

A Global Church History: The Great Tradition through Cultures, Continents and Centuries, by RF Rea and SD Cone

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This volume provides an extensive addition to an existing body of global histories of Christianity. It is interesting to note that throughout, the term “church history” is used only with reference to the Early and Medieval Church periods, while the term “Christianity” is used from the Reformations period. Does this indicate an ideological break with the concept of church history leading to the currently preferred term “history of Christianity”; or are the authors unaware of the difference? The text of the introduction seems to favour the term “Christian history.” Of course in such a wide-ranging and far-reaching attempt at producing a global history of Christianity, the issue of selectivity is paramount.

The book is structured along traditional lines of periodisation; Early church, Medieval period, Reformations, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries and the twentieth century and beyond. It is instructive to note that 400 of the 500 pages of text are devoted to Western Christianity; and almost another half of the text is devoted to the inclusion of primary source documents. In addition, source bibliographies are included for further reference. This is one of the most helpful aspects of this work.

The final section deals with twentieth century Christianity, but the absence of any reference to Pentecostalism—except for some references in the chapters on the Ecumenical Movement and Africa—is remarkable, taking account of its growth as one of the most significant developments in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Christianity. Also, it is rather astonishing that Scotland only merits a three paragraph mention in a chapter of sixteen pages devoted to the English Reformation.



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The book is replete with helpful sidebars, maps, copious illustrations and tables. Particularly helpful are the tables of, for example, the Apostolic Fathers (p.9) and the Apologists (p.12). Each section ends with discussion questions. Readers are advised to follow the progress of the pilgrim people of God following their personal favourite maps on the internet for ease of reference. Needless to say, in a book of this size and nature there are the inevitable factual errors and errors of omission: David Livingstone abandoned his family (p.408) and Robert Moffat was a Congregationalist, not an Anglican (p.410). This would be an excellent general textbook for the history of Christianity, for early learners of the discipline or for interested general readers. However, its price might well be prohibitive for all but colleges and libraries.