

# *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, by MA Noll

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This book represents a mammoth rewrite (2019) and reconceptualisation of an earlier work (1992). It has been completely updated regarding the history of Christianity in the USA and Canada. It is probably the most comprehensive work of its kind as it brings Christian history up to date in the twenty-first century. The introduction sets the tone of the work which is to focus on “important themes, events, leaders and changes” (p.1).

The book is divided into five parts. The first introduces Christianity to the USA from its Roman Catholic beginnings, followed by the arrival of the Puritans and their successors. Part two focuses on the theme of Americanisation in the first half of the eighteenth century. Part three is entitled “The Protestant Century” and offers a broad overview from the late eighteenth century and of the nineteenth century. The fourth part could be labelled the long twentieth century (1900–2018) as it embraces multifarious developments which demonstrate the enormous breadth and depth of Christian history. In this section, the author notes that he is taking a risk in discussing the impact of developments in contemporary Christian history, but reaches some very balanced conclusions nonetheless. The final part consists of a number of reflections on this history and its future prospect.

In particular, Noll considers the ubiquitous role of the Bible, the vast body of Christian literature, fiction and theological (he is more balanced about the former than the latter), the role of Christianity in political life, secularisation, racial politics and the relationship between developments in Christianity in Canada and the USA. Throughout, Noll manages to balance the great trends in history with many personal histories which give added interest to the broad sweep of the text.



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## Duncan

One thing that becomes clear is an emerging recognition that we can no longer take half a continent and refer to history; rather it represents the histories that formed the nations from a time even before they were nations. The narratives of numerous and varied histories are recounted here, representing the immigrant population of North America. One of the saddest omissions in this extensive study is the almost total lack of reference to the indigenous population of the USA and Canada (pages 17-19, 65-66 and a few single references), despite the author's claim to consider "the experiences of women, non-whites [whoever they are], and ordinary people" (p.1) in an attempt to be "as sensitive as possible to the many polarities that inform the history of Christianity in North America" (p.4). In this he failed. That is why I refer to its subjects as the immigrant population because that is the main focus of the book. Was there no substantial and sustained mission to the American/Canadian Indian population in the midst of all this Christian activity; and what is the state of Christianity within this indigenous part of the populations today? This makes the work appear to be more concerned with denominations rather than being inclusive. The author might also have taken the trouble to explain the Jim Crow legislation for the uninitiated of American racial politics and religion.