entitled «The Shaping of Christian Theology». Frederick Norris and Augustine Casiday edited *Constantine to c.600*. They placed special emphasis on the geographical spread of Christianity in that period and on the gradualness of the process by which what became «Christendom» was christianised. *Early Medieval Christianity, c.600-c.1100*, edited by Julia Smith and Thomas Noble, gave special attention to «Christianity as Lived Experience», including «Birth and Death», «Last Things» and «Gender and the Body». This volume benefited from the fact that Noble, who is based at Notre Dame, the famous Catholic university in Indiana, was able to obtain funding from his university for a conference of his authors, whereas contributors to the other volumes were to a large degree working on their own. *Christianity in Western Europe, c.1100-c.1500*, edited by Miri Rubin and Walter Simon, highlighted «The Erection of Boundaries», including those between men and women and between heaven and hell, but more especially between Catholic Christianity and those outside, in-

¹ Frances M. YOUNG and Margaret MITCHELL (eds.), *Cambridge History of Christianity, 1, Origins to Constantine*, Cambridge, 2006, p. 588.

² Sheridan GILLEY and Brian STANLEY (eds.), *Cambridge History of Christianity, VIII, World Christianities, c.1815-c.1914*, Cambridge, 2006, p. 28.

cluding both Jews and Muslims and «heretical» Christians. They emphasise both the centrality of these outsiders in the constitution of Catholic identity and the importance of implicit or explicit debate with them in the development of Catholic theology. Michael Angold edited *Eastern Christianity*. This included both major sections on the Ecumenical Patriarchate and on the Russian Church, and shorter sections on a large range of other Churches, including the Armenian, the Coptic and the Ethiopian. The volume was notable for the amount of space given both to relations between church and state and to monasticism and spirituality more generally. *Reform and Expansion 1500-1660* was edited by Ronnie Po-Hsia, and included extensive attention to inter-confessional relationships in the wake of the Reformation, stressing the variety of forms that these took, ranging from the all-too familiar violent persecutions to «co-existence, co-habitation and collaboration» (to quote the title of one section). Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett edited *Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution, 1660-1815*, and to a greater degree than in any other volume the title neatly summarises the contents of the volume. The leitmotiv here is «balance»: the Enlightenment was both religious and sceptical; the revolutions challenged established religion, yet also stimulated religious revival, often in opposition to, but sometimes in support of the revolutions; and the revivals took very different forms, Catholic, established Protestant, or sectarian Protestant. *World Christianities, c.1815-c.1914*, edited by Sheridan Gilley and Bryan Stanley, gave special attention to the relationships between Christianity and national identities or nationalist movements. The diverse forms these relationships could take led them to provide a series of chapters on individual countries, mostly in Europe, but also including, for instance, the United States, Canada and the Philippines, as well as a chapter covering all of Latin America. *World Christianities, c.1914 to c.2000*, edited by Hugh McLeod, included chapters on the two world wars, the Cold War and the struggles against racial segregation in the United States and South Africa, and highlighted the contrasts between spectacular Christian growth in Africa and parts of Asia and secularisation in much of the Western world.

The *Cambridge History* is evidently very different from most of the other multi-volume histories of Christianity produced in the years since World War II. The contrasts are most glaring when one looks at the largest of these, the *Histoire de l'Église* in 21 volumes edited by Augustin Fliche and Victor Martin. In introducing the first volume, published in 1934, the editors laid out their programme. This was to be an explicitly Catholic project, in which «the Church» meant the Catholic Church though limited attention was also given to other confessions. Their aim was to provide a Catholic history which would also be scientific. That required the use of a team of specialists, each deeply versed in the relevant primary sources. It was no longer possible for one man to range freely across the centuries. At the same time they regretted the over-emphasis in much church history on «externals», such as church-state relations: they wanted to highlight «the internal activity of the Church,

which has enabled it to shine beyond and to spread its light into all areas of life»³. They went on to claim pope Leo XIII as an authority in support of their project. Their objective in writing the introduction to the series was clearly to disarm potential Catholic critics, and presumably they expected a mainly Catholic readership. This first volume, on «The Primitive Church» concluded that the victory of Christianity over philosophy was inevitable: Christianity «was all of one piece: belief, worship, morality». Moreover the virtues practised by Christians and especially the heroism of the martyrs were decisive argument for the superiority of their faith. At the same time the struggle against heresy forced the Church to be stricter in its definitions of orthodoxy and to strengthen its authority structure⁴. The contrasts with the *Cambridge History* are here particularly clear. The contributors to the opening volume were not sceptics or scoffers, and one of the editors, Frances Young, was a prominent Methodist minister, as well as Professor of Theology at Birmingham University. But their objective was precisely to avoid the teleological history exemplified by the authors of the first volume of the Fliche/Martin series. Early Christianity contained a range of diverse possibilities, Young and Mitchell argue, and it was by no means certain which of these would become dominant realities and which would end up in an historical cul-de-sac. Moreover those who came to be branded as «heretics» were often important Christian thinkers whose ideas were attractive to many of their contemporaries and should be taken seriously by historians. It is a familiar cliché that history is written by the winners, but a history that is truly concerned to find out what Christianity meant in the past must also be concerned with the «losers».

Again, Jean Leflon's volume on *The Revolutionary Crisis, 1789-1846* in the Fliche/Martin series might be compared with the Brown/Tackett volume in the *Cambridge History*. Both volumes give considerable attention to political and intellectual developments, while Leflon gives more attention to the history of the papacy and to spirituality, and Brown and Tackett give coverage to popular religion which Leflon scarcely mentions. But the biggest differences are in questions of interpretation. Leflon's treatment of the Enlightenment is purely negative. Brown and Tackett on the other hand are not only broadly sympathetic to the Enlightenment but they also highlight its religious dimensions. And in contrast to the ecumenical spirit of the later volume, Leflon's approach to inter-confessional relationship is encapsulated in a medical metaphor: German Catholics suffered Protestant «contamination»⁵. He is also scathing in his treatment of Jansenism and Josephism – and indeed anything which weakened the authority of the Holy See. And while Leflon claims that the Church was able to survive the revolutionary persecutions because the people

³ J. LEBRETON and J. ZEILLER, *L'Église primitive*, 2nd edition, Paris, 1946, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 462.

⁵ J. LEFLON, *La crise révolutionnaire, 1769-1846*, Paris, 1949, p. 19.

remained Catholics⁶, contributors to the Brown/Tackett volume presented a more complex and contradictory picture in which both dechristianisation and religious revival are essential parts.⁷ Leflon indeed ends the volume on a relatively positive note, stating that the «bark of Peter was sailing through stormy waters» but that «Providence would place at the rudder popes who would rank among the greatest»⁸. In this there is in fact an unexpected parallel between the Fliche/Martin series and the Cambridge History, since Sheridan Gilley co-editor of volume VIII in the latter series would delight some readers and infuriate others by his enthusiasm for popes Pius IX and X, as well as the more generally admired Leo XIII⁹.

Beginning in the 1960s and going further in the 1970s and '80s, historians of Christianity felt the impact of a historiographical revolution which would point in directions very different from those indicated by Fliche and Martin. This revolution began in France and would then be taken further by historians in the English-speaking world. The first impulse came from the *Annales* school, with its tradition of highly detailed local studies, often covering long periods of times, informed by knowledge of geography, of the local economy and social structure, and intensive use of local sources. A second impulse came from *sociologie religieuse* as promulgated in the 1930s by Gabriel Le Bras, whose principal concern was to improve the pastoral effectiveness of the Catholic Church by providing knowledge and understanding of the dramatic variations in levels of religious practice in the various regions of France. He began to accumulate a large body of statistical material, drawn especially from episcopal archives, with a view to showing both how these variations had evolved over time and how they stood in the mid-twentieth century. In the 1960s and '70s a series of brilliant regional studies of French Catholicism appeared, including those by Pérouas on the diocese of La Rochelle under the ancient regime¹⁰, Marcilhacy on the diocese of Orleans in the 19th century¹¹, and by Cholvy on the Herault and by Hilaire on the diocese of Arras in the 19th and 20th centuries¹². The novelty of these studies lay in their keen interest in the beliefs and practices of the mass of the people –what was often termed «popular religion»– and in a micro-historical approach which showed that the well-known division between «les deux

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷ Stewart J. BROWN and Timothy TACKETT (eds), *Cambridge History of Christianity, VII, Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution, 1660-1815*, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 551-4.

⁸ LEFLON, *Crise*, p. 516.

⁹ GILLEY and SHEILS (ed), *Cambridge History, VIII*, p. 29.

¹⁰ Louis PÉROUAS, *Le diocèse de La Rochelle, 1648-1721: sociologie et pastorale*, Paris, 1964.

¹¹ Christiane MARCHILHACY, *Le diocèse d'Orléans sous l'épiscopat de Mgr Dupanloup*, Paris, 1962; Idem. *Le diocèse d'Orléans au milieu du XIX^e siècle*, Paris, 1964.

¹² Gerard CHOLVY, *Le diocèse de Montpellier au XIX^e siècle*, 2 vols., Lille, 1973; Idem, *La géographie religieuse de l'Hérault contemporain*, Paris, 1968; Yves-Marie HILAIRE, *Un chrétienté au XIX^e siècle? La vie religieuse des populations du diocèse d'Arras, 1840-1914*, Lille, 1977.

France», one faithfully Catholic and the other often militantly anti-clerical, was not only a regional phenomenon (Brittany versus the Limousin), but was often highly localised, with neighbouring territories within the same diocese manifesting quite different religious outlooks. This led them to explore the possibility of «collective mentalities», characteristic of particular districts or of specific social groups within those districts. This French school, mainly of Catholic historians, inspired to some extent by specifically Catholic concerns, yet also influenced by wider currents within the French historical world provided an inspiration for historians of Christianity in other countries who wanted to develop new approaches.

A second important development at this time, seen most clearly in the English-speaking countries, was the growing influence of the social sciences, especially anthropology and sociology. This often led to a more detached view of the Church and of religious practices – a more «scientific» approach, less engaged, and certainly less confident that the history of the Church was the history of salvation. A key work was that by the Oxford historian, Keith Thomas, who drew explicitly on the work of anthropologists in contemporary African and Oceanic societies in order to illuminate the religious mentalities of late medieval and early modern England¹³. Another classic of the time, and even more explicit in its new assumptions and use of new methods, was James Obelkevich's study of 19th century Lincolnshire, a rural county in eastern England¹⁴. Declaring himself in the preface a disciple of Feuerbach, Obelkevich approached Victorian religion explicitly as an outsider. Beginning in the French style with a careful examination of the local geography and economy and the identification of a series of micro-regions, he exemplified contemporary «Anglo-Saxon» concerns in his strong interest in social class differences and tensions and his use of concepts drawn from the social sciences, and especially from Durkheim. And not far beneath the surface was the democratic and «bottom up» ethos of the 1960s, reflected in his critical view of the Anglican clergy and his sympathetic account both of the more plebeian Methodists and of the world of «popular religion» – presented here as a alternative, with its own inner logic, to the «official religion» taught by the clergy, whether Anglican or Methodist.

A third historiographical revolution began in the United States and stemmed from the Women's Liberation Movement. The pioneers of that movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s were often militantly secular, and the early practitioners of «women's history» tended simply to ignore religion. But very soon the evident centrality of religion in the lives of large numbers of women in the past, and often in the present too, obliged historians to take note of and to provide explanations for this fact. Already in the 1970s American historians of women, of religion, or of both,

¹³ Keith THOMAS, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, London, 1971.

¹⁴ James OBELKEVICH, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825-1875*, Oxford, 1976.

were claiming that the 19th century had seen a «feminisation of religion»¹⁵ – and, indeed the debates around this thesis remain very lively up to the present day. Then, as women's history broadened into «gender history», religion was increasingly accepted as a key dimension. While the pioneers in the 1970s were mainly American, increasing numbers of historians in Europe joined in during the 1980s and '90s¹⁶.

The rise of gender history was clearly determined as much by events in the «real» world as by developments within the world of history or of other academic disciplines. This is even more true of a fourth historiographical revolution. The period between about 1947 and 1963 had seen the end of the British, French, Dutch and Belgian colonial empires, and alongside the newly independent nations of Africa and Asia were also independent churches of many kinds –Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Lutheran, as well as others which had broken away from the historic denominations– but all under indigenous leadership. Moreover, by the 1980s, if not before, it was evident that the fortunes of Christianity were taking dramatically different directions in different regions of the world. Severe decline in much of Europe contrasted with rapid growth in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa and some parts of Asia, as well as increasing vitality in many of the countries of Latin America. It was evident that the history of Christianity now had to be written from a «post-colonial» perspective. And from recognising that the balance of power within the Christian world had radically changed it was a short step to asking whether the Christian past was less European than it seemed a hundred, or even fifty years ago.

Furthermore one of the central events in the history of the Church in the later 20th century, namely the Second Vatican Council, also had enormous implications for the writing of church history. In particular the revolution in ecumenical relationships, at the grass-roots even more than at the centre, which the Council brought about, as well as the climate of dialogue between Christians and other faiths, made it increasingly difficult to write confessional history of the older kind. At the very least, a new language was required. It was no longer possible to speak of a Protestant «invasion» or Calvinist «tyranny» as did contributors to the Fliche/Martin volume on the Reformation¹⁷ – though subtler forms of confessional bias continue.

In view of all these changes in church, world and academy, it is hardly surprising that the 14 volume *Histoire du christianisme* published between 1990 and 2000 by a Paris-based team of French historians was very different from Fliche and Martin. The directors of the project were the ancient historian Charles Piétri, the medievalist Andre Vauchez, the early modernist Marc Venard, and the late modernist Jean-

¹⁵ Barbara WELTER, *The feminisation of American religion 1800-1860*, in M. HARTMANN and L. BANNER (eds), *Clio's Consciousness Raised*, New York, 1976, pp. 137-57.

¹⁶ Most influentially Claude LANGLOIS, *Le catholicisme au féminin*, Paris, 1984.

¹⁷ E. DE MOREAU, P. JOURDA and P. JANELLE, *La crise religieuse du XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1950, pp. 292, 427.

Marie Mayeur. While the volumes in Fliche/Martin had generally been the work of a single author or a pair of authors, the new series drew on a different specialist to write each chapter. The most obvious innovation was the extensive use of illustrations and maps. Furthermore, the approach was ecumenical, with sympathetic attention being given to the Eastern Churches and to Protestantism, as well as to Catholicism, and international, with the mainly French team being reinforced by collaborators from other parts of Europe. Large steps were also being made in the direction of a more global history. In volume XII, covering the years 1914-58, 12% of the sections concerning specific regions of the world were devoted to Africa, Asia and Oceania, while 11% was given to Latin America. The use of relatively large teams of authors necessarily led to a certain plurality of approaches. But in general there were continuities with, as well as breaks from, the Fliche/Martin model. The title of the volume covering the years 610-1054, «Bishops, Monks and Emperors» reflects a predominant focus on religious and political elites, rather than on the recently fashionable «popular religion». Thus a section on lay piety mainly focused on kings and aristocrats, and the section on popular piety was mainly concerned with the attempts by the clergy to promote more orthodox beliefs and practices, whether by preaching or by the «silent sermons» provided by images. Equally, terms like «heresy» and «sectarian deviation» are used without any of the quotation marks that contributors to the *Cambridge History* were generally anxious to provide¹⁸. Nor is gender a major theme in the series, in spite of interesting observations in passing.

The *Cambridge History* carried the changes already apparent in the *Histoire du Christianisme* several steps further. In the 20th century volume, 37% of the sections concerning specific regions of the world were devoted to Africa, Asia and Oceania, with 15% being devoted to Latin America and the Caribbean. While there will always be debate as to the precise balance to be achieved, few people, I imagine, would doubt that this regional redistribution is a step in the right direction. In the volumes relating to the 19th and 20th century the global framework has become inescapable. But equally clearly the steering group, in planning the series, was surely right to insist that all the volumes in the series should highlight both the geographical spread and the local diversity of Christianity. Two other aspects of the *Cambridge History* seem to me particularly notable. First it goes further than any previous history of Christianity in avoiding confessional bias, and in providing sympathetic treatment for a huge range of churches, movements and individual figures. And though individual authors necessarily have their own prejudices and preferences, there is no «party line» and within any volume one preference is likely to cancel out another. Thus in volume VIII, Sheridan Gilley provided a sympathetic account of Pius X's

¹⁸ Gilbert DAGRON, Pierre RICHE and André VAUCHEZ (eds), *Évêques, moines et empereurs (610-1054)*, Paris, 1993, pp. 226-7, 754-8.

handling of the crisis following the Separation of Church and State in France, only to be contradicted by James McMillan who was highly critical of the pope¹⁹. Second, the volumes go further than any previous such series in recapturing the religious experience of the «ordinary» Christian. As in any series with so broad a scope such achievements come at a price. In breaking new ground the *Cambridge History* inevitably visited a relative neglect on some more familiar themes. For instance, the *Histoire du christianisme* provided much more detailed treatment of the relationship of the churches with Fascism, Nazism and Christian Democracy.

The volumes were on the whole well-received by critics, in spite of occasional negative reviews. One criticism of the series was that in view of the predominance of contributors from the English-speaking world, the volumes were insufficiently international. While the proportions varied from volume to volume, on average about three-quarters of the writers were based in English-speaking countries. There was a practical reason for this imbalance, namely that the lack of money for translations made it necessary for the great majority of authors to be fluent in English. Nevertheless, internationality is not an end in itself, but a means to obtaining the strongest possible team of historians. The predominance of British and American contributors is only a serious weakness, if it can be shown that it led to the selection of inferior scholars. In a series on this scale there were inevitably some weaker contributions; but in general I believe that the quality of the authors was very high.

As far as I know, no-one has attempted an evaluation of the whole series. But I will here consider criticisms made of volumes VIII and IX. The Oxford historian, Martin Conway (ironically, a contributor to volume IX), reviewed volume VIII in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* and was very negative. Some of his complaints (for example, that there was very little about Belgium) were understandable, but hardly of major importance, and others (the reviewer did not share Sheridan Gilley's admiration for popes Pius IX and X) could be taken as differences of personal opinion. But there were two more substantial points: first that there was too much of a focus on Britain, and second that the volume presented an overly optimistic view of the religious situation in the 19th century and said too little about secularisation. In each case there is something in the criticism, but not as much as the reviewer suggests. For instance Andrew Sanders' chapter on literature is disappointingly limited to British writers, but his chapter on art and architecture ranges much more widely. Janice Holmes on «Women Preachers» and David Bebbington «Voluntary Religion» draw heavily on British and North American examples, but David Thompson and John Molony, covering respectively Protestant and Catholic social thought range widely across Europe. Neither is it entirely true that secularisation is ignored. For instance it receives considerable attention from McMillan in his chapter on

¹⁹ GILLEY and STANLEY (eds), *Cambridge History*, VIII, pp. 26-7, 230-1.

France and Thompson in a chapter on «Popular religion and Irreligion in Town and Countryside». However the country by country structure of the volume (used also in volume XII of the *Histoire du Christianisme*) does have some disadvantages. Each chapter is written by a specialist on the country concerned, and many of these chapters are excellent. On the other hand, some themes which occur in several different chapters would benefit from a more concentrated discussion with international comparisons, and secularisation may be an example.

Volume IX received a very negative review in the American journal, *Church History*. Some of the reviewer's criticisms were of doubtful validity. For instance he wanted more on violence or discrimination against Christians, and he provided a long list of countries in which Christians are being persecuted. While it is true that only a few of these examples are discussed in the book, violence and discrimination, both in the past and the present, whether by Communist, Nazi or Islamic governments or by hostile mobs are discussed at several points. There is also the question of how far the writing of history should follow a contemporary agenda. He complained that there was too little about the internet, perhaps overlooking the point that this was a history of Christianity in the 20th century, and that the internet only began to have a substantial influence on Christianity in the very last years of that century.

However two of his criticisms should be taken more seriously. One can simply be accepted, namely that more attention should have been given to popular culture, including the impact of radio, television, gospel music, country and western music, rock music, novels about the Rapture, Hollywood films, Nigerian exorcism videos, Christian kitsch²⁰ of all kinds. While some of these did receive a mention, it remains true that discussion of Christianity and the arts focused too much on high culture. The second major criticism was less expected, namely that the volume was «Eurocentric». The criticism had two aspects: that there was not enough coverage of the non-European world (in which this writer included the United States), and that the choice of themes reflected European and «liberal» priorities. The first of these points has partial validity in that although Part II on «Narratives of Change» does succeed in providing a good balance between the different regions of the world, a number of the contributions to Part III on «The Social and Cultural impact of Christianity» are biased towards Europe and the United States. There is far more in the volume about the United States than any other single country: the claim that the USA has been neglected is indeed bizarre. But it can more legitimately be pointed out that the chapter on «Marriage and the Family» includes a lot on pre-marital sex, a big concern in Europe and North America, but little on polygamy, a major issue in West Africa; or that the chapter on «Liturgy» provides detailed discussion

²⁰ The subject of a brilliant book by one of the contributors to the volume, Colleen MCDANNELL, *Material Christianity*, New Haven, 1995.

of the Liturgical Movement in Europe, but only much briefer consideration of new liturgies in Africa and India. There is, however, a practical problem. Most historians of Christianity are experts on a single country and hesitate to write even about neighbouring countries, let alone the whole world. Two contributors to this section, Duncan Forrester on «Wealth and Poverty» and Pirjo Markkola on «The Church as Women's Space» and «Patriarchy and Women's Emancipation» were impressively international, but most concentrated principally on the regions of the world which they knew best and were able to discuss authoritatively, while dealing more briefly with other areas. The problem might be solved by commissioning a team of experts on different continents to write each chapter collectively, but the result would probably be more like an encyclopaedia than a work of history.

The second point is more interesting, but also harder either to prove or to refute. In writing on a topic as vast as the history of Christianity in the 20th century the decision to prioritise some themes rather than others is inevitably to some degree arbitrary and equally obviously it will reflect some of the beliefs and values of the editor and the society in which he or she lives. The space given in the volume to gender and to questions of social justice does indeed reflect the importance these issues have for European Christians, but I find it hard to believe that these are not also important to Christians in most other parts of the world. It might, however, be granted that other issues which are dealt with only briefly or in passing, for instance healing generally and exorcism in particular, or prophecy, are of central concern to many Christians and might equally have been given fuller treatment. In considering whether an author has considered an issue thoroughly, clearly, fairly and in sufficient depth, objective criteria are available, which should enable the Catholic and the Protestant, the atheist and the believer to agree that a piece of historical writing is good or bad, whether or not they agree with the argument. However, when the editor decides which themes to highlight and which to neglect, his or her religious, ethical and political convictions will play a part – as well, of course, as contemporary intellectual fashions and those events in the «real» world which push certain issues to the top of the agenda. As one obvious example of the latter, the emphasis on inter-faith relations in the *Cambridge History* clearly reflects the intensity of contemporary concern about relations between Christians and Jews and between Christians and Muslims. Every history of Christianity is inevitably partial and incomplete – though incomplete in different ways. But historians must still try, to the limits of their capability, to transcend their personal preferences and to enter imaginatively into the worlds of those whose understanding of Christianity is very different from their own.